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The Spaces and Times of Abortion Complexity. Embodiment and Interruption in Contemporary Francophone Aborto-socio-biographies

Tamzin L. Elliott

This thesis proposes a new theoretical framework of “abortion complexity” for analysing contemporary abortion narratives, considering the ways in which aborto-socio-biographical narratives of the *extrême contemporain* reorient and refigure space(s) and time(s). This concept encompasses a twofold objective: firstly, shifting, or widening legal-centric analyses of abortion towards ones foregrounding the emotional and affective dimension of this reproductive act; secondly, acknowledging the ambiguity within this affectivity to illustrate that abortion is a spectrum of experiences, rather than a dichotomy. Contributing to a timely increase in the awareness of abortion rights in the French social and cultural imaginary, this thesis examines ultra-contemporary autobiographical works from the post-MeToo era by Désirée Frappier, Aude Mermilliod, Sandra Vizzavona, and Pauline Harmange, in forms ranging from graphic narrative to essay, engaging with the lived and embodied reality of abortion (hi)stories. Addressing the spatial politics of graphic narrative, the first half explores the ways in which abortion’s spatialities are reoriented to facilitate a sense of bodily grounding and ownership for *avortées*, emphasising the ambiguous and complex representations of inside versus outside at the core of embodied experiences of pregnancy and abortion, as well as the regulation of reproducing/reproductive bodies. The second half turns to reorientations of pregnant temporalities, arguing that abortion and its narratives interrupt a quintessentially futural pregnant time by transforming it into a subjective progressive presentness of (self-)caring which entraps, empowers, extends, and evacuates, and permits aborto-socio-biographical transmission. More broadly, this thesis invites reflection on the possibilities encountered when using affectivity and emotion to inform our laws, politics, spaces, and times. It therefore advocates for an abortion politics of love and goodness, arguing for the emancipatory potential of reproductive justice as a tool for literary analysis, and literary analysis as a tool for reproductive justice.

The Spaces and Times of Abortion Complexity

**Embodiment and Interruption in Contemporary Francophone Aborto-socio-
biographies**

Tamzin L. Elliott



Thesis submitted for the degree of Master of Arts by Research

School of Modern Languages and Cultures

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Table of Contents

Statement of Copyright	4
Acknowledgements	5
Dedication	7
Introduction	11
Ambivalent abortions.....	14
Abortion complexity as a tool for justice.....	18
From autobiography to aborto-socio-biographies.....	25
The spaces and times of abortion complexity	30
Chapter One. Space Becomes Her: On Subversion, Embodiment, and Spatiality	
1.1 Introduction	34
1.1.1 <i>Bande dessinée</i> and abortion	40
1.1.2 <i>Le Choix</i> and <i>Il fallait que je vous le dise</i>	51
1.2 Embodying abortion.....	53
1.2.1 Against embodiment	82
1.3 The insides and outsides of pregnancy: subverting the common culture.....	90
1.3.1 Becoming inside herself.....	104
1.3.2 Becoming outside herself.....	113
1.4 Conclusion.....	119
Chapter Two. Writing an Abortion of Our Time: On Subjectivity, Interruption, and Transmission	
2.1 Introduction	123
2.1.1 Abortive temporalities.....	125
2.1.2 <i>Avortée. Une histoire intime de l'IVG</i> and <i>Interruption. L'avortement par celles qui l'ont vécu</i>	128
2.2 Abortive subjectivities.....	130
2.2.1 Timely reorientations.....	131
2.2.2 (Repro)normative language	137
2.2.3 Pregnant presentness: entrapment or empowerment?	141
2.2.4 Caring in the conditional.....	148
2.2.5 Conclusion	152
2.3 Interruptions	153
2.3.1 Extensions.....	155
2.3.2 Evacuations.....	162

2.3.4 Conclusion	169
2.4 Transmission	170
2.5 Conclusion.....	177
Conclusion. Notes on Courage, Compassion, and Complexity	180
Bibliography	191
Appendices	
Appendix One: Interview with Pauline Harmange.....	208

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For Sammy, Katie, Bethany, Carla, and Nicola, who faced injustice when they needed compassion.

For Amber, Candi, and Adriana, who deserved long, beautiful, and dignified lives.

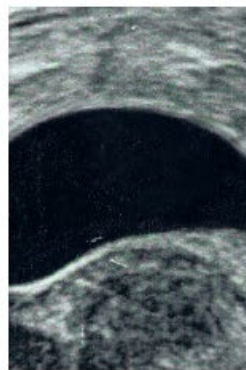
For my friend M., who had to make a hard decision.

For the children born in Gaza today, who should be greeted by freedom.

For all those who needed love, may you find it here.



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If I had not created my whole world, I would certainly have died in other people's.

— Anaïs Nin

Introduction

There was no grief. You are my silence.

Why do you choose to rise now like shifting sand

blown by a slight breeze?

You were my simple crime against humanity,

and, like a criminal, I claim no regrets.

I buried you too deep to call you a name;

you are my trail of invisible lines

like the stretch marks that did not have time to form.

No guilt resides in my house.

(Booker, 2013)

This thesis is an experiment in possibilities and conditionalities. It explores the could be, should be, and the becoming of abortion representation across French visual and textual culture of the *extrême contemporain*. In some ways, this thesis is a manifesto of hope for the future of abortion representation. As reproductive dystopias rear their unjust heads across the globe, both on our doorstep and far from home, let this work be a reminder that a compassionate, love-filled perspective is possible. As Rebecca Solnit reminds us, “people have always been good at imagining the end of the world, which is much easier to picture than the strange sidelong paths of change in a world without end” (Solnit, 2016 [2004], p.27). Hope, although not always easy to find, prevents us from falling into the despair which

insists that advocating for change is pointless. Hope sustains activism and sustains us too, reminding us that alternative futures are out there. Hope is a doing word, an action; feelings of hope alone cannot facilitate change, but hope as an action allows us to traverse unthinkable, untrodden paths. This thesis is part of that action. By travelling these “strange sidelong paths of change”, we are reminded of the necessity of depicting this change in our cultural and social imaginaries; we need both complex realities and representations to cement progress.

The contemporary literary landscape in France boasts representations of abortion demonstrating complexity, nuance, and compassion, illustrating some possible realities (Collette, 2025). There is widespread support for abortion in France, with 94% of the population in favour of abortion, whilst 81% supported its constitutionalisation which came to fruition in March 2024. Yet a sense of illegitimacy still surrounds this reproductive act as abortion care seekers continually feel a need to justify their decisions, whether to themselves, possibly as a means of releasing and exonerating any guilt, or out of fear of refusal when they ask for help (Harris, 2013; Planning familial, 2019; Fondation Jean Jaurès, 2022). Whilst the recent inclusion of the freedom to abort in the French Constitution would suggest that France is ahead of the game with regards to abortion rights, the endurance of abortion stigma speaks to the necessity of foregrounding stories from the literary margins which counter stigmatising and dichotomic ideologies (Runde, 2018; De Meyer and Romainville, 2024; Nemtoi, 2024; Tongue, 2024). Contrary to the French exceptionalist rhetoric which heralds this constitutionalisation as the end point of “un long combat pour la liberté” and positions France as the global leader of this struggle, abortion care seekers in the metropole still contend with numerous obstacles preventing meaningful access to terminations (Lamothe, 2024; Tongue, 2024).¹ Notably, there remain stringent time limits – the legal limit

¹ “a long struggle for freedom” Unless otherwise stated, all translations are my own.

for accessing abortion upon request in France currently stands at fourteen weeks of pregnancy – and the need to cross geographical borders to access care – in 2024, the Abortion Support Network was contacted by one hundred and thirty seven French clients who needed help accessing abortions in Spain, England, and the Netherlands.² The temporalities and spatialities of abortion are inherently bound up with one another. This body of work therefore explores, in a timely fashion, the spaces and times of “abortion complexity” in contemporary French abortion narratives, a framework used to consider the varying and nuanced ways in which the *avortée*, or aborting self, is embodied and interrupted in aborto-socio-biographical narratives, with the hope that it will cement complex representations as complex realities and vice-versa.³ Recognising that our existing frameworks are insufficient, I hope to offer new ways and words to talk about the spaces and times of abortion, to give new meaning to abortion’s spatialities and temporalities which mark a departure from existing reductive paradigms. The works featured in the corpus range from graphic narrative – *Le Choix* by Désirée and Alain Frappier (2020 [2015]) and *Il fallait que je vous le dise* by Aude Mermilliod (2019) – to personal essay – *Avortée. Une histoire intime de l’TVG* by Pauline Harmange (2022) – and a collection of *témoignages* – *Interruption. L’avortement par celles qui l’ont vécu* by Sandra Vizzavona (2021). They ask: what else could pregnancy and abortion look like? How should we be conceiving and discussing abortion representation in the 2020s, an era marked by both rollout and repeal of reproductive freedoms? In what ways do our existing conversations fall short, and is there an alternative, or perhaps a remedy, to

² Many thanks to Annie at the Abortion Support Network for providing these figures. In Belgium, where Aude Mermilliod’s abortion in *Il fallait que je vous le dise* unfolds, abortion is available until twelve weeks of pregnancy.

³ A note on nomenclature: the term *avortée* has no exact equivalent in English, meaning “person who has had an abortion”, or literally “person who has been aborted”, so the French term will be used throughout this thesis. As a feminine substantive, *avortée* is a well-suited descriptor for the narrators whose work constitutes the corpus of this thesis. It is nevertheless pertinent to acknowledge that women are not the only people who access abortion care, and where appropriate this thesis will refer to “pregnant persons” and “abortion care seekers”. Although Pauline Harmange, whose work is analysed in Chapter Two, is openly bisexual, this aspect is not addressed in her narrative. At the time of writing this thesis, there exist no French-language abortion narratives directly about queer experiences of abortion.

the shame and stigma shrouding this reproductive act, shame and stigma which has often been compounded by its representations?

Ambivalent abortions

French women's writing of the 2000s and early 2010s was marked by its insistence on a thorough scrutiny of the body (Jordan, 2006). It was in part due to the MeToo movement in 2015 that this tendency shifted from observation to ownership, with women's writing now reclaiming the body as a site of autonomy. After this collective reckoning liberated the topic of sexist and sexual violence on a global scale, it was "dans la logique féministe des choses que les thématiques liées à la grossesse, à l'accouchement et à la maternité soient ensuite saisies," seeking to reappropriate these narratives too. (Zenetti, 2022; Froidevaux-Metterie, 2023, p.34; David, 2024).⁴ The push to reclaim ownership of maternal narratives also signified a need to do the same for narratives of the non-maternal body, as reflected in Maria Kathryn Tomlinson's work on the female fertility cycle in women's writing in French (2021).⁵ However, as contemporary literature illustrates, abortion cannot be reduced to a rejection of motherhood.

The processes of pregnancy have historically been inherently bound to motherhood, insofar as pregnancy is interpreted as a linear, forward-facing trajectory inevitably resulting in a live birth (Browne, 2013; 2017; 2022). This seemingly immutable pipeline of pregnancy to motherhood is indicative of repronormativity, a regime under which cisgender female sexuality is understood as "necessarily (re)productive" (Franke, 2001; Weissman, 2017, p.292;

⁴ "in the feminist logic of things that topics linked to pregnancy, childbirth, and motherhood were subsequently taken up."

⁵ For more on francophone representations of non-motherhood see: Edwards, Natalie. *Voicing Voluntary Childlessness: Narratives of Non-Mothering in French*. Bern: Peter Lang, 2015; Cooper, Jasmine. *An End in Herself: Non-Motherhood in Contemporary French Women's Writing*. Apollo - University of Cambridge Repository, 2020, doi:10.17863/CAM.70299; Björklund, Jenny *et al.* *Negotiating Non-Motherhood. Representations, Perceptions, and Experiences*. Cham: Springer Nature, 2025.

Love, 2022). Not intended for pleasure, desire, self-care, or autonomy, reproductivity dictates that these bodies are expected only to burden the physical and emotional labours of gestating, birthing, and caregiving. In deviating from this model, abortion thus signifies non-adherence to the ideals of womanhood (Kumar et al., 2009; Evans and O'Brien, 2015).

Writing on the embodied experience of pregnancy, Camille Froidevaux-Metterie (2023, p.45) remarks that it is a lived bodily experience “parmi toutes celles qui caractérisent l’existence féminine et qui ne sont ni obligatoires ni nécessaires, simplement possibles”.⁶ Many abortion complex narratives suggest that the same is true of abortion, reconciling experiences of pregnancy, motherhood, and abortion, to position them as part and parcel of a holistic reproductive trajectory; to abort is an eschewal of reproductivity, but not necessarily of motherhood. Moreover, upon reading Illana Weizman’s *Ceci est notre postpartum* (2021) which centres on women who had continued and completed their pregnancies, Harmange wonders “quelle place on laissait au post-partum de l’avortement, là encore sans oser utiliser cette expression parce que les corps ‘post-gestum’ n’ont rien produit et ce qu’ils ont expulsé, ils l’ont fait par choix” (Harmange, 2022, p.50).⁷ Recently there has been much work to destigmatise the postpartum experience by being honest about the traces pregnancy leaves on the body and positioning it as an extension of the pregnancy and childbirth experience (Froidevaux-Metterie, 2023). Nevertheless, abortion remains largely absent from both considerations of pregnancy and perinatal loss, as well as our language more broadly, thus necessitating the theorisation of abortion within the context of pregnancy.

The corpus encompasses narratives which speak to the intertwined possibilities of both abortion and motherhood. *Le Choix* (hereafter *LC*) embodies a narrative of undesired

⁶ “among the many which constitute the female experience, but which are neither obligations nor necessities, simply possibilities.”

⁷ “What place there is for the postpartum experience of abortion, without daring to use this expression because ‘post-gestational’ bodies haven’t produced anything, and the thing they got rid of, they did so by choice.”

motherhood and its lifelong psychological impact on the narrator, as well as the narrator's own navigation of what it means for her to exist and embark on parenthood. *Il fallait que je vous le dise* (hereafter *IFJVD*) and *Avortée. Une histoire intime de l'IVG* (hereafter *Avortée*) offer accounts of deeply coveted motherhood which end in abortion, the latter ending as the narrator tries to conceive, whilst *Interruption. L'avortement par celles qui l'ont vécu* (hereafter *Interruption*) shares accounts encompassing a range of maternal desire, from rejection, to embrace, to indifference. Notably, *LC*, *Avortée* and *Interruption* are all written or compiled by mothers. As Shelby Swafford remarks, "My abortion teaches me what it means to be a (m)other, to live in/as a body colliding with internal and external expectations, to inhabit a cultural space between motherhood and not" (Swafford, 2020, p.96). However, whilst it is important to acknowledge the stories of "des mères d'aujourd'hui qui ont avorté hier" and the many reproductive events which may occupy one's life, we must also pay heed to the ways in which abortion may be coopted as a contribution to the founding of the nation-state by facilitating future (re)productivity (Harmange, 2022, p.53; Froidevaux-Metterie, 2023).⁸ If abortion is perceived as an act which can be represented and shared only in the event that it enables motherhood or work at a later date, it ultimately serves as a reification of repronormativity.

Alongside the inscription of abortion into narratives of pregnancy and motherhood, there is also a need to consider termination from the perspective of perinatal loss. Scholarship suggests that pregnancies which do not result in a live birth leave women in an unresolved state of liminality, leaving motherhood, as a rite of passage under patriarchy, in an unresolved state (Côté-Arsenault *et al.*, 2009). Even though these reproductive acts share the same clinical spaces, in the social sphere they are placed in opposition with the moralising framework of veneration (pregnancy) and vilification (abortion) (Morrissey, 2003; Bolton,

⁸ "today's mothers who aborted yesterday."

2005; Love, 2022). Whilst stating her intentions to be sensitive to the grief and emotional intensity of involuntary pregnancy loss, Victoria Browne (2017) suggests that such feelings are exacerbated by exclusion from the states of pregnancy and motherhood. In a similar vein, scholarship typically interprets perinatal loss as encompassing miscarriage, stillbirth, and only certain forms of abortion, specifically those resulting from life-threatening foetal diagnoses (Berry, 2022). However, this thesis advocates for the inclusion of all abortions in the umbrella term of perinatal loss, from early, voluntary terminations to late term, medically necessary, perhaps involuntary abortions. This allows us to acknowledge that abortion may be experienced just like other forms of perinatal loss, even when the procedure is wanted (Zeh, 2022; Manninen, 2024). Embodying abortion as an experience inclusive of grief is a common theme in the corpus, from Frappier, who grieved her own existence and her mother's lack of access to abortion care, to Mermilliod and Harmange, who grieved the abortions they needed because of their personal circumstances, to Vizzavona, who has guarded the memory and image of the child she did not have as an adolescent. Such an inclusion does not necessarily translate to regret or represent a fear-inducing anti-abortion argument, but rather "recognition that there is not one, correct emotional response to undergoing a liminal event" (Runde, 2019, p.52). Positioning abortion within phenomenologies of both perinatal loss and pregnancy and acknowledging their ambivalent positionings within these spaces allows for solidary, empathetic, and compassionate approaches to their complex narratives. Acknowledging the complexity of this act does not tongue-tie us but rather provides a forum for authentic discursivity, allowing us to create new language and discourses to frame these complex experiences.

Contemporary narratives frequently represent the liminal, grey areas of abortion, often alluding to the undecidable element of this reproductive act (*ibid.*; Collette, 2025). Looking once again to the corpus to illustrate this, *LC* foregrounds the account of the

narrator's mother who desperately sought an abortion, but who could not have one due to the inaccessibility of safe procedures. *IFJVD* recounts an abortion which was not wanted but which the narrator felt they had no other choice about. *Avortée* shares a narrative fraught with complicated emotions, including rage, jealousy, and grief, despite the narrator's relief, determination, and pride, whilst *Interruption* intertwines multiple accounts spanning different ages, generations, and motivations, whilst also addressing their experiences of infertility and miscarriage. Much like the MeToo movement liberated discussions on sexuality and sexist and sexual violence, which subsequently facilitated frank discussions about maternities and pregnancies, these contemporary portrayals suggest that abortion representation has entered an era of authenticity and audacity. These narratives convey authenticity through their insistence on abortion complexity, and audacity in the sense that they are "a public challenge to conventions, characterised by boldness and a disregard for decorum, protocol, or moral restraints" (Cooke, 2020, pp.1-2). How does this commitment to authentic and audacious depictions of abortion allow us to attain reproductive justice, ensuring that complexity is acknowledged and accounted for beyond both academic scholarship and literary and visual representations?

Abortion complexity as a tool for justice

Reproductive justice consists of three primary tenets: the right to have a child, the right to not have a child, and the right to parent in safe and healthy environments (Ross and Solinger, 2017). As such, reproductive justice focuses on the lived experiences of those affected by reproductive decision making, who "require a safe and dignified context for these most fundamental human experiences" (*ibid.*, p.9). A key component of reproductive justice, or critical reproduction studies, is the consideration of social justice issues such as poverty, economic injustice, welfare reform, housing, and violence, to name just a few, into analyses

of the system(s) regulating reproductive care, particularly the medico-legal systems (Price, 2020). Recounting the struggle for abortion rights in France is typically achieved by listing the legal advances of the 1970s: from the *Manifeste des 343*, a petition published by *Le Nouvel Observateur* in 1971 and signed by 343 notable French figures who openly declared their illegal abortions, to the Bobigny trial in 1972, whose verdict did not punish the young, working-class Marie-Claire Chevalier for having an abortion, to the passing of the Veil law in 1975 which ultimately legalised abortion. Even though contemporary abortion discourse is similarly “dominated by the abstract language of rights and obligations”, this reduces the question of abortion provision and access to the single issue of its legal status (Koukal, 2019, p.2). For example, it overlooks that the Bobigny trial’s focus was not the illegality of abortion at the time, but rather that this illegality unfairly targeted working-class women who were forced into undergoing unsafe procedures, or that the Veil law was in reality “un texte de tolérance”, positing abortion as the lesser of two evils (Le Naour and Valentini, 2003, p.270; Cordona, 2015).⁹ Even feminist historians have tended to focus on abortion as a legal or political, rather than social, issue (Gauthier, 2002; Pavard, 2012; Duchen, 2013). The notion of abortion complexity central to this thesis seeks to shift, or widen, legal-centric analyses of abortion towards ones which encompasses this aspect alongside the emotional, affective, and often ambivalent dimension of abortion. Abortion complexity attempts to account for the diverse emotional responses to this reproductive event encompassed in Frappier, Mermilliod, Vizzavona, and Harmange’s works. Importantly, in its consideration of autobiography, this thesis actively engages in examining lived reproductive experience, illustrating the potential for reproductive justice as a tool for literary analysis, and literary analysis as a tool for reproductive justice.

⁹ “a text of tolerance”

Abortion complexity also acknowledges the ambiguity within this affectivity, illustrating that we are dealing with a spectrum of experiences, not dichotomies. *LC*, *IFJVD*, *Interruption*, and *Avortée* are the stories of humans who had abortions, of humans who felt very human things in the wake of this experience. These are the stories of complicated emotions, ones that take on a kaleidoscope of colours, moods, and tones, stories which transgress the binary of experiences which has been set out for us (Runde, 2017). These are stories of violence, pride, shame, grief, relief, trauma, and even joy. As an abortion activist who works directly with abortion care seekers, there are difficult conversations, but also joyful ones, filled with hope and relief. Every day that I continue this work and listen to their experiences I find myself grateful, rather than pitiful, for their courage, kindness, and resilience. There is joy in this work, and joy in these stories. These complex stories, these body matters, remind us that these bodies matter too.

By focusing on the emotional dimension, and the myriad of forms this can take, abortion complexity builds on Ludlow's (2012) work on abortion politics, which highlights that people are not seeking abortions out of a desire to exercise their legal rights, but rather because their lives are complicated. Pro-choice discourse ignores the fact that the decision to have an abortion is shaped by a multitude of social justice issues, structures, and systems (Smith, 2005). Such discourse is often raised in opposition to a "pro-life", anti-abortion stance, wherein abortion is transformed into a necessarily violent, guilt-ridden, and traumatic event to dissuade people from accessing this care, as well as reduce access – sometimes completely – to abortion services (Collette, 2025). However, this pro-choice/pro-life dichotomy is more applicable to discussing abortion rhetoric in the United States, where abortion support is significantly more polarised. As stated at the start of this introduction, support for abortion is widespread in France and those in favour of blanket bans on

abortion access occupy extremely marginal positions in this context.¹⁰ Since scholarship on reproductive justice originated in Black feminist thought from the United States, it is perhaps no surprise that its theories are biased towards this geographical context. As such, the relevance of such a lens for the French setting is perhaps tenuous and the complexity of the narratives analysed in this thesis may therefore partly be attributed to their presence in a less polarised political context. However, in her article on representations of abortion in graphic narrative, Catriona Macleod's (2024) analysis insists on employing this pro-life versus pro-choice lens. Even though the article concludes by alluding to the problematic nature of such rhetoric, her consideration of *Il fallait que je vous le dise*, *Le Choix*, and *Des salopes et des anges* (2011) centres on categorising each of the three works into either camp. Furthermore, it is interesting to note that the language of these stances has integrated itself into mainstream abortion discourse, with a particular emphasis on the notion of choice. See for example the ironic title *Le Choix* (Chapter One) as well as the many references to choice in *Avortée* (Chapter Two). Whilst the concepts of pro-life versus pro-choice may not exist in France *per se*, abortion discourse in France has nevertheless borrowed its terminology. This reflects a form of iterative reification, in which the narrators of abortion narratives seek to “shape their stories to the discursive mode of previously accepted abortion stories” (Allen, 2014, p.51). There is a desire for transgression but not to the extent that it would create a fissure between the aborting self and the other aborting selves with whom it seeks to connect.

Highlighting one of many fallacies in the pro-life argument, Browne explains that social support for pregnancy is not always guaranteed, which is especially true in the case of queer, racialised, and working-class pregnancies (Duden, 1993; Maher, 2002; Browne,

¹⁰ To date, little research has interrogated oppositional stances to abortion in France, perhaps because it occupies such a marginal position. In 2025, sociologists Mireille Le Guen, Marie Mathieu, and Raphaël Perrin announced a special issue of the *Revue française de sociologie* which will focus on contemporary opposition to abortion in France and beyond.

2023).¹¹ Abortion is arguably normalised and incentivised in these communities, whereas in white, heterosexual, middle-class communities, it is more likely to be discouraged and stigmatised (Vergès, 2017). A pertinent example of these stratified reproductive politics is found in the colonialist, antinatalist campaign in the French territory of La Réunion, where physicians carried out thousands of forced abortions and sterilisations during the 1960s and 1970s, whilst abortion and contraceptive care were criminalised in mainland France as part of the postwar pronatalist repopulation campaign (*ibid.*). Whilst abortion was/is frowned upon, certain pregnancies were/are also frowned upon. Clearly, the conversation has never truly been about abortion; it has always been about controlling the marginalised body.

Understanding the decision to abort as contextual, acknowledging aspects such as those integrated into reproductive justice, and moving beyond legal paradigms reorients abortion discourse into one of complexity rather than dichotomies (Ross and Solinger, 2017; Price, 2020). It is for this reason, the simple fact that humans lead complicated lives which cannot be reduced to a single-issue, that in Jeannie Ludlow’s viewpoint, abortion politics should be based on love and goodness or understanding and compassion.

Practicing compassionate abortion politics necessitates empathy, even though this may be understood as antithetical to law and politics (Ludlow, 2012; Grossi, 2014; Robson, 2019). Such an invitation requires “accepting as legitimate sources such as art, music, and literature, and it means accepting knowledge which is neither objective nor measurable” (Grossi, 2014, p.58). This thesis deals with subjective experiences and unquantifiable

¹¹ The examples of abortion complexity in this thesis largely centre on the experiences of white, heterosexual, middle-class cisgender women, meaning this thesis is limited in the conclusions it can draw. There is a distinct lack of literature on queer abortion experiences, as mentioned in footnote 3. As for racialised experiences of abortion, a single account can be found in Sandra Vizzavona’s collection, also analysed in Chapter Two, as well as in Line Papin’s *Une vie possible* (2022). Ines Foueja’s podcast and social media platform *Et si on parlait avortement?* (2021) seeks to create a non-judgmental, welcoming space for those who are having or have had any kind of abortion experience. Foueja often platforms Black women’s experiences of abortion, including her own. All other representations of racialised *avortées* I could uncover were fictional, including *Le Baobab fou* (Bugul, 1984), *A vol d’oiseau* (Tadjo, 1986), and *C’est le soleil qui m’a brûlée* (Beyala, 1987), all analysed side-by-side in a single article (Hunt, 2007).

emotions, focusing on the lived and embodied realities of Frappier, Mermilliod, Harmange, and Vizzavona, who share their abortion experiences from an affective vantage point and encourage the reader/viewer to consider abortion through this lens, focusing on love and embodiment before law and politics. Literature, represented in this thesis via the wide-ranging forms of graphic narrative, personal essay, and collection of *témoignages*, provides an opportunity to engage with the personal, subjective dimension of abortion. This engagement is especially possible via the lived, embodied first-person of autobiography, even if this experiential knowledge has recently been harnessed as a form of unmediated truth (Budgeon, 2021). Autobiography is of course politically situated within wider sociolegal contexts which serve as a backdrop for these experiences. However, it is important to foreground the personal dimension as a reminder that abortion affects and touches real lives. It does not exist solely in clinics, courts of law, or parliamentary debates, but also, and perhaps more importantly, in the hearts, souls, and memories of those who have experienced it. Medical *humanities* thus become a form of medical *humanity*, representing not just interdisciplinary approaches to medicine but also humane and benevolent ones. To paraphrase bell hooks, who emphasised the importance of justice for love; without reproductive justice there can be no love, just as there can be no reproductive justice without love (hooks, 2018 [2000]).

The abortion complexity framework also takes inspiration from Ludlow's later work on abortion positivity, referring to abortion representations which are "[supportive of] decisions and access without conforming to the narrow, politicized expectations of prochoice discourse" (Ludlow, 2020, p.49). Whilst this definition somewhat aligns with the objectives of the present work, I find the emphasis on positivity – denoting happiness, enthusiasm, and joy – problematic if we are to stress a continuum of experience. Positive emotions can certainly occupy the spaces and times of abortion, but such feelings may be some occupants amongst many (Solnit, 2016 [2004]). One of this thesis' significant

contributions in its theorisation of the abortion complexity framework is recognising the ambivalence and ambiguity in emotional responses to abortion, often capturing coexisting positive and negative emotions. For example, as demonstrated in Chapter One, *Le Choix* conveys the narrator's traumatic and infantilising abortion procedure alongside her intense determination and relief, whilst *Il fallait que je vous le dise* addresses Mermilliod's anger and helplessness in the face of her non-choice, as well as the ways in which she finds peace with this decision. Meanwhile, in Chapter Two, Vizzavona's collection of *témoignages* and Harmange's essay bear witness to the emotional intricacies of abortion, and the ways in which abortion, in taking something away not necessarily through choice, gives back in its facilitating of other opportunities. Even though the corpus perhaps infers that abortion must necessarily have a happy ending in which one finds peace with and gains worldly knowledge from this experience, by applying and promoting the lens of abortion complexity, this thesis contributes to the creation of "new scripts for iterating the complex nature of reproductive care" (Browne, 2023; Grenouilleau-Loescher, 2023, p.129). We are therefore addressing representation in the sense of presentations of abortion which *reframe* and *reorient* existing narratives to create new presentations, instead of *repeating* and *recycling* harmful presentations (Neuman, 1993; Baird and Millar, 2019).

In the fields of medical humanities and narrative medicine, literary studies allow for a reconsideration of illness and medicine "puisqu'elles donnent à voir, à entendre des expériences humaines, expressives et créatrices" (Galichon, 2023, p.41).¹² Brian Hurwitz and Victoria Bates (2016) suggest that literature offers a complex perspective on medicine which considers the subjective, lived experience central to reproductive justice. It is through this engagement with narratives of lived experience that this thesis will fulfil its most important contribution to scholarship on abortion, which is making sure *avortée's* voices are heard.

¹² "since they allow us to see and hear human, expressive, and creative experiences."

Academia is not necessarily about seeing what is missing or searching for a gap, but rather about hearing what is already being said and making sure others are listening. Rather than trying to fill the void, let us listen to and echo what is already being shouted into it. Such an approach is also reminiscent of reproductive justice, as I seek to do justice to people's accounts of their lived reproductive experiences to facilitate a compassionate abortion politics of love. If we can only recognise injustice when we acknowledge difference, then only when we engage in and with different voices, practices, and perspectives can we seek to rectify these injustices.

From autobiography to aborto-socio-biographies

The corpus of this thesis consists of works which fall into Holly Runde's definition of abortion narratives, referring to "a work of literature or film whose protagonist has an abortion, and in which her abortion acts as a main plot device that is either itself the climax of the narrative or is instrumental in bringing about the narrative climax" (Runde, 2018, p.7). The processes of embodiment and interruption at the heart of abortion – and this thesis – are in many ways at odds with the processes of narrativisation. How do we narrativise the aborting self, an act which requires linearity and clarity, for this self that is whole but also fragmented, that is now less but also more, that is both outwith and within the body? I understand "narratives" in a broad sense, connoting in this thesis textual and visual-textual experiments which "allow us to constitute experience and construct subjectivities" (Morrissey, 2003, p.17). In recent years, an increasing number of French-language autobiographical abortion narratives have appeared (Grenouilleau-Loescher, 2023).¹³ These

¹³ Despite this, most French-language literary representation of abortion has historically been fictional, even though little scholarship has interacted with these (re)presentations (Détrez and Simon, 2006; Hunt, 2007; Fréville, 2012; Runde, 2018, 2019). Nevertheless, fictional abortion narratives remain marginal, which can perhaps be attributed to the increased privileging of lived experiences, which retain a certain untouchability and

have taken on a variety of formats, from essay (Harmange, 2022) to collections of *témoignages* (Vizzavona, 2021) and autofiction (Papin, 2022), to documentary film (Arbizu and Belin, 2018; Simon, 2023) and graphic narrative (Mermilliod, 2019; Castor 2022). This uptick can partly be explained by the fact that abortion is increasingly present in the French social imaginary following its 2024 constitutionalisation, and the fiftieth anniversary of the passing of the Veil law in 2025 which paradoxically arrives at a time where abortion rights are being repealed worldwide (Erdman and Bergallo, 2024; Querrien and Selim, 2024).

Little scholarship has interacted with depictions of abortion in francophone literary and visual productions (Détrez and Simon, 2004; Carlini Versini and Verdier, 2024; Carlini Versini, 2025). Of this scholarship, much has focused on autobiographical narratives, which this thesis contributes to (Harmon, 2018; Runde, 2018; Thevenet, 2023), with a particular emphasis on Annie Ernaux's *Les Armoires vides* and *L'Événement* (Nelson, 2004; Mihelakis, 2010; Runde, 2017; Hornsby and Riggle, 2022). The former was Ernaux's literary debut, a novel recounting protagonist Denise Lesur's abortion during which she recalls her childhood and adolescence. This book is largely recognised as a fictionalised retelling of the author's own clandestine abortion experience in 1964 and was published the year before the passing of the Veil law (Ernaux, 1974). Meanwhile *L'Événement* (2000) is the autobiographical reliving of this clandestine abortion, whose publication symbolised an apparent end to the individual and collective silence on abortion (Robison, 2024). This *récit* not only addressed a personal experience of clandestine abortion but also targeted the political and cultural backlash which

trustworthiness and as such become perceived as immune to fictionalisation and criticism (Budgeon, 2021). Some examples of abortion narratives in French-language fiction include: *Ton corps est à toi* (1927) by Victor Margueritte; *Le Sang des Autres* (1945) by Simone de Beauvoir; *Tourbillon* (1961); *Les armoires vides* (1974) by Annie Ernaux; *La Vacation* (1989) by Martin Winckler; *Journal d'Hannah* (1992) by Louise Lambrichs; *L'enfant sacrifié* (2002) by Othilie Bailly; *Qui touche à mon corps je le tue* (2008) by Valentine Goby; *Les suppliciées du Rhône* (2018) by Coline Gatel; *Ta grossesse* (2021) by Suzanne Duval; *Le mourir des anges* (2022) by Geneviève Blouin, and *MURmur* (2023) by Caroline Deyns. In the 2020s, particularly post-pandemic, francophone fiction has seen a rise of abortion representation in the forms of reproductive dystopia and crime fiction.

followed the legalisation of abortion in 1975. The appearance of Ernaux's book in 2000 thus sought to avoid this storm as well as the strict censorship that literary abortion representation was subject to prior to its legalisation (*ibid.*) Furthermore, even though this was not the first instance of an autobiographical abortion narrative, part of the importance of this text lies in its emphasis on Ernaux's pride at her abortion experience.¹⁴ Whereas most representations historically foregrounded only the most challenging aspects of abortion, Ernaux highlights the positive aspects of her clandestine abortion alongside her trauma (Détrez and Simon, 2004). In many ways, *L'Événement* was the original abortion complex representation, destabilising the assumption that illegal abortions could only be experienced as traumatic. The release of its film adaptation in 2021 testifies to the length of time it has taken for French visual culture to become more at ease with complex portrayals of abortion. Historically, as referenced in the introduction to Chapter One, French cinematographic abortion representation tended to oscillate between the necessarily fatal and the euphemistic (Hallet and Miller, 2025). This illustrates the persistence of abortion stigma, particularly in relation to complex narratives which both defy and align with reproductive politics of acceptability, reinforcing that this narrative "remain[s] agonizingly pertinent today" (Diwan, 2021; Pugh, 2022, n.p.).

This text has subsequently become a crucial and unavoidable reference for many other *avortées*, including some featured in our corpus; Frappier and Frappier (2020 [2015]), Vizzavona (2021), and Harmange (2022) all mention *L'Événement* as being of either historical and/or personal significance. This intertextuality testifies to a broader intersubjectivity between and within abortion narratives, referring to a constitutive and symbiotic relationship

¹⁴ Earlier examples include Halimi, Gisèle. *Propos recueillis par Marie Cardinal. La cause des femmes.* Paris, Grasset, coll. « Enjeux », 1973 and Thibout, Lorette (pseudonym of Laurence Nobécourt). *L'Avortement vingt ans après – Des femmes témoignent, des hommes aussi.* Éditions Albin Michel, 1995.

in which the singular voice of the *avortée* draws close to the collective voice of *avortées*. These texts therefore align with Annie Ernaux’s “auto-socio-biographical” practice, reimagined in this thesis as “aborto-socio-biographies”, a form of self-representation at the crossroads of social analysis and political commentary (Ernaux, 2011; Elliott, 2023; Duikeren *et al.*, 2025). Autobiography authored by women has long been theorised as a plural, intersubjective undertaking (Edwards and Hogarth, 2010; Edwards, 2011). There is a broader argument to be made that all self-representation is auto-socio-biographical, in that it speaks from the perspective of multiple selves, referring not just to a multiplicity of the individual self but also one that speaks for an external collective. Abortion narratives for example occupy “a liminal space between lived experience and social movement rhetoric”, straddling subjectivity and sorority (Allen, 2014, p.60). Indeed, the Butlerian ethics of giving an account of oneself argues that ‘I’ “can start with itself, but will find that this self is already implicated in a social temporality that exceeds its own capacities for narration” (Butler, 2005, pp.7-8). It is therefore never so much a question of writing the self in a singular sense, as it is writing beyond the self, writing greater than the self, or writing multiple selves, overflowing the restrictive container of the autobiographical “I” to situate itself within a collective history and collective voice (Havercroft, 2004).¹⁵ What is the self and its representation(s), if not imbued with the social and political influences of their surroundings? The coining of “aborto-socio-biographies”, with its emphasis on the prefix “aborto”, seeks to reflect the authenticity and audacity implicated in the auto-socio-biographical act of sharing one’s abortion story. Frappier, Mermilliod, Vizzavona, and Harmange’s decision to dedicate entire works to this topic which has historically remained on the literary margins, and to do so in a way which illustrates the complex nature of this act, is worthy of acknowledgement as an “expansion of

¹⁵ This collective dimension is also reflected in Ernaux’s later publication, *Les Années* (2008), which features numerous references to abortion with particular emphasis on the collective experience (Hechler, 2020).

available narratives of intelligibility, fostering transnational and transgenerational dialogue” (Grenouilleau-Loescher, 2023, p.128). It is important to highlight these narratives for what they are, and normalise first-person abortion storytelling, in the hope that this frankness and complexity will help combat abortion stigma.

Although abortion does not biologically contribute to either the reproduction of the species or the genetic chain, the aborto-socio-biographical narratives born from this non-reproductive event are reproductive in other ways (Kristeva, 1979). This writing is at the same time a reproductive act of non-reproduction and a non-reproductive act of reproduction. In a literal sense, abortion is non-reproductive, as it permanently halts the processes of reproduction, but as a lived and embodied experience of termination, it is simultaneously a reproductive act (Runde, 2018). The works conceived in the wake of this event, specifically those analysed in this thesis, are non-reproductive, as they interrupt and complexify the discourses on abortion we are so familiar with, refusing to perpetuate and reproduce damaging representations.

Yet, aborto-socio-biographies are also a literal form of reproduction. As a form of creativity and generation, such as intertextuality, they reproduce through their continuation and extension of a feminist lineage. In *L'Événement*, Ernaux writes that aborting represented “suivre la voie dans laquelle une longue cohorte de femmes [l]’avait précédée” (Ernaux, 2000, p.32).¹⁶ Although a non-reproductive act, her abortion connected her to a sororal lineage of *avortées* and their stories. Ernaux’s story exists because of theirs, just as later texts exist because of hers; the conditions of emergence of these texts are each other. These works exist because of and in relation to each other, making visible an invisible chain of *avortées* (Meunier, 2024; Bryan, 2025). This chain, or community, created by the existence of aborto-socio-biographies, facilitates an abortion politics of love since the courageous and audacious

¹⁶ “following the path which a long cohort of women had travelled before [her]”.

existence of one narrative naming and detailing abortion experiences makes others possible. The experiential knowledge gained from abortion is therefore not as individualistic and untouchable as we might initially imagine (Budgeon, 2021). The writing of this invisible chain facilitates the transmission of these experiences through time, from one *avortée* to another, meaning there is not just transpersonal and transgenerational transmission, but also transtemporal transmission. Aborto-socio-biographies and their complex iterations from Frappier, Mermilliod, Vizzavona, and Harmange thus span multiple spaces and times, which constitutes the focus of this thesis.

The spaces and times of abortion complexity

As *avortées* are constrained by geographies and time limits, the spatialities and temporalities of abortion are crucial to our understanding of their narratives. The aborting bodies in *Le Choix*, *Il fallait que je vous le dise*, *Interruption. L'avortement par celles qui l'ont vécu*, and *Avortée. Une histoire intime de l'IVG* require space and time to express their liminality, firstly to interrupt a discourse which does not grant them the nuance they have long been denied and secondly, to embody one which grants them this complexity. The present work achieves this not only in the space it grants to these *avortées* on its pages and the time dedicated to this endeavour, but also through its exploration of spatialities, temporalities, interruption, and embodiment in these *avortée*'s stories.

Chapter One, "Space Becomes Her: On Subversion, Embodiment, and Spatiality" will examine the intermedial interactions between pictorial and textual modes of storytelling in graphic abortion narratives and how this is utilised to communicate embodied abortion experience in *Le Choix* (Frappier and Frappier, 2020 [2015]) and *Il fallait que je vous le dise* (Mermilliod, 2019). Using Sara Ahmed's theories of space and (re)orientations delineated in

her work on queer phenomenology (2006), I interrogate the spatial politics of graphic narrative and abortion, to highlight how aborto-socio-biographers represent the self/selves as creators, occupiers, and transmitters of space. I argue that these representations of the aborting body permit a reorientation of abortion's spatialities as defined by Sydney Calkin *et al.* (2022). The chapter subsequently moves to an exploration of the ambiguous and complex representations of inside versus outside at the core of embodied experiences of pregnancy and abortion, as well as the regulation of reproducing/reproductive bodies. The chapter also draws attention to the subversion and reification of repronormative discourses and iconographies of motherhood and/or mothering in *LC* and *IFJVD*, using Mary Jane Kehily and Rachel Thomson's concept of a "common culture of mothering" (2011). I focus on their depictions of sexuality, foetal imagery, and bodily porosity, with a view to suggesting that these graphic aborto-socio-biographies offer a complex, feminist, and embodied visual aesthetics of abortion.

Chapter Two, "Writing an Abortion of Our Time: On Subjectivity, Interruption, and Transmission" examines the reorientation of pregnant time in *Interruption. L'avortement par celles qui l'ont vécu* (Vizzavona, 2021) and *Avortée. Une histoire intime de l'IVG* by (Harmange, 2022). Using notions of women's time and pregnant time founded by Julia Kristeva (1979) and Browne (2023) respectively, it will analyse Harmange and Vizzavona's depictions of subjectivity in pregnancy and abortion experiences, and the ways in which these shift their reproductive decisions into the time of the subjective progressive present. It thus equates "abortion time" with the concept of care time, offering new modes of conceiving abortion's temporalities and situating the act as a collective form of (self-)care (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017; Baraitser and Brook, 2021). The emphasis on collectivity is supported by the work of Judith Butler, in particular the Butlerian ethics of giving an account of oneself (2005; 2024). The chapter proceeds to consider the tension between the temporary connotations of

interruptions, and the permanency of termination or *interruption de grossesse*, interrogating the implications of this conflict for how the self and passage of time are perceived. I conclude by addressing the significance of transmission, insofar as this binds these texts to each other and the genre of aborto-socio-biographies.

The present-day global attack on reproductive freedoms is a pivotal moment for aborting and birthing bodies everywhere. This is proven by the rising number of investigations into pregnancy loss and prosecutions relating to suspected illegal abortions in Britain (Tongue, 2025), increasing maternal and pregnancy-related mortality resulting from abortion bans in the United States (Stevenson, 2021; McGovern, 2024), to the ongoing violations of Palestinians' reproductive rights caused by the Israeli occupation and genocide (McGonigal, 2024). In France, the constitutionalisation of the freedom to abort has not been met with an equalisation of access. Many *avortées* still find themselves up against intersecting temporal and spatial obstacles, from legal time limits to reproductive care deserts and the need to cross borders, an act fraught with increasing bureaucracy, hostility, and racism. Reproductive care seekers remain at the mercy of the nation-state who determines to whom such care is extended and to what extent (Potente, 2023; Erdman and Bergallo, 2024; Querrien and Selim, 2024). In a presidential press conference held in January 2024, Emmanuel Macron called for a "réarmement démographique" in response to France's apparently alarming decline in fertility (Conesa, 2024).¹⁷ When considered alongside France's hardening immigration reform, and their disparate criteria for accessing assistive reproductive technologies for LGBTQ+ couples, to name just two examples, such rhetoric can only be interpreted as a dystopic reminder that reproductive care will still be regulated, and that only certain people will be considered legitimate (re)producers.

¹⁷ "demographic rearmament."

On the one hand, the crossroads we find ourselves at proposes a nosedive into dystopia, also known as the far-right's utopia. Yet, on the other hand, it also offers the option to act on hope and take a sharp left turn towards abortion complexity. This thesis hopes to contribute to the guiding light of grassroots abortion activism as part of the latter endeavour, recognising that the only way to reproductive freedom is perhaps audacity, ambiguity, and authenticity, as incarnated in the abortion complexity framework. As collective emancipation depends on unity and solidarity, abortion complexity is my contribution to this community. I therefore offer in the present work new perspectives on spatialities and temporalities as well as additional time and space to enable this audacious and authentic reproductive freedom, the advent of which will be obtained through an abortion politics of love, compassion, and empathy.

Chapter One

Space Becomes Her: On Subversion, Embodiment, and Spatiality

...no image dangles in a cultural void, just as no fetus floats in a space capsule...

(Petchesky, 1987, p.287)

*What moves us, what makes us feel, is also that which holds us in place,
or gives us a dwelling place.*

(Ahmed, 2014 [2004], p.11)

1.1 Introduction

Women's relationship to space, the ways they inhabit and survive in it, and their sense of belonging or security "is profoundly shaped by our inability to secure an undisputed right to occupy that space" (Hanmer and Saunders, 1984, p.39; Rose, 1993). For certain bodies, space is an experience of non-belonging and insecurity, of being forced into an unwelcoming place and forced to conform to its contours. This is a painful experience, for it is a "painstaking labor for bodies to inhabit spaces that do not extend their shape" (Ahmed, 2006, p.62; Ansaloni and Tedeschi, 2016; Rodó-Zárate, 2023). In the context of abortion, space extends to the reproductive body, with the spatialities of abortion commonly understood as the socio-legal settings in which this reproductive act is regulated, such as wombs, bodies, clinics, hospitals, states, and regions (Calkin *et al.*, 2022). Yet, these spaces do not occupy equal freedoms. The embodied spaces of abortive and reproductive happenings are contained not just by the barrier of our skin, the thick lining of the womb, or the amniotic sac, but also contained, monitored, and scrutinised within the four walls of the

abortion clinic, the hospital chamber, and the parliamentary debating chamber. Only we can live in our bodies, our bodies being the space and place of reproduction, yet the ways in which we experience and occupy our bodily space are necessarily bound up with the politics which police the body's location in the outside world. As such, the owners, or inhabitants, of reproductive and aborting bodies, including Désirée Frappier and Aude Mermilliod, the protagonists of *Le Choix* (2020 [2015]) and *Il fallait que je vous le dise* (2019) respectively, have a disputed right to occupy spaces, both bodily ones and those outwith, even though there is not always a clear boundary separating the two (Ahmed, 2006). To experience and live in the reproductive body, whether through birthing, gestating, lactating, labouring, menstruating, aborting, or all, or none of the above, is therefore situated in a politics of location; to exist in spaces, whether bodily or otherwise is to live in a place we do not belong, in a place which does not extend to our shape, and so our bodies labour, in both the (re)productive sense and the painful sense of non-belonging (*ibid.*). Aborting bodies thus occupy space as space itself; unable to own space, women are simultaneously understood to *be* space itself, since both are perceived as static objects (Löw, 2006). In this context, I therefore understand the concept of situated knowledges to be a physical, corporeal, objective standpoint, referring to knowledge gained through bodily inhabitation of space, the literal location of the body, rather than our subjective relation to this space (Haraway, 1988).

Literary analysis has long interpreted space as a passive background or container of narrative, treated as the mere location of narrative development, whilst time is its driver (Tally, 2017). In literature, women are passive space whereas men are active time, assertions which will be refuted throughout Chapters One and Two (*ibid.*). However, in graphic narrative, which this chapter is concerned with, spaces are translations of time. The braiding together of these images or spaces, known as sequentiality, refers to the way in which adjacent panels are braided into a coherent, logical sequence, and imbued with narrative

meaning (Horskotte, 2015). By virtue of their creation of graphic space and positioning within this space, Frappier and Mermilliod are elevated to time and thus active subjects. Ann Miller insists on the “narrative legibility” of Franco-Belgian *bande dessinée*, suggesting that the specificity of the Franco-Belgian tradition, in contrast to the American comic strip or Japanese manga for example, can be attributed to the decomposition of movements and the role of the reader in constructing this sequentiality (Miller, 2007, p.55; Groensteen, 2013).¹⁸ Space is transformed into a narrative moving through time, blurring spatial and temporal boundaries and allowing the bodies contained within to transcend drawn lines (Chute, 2010). Furthermore, the spaces of graphic narrative – extending to the diegetic spaces of action, the representational spaces, meaning the material pages of these works which are commonly divided into bordered panels, as well as the physical space these works take up – differ from the traditionally interpreted spatialities of abortion because they are tailor-made for the aborting body. If we define abortions’ spatialities as above (Calkin *et al.*, 2022), referring to the spaces which, in not extending to the shape of these bodies, constrain them, then graphic narratives are a reorientation of these spaces.

The spaces of graphic narrative may perhaps be considered as unregulated, referring to a space shirking laws and regulations, created instead by the hands whose story they tell. For example, Aude Mermilliod acts as the scriptor and artist for the entirety of *Il fallait que je vous le dise* – hereafter *IFJVD* – including the second half which centres on doctor and author

¹⁸ Throughout this chapter I will use the terms *bande dessinée* and graphic narrative interchangeably. Although graphic novel is a more frequent term, this evokes the specific literary genre of the novel, which typically designates a work of fiction written in prose. As a genre, graphic novels nevertheless encompass a variety of literary formats, including non-fiction, documentary, and autobiography. This thesis thus favours graphic *narrative*, understanding this as an umbrella term designating visual-textual experiments which “[encompass] different forms, formats, genres and storytelling traditions across cultures and from around the world” (Stein and Thon, 2015, p.15). Furthermore, the term “narrative” is privileged as a means of situating the chosen works within the field of graphic medicine, recognising these works as medical *narratives* which bridge the gap between medical knowledge and embodied patient experience (Williams, 2012). *Bande dessinée* is also used in lieu of comics as the latter concept has culturally specific origins in the Anglo-American world, just as *manga* is culturally specific to Japan, and the *bande dessinée* to Franco-Belgian societies.

Martin Winckler. *Le Choix* – hereafter *LC* – is scripted and narrated by Désirée Frappier, who is the primary protagonist and narrator – although this is not explicitly revealed until the final pages (Macleod, 2024) – with images drawn by her professional and life partner Alain Frappier.¹⁹ Even though in *LC* the spaces are not filled entirely with Frappier’s hand *per se*, it is nevertheless her existence and narrative which dictates the (re)orientation of space. In abortio-socio-biographical graphic narrative, not only does the boundary between space and time become unclear, so does the boundary between self and other, and the insides and outsides of the self. This chapter is therefore interested in the creative and transcendent reorientations of space in depictions of abortion and pregnancy in contemporary abortio-socio-biographical *bande dessinée*.

Space has the potential to be transformative, if we (re)orient it in certain ways. In Ahmed’s definition, space “becomes a question of ‘turning’, of directions taken, which not only allow things to appear, but also enable us to find our way through the world by situating ourselves in relation to such things” (Ahmed, 2006, p.6). Space provides direction, a way forward, but also grounding, security, and safety. As alluded to in the epigraph, it is the very things that move us which also hold us in place (Ahmed, 2014 [2004]). Indeed, the abortion complex representations offered in *LC* and *IFJVD* offer a way forward for complex realities and further representation, as well as comfort and grounding for the *avortée* embodying this complexity. This tension between grounding and moving is embodied in the objective of this thesis, in that the potential of progressing and advancing with regards to abortion complex

¹⁹ Knowing this, there is an argument to be made that the art in *LC* is more like illustration, in the sense that the images were created as a supplement to the text, after the events of the text took place; the manuscript and the events it details act as preconditions for the accompanying images (Gratton, 2011). Indeed, Désirée writes that “Alain dessine [ses] histoires” (p.69), implying that he illustrates them, rather than her verbalising the visual elements he creates. The narrative relationship between discursive and pictorial elements in *LC* could therefore be classified as a word-specific iteration, in which the images do not necessarily add additional meaning to the words on the page (McCloud, 1993, p.153; Gratton, 2006; Hoppeler et al., 2009). *LC* arguably deviates from the *BD* genre’s norm of meaning being derived from the tensions between the discursive and pictorial elements, the latter existing merely to reiterate and buttress the former.

representation provides comfort and solace, a moment of peace in which the action of hope can manifest. *IFJVD* is a way forward for Mermilliod who deeply grieves her abortion, yet felt she had no other choice, as *LC* is for Frappier, whose abortion procedure was violent and traumatic, yet she harbours no regrets in its aftermath. The introduction to this thesis stated a desire to explore *re*presentations of abortion which *re*frame and *re*orient existing narratives, a potentiality offered by contemporary graphic abortion narratives. Specifically, these narratives offer a reorientation of space, providing, in the most literal sense, “new contours of what we could call livable or inhabitable space”, rather than a space of non-belonging and insecurity (*ibid.*, p.11; Hanmer and Saunders, 1984).

Beginning with embodiment, this chapter proposes to consider possible spatial reorientations in graphic abortion narratives, in a world where it is a painful experience to exist within the boundaries of an unwelcoming space, but perhaps equally painful to escape its walls, as transcendence can be dangerous for those who decide not to conform to the laws of a repronormative, male-dominated space (Mohanty, 1997; Rose, 1993). On the surface, the inscription of abortion into the format of graphic narrative invites the reader/viewer to reinforce the surveillance of aborting bodies. Just like in the beyond bodily space, these bodies become static objects to be looked at, peered, surveilled, and governed. Through their authentic portrayals of the abortion procedure in particular, *LC* and *IFJVD* reorient spatiality in such a way that allows them to take control of space, rather than merely entertain a painful existence within its confines. For example, Frappier’s experience is portrayed in a traditional black and white comic style yet subverts the ways in which we have come to conceive of abortion in contemporary France. She criticises the Veil law rather than lauding it as a silver bullet for abortion access, depicts the lasting consequences of being an unwanted child which was the result of the inaccessibility of abortion, and contributes to a new visual aesthetic of abortion as one of many possible reproductive events in a woman’s

life (Le Naour and Valentini, 2003; Froidevaux-Metterie, 2023; Macleod, 2024). Meanwhile, Mermilliod employs a more contemporary style of art, rejecting the traditional borders and panels of *bande dessinée*, and openly criticises the notion of choice by illustrating the abortion she did not want to have but felt forced to because of her personal, emotional, and financial circumstances. Both narratives employ space to destabilise assumptions about abortion, including that the birth of a child means they are wanted, and that a termination is necessarily the result of an unwanted pregnancy. Furthermore, both *LC* and *IFJVD* offer the reader/viewer haptic and tactile readings of these reoriented spaces, pushing their narratives beyond the physical book, as well as inviting the reader/viewer into these spaces. This notion of hapticity is central to my readings of the entire corpus. I argue that these aborto-socio-biographies evoke a form of literary hapticity by transmitting tactile information via their visual aesthetics and language (Paterson, 2017). By implicating the proximal senses as well as the distal ones commonly associated with visual aesthetics and reading, the reader/viewer is encouraged to physically engage with the material, to feel similar sensations to the narrator/artist (Roberts, 2022).

By narrativising, spatialising, and pictorialising their complex experiences, Frappier and Mermilliod transform the aborting body as well as all the regulated spaces it inhabits into figures deliberately and actively taking up space on the page, translating their embodiment into literary space (Ardener, 2021 [1993]; Bouamer and Stojanovic, 2022). In exploring unregulated spaces, my analysis also ventures into considerations of the *dys*regulated, insofar as abortion consists of an inherently corporeal experience sparking affective responses considered as antithetical to law and politics (Grossi, 2014). This includes feelings such as grief which are often not considered to exist within the palatable range of emotional reaction (Runde, 2017). As a reader/viewer we are invited by the occupiers of these bodies to peer, but not surveil or police, gazing upon a space tailor-made for the aborting body (Chute,

2010). The space of the panels, the positionality of the body on the page, the physical space taken up by the aborting body as subject are designed specifically for the purpose of narrating Frappier and Mermilliod's abortion experiences.

In working with unregulated and dysregulated spaces, the works in question are not safe spaces, a descriptor we are accustomed to hearing in social justice activist contexts, referring to spaces whose inhabitants avoid difficult topics to keep the peace. The danger, difficulty, and taboo inherent in speaking up about one's abortion, much less visualising it for all to see, is entirely at odds with the concept of safety (Arao and Clemens, 2013). Rather, *LC* and *IFJVD* are *brave* spaces whose inhabitants openly speak about and display that which makes us uncomfortable and that which we would perhaps prefer remained unsaid (*ibid.*). This chapter will consider how those who decide to not mould themselves and their bodies into existing cartographies embody and create space. Indeed, how do people who have had abortions create such spaces without roadmaps or landmarks, balancing the challenges of occupying and transcending boundaries? How do aborting bodies occupy these spaces, and how do these bodies reorient themselves towards spaces of abortion complexity? In this perspective, I am interested in the politics of location, but particularly a locatedness of the self and the embodied knowledge offered by this location and bodily physicality (Rich, 1985; Eagleton, 2010).

1.1.1 *Bande dessinée* and abortion

Although comics and film developed their narrative methodologies around the same time (Horskotte, 2015), images of reproduction, pregnancy, and childbirth have not been equally featured in both. These subjects have been present in cinema since the birth of the medium, providing visual representations and referents for these events (Bliss, 2020). In the

twentieth century, pregnancy gained a privileged status in artistic representations, particularly by women artists (Berthiaud, 2013). However, reproductive experiences in cinema were not necessarily represented in a positive light, particularly those falling beyond the realms of repronormativity, such as abortion. Prior to the long 1960s, French cinema tended to depict abortion as a nefarious and deadly event, and later representations merely alluded to the act via euphemistic references to pregnant people travelling to popular abortion destinations (Hallet and Miller, 2025). Admittedly, contemporary French television series have moved towards more empathetic and positive abortion representations in shows such as *Engrenages* (2014), *Plus belle la vie* (2020), *Drôle* (2022), and *Plan cœur* (2022), and recent cinematic depictions have suggested that abortion can become a site of patriarchal resistance and sorority, such as in *Portrait de la jeune fille en feu* (2019), *Lingui, les liens sacrés* (2021) and *Annie colère* (2023) (Hallet and Miller, 2025). Nevertheless, in cinema, it is a subject that remains mostly shrouded in taboo, “un phénomène intéressant qui résulte à la fois de la frilosité des médias français et du statut de l’IVG dans la société, considérée comme déviance légale” (Conte *et al.*, 2015, p.210; Ludlow, 2020; Carlini Versini, 2025; Hallet and Miller, 2025).²⁰

In contrast to this ever present, albeit not necessarily positive or complex, representation in cinema, francophone graphic narrative has consistently reduced images of reproduction, pregnancy, and childbirth to a secondary standing throughout its history. Meanwhile, Anglo-American and Hispanophone comics have illustrated great openness to (analyses of) graphic reproduction, referring to a subcategory of graphic medicine which uses comics as a means of bridging reproductive medical knowledge with embodied patient experience of reproduction (Williams, 2012; Squier, 2020; Freeman and Nandagiri, 2023). Catriona Macleod’s work on the representation of women in French-language comics, the

²⁰ “An interesting phenomenon stemming from both the reluctance of French media and the societal status of abortion as a legal deviance.”

only such comprehensive study to date, barely mentions pregnancy, reproduction, or childbirth. One mention occurs in a chapter on secondary female characters drawn by men, and another in a footnote (Macleod, 2022, p.135; p.214, note 17). Abortion is featured just once in this volume (*ibid.*, p.147), and constitutes the focus of a single further piece of graphic narrative scholarship (Macleod, 2024). Yet, that is not to say that it is completely unspoken about in francophone *bande dessinée* (BD), even if its accompanying scholarship has historically excluded aborting bodies from its analyses.²¹ Historically, abortion has taken up limited space on the pages of BD, meaning it appears to retain a certain unrepresentability. It is in spite of the prominence of abortion in the contemporary cultural arena, particularly following the constitutionalisation of the freedom to abort, that this chapter seeks to help rectify this limited place in BD and accompanying scholarship.

Interestingly, perhaps even ironically, *bande dessinée* has long been associated with the campaign for abortion rights in France. One week following the publication of the *Manifeste des 343*, a satirical cartoon by Cabu appeared in *Charlie Hebdo*, entitled “Qui a engrossé les 343 salopes du manifeste pour l’avortement?” with a caricature of politician Michel Debré responding “C’était pour la France!” (Macleod, 2024) (see Figure 1)²² The satirical tagline demonstrates that it was widespread knowledge that the state was actively implementing a politics of stratified reproduction for the purpose of nation-state building. The state, rather

²¹ These include fictional depictions such as *Des salopes et des anges* (Benacquista and Cestac, 2011) – which, together with *Le Choix* (Frappier and Frappier, 2020 [2015]) and *Il fallait que je vous le dise* (Mermilliod and Winckler, 2019), the two works analysed in this thesis, form the focus of a single piece of scholarship (Macleod, 2024) – *Clémentine ou la contraception* (Crinon et al., 1978; Olsen, 2025), *Libre de choisir* (Wachs and Richelle, 2011), and *Des femmes guettant l’annonce* (Massot and Misk, 2024). There are also non-fiction volumes, including a broad overview of the history of abortion worldwide, *Le mot en A* (Casillas and Garay, 2023), biographical retellings of Simone Veil’s life, *Simone Veil, L’immortelle* (Bresson and Duphot, 2018), and the Bobigny trial, *Bobigny 1972* (Bardiaux-Vaïente and Maurel, 2024), and the story of the forced sterilisations and abortions in La Réunion during the 1970s, *Outre-Mères* (Andriansen and Anjale, 2024). Beyond the corpus of the present chapter, there currently exists, to the knowledge of the author, just two other autobiographical retellings of abortion in graphic narrative form: *Cher Bloplop: Lettre à mon embryon* (Castor, 2022) explores Violette’s first pregnancy experience, which ends in abortion, and her second which results in a child, and *Je voulais parler de lui* (Lili, 2024) explores the emotional burden of a late-term abortion following a foetal anomaly diagnosis.

²² “Who knocked up the 343 sluts of the abortion manifesto?” “It was for France!”

than pregnant people, were empowered to make decisions about conceiving, continuing, and completing pregnancies (Wenham, 2021). Whilst pronatalist, anti-abortion politics were in place for white women in 1970s France, Black women in La Réunion were undergoing forced abortions and sterilisations which had been enabled by Debré's introduction of family planning centres to the region (Vergès, 2017). The abortion clinic is therefore also a colonial space, which is a potential avenue for future research. These stratified – and racialised – politics of reproduction were justified as necessary for the construction of a nation-state constituted only of legitimate subjects, conceived by those perceived as legitimate (re)producers. Simply put, the value accorded to some reproductive bodies is not identical to the value imbued on others. This concretely illustrates the ways in which external spaces dictate the happening and becoming of embodied patient experience and consequently governs and surveils these bodies' means of occupying and inhabiting these spaces.

The impact of this cartoon was such that the *Manifeste des 343* was also misogynistically referred to as “the *Manifeste des 343 salopes*”, amalgamating abortion and sexual promiscuity in the French social imaginary and reinforcing a sexual comedy dependent on promiscuous objectification (Stoneley, 2020). It reflects the beliefs that in Western societies, the onus of sexual morality is typically placed on women who are expected to be modest and passive in their sex life and perpetuates the widespread notion that if sexual health and reproductive information are widely available, people are more likely to behave promiscuously (Dreweke, 2019; Sævik and Konijnberg, 2023). The original representation of abortion in *BD* culture was therefore not an auspicious one, its spaces used to constrain and stigmatise the marginalised aborting body and reinforce a repronormative rhetoric along sexualised and racialised boundaries. Whilst some may view it as positive that abortion took up space on the cover of a nationally adored comic, it served only to reinforce the reproductive body as one subject to both politico-legal and sociomoral surveillance, seeking

to contain and constrain its movement beyond regulatory and regulated space. Yet, it is also important to note the stylistic parallels between Figure 1 and the art featured in *LC*. As previously alluded to, Frappier relies on a more traditional style of comic art in comparison with that found in *IFJVD*. The use of black and white and consistent – although not exclusive – use of negative space mimics the *Charlie Hebdo* cartoon but does so in a narrative context which reorients the space



Figure 1 - Front page of Charlie Hebdo on 12th April 1971 © Charlie Hebdo, 1971

into a complex one no longer constrained by reproductive and repronormative stereotypes. Part of the complexity of the reoriented space in *LC*, which encompasses the nuanced realities of aborting, is due to its creation at the hands of an aborting body.

Since the publication of this caricature in 1971, graphic representation of abortion has significantly shifted. The publication of the sexual health campaign posters designed by *bédéiste* Laurier The Fox for *Planning familial* stating that abortion also affects transgender people (Figure 2) and that men can access pregnancy support at *Planning* centres (Figure 3), illustrates that the organisation, and abortion discourse more broadly, is perhaps evolving away from perpetuating the compulsory heterosexuality of repronormativity, and the stratified reproductive politics reinforced by the *Charlie Hebdo* caricature (Romerio, 2022; Morel and Reignier, 2024). Women are invariably reified as the subject of pregnancy, abortion, and miscarriage, which is partly illustrated and reinforced by the fact that “reproductive health” is considered synonymous with “women’s health” (Love, 2022). Furthermore, “women’s health” is assumed to refer uniquely to gynaecology and obstetrics, and vice versa, when the reality of women’s experiences of healthcare encompasses a variety of clinical settings (Bolton, 2005; Moseson *et al.*, 2020; Froidevaux-Metterie, 2023). Such repronormative discourse has also become ingrained in government policy. In June 2022, the French Constitutional Council confirmed that transgender men would be unable to access fertility treatment even if they had a uterus, thus delegitimising trans and queer parenting whilst simultaneously venerating cisgender motherhood (Rozée et de La Rochebrochard, 2023). Once again, this illustrates that abortion’s spatialities are not on equal footing, as the bodily spaces of reproduction are constrained by the sociolegal spaces of their governance, and these bodies are themselves imbued with meaning and legitimacy depending on age, race, gender, class, and disability etc.

It is thought that one's own body and the place in which one positions bodily experiences have a shared identity, and that this identity "enables the spatial content of bodily experiences to ground the sense of bodily ownership" (De Vignemont, 2023, p.275). However, this assertion ignores that the spatial content of (reproductive) bodily experiences is often grounded in a sense of bodily disenfranchisement. By alienating queer and racialised reproductive bodies from the spatial content of bodily experiences, they are in turn situated as disparate from a sense of bodily ownership. Of course, the concept of bodily ownership is a slippery one as we cannot always exercise full control over the body's thoughts and movements. Nevertheless, this separateness between bodily experience and spatial ownership defines the aborting body's relationship to space; exempt from the norms of bodily ownership enjoyed by non-reproductive bodies, Mermilliod and Frappier are simultaneously alienated from space whilst simultaneously posited as space itself as the passive container of narrative (Tally, 2017). Yet, through reorienting space, the reproductive bodily experience becomes grounded in this space. Space thus becomes her through a conferral of bodily ownership (De Vignemont, 2023). Figures 2 and 3 exemplify this reorientation of space through their eschewal of repronormative ideals, grounding queer parenting and pregnancy in a tailor-made spatiality, and conferring the non-repronormative reproductive body with bodily ownership. It is this question of bodily ownership that is problematised in *LC* and *IFJVD* and analysed in the present chapter. I argue that contemporary portrayals of abortion in graphic narrative ground the non-repronormative reproductive body in a brave, unregulated, and dysregulated spatiality, which is imbued with bodily ownership – to the extent that this is possible – in gaining meaning and direction in this space. Furthermore, if narrative becomes reality and vice-versa, complex depictions of non-repronormative parenting and pregnancy hold potential to realise real-life non-repronormative trajectories (Jacobs, 2008). The graphic examples in Figures 2 and 3 thus illustrate the potential of

contemporary abortion narratives to provide new visual referents for reproductive experiences and reorientations of space, just like *LC* and *IFJD*.



Figure 2 – “At Family Planning, we know abortion also affects trans people” © Laurier The Fox, 2024



Figure 3 – “At Family Planning, we know men can be pregnant too” © Laurier The Fox, 2021

1.1.2 *Le Choix* and *Il fallait que je vous le dise*

I will now present the two works of *bande dessinée* which will be analysed in the present chapter. *Le Choix* (Frappier and Frappier, 2020 [2015]) interweaves Frappier's account of her own reproductive trajectory which includes both abortion and motherhood. She recounts the abortions of those around her but perhaps most significantly that of her mother, whose trajectory to motherhood was determined by the inaccessibility of a desperately sought abortion. Furthermore, not only do these multiple accounts attest to the widespread practice of abortion in the pre-Veil era, but also the lifelong psychological and developmental impacts of being a child whose parents did not want them (Macleod, 2024). The narrative traces Frappier's legitimisation of her sexual and reproductive trajectory at the same time as her very existence, interrogating the affective aftermath of aborting and not. At its core, I argue that *LC* seeks to institute a space for peace and joy in abortion amidst trauma, pain, and a sense of illegitimacy, displaying abortion complexity in its affective responses and through its portrayal of multiple, differing trajectories (Froidevaux-Metterie, 2023). Indeed, this question of legitimacy, which is very much tied to the concept of repronormativity, is also prevalent in the choice of medium. *LC*'s utilises classical comic techniques, specifically those relating to the management of space, including monochrome panels and rigid borders and gutters, clearly defining the narrative and discursive boundaries. Whilst this perhaps stems from a desire for this work to slot comfortably within the defined parameters of *bande dessinée*, its portrayal of abortion complexity nevertheless reorients abortion's spatialities.

The question of legitimising experiences is also pertinent in *Il fallait que je vous le dise* (Mermilliod, 2019). Drawn entirely by Aude Mermilliod, who also scripts the first half of the narrative detailing the abortion she had in Brussels in 2011, the second half introduces doctor and author Winckler, who discusses his trajectory as a gynaecological healthcare

provider offering abortion care. Mermilliod's retelling of her unwanted abortion meets panels depicting her sexual encounters, her friend's pregnancy, and her sister's postpartum experience. Yet, just as in *LC*, the reader/viewer is not subject to a narrative of solely trauma or regret, as Mermilliod emphasises that hope and peace are central to her reproductive decision. I argue that both works therefore incarnate Ludlow's (2012) aforementioned abortion politics of love and goodness, in which abortion is practiced as an act of love rather than as an exercise of legal rights, shifting the spatialities of abortion away from the regulated and regulatory, towards the unregulated and dysregulated. Whilst the legal status of abortion is prominently mentioned in both, the insistence of both narratives on emotional complexity of their respective experiences reinforces the necessity of an embodied, rather than purely legal – illegal versus legal – or polarising – pro-life versus pro-choice – approach to reading and understanding abortion narratives.

This chapter has begun by exploring the intertwined existences of space(s), abortion (narratives), and the Franco-Belgian tradition of *bande dessinée*. In the next section I will consider the ways in which the embodied experience of abortion is conveyed across both works, asking how affectivity, embodiment, and emotion both allow and are manifested through spatial reorientations. By focusing on the bodily space, I seek to reorient contemporary discourse in which there is “[infrequent reference] made to the obviously central and concrete role the human body plays in this ethical drama” (Koukal, 2019, p.2). The chapter will examine representations of the pregnant body in graphic narrative and their portrayal of abortions as a haptic, sensual experience, moving beyond the bodily space, the space of graphic narrative, and the locatedness of the body within these spaces, theorising the becoming of the self as space. Subsequently, it will analyse the ways in which this embodiment subverts discourses and iconographies of motherhood and/or mothering. By interrogating depictions of sexuality, foetal imagery, and inside/outside, the chapter

considers the ways in which Frappier and Mermilliod reify or subvert the “common culture of mothering” (Kehily and Thomson, 2011), creating a new visual aesthetic for abortion as an embodied experience.

1.2 Embodying abortion

How do we tell the embodied stories of “a body deemed unworthy of embodiment”? (Swafford, 2020, p.95) What does embodiment look like for those who have been denied the space for it? Frappier and Mermilliod portray their embodied abortion experiences in an era where abortion misinformation is widespread, particularly with regards to the procedure itself (Gyuras *et al.*, 2022; John *et. al.*, 2024). Depicting this embodiment places the reproductive space of the body at the centre of these narratives. For Frappier and Mermilliod, the body gains meaning from its inhabitation of space, just as space gains meaning and direction from this bodily inhabitation (Ahmed, 2006). As such, even though the reproductive body is separated from its spatiality in abortion’s spatialities as they are traditionally conceived, the spaces of graphic narrative offer new meaning to the body, locating it in a position of importance.

In *LC*, a young Frappier is faced with “un jeune médecin, armé d’un spéculum, qui ne prend même pas la peine de dire bonjour à ma tête” (p.65) (Figure 4).²³ The medicalisation of abortion, and certainly its regulation and legislation, has arguably infantilised abortion care seekers by placing them under the paternalistic control of (often male) doctors (Amery, 2020). The inscription of abortion into law determined who could perform abortions – doctors – and where they could do so – in designated medical

²³ “a young doctor armed with a speculum, who doesn’t even bother saying hello to me”

institutions (Hennette-Vaucher and Marguet, 2025). As such, the medicalised domain became the epicentre of abortion knowledge, delegitimising pregnant person's embodied experiences in favour of an institutionalised epistemic authority (Duden, 1994; Morgan and Michaels, 2016; Popowicz, 2021; Millar, 2025). This question of authority is also pertinent when interrogating the co-authorial relationship between Winckler and Mermilliod in *IFJVD*. As a doctor and abortion provider, Winckler occupies a position of epistemic authority granted to him by the legalisation and medicalisation of abortion. In this perspective, Winckler's narrative is *de facto* authoritative due to his position. Mermilliod's narrative is arguably legitimised by his presence, buttressed by a trustworthy source; her narrative requires validation outwith her body to exist in this literary space (Grossi, 2014). Yet, Mermilliod and Winckler are shown to actively engage in dialogue with one another (Mermilliod, 2019, pp.9-13), illustrating the potentiality of patient-doctor interaction as a source of empowerment rather than a disenfranchising site of hierarchical power relations.



65

Figure 4 - LC, p.65

Returning to *LC*, the doctor does not directly address Frappier lying on the examination table, instead treating her like “un vulgaire poulet rôti embroché sur son spéculum” (p.66) (Figure 5).²⁴ Her embodied experience of her own space is ignored in favour of an unembodied epistemic authority; her experience of this space is dictated by a body which is not her own. For example, the setup of the gynaecological chair, which determines the position in which the patient’s exam or procedure takes place, is created with the needs and comfort of the gynaecologist in mind (Gleisner and Johnson, 2019). The way in which each person experiences this space is determined by their physical bodily position within it. Whereas the doctor is fully clothed and able to physically move around the hospital room, Frappier is half-naked and exposed, confined to the chair in such a way that the doctor can easily navigate her space, and therefore cannot freely occupy the space and claim it as her own (*ibid.*). Frappier’s confinement to passivity within the four walls of the hospital is reflected by the rigidity of the four borders surrounding the panels in Figures 4 and 5. Furthermore, as a context in which the doctor exercises the rule of law and epistemic authority, he perceives the space of this clinical setting as belonging to him, reflecting the delegation of abortion governance from lawmakers to abortion practitioners and transforming the clinical space into a site of surveillance (Calkin *et al.*, 2022). Although his purpose in this space is to care for Frappier, and she has been granted access to this space under such a guise, she does not exercise freedom or agency within it. Her body does not extend to the shape of this space, making her body’s inhabitation of it a painful experience, and it is for this reason that she creates a new space in graphic narrative (Ahmed, 2006).

²⁴ “a common chicken skewered on his speculum”



Figure 5 - LC, p.66

Her unwanted presence is reinforced by an animalistic and food metaphor, indicating the impact of the doctor's infantilising treatment. The description of "un vulgaire poulet rôti" in Figure 5 subjugates her; reducing Frappier to a tame, often domesticated creature, this metaphor encourages sexist beliefs and a culture of sexual violence towards her as the animalised subject (Haslam *et al.*, 2011; López-Rodríguez, 2023). Moreover, Frappier is not granted the status of a live animal, but one which has been killed and skewered for the purposes of male consumption and violation. As abortion is considered a rejection of motherhood – to the extent that it does not subsequently reify nationalistic ideals – and of the rituals of gestating, birthing, and caregiving perceived as a woman's biological and social destiny, this reproductive act symbolises a refusal of the archetypal model of womanhood. Her body is perceived as abject in both its unclean womanliness – the ability to reproduce, birth, and menstruate, and the inevitable presence of blood outside the body has historically led to associations between women and animals – and its refusal of womanhood (Kumar, 2018). One of patriarchy's many absurdities is that performing maternal perfection necessarily requires this abject porosity between inside and outside, but the body may not exhibit or bear traces of this abjection (Kristeva, 1980). As a woman Frappier would be confined to domestication, but her refusal of these ideals makes her doubly, perhaps too abject, and she is unbefitting of such a cage (Kumar *et al.*, 2009; O'Brien, 2015). She thus imagines herself as a dead animal, unworthy of belonging even in a constricting space. Whilst it is painful to conform to spaces that were not made for us and in which we are not welcome, it is perhaps even more painful, to the point of violence, to transcend these spaces (Mohanty, 1997; Rose, 1993).

This clinical setting serves as the backdrop for controlling the space of Frappier's womb and body, reinforcing the clinic as a site of surveillance of the reproductive body (Powis and Strong, 2025). This surveillance can be thought of in legal terms, in which the

clinic acts as a proxy for the nation-state for monitoring and managing pregnancies. Yet, there is also literal surveillance of the body via the peering, touching, and feeling inherent in medical exams. By inscribing the procedure to graphic narrative, Frappier's abortion is subject to the unwanted surveillance of the doctor, whose peering is a violation, and the reader/viewer, whose gaze is instead invited to transform the *avortée* into an active subject. In Figure 4 and the first two panels in Figure 5, the narrow panels centre the doctor from Frappier's horizontal perspective whilst the surrounding space of the hospital room is not featured. The focus is on the doctor peering into her vagina, with no sheet placed over her legs so from the reader/viewer's perspective – which is also Frappier's perspective – her pubic hair is fully visible. The panel borders are rigid, caging the protagonist and reader/viewer into this space with the doctor, offering no escape. Frappier's bodily space is violated as she experiences both verbal abuse and “speculum violence” at the hands of the doctor charged with her care (Sherafat, 2024). He yells at the nurses “ELLE A UN STÉRILET! ON NE POSE PAS DE STÉRILET À UNE FEMME NULLIPARE !” (p.66) (Figure 5).²⁵ The doctor's shouting, illustrated by the uppercase text, fills the space with the sound of his voice, rather than his patient's which should be centred. He is angered that Frappier has had an IUD inserted and perceives this contraceptive decision as improper. Since he is the epistemic authority in the doctor-patient relationship, he governs her body as a space of reproduction, and as Frappier has no children, she has not yet fulfilled the rite of passage of motherhood. The doctor thus reads/views her body as an empty space for reproduction which he governs. Yet the uterus is both culturally and biologically dense, rather than a hollow organ (Nicolas *et al.*, 2022). By exercising agency and authority over her reproductive capacities, Frappier refutes the notion that non-pregnant bodies are empty spaces waiting to be filled. However, in reclaiming agency over her intimate spaces of

²⁵ “SHE HAS AN IUD! YOU DON'T GIVE IUDS TO CHILDLESS WOMEN!”

reproduction in a clinical setting where she is not entitled to the same ownership, she experiences this transgression as painful by refusing to conform to the laws of a repronormative, male-dominated space (Mohanty, 1997; Rose, 1993). Frappier is an exposed and vulnerable static object, forced to exist in a setting and context which does not welcome her presence, as illustrated by the doctor's demeaning bedside manner. Yet she chooses to allow the reader/viewer access to this space, and thus our peering is perhaps not violent to the same degree. Indeed, the reader/viewer's experience of this space is much like Frappier's, as we bear witness to medical violence but are not able to alter an event which has already happened, nor edit the elements portrayed on the page. In relation to the reader/viewer, Frappier thus occupies a position of power as creator of this space, which we may only experience as she dictates. This passage also draws our attention to the fact that many abortions are the result of contraceptive failure rather than unsafe sex, dismantling the amalgamation of promiscuity and abortion promulgated by the *341 salopes* caricature in 1971.²⁶

Not only is Frappier physically and violently excluded from conversations about her care by the doctor's use of the third person "elle" to talk about her rather than to her, he also uses medical terminology that she does not understand, rendering her even more vulnerable.²⁷ Frappier finds herself in a hostile space where she is unable to advocate for herself, as she does not speak their language. Similarly to Figure 4, Frappier is confined within the four rigid walls of the panel. She is caught in a paradox of being unwelcome – a sentiment undergirded by the moral disgust expressed in the adjective "vulgaire" (p.66)

²⁶ Around a quarter of unintended pregnancies are the result of a contraceptive failure, rather than its non-use, just as in *IFJVD*, illustrated by Mermilliod's IUD on her ultrasound (Figure 19) (Cleland, 2020; Macleod, 2024).

²⁷ Interestingly, *LC* originally appeared in 2015 at a moment where an increasing number of women in France began denouncing their experiences of gynaecological and obstetrical violence using the hashtag #PayeTonUtérus and advocating for their right to feel safe in these gynaecological and obstetric settings (Veto *et al.*, 2024). Frappier therefore uses *LC* as a means of contributing to a cultural moment of reckoning for the gynaecological profession in France, as well as audaciously and authentically sharing the reality of her abortion.

(Figure 5) – and unwanted in this space, yet simultaneously unable to break free. In many ways, this depiction helpfully illustrates the major shortfalls of liberal feminism and the Veil law. Based on the concept that equal rights for women will achieve their welfare by initiating them into the democratic processes of the nation-state, liberal feminism is often concerned with surface-level improvements to political representation (Ansari, 2023). However, it is insufficient to merely occupy space. There is no equality or justice if one is not truly welcome or wanted in it, just as it was insufficient to legalise access to abortion or constitutionalise it as a freedom, with no action in place to facilitate its provision (Tongue, 2024; Hennette-Vaucher and Marguet, 2025). What is the difference between standing outside the door, waiting to be let in, and being pushed towards the door the minute you arrive? As illustrated above, being unwelcome in a space can have more violent consequences than not being invited into this space at all.

Despite the violence of Frappier's abortion procedure, the nurses succeed in reorienting this unwelcoming clinical space into a space of care in Figure 6. Reorientations of space thus constitute the ways in which we physically inhabit space, but also the ways in which we might transform this space after the fact. A wealth of literature has theorised nursing as a gendered occupation, which is evident in this sequence (Davies, 1995; Speedy, 2009; Prosen, 2022). In this medical setting the female nurses, who are traditionally perceived as inherently more caring, are under the orders of the male doctors, themselves perceived as more qualified and knowledgeable. As such, the nurses are also victims of the doctor's governance of this clinical space, who directs his anger about Frappier's IUD towards them. They are subjugated by the gendered burden of care yet are not quite as vulnerable as Frappier because they can physically move around and occupy the space, even if they do not own it. However, much like Frappier's use of contraception calls into question the doctor's epistemic authority, the nurses also challenge this authority by banishing him from this space,

as illustrated in the top panel in Figure 6: “Une infirmière me prend la main. J’entends sa voix : « Tu es malade ! Pourquoi tu as fait ça ? Sors! Laisse-nous avec elle! »” (p.67)²⁸ Having abused his perceived ownership of this space, he is no longer welcome, offering hope that even those who govern space face consequences when abusing its boundaries.

The perspective in this panel is considerably wider than those analysed in Figures 4 and 5, and shows the hospital room to be a large, open space, rather than the claustrophobic, constricting space the reader/viewer has imagined based on previous panels. (Re)orientations offer a specific “take” on the world, a set of views and viewing points, as well as a route through the contours of the world, which gives our world its own contours” (Ahmed, 2006, p.17). By turning our gaze and Frappier’s view of the clinic, she situates herself differently in the space, as her perception is determined by her locatedness (*ibid.*). The now-expanded room is still shown from Frappier’s perspective, except her vagina and pubic hair are no longer visible to the reader/viewer in the panel, covered by a hospital gown. This reorientation of space grants Frappier privacy and dignity, which she has previously been denied in her status as an animalised object for male medical consumption. By diverting the reader/viewer’s gaze, and translating the doctor’s incomprehensible medical speak, the nurses present in the room offer “a route through the contours of the world, which gives our world its own contours” (Ahmed, 2006, p.17) This reorientation of space posits the abortion clinic as quintessential example of power relations in which clinicians can stigmatise and harm abortion care seekers or create and uphold a safe environment for the provision and receipt of this care (Calkin *et al.*, 2022).

The increased size of the panel and the space within reflects that the doctor was withholding this space from her, whereas she is now the owner of this space, free from the

²⁸ “A nurse takes my hand. I hear her say: “You’re sick! Why did you do that? Get out! Leave her with us!”

claustrophobia of the narrow panels. This reorientation is facilitated by the shift in care relations; as the nurse orders the doctor's departure, she is shown to be holding Frappier's hand in support, offering physical touch as a source of comfort. This is similar to the ways in which *LC*'s haptic portrayal of abortion provides other *avortées* with comfort, which will be addressed presently. A common trope in autobiographical *bande dessinée* is the metonymic image of the artist's hand which acts as a proxy for their body (Miller, 2011). However, the hand depicted in this panel belongs to the figure recontouring the space *for* the artist, as this gesture transforms the clinic into a space of care rather than violence. The nurses create a space for Frappier which moves beyond technical caring – administering tests and offering medical advice – towards models which combine this with affective caring (Powis and Strong, 2025). It is this affective (after)care which reorients the space of this hospital room into a space in which Frappier is an active aborting subject. Trauma-informed (reproductive) care shaped by love, compassion, and goodness as per Ludlow's model of abortion politics, therefore allows for a reorientation of the spatialities of abortion.

Despite the obvious power imbalance between doctor and patient and the former's abuse of this relationship, the claustrophobic framing of the doctor between Frappier's spread legs on the examining table (Figures 4 and 5) and the open framing of her holding the nurse's hand (Figure 6) emphasise that this is an embodied, first-person account of abortion. The invisibility of Frappier's face in these panels is also perhaps reminiscent of the guilt she feels at being able to access the abortion her mother so desperately wanted. As her face is not visible, this body could belong to someone else. In this moment as she aborts, she becomes her mother giving birth, in the same position, experiencing the same verbal abuse: "Le médecin se contente de faire pleurer ma mère" (p.60) (Figure 10).²⁹ It has been suggested

²⁹ "The doctor settles for making my mother cry."

that part of the disgust and disturbance elicited by birth imagery is caused by its emphasis of the birthing process as one which involves a particular mother, “who is fully present in her ecstasy, and in her specificity” (Tyler and Baraitser, 2013, p.14). By removing specificity from this image – which can also be found in Figure 6, in which distinguishing features are hidden by covering eyes, utilising negative space, and showing the back of the body – Frappier’s experience mirrors the objectification and dehumanisation which permeated her mother’s birth experience and her own abortion. Moreover, this removes experiential knowledge from a necessarily untouchable first-personness, transforming embodiment into a shared experience (Budgeon, 2021). Through this “shared” experience she legitimises her own reproductive trajectory as well as her own existence. Frappier has long felt guilty about her existence, believing it was her fault that her father was abusive and her mother depressed: “Si longtemps j’ai cru que c’était de la faute à mon corps, à mon odeur, à mon visage, à ces mots toujours idiots qui sortaient de ma bouche, à ces gestes minables, rien que pour attirer l’attention” (p.62).³⁰ Once forced to take up as little space as possible, Frappier was continually forced out of the family home, unable to call a space her own. Yet, able to occupy space in this way that her mother could not, she finds a sense of legitimacy in taking up space: “Ne plus se sentir coupable est une chose, se sentir légitime en est une autre” (p.65).³¹ This sense of legitimacy importantly does not derive from inhabiting space as a mother, but as an aborting body; she is an end in herself (Cooper, 2020).

Furthermore, rather than observing her body as an erotic and animalised object through the male medical gaze, the reader/viewer is forced to see and live the abortion from Frappier’s point of view (Mulvey, 1975; Couégnas and Périneau-Lorenzo, 2024). As such, the reader/viewer is transformed into an aborting subject, coming to understand firsthand what

³⁰ “For such a long time I believed it was the fault of my body, my smell, my face, of the stupid words always coming out of my mouth, of these pathetic gestures, all just to get attention.”

³¹ “No longer feeling guilty is one thing, feeling legitimate is another.”

it means to experience, rather than observe, vulnerability in an unwelcoming and violent space. The invitation of the reader/viewer into the narrative is a similar visual trope employed in Audrey Diwan's film adaptation of Annie Ernaux's *L'Événement*.

Cinematographer Laurent Tangy carefully tracks Anne's gaze throughout the film, often showing the back of her head, and the abortion scene is viewed from over her shoulder, with the abortionist visible between Anne's bent legs (Pugh, 2022). The viewer thus experiences time and space just as Anne does. Tangy's handheld camera shots offer a similar materiality to the hand-drawn-ness of graphic narrative. The framing of the doctor between Frappier's legs and the close-up of her face provides a similarly claustrophobic perspective, and the use of plewds convey "un geste qui me condamne aux flammes de l'enfer", allowing the reader/viewer to simultaneously feel these hot flashes (p.66) (Figure 5).³² Abortion is not merely represented as an embodied experience, it is also felt and lived as one, implicating the reader/viewer in this sensual intensity and reflecting once again that this a shared embodied experience and that the first-person is not untouchable. *LC* and graphic narrative more broadly offer a tangible, haptic, material experience in which the reader/viewer is physically interacting with the artist/narrator on every page (Miller, 2011). *LC* thus demands a multileveled reading strategy to account for this four-dimensional narrative event, complexifying not just discourses on abortion, but the way in which reader/viewers engage with them (Horskotte, 2015).

The reader/viewer occupies the space on the page at the same time as the narrator, meaning that graphic narrative is not just a tailor-made space for the narrator, but also for the reader/viewer. The collective and intersubjective experience of aborto-socio-biographies is felt in graphic narrative not just through the co-authorial relationships between scriptor

³² "a gesture which condemns me to the fires of hell." This is also an ironic comment on her time spent at Catholic school, where getting an abortion was believed to send you straight to hell.

and artist, but also through a shared experience of abortion's spatiality for protagonist and reader/viewer. The spatiality of abortion is thus reoriented away from a solitary, paternalistic, and infantilising procedure in a clinic or hospital, towards a solidary, collective experience in a space tailor-made for this experience to be lived and shared. As a result, there is an element of rewriting as well as reorientation in graphic narrative. Frappier's lived experience of abortion occurs in a constrained and claustrophobic space where she does not belong, whereas the abortion as experienced by the reader/viewer via its graphic depiction takes place in a space owned, occupied, and managed by the protagonist. Between lived reality and the aborto-socio-biographical retelling of this event, there is a reorientation of space via its inscription into graphic narrative, which grounds and acts as a source of comfort for Frappier, holding her and moving her forward, a transformation which fully embraces the marginalised contours of her othered, reproductive, and gendered body.

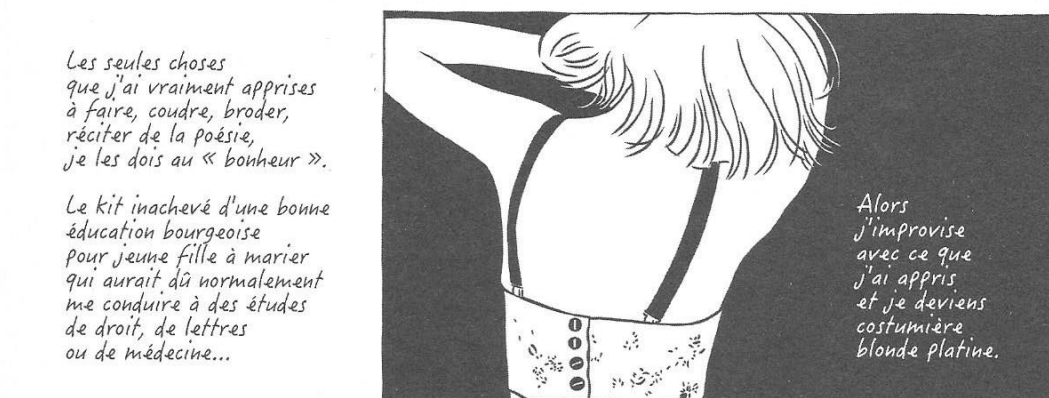
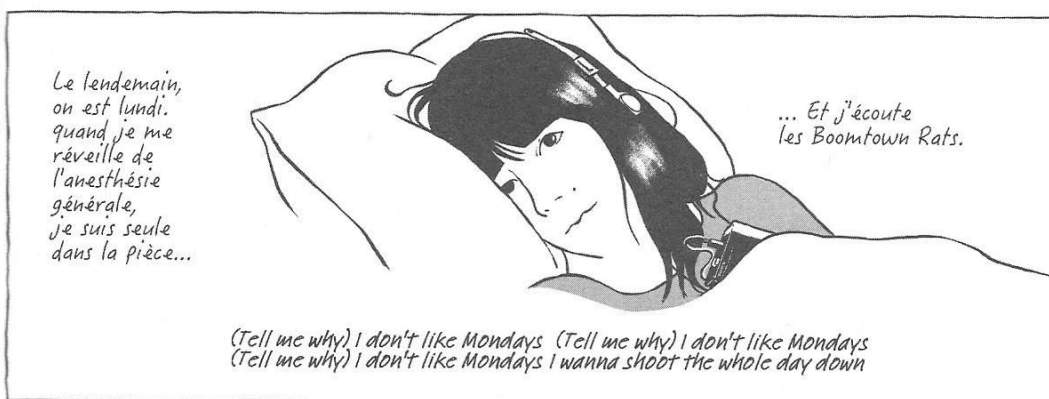


Figure 6 - LC, p.67



51

Figure 7 - IFJVD, p.51



Figure 8 - IFJVD, p.52

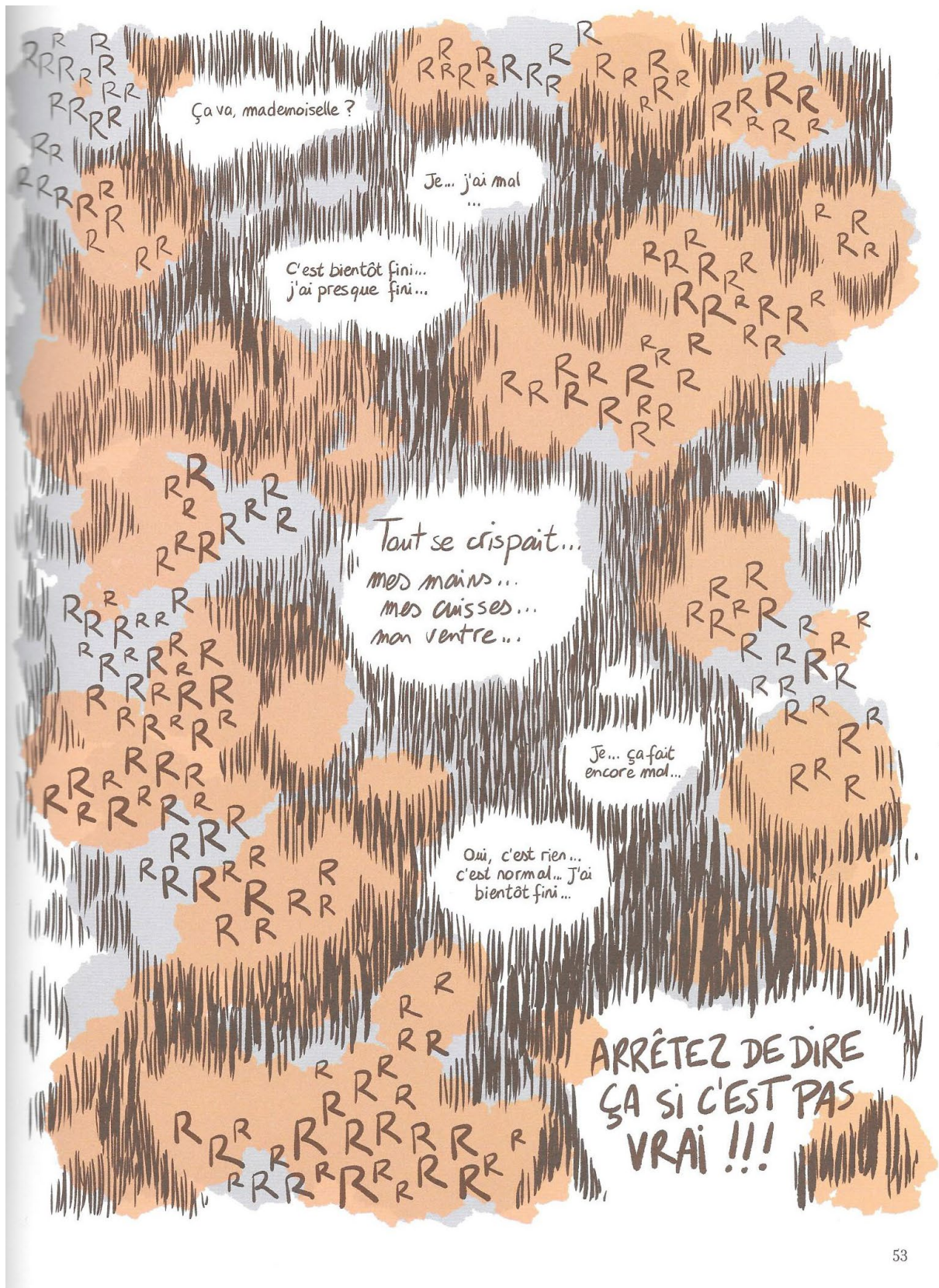


Figure 9 - IFJVD, p.53

A similar engagement with hapticity is present in Mermilliod's portrayal of her abortion procedure in *IFJVD*, depicted on the splash pages in Figures 7, 8, and 9. The reader/viewer observes Mermilliod as the abortion takes place, rather than viewing and experiencing it from her perspective. Nevertheless, the reader/viewer continues to feel similar sensations to the protagonist, evoking this literary hapticity which transmits tactile information from marks on the page and translates them into physical, embodied feelings (Paterson, 2017; Roberts, 2022). The space of the clinic where Mermilliod's body is located dissolves, beginning by zooming in on clinical objects (Figure 7). Ultimately, the clinic is represented only by the blue-grey splotches, allowing the reader/viewer to focus uniquely on the sensual dimensions of the procedure (Figures 8 and 9). The splash pages of Figures 8 and 9 are dominated by overlapping short, vertical lines, appearing as if they have been scratched away from the surface of the page. Upon viewing these, the reader/viewer feels the convulsions and contractions flooding Mermilliod's body, on top of each other like the intersecting lines: "Tout se crispait... mes mains... mes cuisses... mon ventre..." (p.53).³³ These convulsions occur as Mermilliod expels aborted blood and tissue, represented by reddish-brown splotches. Whilst the haptic portrayal feels as if it is happening in real time, the colour choice is reminiscent of dried blood, reminding the reader/viewer that this is a past experience. The materiality of graphic narrative also allows the reader to touch this blood, adding a further haptic dimension outwith the physical pages of the book. Her bodily matter is externalised, invading both the space of the clinic, the space on the page, and the space beyond. This visual representation thus encompasses the porosity of the unruly maternal body, with its "dubious, hard to fix, permeable boundaries" (Kukla, 2005, p.3). Whilst abortion may legally belong to the regulated space of the clinic, the regulation of this spatiality cannot escape the space of the body, which spills out into the clinic. Mermilliod's

³³ "Everything was convulsing... my hands... my thighs... my stomach..."

body acts as an unregulated, dysregulated, and permeable border between inside and outside, blending organic bodily matter with inorganic clinical materials, just as the diegetic spaces pervade the representational spaces on this splash page.

Meanwhile, in *LC*, nothing is visibly expelled from Frappier's body, as if her bodily space is markedly separate from the clinical space. The two do not leak into each other, positing her aborted material as untouchable and unrepresentable and her body as impermeable. Yet her body is also penetrable and accessible for the doctor who seemingly owns this outside space as the nation-state's designated surveillor of reproductive bodies. Frappier's body is permeable, but only to the extent that it is heavily regulated. Meanwhile the reader/viewer is not granted access to her bodily spaces and matter, bearing witness to a body in and of itself, rather than a necessarily reproductive one. The absence of foetal matter – although we could argue that such material is also absent from *IFJVD*, whose artistic rendering devoids it of materiality – conveys an unwillingness to engage with the materiality of the foetal body, the avoidance of which can be interpreted as disgust towards rotting, bleeding, and amorality, and consequently a disgust towards death (Cahill, 2013; Kumar, 2018; Hann and Ludlow, 2020). Avoiding the expelled blood and tissue from her abortion allows Frappier to deny the death she has voluntarily caused. Indeed, pro-choice discourse typically refuses to engage with death and grief, as this potentially problematises the foetus as a legal human being, and abortion as a necessarily regrettable procedure (*ibid.*). Frappier's refusal to engage with death has both positive and negative outcomes: on the one hand, it draws the attention back to her as the aborting subject and calls the reader/viewer back to an affective abortion politics based on the embodied realities of pregnant persons rather than the tenuous life and death of the foetus. However, on the other hand, it perpetuates the denial of death within the scope of abortion rhetoric, rather than accepting it as a fact of this reproductive act and denies the reader/viewer of engagement with death in an abortion

narrative. Although Frappier complexifies the meaning of porosity in relation to the body, highlighting that this is not a *fait établi* of the liminal space between maternity and non-maternity, she does not allow this body to appear as abject, even though as Other, the reproductive body is already abject in and of itself. Her body thus remains a transgressive one, but one that does not take this transgression too far. Frappier adheres to the sociomoral norms of her surroundings which imbue her body with meaning and direction; space and bodies enjoy a symbiotic relationship in which bodily inhabitation gives meaning to space, “just as bodies acquire direction in this inhabitation” (Ahmed, 2006, p.12). At the moment of her abortion, her body has meaning only insofar as the space around her creates it.

Mermilliod’s porous body can also be considered from a similar point of view, in which external space comes to invade the bodily experience. The splash pages are not whole without the abstract renderings of both the abortion clinic and Mermilliod’s body, just as the narrative would not be complete without either. First and foremost an experience lived and felt in the body, abortion has become overrun with regulations of its spatialities and temporalities, with “[infrequent reference] made to the obviously central and concrete role the human body plays in this ethical drama” (Koukal, 2019, p.2). Regardless of how much Mermilliod tries to avoid the reality of regulation by embodying an unregulated, dysregulated abortion free from spatial constraints, reflected in the absence of traditional panels and borders and the claustrophobic framing of her face in Figure 8 which removes the space of the clinic, the regulated space of the abortion clinic catches up with her. Her embodied experience is defined and ultimately confined by the necessity of it taking place within this particular spatiality. It is this rigidity of regulated abortion spaces which equally defines and confines Frappier’s abortion procedure.

IFJVD additionally represents the sonic dimension of abortion as part of this haptic experience, expressed onomatopoeically by repeating the letter “R” in varying sizes and thickness. The reader/viewer summons the sound of the abortion clinic for themselves, once again demanding a multileveled reading which engages all the senses, as the onomatopoeia functions as a spatial marker linking narrative space, characters, and reader/viewer (Horskotte, 2015; Dey and Bokil, 2020). In contrast, *LC*’s abortion sequence is defined by its absence of abortive sound, dominated instead by the doctor’s verbal abuse. There are no diegetic, clinical sounds, no moving of instruments, whirring of an aspirator, or utterances from Frappier. Just as bodies gain direction from inhabiting space, sound gains meaning from its spatial and bodily interactions (Ahmed, 2006). The relationship between medical sounds and patient experience is ambivalent, as these acoustemologies represent both discomfort and disruption of recovery and rest, in addition to empowerment of the individual to understand their care environment (Lipscombe, 2025). The space of the abortion clinic is unnaturally silent, the absence of sound offering neither comfort nor distraction and disturbance; in medical settings, silence is often interpreted as the sign of something amiss, the absence of sound implying the absence of life (*ibid.*). In this sense, Frappier perhaps implicitly engages with the death discourse eschewed by pro-choice activists, complexifying contemporary abortion rhetoric (Kumar, 2018).

It is only after her abortion procedure that extradiegetic sounds appear in the form of *I Don’t Like Mondays* by The Boomtown Rats (Figure 6). This cultural reference is perhaps an ironic commentary inspired by the song’s origins and directed at healthcare providers and policymakers. Just as abortion is rarely – if ever – sought out of a desire to exercise one’s bodily autonomy or legal rights, no one gets an abortion simply because they don’t like Mondays (Ludlow, 2012). The introduction of sonority removes Frappier from her body, coinciding with her awakening from the general anaesthetic which would normally be a

coming-back-into-body experience. By controlling the sonority of the clinical space, Frappier illustrates ownership of (sonic) space not usually afforded to patients in medical settings, allowing her to dissociate – “space out” – and consequently offering her greater control over her body by distracting her from the traumatic abortion procedure. She is both in and out of her body, in and out of the clinical space, occupying a liminal locatedness of self. Once again, the knowledge of her abortion procedure conveyed to the reader/viewer is situated in a physical, objective sense, rather than a subjective, contextual one; Frappier’s relationship to her abortion is determined by her actual location, by her relationship to the space in which it took place. Whilst her body is not depicted as literally porous like Mermilliod’s which expels bodily matter, Frappier metaphorically inhabits a state of presence and absence which leak into one another. Meanwhile, in *IFJVD*, the sound of the vacuum fills the clinical space, allowing the reader/viewer to hear the abortion taking place. The sonority of these latter panels encompasses the ambiguity of medical acoustemologies (Lipscombe, 2025). The sound of her abortion is a source of discomfort, invading the tranquillity of the space and reflecting Mermilliod’s own physical discomfort, as well as a discomforting unfamiliarity for the reader, but also a sonic representation of her empowered decision and courage to go ahead with an abortion procedure about which she is uncertain (*ibid.*).

In Figure 9, the sketches of Mermilliod’s body which are so prominent in the previous panel have also dissolved, absorbed by the sonority of the aspirator, speaking to the importance of onomatopoeia as a spatial marker on these splash pages (Dey and Bokil, 2020). Just as she is removed from the space of the clinic, which nevertheless returns to her, she is now removed from the space of her body. Phenomenologically speaking, just as the subjective lived experience of pregnancy may be experienced as *unheimlich*, abortion can “fai[re] éprouver une condition corporelle tellement nouvelle que celle-ci peut être vécue dans une forme de distance, avec le sentiment de ne plus être en possession d’un corps que

l'on n'identifie plus comme le sien" (Zavislan, 2021; Froidevaux-Metterie, 2023, p.62).³⁴ As outlined in the thesis introduction, this speaks to the importance of incorporating abortion into phenomenologies of pregnancy and perinatal loss since there are many parallels to be drawn between the experiences, which Harmange suggests in the following chapter.

Mermilliod's experience of being out of her body mirrors Frappier's experience of returning to her bodily space as the soporific effect of the anaesthesia wears off, at the same time as sonority removes her from her surroundings, which consequently takes her out of her body again. Like the reader/viewer retains a third-person perspective of Mermilliod's abortion procedure, experiencing only the haptic dimension, the absence of the actual body from Figure 9 suggests that Mermilliod similarly experiences her abortion outside of her body, attending to this experience as the reader/viewer does in the third person. The abortion process is unfamiliar to the extent that it has taken over her body, taking her out of it, making her a stranger in her own body. Her abortion does not only expel her foetus, but also her self. Yet, although abortion is an unsettling out-of-bodily experience, to be on the outside is a familiar one for *avortées* who are so often vilified for their decisions, a marginalising process which "operates to displace the offender from her society, to insist on her otherness, thereby avoiding the knowledge that she is produced *by* that society" (Morrissey, 2003, p.34, emphasis in original). Mermilliod thus experiences her bodily space as a painful one of non-belonging, finding that she no longer extends to its shape (Ahmed, 2006, p.62; Ansaloni and Tedeschi, 2016; Rodó-Zárate, 2023).

This abortion lived out of the body and out of space may also represent a form of dissociation. Space is no longer a physical place, a noun, but a continuous, verbal state of "spacing out". Mermilliod harbours complex feelings towards her termination which she

³⁴ "triggers a bodily condition so new that it can be lived as if from a distance, with the feeling of no longer being in possession of a body which no longer feels like your own."

feels she does not choose for herself; a decision beyond herself, just as her abortion is experienced outside herself. She is angry that her material circumstances have decided for her, whilst accepting of the fact that this is the best outcome for her and her would-be-child, displaying both a peaceful and rageful demeanour. Whereas Catriona Macleod (2024) classifies *IFJVD* as a pro-choice text, this neglects that Mermilliod's perceived lack of choice is a source of immense frustration for the narrator: "On va pas faire comme si j'hésitais... J'ai l'impression que les circonstances choisissent pour moi, voilà..." (p.27) (Figure 11).³⁵ Similarly, Macleod categorises *LC* as a definitively pro-choice text, which is problematic because Frappier's narrative(s) are also defined by a lack of choice. Certainly, *LC* engages in the discursivity of choice from the start as illustrated by the title *Le Choix*. Reminiscent of Ernaux's *L'Événement* and once again aligning with a form of iterative reification specific to abortion narratives, this title evokes a sense of universality around this reproductive event, which reflects the universality of abortion which is far from a marginal occurrence. This peritextual feature also points to the ubiquitous lack of choice endemic in the inaccessibility of abortion care which Frappier's mother experienced (Figure 10) (Allen, 2014). Constrained by both the illegality of contraceptive and abortion care, Frappier's mother is denied bodily ownership. Yet, as previously illustrated, Frappier's mother's abortion was no more or less violent than her own. The limited and carefully monitored ways in which the (non-repronormative) body takes up space across time is depicted as stagnant, immutable, regardless of legal status.

³⁵ "Let's not pretend I'm uncertain... my circumstances have decided for me, that's all..."

Je nais huit mois après la lettre de François, trois mois après le clap de fin de ce qui sera son premier grand succès. La contraception est interdite. Des milliers de familles se fondent, s'accroissent et se désespèrent en raison du simple désir éprouvé par deux êtres l'un pour l'autre.

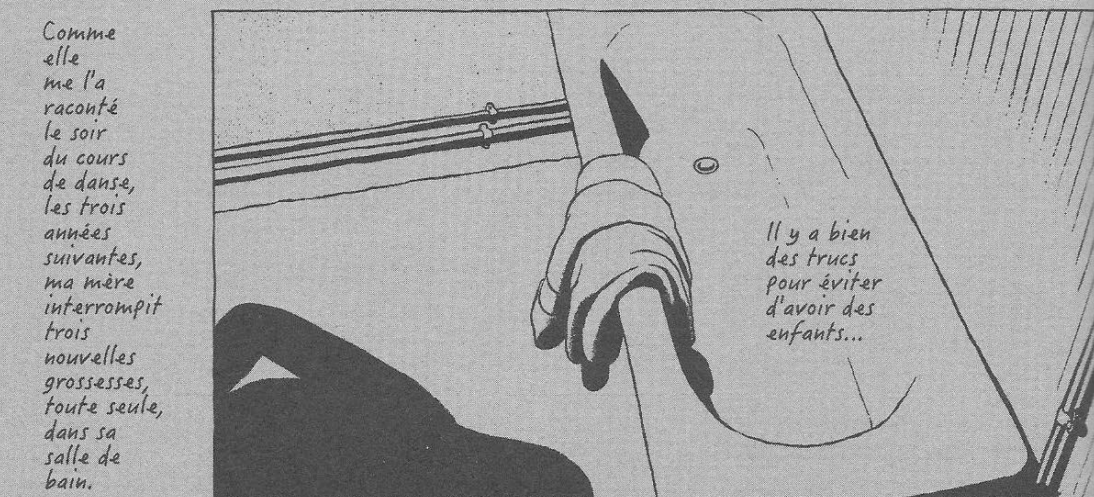
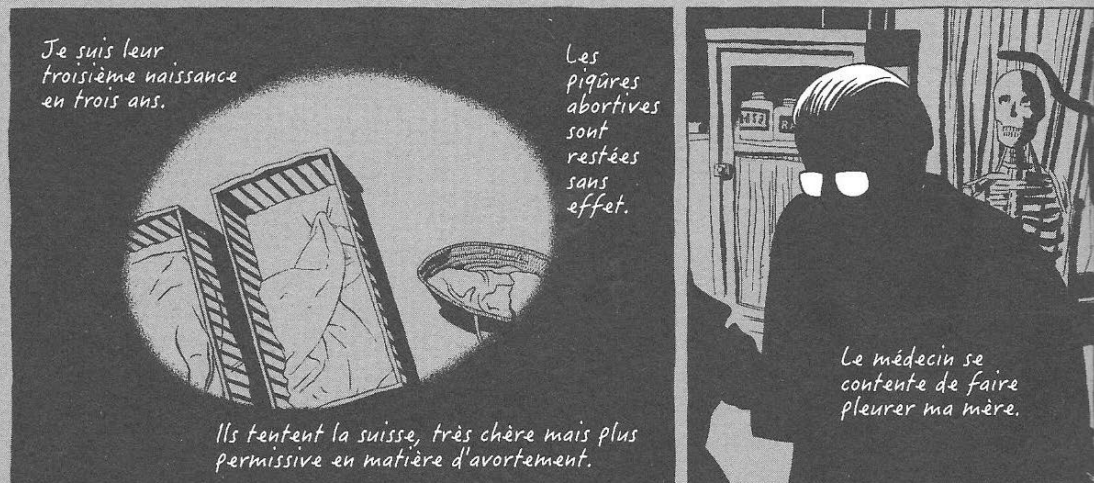


Figure 10 - LC, p.60



Figure 11 - IFJVD, p.27

IFJVD emphasises the necessity of portraying complex abortions by similarly reinforcing the notion that it is not simply a choice of whether to continue and complete a pregnancy, but rather whether one can (Smith, 2005). Mermilliod's conflicted feelings about her pregnancy – not knowing whether she wishes to continue the pregnancy and become a parent, whilst knowing she cannot – are reflected in her behaviours which illustrate this possible desire as well as the acceptance that this desire cannot and will not come to fruition, which I will expand upon later in this chapter. These complexities and contradictions are common for people who abort but are rarely represented. This failure to represent unplanned or unwanted pregnancies means that pregnant persons may struggle to articulate their narratives, as they have no referent for the narrative they wish to live out (Kehily and Thomson, 2011). As previously asserted, narrative becomes reality, becomes narrative; narratives shape our lived experiences, which we then recall via narrative, which speaks to the necessity of abortion-complex representations as a means of cementing complex realities (Jacobs, 2008). The irony of Mermilliod lamenting her abortion as she is pictured with her pregnant friend Vic also reflects that when it comes to pregnancy and parenting, choice comes in many forms, especially when we consider Frappier's mother's unchosen yet completed pregnancy.

The fact that Mermilliod does not wholeheartedly want an abortion may explain her bodily "absence" during the procedure. She has always been distant from this reproductive decision, and as such feels that she does not own or identify with this body having an abortion (Froidevaux-Metterie, 2023, p.62). By occupying a space outside of her body, Mermilliod abandons the well-trodden definition of abortion's spatialities in favour of generating so-called "desire lines", "those marks left on the ground that show everyday comings and goings, where people deviate from the paths they are supposed to follow" (Ahmed, 2006, pp.19-20). She will never again know this body she was before her abortion,

nor the body of the moment of her abortion, and thus demands a new space which does extend to her new shape, (literally) leaving her own marks and an alternative space in the wake of this experience. Her abortion is her way of searching for and creating a space which she can safely live and inhabit, free of this foetus and the grief it has caused her. As we will see later, just as this grief defined her abortion experience, so it will come to define its aftermath.

At the same time as being taken out of her body, Mermilliod also becomes the space of her body, and in doing so becomes her abortion. The reddish-brown splotches representing the expelled blood and tissue from her procedure also represent Mermilliod's body, matching the colour of her shirt in the previous panels. Women are often understood to be space, an empty container for reproduction and narrative to unfold without input from the bodily subject (Löw, 2006). Yet, Mermilliod's becoming of space is not a static act as she has made this space, physically redrawing and delineating its boundaries, those "desire lines" (Ahmed, 2006). Through the act of becoming, occupying, and creating space, she drives the narrative forward, reclaiming ownership of her body's reproductive spatialities. She thus experiences "une forme de dédoublement, quand le corps objectif cesse, assez soudainement, de coïncider avec l'être subjectif" (Froidevaux-Metterie, 2023, p.63).³⁶ Her body is neither fully objective, as it is the location of her subjective interaction with the outside world, nor is it fully subjective, as it is always in part lived in according to the rules of prevailing systems and accepted knowledge (McNay, 1999; Fox and Neiterman, 2015). By externalising her internal bodily matter in the space of the clinic and on the space of the page, she recontours the boundary of the self, occupying a liminal space between object and subject. However, the external space of the clinic also exerts control over her body, pushing her out of both the

³⁶ "when the objective body suddenly ends to coincide with the subjective being"

bodily and clinical space. Like Frappier, she is simultaneously in and out of these spaces, dissolving into space and doubling outside of it, occupying the same liminal space of her abortion; space becomes her as she becomes space, made possible as the body and its location are placed both figuratively and literally in the centre, contrary to much contemporary representation (Koukal, 2019).

1.2.1 Against embodiment

Whilst the above analysed depictions of embodiment offer reorientations of space by centring the bodily spaces of abortion, both *LC* and *IFJVD* simultaneously place significant emphasis on the legal dimension of abortion, even though these narratives illustrate that abortions have and always will be sought regardless of legal context (Runde, 2018). As shown in Figures 12 and 14, both narratives dedicate full-page sequences to Simone Veil and her address to the *Assemblée nationale* preceding the vote which legalised abortion. Consequently, at the same time as Frappier and Mermilliod ground this bodily experience in spatiality by offering visceral, haptic depictions of this foremostly embodied experience, thus offering these non-repronormative reproductive bodies a form of bodily ownership they are often denied, they reify the spatialities of abortion as the sociolegal settings of the regulation of this reproductive act (Calkin *et al.*, 2022). The embodiment of bodily spaces and the beyond bodily spaces captured in the panels analysed in the previous section is diametrically opposed to the space contained within the four walls of the *Assemblée nationale*. The latter space disenfranchises the *avortée*, making ownership of bodily space impossible. The emphasis on the Veil law and positioning of Simone Veil as a figurehead of the struggle to legalise abortion posits this legal advancement “as the result of Veil’s sole effort and her as a solitary, selfless hero” (Macleod, 2024, p.169). Not only does this neglect the sororal and collective

activism which was instrumental to this vote, Veil has also become immortalised as representing the end of the abortion struggle – similar to the rhetoric surrounding the constitutionalisation of abortion – even though her advocacy centred on establishing this reproductive act as the lesser of two evils. The legalisation of abortion merely sought to reduce deaths by transferring it from unsafe, often unhygienic, spaces to medicalised spaces, rather than destigmatising and actively supporting it (Le Naour and Valentini, 2003). By dedicating prominent space to this legal event, both *LC* and *IFJVD* illustrate a reluctance to move beyond and reorient the liberal, pro-choice paradigm which promotes legalisation as the end goal. In this perspective, the traditional definition of abortion’s spatialities as the spaces of its regulation and surveillance is the ultimate objective. Indeed, this speaks to a form iterative reification, through which Frappier and Mermilliod seek to share a discursively relatable and understandable narrative (Allen, 2014). Debates over the legal status of abortion are perhaps familiar to the point of relief, and moving beyond this paradigm requires uncomfortable confrontation with the trifecta of self, affect, and the body. In these graphic narratives this iterative reification is literal, as attested to by a footnote on page 41 of *IFJVD* referencing *LC*: “Désirée et Alain Frappier sont les auteurs de la bd *Le Choix* qui traite avec brio du sujet de l’avortement”.³⁷ Mermilliod’s abortion experience and the subsequent conception of *IFJVD* are therefore in part directly owed to the existence of *LC*, constituting a literal incarnation of the reproductivity of aborto-socio-biographies.

Yet, Frappier is extremely critical of the Veil law, writing: “La loi Veil entre en vigueur le 17 janvier 1975, mais Mathilde a raison de s’inquiéter. Le combat n’est toujours pas fini. Le mois de mars suivant à Paris, l’hôpital Cochin refuse toujours d’appliquer la loi.”

³⁷ “Désirée and Alain Frappier are the authors of the *Le Choix*, a *BD* which treats the subject of abortion with verve.”

(p.48) (Figure 13)³⁸ By directly acknowledging the shortfalls of the legalisation of abortion, combined with the visceral embodiment of her violent abortion care, Frappier illustrates Ludlow's abortion politics of love and goodness, by privileging affectivity over legality. Interestingly, Figure 12 reorients Frappier's typical organisation of space away from uniform panels contained by rigid borders as seen in Figures 4, 5, 6, and 10. Rather than confining the space which deprives the *avortée* of bodily ownership to the traditional four walls of the panel, she confines the dysregulated embodied experience to this restrictive container. This perhaps represents Frappier's perception of her spatial control. Even though her relationship to the space of the abortion clinic was restricted by the violence of her procedure, she is closer to owning and inhabiting the space of her body comfortably than she is the space of its regulation. By containing the bodily experience, she protects it; these are the literal boundaries – “desire lines” – she has implemented to safeguard her experience, just like the physical beginnings and ends of the book contain her narrative (Ahmed, 2006). Meanwhile, whilst the regulatory spaces of abortion view her body as an unruly one, a perspective the reader/viewer is denied, Frappier perceives these beyond bodily spaces as unruly, as they do not extend to her shape (*ibid.*). Space thus overflows its traditional container, beyond Frappier's control. This is also reflected in the departure from the classic comic style of art used in the remainder of the narrative. Like a newspaper, Figure 12 depicts a grainy image emerging against the negative space, marking it as distinct from Frappier's embodied narrative(s).

In *IFJVD*, Mermilliod organises space differently to Frappier; whilst her body spills out onto and beyond the page during her abortion, the sequence depicting Veil's address is carefully contained (Figure 14). Whereas her abject and unruly body becomes the space of

³⁸ “The Veil law came into force on the 17th of January 1975, but Mathilde was right to be concerned. The fight wasn't over. In Paris the following March the Hôpital Cochin still refused to practice abortions.”

the clinic, the same is not possible in this space. In regulatory spaces, it is perhaps not so much the reproductive body than the reproducing body which poses problem. The reproductive body holds the potential to transgress space, whilst the reproducing body actively transgresses. In this case, Mermilliod reproduces a scene in which her body is only implicitly implicated. Yet, by rendering this space in her own style by her own hand, the scriptor nevertheless manages to illustrate some form of ownership over this space, reorienting into her own to make it a part of her narrative and positioning her physical body in the space. In this sense, it could be argued that even though the depicted space is one of disembodiment, its inscription into graphic narrative reorients it into an embodied one as its rendering came to be through the body. Reorientations or new iconographies of pregnancy and the reproductive/reproducing body are made possible through the depiction of embodiment in the panels, but also the embodiment inherent to the genre of graphic narrative.

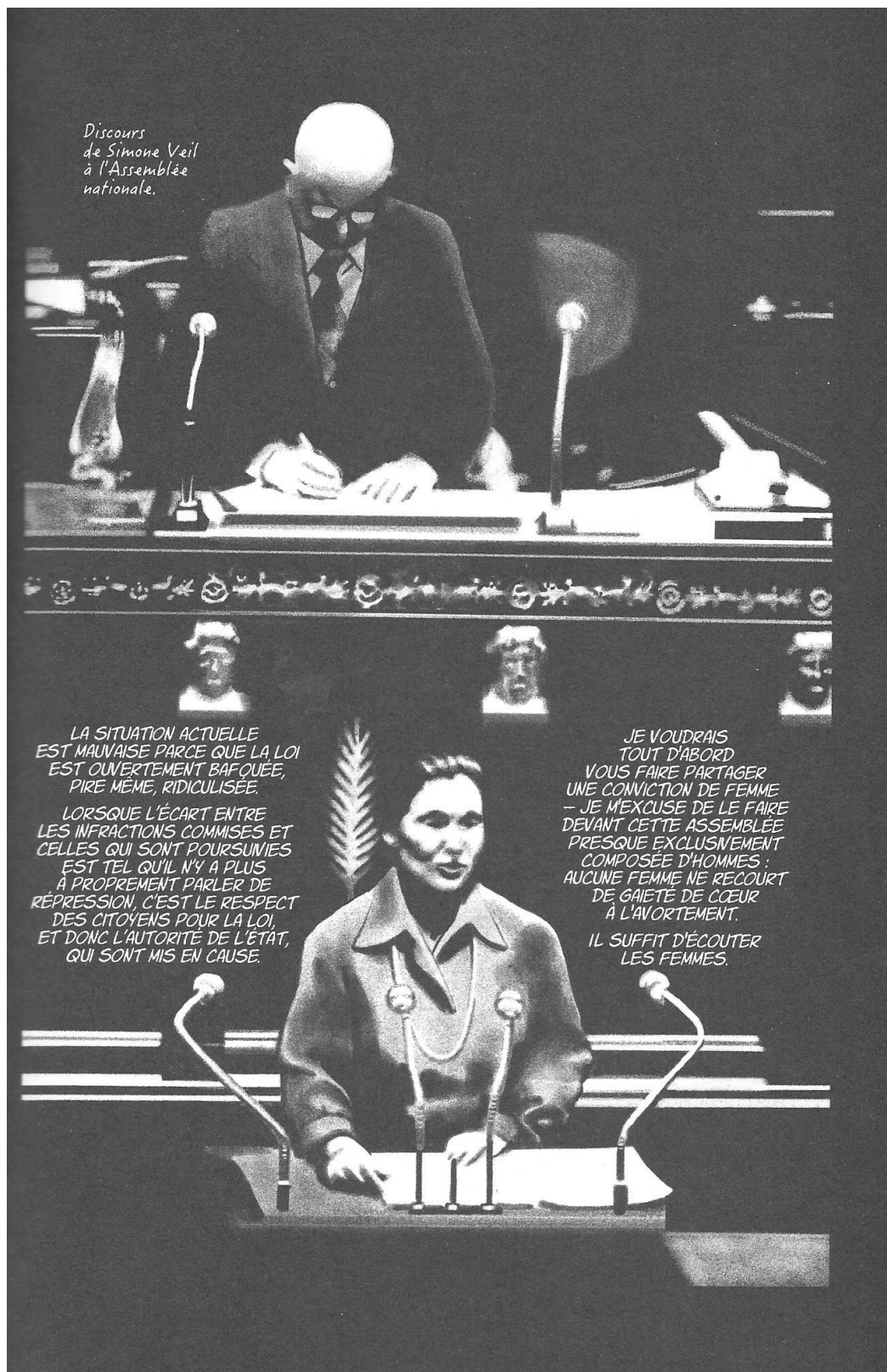
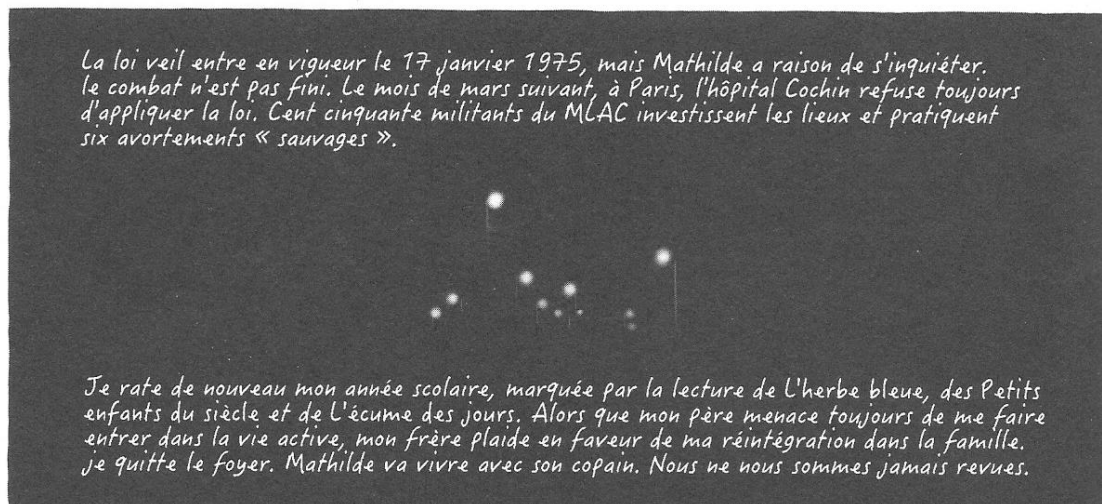


Figure 12 - LC, p.39



48

Figure 13 - LC, p.48

However, it is also perhaps important to note that this reference to Simone Veil is raised in Winckler's part of the narrative, reflecting his experience as an abortion provider. Meanwhile, Mermilliod's portrayal of her personal experience emphasises corporeality and affectivity with no reference to the law, implying that whilst she believes her embodied reality is valid, she is aware of the minimal autonomy enjoyed by aborting bodies and consequently how their narratives are perceived. In other words, her personal experience as portrayed through her body, her emotions, and her transgressive use of spatiality requires legitimisation by an authority deemed worthier. Of course, Winckler can only know the medicolegal side of abortion, just as Mermilliod can only know its embodied corporeality, although as demonstrated in *LC*, this embodiment is not necessarily confined to a singular person or event. However, this inclusion of Figure 14 strongly suggests that the bodily experience alone is not sufficient and necessitates support from medicolegal perspectives and authorities which/who greenlight the need for this procedure. This overlooks the fact that abortion care seekers are uniquely placed to seek and decide on their care pathways, as it is unusual for patients to have an explanation for their symptoms – pregnancy – and knowledge of the procedure which will resolve such symptoms – abortion (Ottley, 2020). Not only does the emphasis on a medicolegal perspective disenfranchise the aborting bodies at the centre of the narrative by diverting space and attention away from them, but also by implying that their stories are not worthy of spaces which are fully their own.

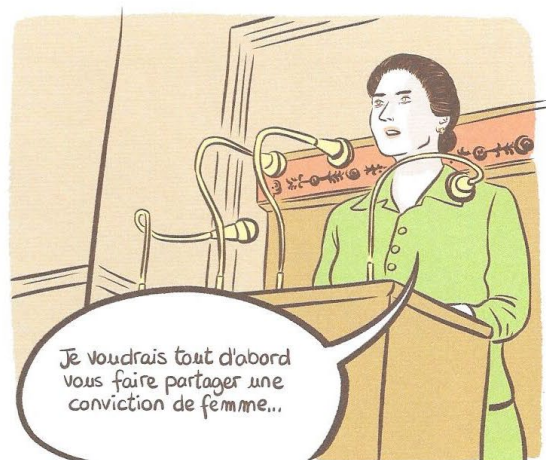


Figure 14 - IFJVD, p.107

1.3 The insides and outsides of pregnancy: subverting the common culture

Representations of abortion, alongside miscarriage, stillbirth, surrogacy, and embryo implantation are negatively perceived as “disturbing or contrary to conventional representations of the maternal ideal”, insofar as they suggest creating a fissure between the pregnant body and the maternal body (Betterton, 2002, p.256). The existence of this fissure illustrates that the pregnant body can occupy space on its own terms without being tied to parenthood, or specifically motherhood (Browne, 2023). By organising space such that the reproductive/reproducing body is depicted in multiple iterations – aborting, pregnant, birthing – abortion is positioned as a potential outcome of pregnancy but not separated from motherhood. This multiplicity is enabled in part by the range of visual and verbal communication devices which allow comic artists to layer ambiguities and metaphors, making it a particularly apt medium for expressing abortion complexity (Williams, 2012). In the form and content of *LC* and *IFJVD*, abortion constitutes a rupture in the “common culture of mothering”, designating “the routine and everyday existence of mass produced and culturally available representations and commodities that create versions of the maternal in the public sphere” (Betterton, 2002; Kehily and Thomson, 2011, p.64).

This rupture is demonstrated through Mermilliod’s deliberate representation of the *avortée*/mother as a sexual being. By depicting the acts of procreation and termination, the narrator embraces a portrayal of women as doubly sinful, in contrast with the Madonna who is perceived as the ultimate representation of motherhood because of her status as a nonsexual maternal being (Betterton, 2002). The central panel in Figure 15 represents Mermilliod as a sexual subject. Her face, contorted in an expression of pleasure, is the only one visible in the panel. The reader/viewer sees only the back of her partner’s head as he is on top of her, his face buried in her neck. In this panel, hites and uphites act as a proxy for the sonic aspect of pornography expressing the intensity of Mermilliod’s – possibly orgasmic

– pleasure; these cloud-like emanata, which mirror the panel shape, reflect the ephemerality of this casual sexual encounter. From a radical feminist perspective, in which women in pornography are “faceless bodies used (often with violence) to satisfy male desires and pleasure”, this is a subversive depiction in its prioritisation of female pleasure (Shor, 2025, p.3). However, sex-positive feminist thought suggests that pornographic productions focus on female pleasure as a means of catering to male viewers; the female body is an object of eroticism, whereas the male body is not viewed as such (*ibid.*). Whilst Mermilliod’s engagement in and depiction of female sexual behaviours eschews their expected passivity and morality, the reader/viewer is invited to perceive her through the male gaze, peering without consequence for this objectification as they see and read her as an erotic object (Couégnas and Périneau-Lorenzo, 2024). By giving space to this sex scene in an abortion narrative Mermilliod allows these two possible events to occupy the same space, associating cisgender female sexuality with pleasure, desire, and nonreproductive sexuality, countering repronormative ideals which reify only reproduction and motherhood. Abortion is thus represented as a possible outcome of pregnancy and a possible reproductive event (Froidevaux-Metterie, 2023).



35

Figure 15 - IFJVD, p.35

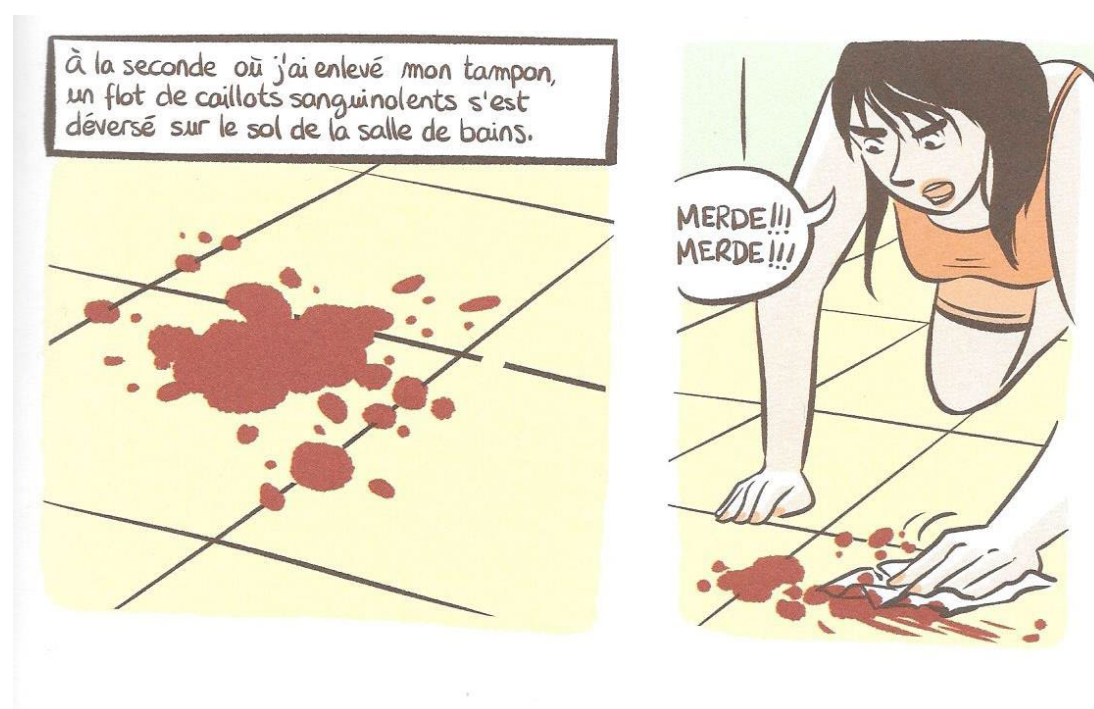


Figure 16 - IFJVD, p.69

Furthermore, the page layout allows the reader/viewer to simultaneously read/view Mermilliod's body in early pregnancy, her visibly pregnant friend Vic, Mermilliod's eight-week-old foetus on the ultrasound scan, a depiction of a foetus at full gestation on the wall in the doctor's office, and Mermilliod's sexual encounter with Christophe. This multiplicity returns towards the end of the narrative when Mermilliod bears witness to her sister-in-law's postpartum body and her sister's newly pregnant body, both of which are uncannily similar to Mermilliod's once pregnant, now aborted body (p.76). If we return to Figure 6, an almost identical use of spatial multiplicity is employed in *LC*. The positioning of the panel which depicts Frappier breastfeeding her child directly below the panel of her abortion allows these displays of bodily unruliness to occupy the same space (Kukla, 2005). Frappier and Mermilliod represent the reproductive self and body as multiple, challenging the teleological, unchanging self at odds with the corporeal spaces of reproduction. In doing so, they demonstrate that "different iterations of the "I" can be literally contagious, available but not stabilized", which is made expressly possible by the medium of graphic narrative, making it a literally reproductive medium (Williams, 2012; Chute, 2015, p.206). Similarly, by enabling these varying iterations of reproducing/reproductive bodily space to harmoniously coexist alongside each other, Mermilliod complexifies the repronormative narrative, illustrating that the female body can be both sexual and pregnant, but not necessarily maternal.

A later sexual encounter reinforces the coincidence of these sexual and aborting bodies, as well as the display of complex emotions, demanding an empathetic and compassionate reading (Ludlow, 2012). Mermilliod's sexual desire is neither constrained by her abortion nor her grief. In Figure 16, Mermilliod rushes to the bathroom where she removes her tampon to see "un flot de caillots sanguinolents [qui] s'est déversé sur le sol"

(p.69).³⁹ Once again, her internal bodily space spills into outside space, illustrating the porosity of this body which is both maternal and not. Her blood covers the lines of the tiles, breaching the borders of the uniform pattern on the floor, just as she represented the aborted bodily material in Figures 8 and 9 overflowing the traditional container of the panel, as well as the container of the physical book by inviting the reader/viewer to participate in a tactile reading by touching the aborted material. Organic and inorganic spaces once again contaminate each another, from Mermilliod's blood on the bathroom tiles, to the reader/viewer's skin touching the diegetic and representational space and it is "[ce] potentiel de contamination [qui] caractérise l'avortement lui-meme" (Cotille-Foley, 2022, p.185).⁴⁰ Mermilliod's breaching of abortion's spatial borders is also a breach of accepted rhetoric surrounding this act. As asserted to previously in relation to *LC*, the refusal to engage with post-abortion grief perhaps constitutes a denial of death, and it would perhaps be expected that Mermilliod who does not want an abortion and dissociates during the procedure abstains from such rhetoric (Kumar, 2018; McCullough, 2025). Nevertheless, her frustration at the sight of her post-abortion bleeding indicates a kind of mourning, not unlike that sometimes felt at the sight of menstrual blood, a symbolic reminder of a failed attempt to conceive (Jancović and Todorović, 2021). In this instance, her bleeding is a reminder of a successful conception, and Mermilliod grieves the child she could have had. By illustrating this grief, Mermilliod "[challenges] our understanding of the acceptability and representability of abortion-related grief and mourning", despite the risk of this grief being translated into regret and manipulated into an argument against abortion (Runde, 2017, p.35; Nevin, 2024). Indeed, by forcing this grief to take up space in the cultural and social imaginary, *IFJVD* troubles the pro-choice feminist rhetoric of abortion positivity (Zeh, 2022; Manninen, 2024).

³⁹ "a flow of blood clots flooded onto the floor"

⁴⁰ "this potential for contamination which defines abortion itself"

Frappier's portrayal of her traumatic procedure also unsettles this pro-choice tendency to focus solely on the positive aspects of abortion. Her abortion representation does in part align with earlier visual portrayals of abortion which tended to be rooted in the negative, as well as recent rhetoric positing abortion as necessarily traumatic (Conte *et al.*, 2015; Ludlow, 2020; Carlini Versini, 2025; Hallet and Miller, 2025). Through their respective evocations of grief and trauma, both narratives simultaneously demand compassionate readings in line with Ludlow's (2012) abortion politics of love and goodness, whilst simultaneously rewriting the script of a good, politically acceptable, feminist abortion.

Frappier's portrayal of sexuality in *LC* manifests through the implicit rather than the explicit and forbids her body to appear as unruly and abject (Kukla, 2005). In Figure 17, the verbal elements of a euphemistic, underhand conversation about sex and pregnancy are positioned against a celestial night sky, unattached from the speaker. The absence of the speaker is similarly employed in Figure 13 to address the shortfalls of the Veil law, reflecting Frappier's hesitance to openly deviate from its veneration. The sequence in Figure 17 unfolds at night, the period of day where most human sexual activity takes place; since nighttime represents a moment during which daytime social customs no longer apply, this illicit act and topic of conversation is liberated (Bozon, 1999). Indeed, it is nonreproductive *sexuality* that demands governance rather than abortion. The apparent unspeakability of abortion arises not from the fact that it was perceived as ending a life, but rather that it "represented 'getting caught' in the consequences of sexuality" (Luker, 1982, p.129). Despite the apparent freedom afforded to this subject of sexuality because of this nighttime setting, the conversation at hand is nevertheless full of euphemisms. For example, it is revealed that a fellow classmate, H  l  ne, never returned to school the previous year. Whether she fell pregnant, died from an abortion, or left school for other reasons is unknown to the reader/viewer and we are left to read, or view, between the lines. We learn that another girl, Babeth, "a eu des nouvelles",

implying she is pregnant, and that the previous year she nearly died from a backstreet abortion. Her fate is also left unknown. At the end of this sequence, the reader/viewer is literally left in the dark. Not only is the reader demanded to fill in the gaps between panels to create sequentiality, but they are also asked to read between the lines of the content within the panels. Although the time of day allows for some semblance of a taboo conversation to unfold, it simultaneously implies a continued need for secrecy, or a distinct lack of freedom, a duality reinforced by the outside backdrop.

According to some strands of ecofeminist thought, women enjoy a unique closeness to nature because of their shared history of patriarchal domination and oppression (D'Eaubonne, 2020 [1974]; Gagné, 2010). Although some schools of ecofeminist criticism maintain that the bond between women and nature is innate because of their lifegiving abilities, this essentialist approach ultimately reduces women to their reproductive capacities, tightening the knot of the monolithic bind from which feminism seeks to liberate women (*ibid.*). However, it is their shared victimisation by the patriarchy which offers proximity and in this perspective, the natural environment offers women solace and solidarity, implying that they necessarily experience this space as emancipatory. Nonetheless, this ignores that nature is not a space of respite and safety for all women. We fear venturing into these spaces alone, fear the repercussions of rape culture triggered at the sign of any minor transgression, we are afraid to be outside after dark, knowing that we are not entitled to roam unchaperoned, unaware, or unprepared. Social structures of hierarchy, oppression, and domination are produced and reproduced through routine and repetition, which is reflected in the way certain bodies are continually granted comfortability in occupying space, whereas others experience only discomfort (Rose, 1993; Rodó-Zárate, 2023). The illicit discussion in *LC* fraught with euphemisms, a tactic to circumvent any frank discussion of sexuality and abortion, reflects that whilst in this moment they are physically beyond the spaces of clinics,

hospitals, and government buildings where abortion is regulated, they remain unable to speak freely or “secure an undisputed right to occupy that space” (Hanmer and Saunders, 1984, p.39). They are outside the physical structures which constrain the movement of their reproductive bodies, yet not free from the systemic and sociomoral constraints which continue to define the way their bodies unsafely and unwelcomingly inhabit space, whether inside or outside. Much like the impossibility of representing the product of Frappier’s abortion, the reproductive bodies speaking and being spoken about in this panel are unable to be represented. In both Figures 13 and 17 the unruly body remains hidden and invisible, afraid of the consequences of transgression (Mohanty, 1997; Rose, 1993). Yet, an alternative interpretation of this apparent unrepresentability is a refusal of the surveillance of the reproductive body. Whilst Frappier does show her body, for example in the sequence portraying her abortion procedure, it is done so in a way which prevents full visibility of this space. Contrary to the actual moment of her abortion, in her graphic narrative Frappier shields her and other’s bodies from view, as if avoiding any possibility of repeating the doctor’s gaze policing her abortion and contraceptive decisions, transforming nature into a space of refuge from hypersurveillance (Fréville, 2020).

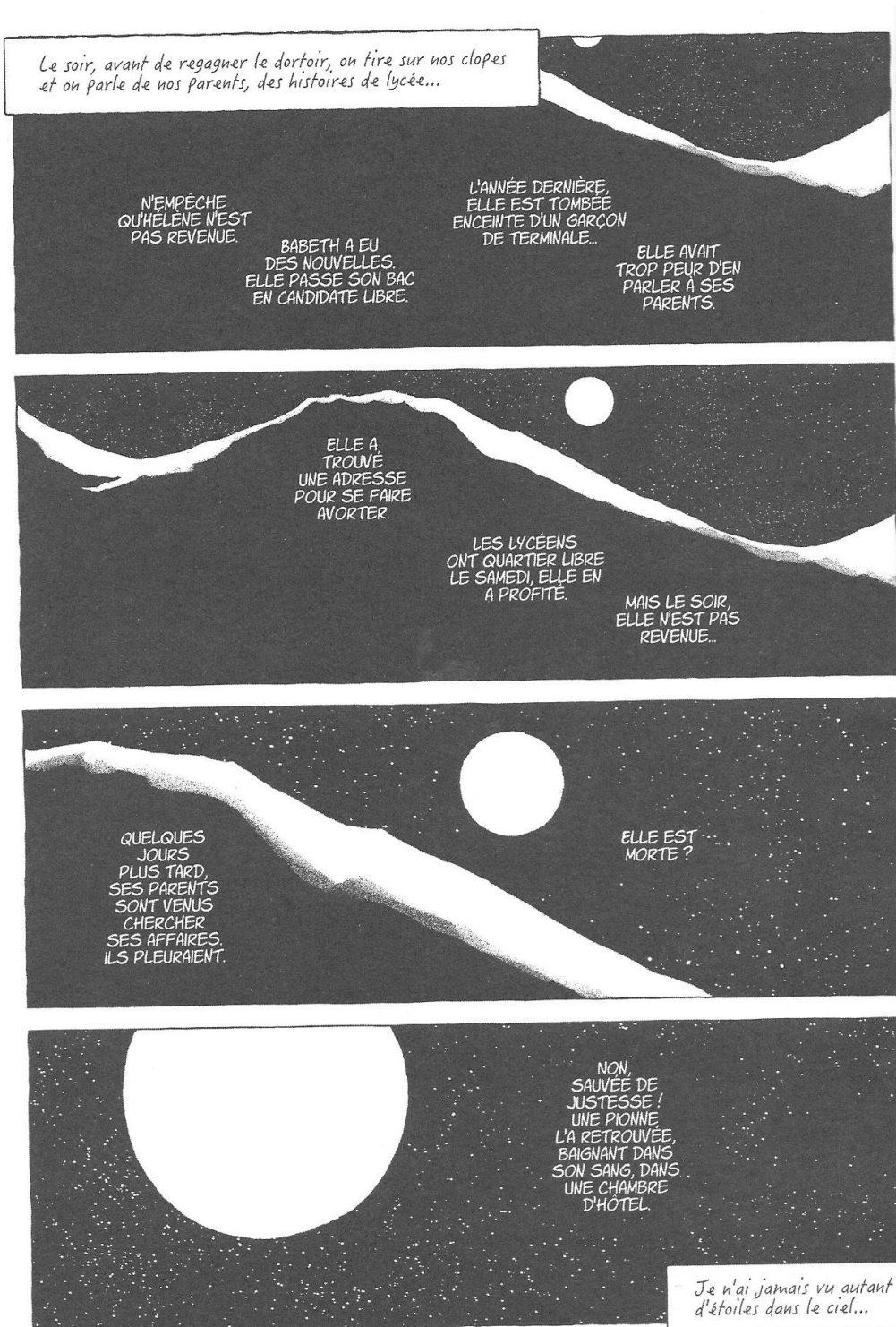


Figure 17 - LC, p.18

Like Mermilliod, Frappier engages in a rejection of repronormative representation, but continues to do so via this implicitness and by positing it as a non-issue. There is indeed a fissure in the common culture of mothering, one that questions “the routine and everyday existence of mass produced and culturally available representations”, but in the previously analysed example, this does not consist of one that provides a literal *representation* or alternative presentation (Neuman, 1993; Kehily and Thomson, 2011, p.64) However, in Figure 18, Frappier does offer a visual representation of sexuality, rather than a textual questioning. It has been asked whether the hybrid format of discursive and pictorial elements has the damaging potential to minimise or even trivialise the seriousness of the topic at hand (Evans, 2021). However, Frappier’s portrayal seeks to trivialise sex and contraception in the sense of normalising it as part of everyday life, rather than reducing its significance, allowing female sexual desire to be perceived as normal rather than deviant (Sævik and Konijnenberg, 2023).

One sequence addresses the difficulty that Josette, a friend of Frappier’s, experiences in accessing to the contraceptive pill at the age of nineteen, denying her the bodily autonomy to safely exercise her sexual desires: one doctor “a refusé en lui faisant la morale parce qu’elle est mineure” (Figure 18).⁴¹ Bodily autonomy includes the right to have sex, not insofar as this suggests being entitled to another’s body but rather being empowered enough to choose what to do with one’s own body (Srinivasan, 2021). Josette ultimately finds a doctor willing to prescribe her the pill and the image of the blister pack positioned in the bottom-left of the sequence constitutes a sharp contrast to the surrounding panels in the double-page layout. Firstly, it is the only panel without a border, which is somewhat unusual for this work, which largely favours rigid panel borders. This is perhaps indicative of the inability to govern or

⁴¹ “refused while lecturing her because she was a minor”

contain abortion and contraception. No matter how much the healthcare system wished to govern nonreproductive or illicit sexuality by banning use of and propaganda in favour of contraception and abortion, people continued to have sex and have abortions (Runde, 2018). Secondly, this image appears amongst a display of images depicting banal and carefree adolescent life. In the adjacent panel, Josette and Frappier are positioned in front of the film poster for *Les Pétroleuses* (1971). Not only does this cultural reference give this panel a timestamp, reflecting graphic narrative's inherent blurring of spatial and temporal boundaries, but it also reflects that the girls themselves are consuming content which normalises sex, thus evoking a sense of metarepresentativity. We see the content structuring Frappier's self and worldview as she makes another form of content to structure herself and others' selves and ideas about sexuality (Miller, 2011). In the above panels, Josette does Frappier's makeup before going out on the town, and the opposite page is the celestial scene of gossiping and smoking with classmates. Frappier therefore reinforces that contraception and sexual desire, much like abortion, were, if not a ubiquitous, certainly a frequent part of people's everyday existences (Macleod, 2024). Furthermore, it illustrates that sexual desire, as well as the desire to act on this, is neither extraordinary nor deviant, like in *IFJVD*. *LC* thus subtly and subversively employs space with the objective of disentangling cisgender female sexuality from its repronormative connotations of motherhood.

Mermilliod and Frappier create a tailor-made space for their aborting bodies to exist in and occupy. These bodies are space, in that they take up and own these spaces rather than being passive containers of narrative, and the agents of this space, because they have been created by these same bodies (Löw, 2006; Calkin *et al.*, 2022). In doing so, *IFJVD* and *LC* call into question the politics of representability and acceptability (Chute, 2010). Their portrayals of the *avortée* as explicitly or implicitly sexual rupture the common culture of mothering, both in the denial of motherhood but also in their outward expression of

sexuality and status as sexual subjects, contrary to the maternal ideal of being a nonsexual object. Indeed, Mermilliod employs a quintessential pornographic display of female pleasure whilst Frappier ironically employs euphemism, both representations which align with expectations of female sexuality (Sævik and Konijnenberg, 2023). Nevertheless, Mermilliod's portrayal of grief upon seeing her post-abortion bleeding suggests an abortion complex approach, by positing mourning as a legitimate and acceptable response to abortion, even in cases where abortion was freely sought. Her body takes up space in unruly ways for an aborting body. This body bleeds, grieves, expresses rage, and experiences sexual desire and pleasure, experiences which overlap in representational space. This illustrates a multiplicity of the reproductive self which is not often granted to aborting bodies, or women more broadly (Harmange, 2022, p.54). Meanwhile, Frappier's integration of sexual references into the representational space of *LC* employs a subtler approach, in which aborting subjects are not pictorialised as actively sexual. This seeks to normalise rather than villainise the reproductive body as one with the potential to be an aborting one and/or a sexual one. Her refusal to display her and other reproductive bodies prevents the reader/viewer from peering at the self and acting as another surveillor of reproductive bodies. Frappier takes up space as an invisible subject, which on the one hand protects her bodily space from violation, but on the other hand reinforces the invisibility of the *avortée*. Both narratives create complex visual referents for abortion trajectories, complexifying what we consider as acceptable behaviour and depictions of women and *avortées*, highlighting that the issue has never truly been abortion, it has always been about controlling the marginalised and reproductive body.



*Josette a 19 ans et la majorité est à 21 ans.

Heureusement, dans une station de ski, les jambes cassées, c'est une affaire qui roule et il y a presque autant de docteurs que de berlingots.

Alors, Josette a obtenu sa pilule ailleurs.

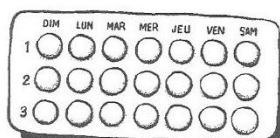


Figure 18 - LC, p.19

1.3.1 Becoming inside herself

During pregnancy, the inside bodily space engages in an ambivalent relationship with the beyond bodily space, as manifested in Frappier's implicitly and Mermilliod's explicitly porous bodies (Tyler, 2001; Kukla, 2005; Young, 2018 [1995]). Since the advent of ultrasonic technologies in antepartum care which have been widely used in France since the 1990s, foetal images have transformed pregnancy into a public matter, becoming an externalised process rather than confined to an inaccessible and opaque womb (Duden, 1992; Kehily and Thomson, 2011). Once intended for diagnostic purposes, this visualisation of the foetus in early pregnancy has resulted in its conceptualisation as a person rather than a person-*to-be*, in contrast to the mother, who during pregnancy is recognised as a mother-*to-be*, shifting only to mother upon childbirth (Berlant, 1994; Froidevaux-Metterie, 2023). By looking, peering, and creating imagery, this act of reproductive surveillance has reoriented a previously private, internal space into a publicly accessible one fraught with tension over who has greater rights to occupy and control this space. If women's relationship to space is dictated by "their inability to secure an undisputed right to occupy that space", then this inability extends to agency over their own bodies and the spaces of reproduction (Hanmer and Saunders, 1984, p.39). This relationship to space is particularly flagrant in ultrasound imagery, which separates the pregnant person and the foetus, wiping out the former's body and disembodiment it from the latter (Duden, 1993; Maher, 2002; Favaretto and Rost, 2024).

Even though abortion rarely, if ever, represents a desire to exert bodily autonomy and is instead a reflection of material circumstances, bodily autonomy nevertheless becomes an important issue when the ability to own and control one's own bodily space is contested (Ludlow, 2012). In the space of the traditional ultrasound image, the pregnant person is non-existent, even though "no fetus floats in a space capsule", as cited in the epigraph (Petchesky,

1987, p.287). A foetus can only be understood in relation to its surroundings, reinforcing once again that space imbues its inhabitants with meaning (Ahmed, 2006). Regardless of how much attention is paid to the foetal figure, there is always some trace of the womb which interacts with this image (Adams, 1994). In *IFJVD*, Mermilliod positions both herself and a developmentally accurate foetus within the frame (Figures 19, 20, and 21), contextualising the foetus by ensuring that it is only understood and represented in relation to her body, insisting that the foetus occupies *her* space. In doing so, this space becomes her, and she places “the uterus back into the woman’s body, and her body back in its social space” (Petchesky, 1987, p.278; Gauthier, 2002). There is a literal process of becoming happening inside herself, but she also becomes inside herself by reclaiming this space as hers. By visually associating her body and the foetus within the same space Mermilliod prevents disembodiment, allowing her to occupy space as a fully embodied subject. Even though the peering aspect of ultrasonic visualisation continues to render her pregnancy public, her contextualisation of the uterine space answers the question of who this space belongs to.

The cultural significance of and value accorded to this visualisation of the foetus occupies varying positions in the reproductive trajectories of those who want to be pregnant, those who do not, and those who are unsure or perhaps ambivalent towards pregnancy (Boltanski, 2004; Morgan and Michaels, 2016). Indeed, Mermilliod’s relationship to her pregnancy is ambivalent, as suggested by her request to hold onto the ultrasound image. This gesture seems to surprise the technician, especially in the wake of her determination to abort illustrated in Figure 15. She wishes to keep the photo so that it takes up physical space in her life, unlike her child.⁴² Sometimes foetal imagery has propagandistic significance for “pro-

⁴² Photography has a special significance for Mermilliod, who documents her pregnant and post-abortum body with her camera and concludes her narrative with a photographic self-portrait. According to Imogen Tyler and Lisa Baraitser (2013), pregnancy photography has become a hallmark of family photo albums in the twenty-first century, positing it as a rite of passage for the repronormative nuclear family. In their collections *Sacrum* (2020) and *Reviens demain* (2016-2021), photographers Juliette Treillet and Manon Gardelle respectively visually

life” groups, manipulating images to divert attention away from the policies and welfare issues which determine people’s social circumstances and subsequently their reproductive decisions (Ross and Solinger, 2017). In such an instance, foetal imagery is utilised with the goal of provoking a visceral, emotional response to influence the decision to abort. However, Mermilliod’s images are not the kind weaponised by anti-abortionists, whose rhetoric depends on manipulating images which transform the foetus into a baby (Newman, 1996; Hurst, 2020). Of course, this ultrasound picture has been manipulated, in the sense that it has been artistically rendered into a comic form but has not been done so in an unscrupulous way which represents the foetus as a live child, which is to suggest that this is the only possible outcome of pregnancy (Betterton, 2002; Browne, 2023; Froidevaux-Metterie, 2023).

document their personal experiences of abortion. In doing so, they contest the place of photography and its role in reifying pregnancy as part of a repronormative and nuclear trajectory towards motherhood.



Figure 19 - IFJVD, p.32



Figure 20 - IFJVD, p.33



37

Figure 21 - IFJVD, p.37

Yet, just like Mermilliod's frustration at her post-abortion bleeding, keeping the ultrasound picture suggests a desire to cling onto the would-have-been of her pregnancy, even though she has made peace with her decision, as far as is possible in her case. Once again, *IFJVD* audaciously eschews existing prototypes of acceptability through its display of grieving, despite the possibility of this grief being interpreted as regret and consequently transformed into an argument against abortion (Nevin, 2024). During the period following her initial appointment to schedule her abortion and prior to her termination, Mermilliod notes that "[elle] a bizarrement pris soin de ce qu'il y avait dans [son] ventre" (p.41) (Figure 22).⁴³ The protagonist takes time to rest and refrains from smoking and drinking alcohol, recognising that she is looking after the foetus she is going to terminate in a way that would suggest she is planning on continuing and completing her pregnancy. It is almost as if in making the decision that her pregnant body will not physically expand to take up more space, she needs it to take up some other form of space, as it comes to do so on the space of the page. In the sequence portraying this self-care, she uses the impersonal relative pronoun "ce que" to refer to the foetus, refusing to bestow it with personhood (Petchesky, 1987; Duden, 1993). This is similar language utilised in Sandra Vizzavona's collection *Interruption*. *L'avortement par celles qui l'ont vécu* (2021) analysed in Chapter Two; some *avortées* remain bound by the unspeakability of their reproductive decisions despite their willingness to share their stories. In the following sequence, Mermilliod distractedly doodles a name on a notebook, realising that she is "en train de choisir un prénom pour l'embryon qui allait, à [sa] demande, être aspiré hors de [son] utérus le lendemain..." (p.42) (Figure 23).⁴⁴ Once again, we witness Mermilliod engaging in apparently contradictory behaviour wherein she visualises a would-be future child, by giving it a name – something she had previously joked about immediately

⁴³ "she had bizarrely been looking after the thing inside her."

⁴⁴ "choosing a name for the embryo which would, at my request, be removed from my uterus the following day."

after discovering her positive pregnancy test: “J’serai là, à chercher un prénom! Hahaha!” (p. 24)⁴⁵ – yet simultaneously replaces it with a relative pronoun, acknowledging that it is not a child, nor will it ever be one. It is an embryo, with no subjecthood or personhood. These conflicting actions represent an openness to the breadth of emotional responses to abortion. Between her desire to parent and her circumstances denying this possibility, Mermilliod’s child is liminally suspended in her present space between absence and presence, life and death, could-be and cannot-be, and inside and outside; it is a child, but also a choice (Ludlow, 2008). This once again speaks to the importance of incorporating abortion into phenomenologies of pregnancy loss, as those who have experienced pregnancy loss engage in an “ongoing process of mourning and incorporating their experience statuses into their life stories” (McIntyre *et al.*, 2022). This loss is very much still a part of her life trajectory, to the extent that it is inscribed in an aborto-socio-biographical narrative, defining not just who she is as a person, but who she is as an artist and narrator. By dedicating space to this loss, Mermilliod encourages an affective and complex reading of her narrative, asking us to actively engage with, rather than merely advocate for, a compassionate abortion politics. Mermilliod’s narrative *is* an abortion politics of love and goodness (Ludlow, 2012).

⁴⁵ “I’ll be here, thinking about baby names! Haha!”



Figure 22 - IFJVD, p.41



Figure 23 - IFJVD, p.42

1.3.2 Becoming outside herself

In contrast to the previous analysis, the deliberate omission of the foetus and foetal imagery from *LC* is significant as it completely removes any possibility of disembodiment of the *avortée*, allowing this abortion narrative to focus solely on the embodied and affective experience of abortion rather than entertaining any moral debate about foetal personhood. Disembodied in her abortion, as literally manifested in Figures 4 and 5, Frappier finds embodiment in occupying a (dis)similar space to her mother, legitimising her own existence. Yet like *IFJVD* problematises the relationship to inside and outside space with reference to the foetus, *LC* also evokes an ambivalent relationship to inside and outside. Indeed, both narratives express this ambiguity with regards to their respective bodily inhabitances of space, as these bodies become their inside and outside spaces and they experience their abortions both inside and outside their bodies, phenomena which were drawn out previously in the chapter. However, I speak here of the inside, built world and the natural outside world. As attested to in my analysis of Figures 13 and 17, women's relationship to space is particularly slippery when it comes to their inhabitation of natural spaces. Even in its non-essentialist forms, the implication of solidarity between women and nature because of their shared history of oppression assumes a degree of safety experienced by women in nature which is often not the case. In Figures 24, which appears towards the start of the narrative, and 25, which closes the narrative, the reader/viewer is (re)presented with vast open expanses of space, set in the daytime. In the former figure, a bird soars over the open sea yet this image is contained within the rigid panel borders; Frappier contains this uncontainable space, just as she confines her implicitly porous body during her abortion procedure, unlike Mermilliod whose body overflows the container of the page. Meanwhile, Figure 25 also depicts these birds, yet they are not contained by the panel borders, reflecting Frappier's own freedom which she has found by legitimising her own existence. In both these examples, her

bodily space is once again absent. For Frappier, it is the non-figuring of the visual self through which she grounds herself in space, free from the policing and surveillance of her reproductive body. By ridding herself of her guilt at being alive, she no longer seeks to be contained in as small a space as possible and can now take up as much as she wishes, even in this outdoor space where she was previously constrained by rules and regulations. The end of her narrative indicates that her newly found internal and cognitive freedom spills out of her, into the beyond bodily space and onto the space of the page. Frappier thus becomes outside herself, occupying a space that extends to her shape so much that it knows no bounds. By reorienting space, Frappier can ground herself in a boundless natural space, the same one that previously invisibilised reproducing/reproductive bodies behind euphemisms and negative space.

IFJVD ends in a similar fashion, as depicted in Figure 26. Mermilliod's body is grounded in a boundless, natural space, cascading across two pages and crossing the barrier imposed by the middle seam of the book which typically marks a division rather than a union. This reflects the continuity of Mermilliod's abortion, or the ways in which she carries it with her. Her abortion is porous, just like her body. Indeed, those who have experienced pregnancy loss continue to mourn and incorporate this event into their lives long after its occurrence (McIntyre *et al.*, 2022). She chooses a tree to act as a physical memorial of her abortion, choosing nature not because her status as a woman amalgamates her with nature, but because this act grounds her in an unbounded, continuing space: "Il paraît que certaines femmes ayant vécu des fausses couches plantent un arbre, moi j'ai choisi le mien, et je suis retournée le saluer chaque année depuis" (Figure 26) (p.163).⁴⁶ Just as a tree is grounded in earthly matter by its roots, Mermilliod's abortion takes permanent root in her bodily matter,

⁴⁶ "I heard that some women who have experienced miscarriages plant a tree; I chose mine, and I go back every year to greet it."

grounding itself both within and outwith the self. The tree immortalises her abortion in the unbounded space of nature, the space on the page of graphic narrative and Mermilliod's calendar, and in the space of her heart, incorporating abortion into phenomenologies of pregnancy loss and legitimising grief as a legitimate affective response.

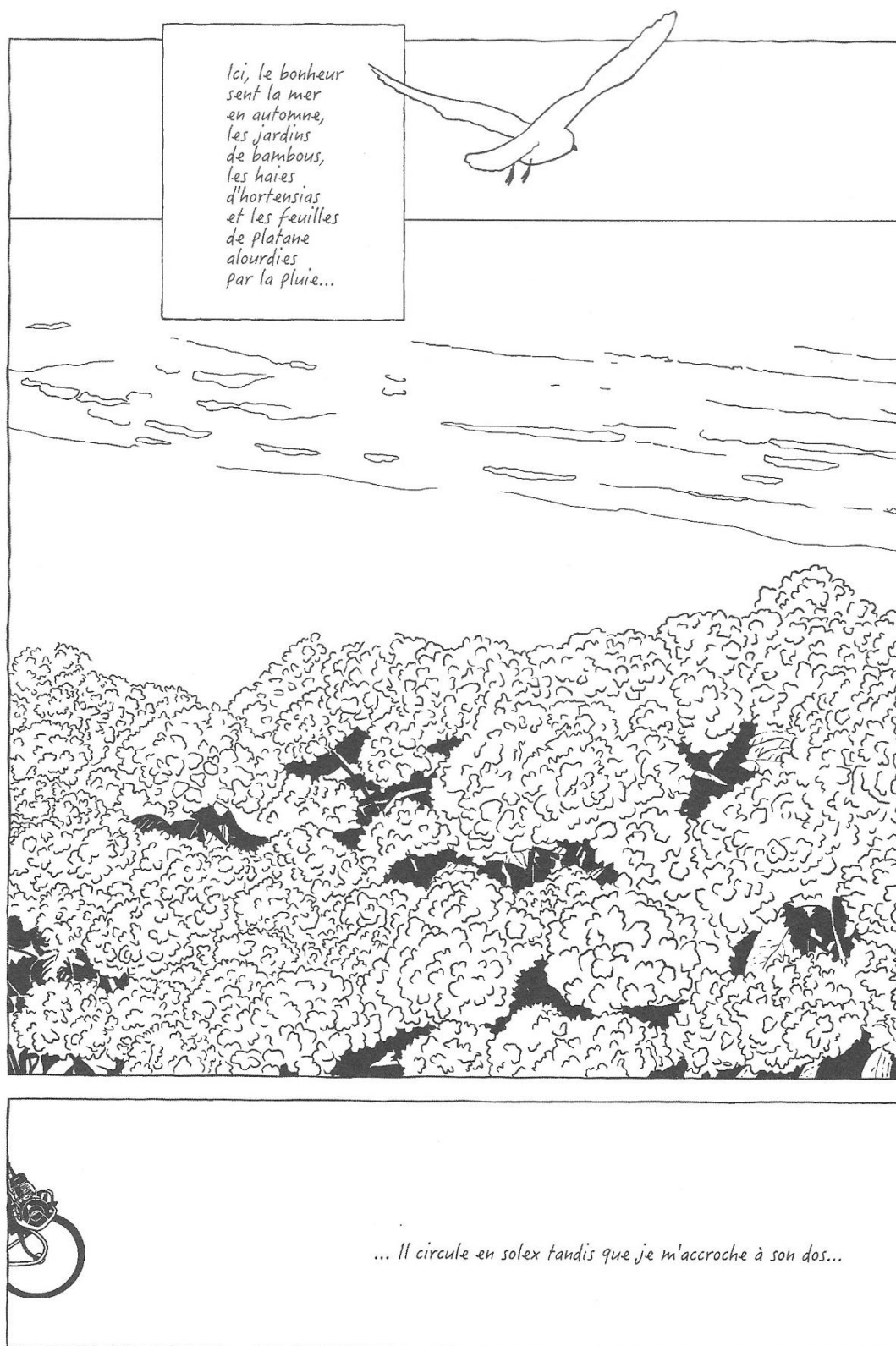
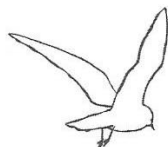


Figure 24 - LC, p.12



NOUS ÉTIONS AU DÉBUT DE NOTRE RELATION ET J'AI PU MESURER
À QUEL POINT NOUS ÉTIONS EN ACCORD L'UN AVEC L'AUTRE.



C'EST À PARTIR DE LÀ QUE J'AI VRAIMENT RÉFLÉCHI À MON ENVIE D'AVOIR DES ENFANTS.



ET QUAND NOUS AVONS DÉCIDÉ D'ÊTRE PARENTS, NOUS ÉTIONS TOUS LES DEUX PRÊTS.



RÉTROSPECTIVEMENT, JE ME DIS QUE LES RÉFLEXIONS QUI SE SONT MISES EN PLACE
EN CE MOIS D'AOUT 1995 NOUS ONT AIDÉS À NOUS FORGER EN TANT QUE PERSONNE.

Figure 25 - LC, p.94

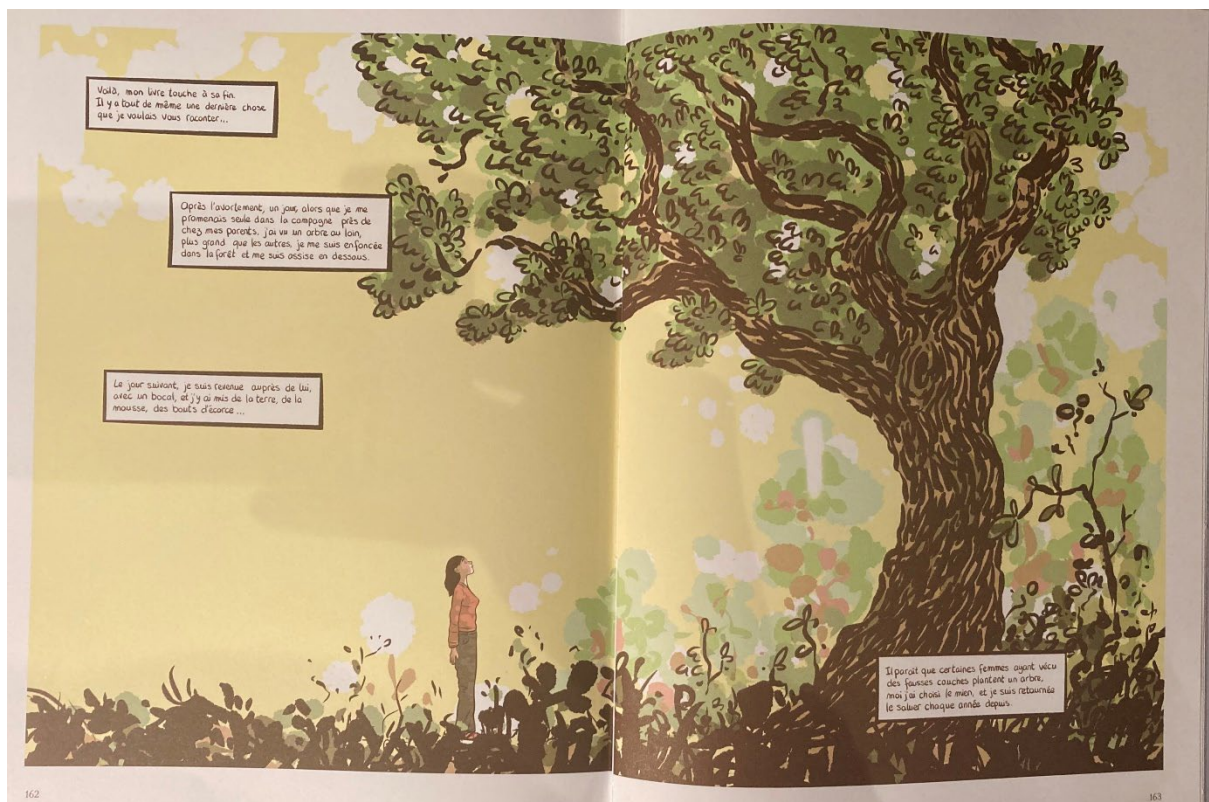


Figure 26 - IFJVD, pp.162-3

1.4 Conclusion

The start of this chapter called our attention to abortion's limited space in *BD* and its scholarship, not to mention the distinct lack of complex narratives addressing the topic. This limited and by consequence limiting space was thus at the forefront of this chapter's analytical vantage point. I posited abortion's spatialities as the places of its regulation, which extend to the bodily spaces of reproduction, whilst acknowledging that some of these spaces are regulatory (active) and others are regulated (passive). This allows us to understand the bodily spatial experience as one grounded in the beyond bodily space, particularly in relation to the non-repronormative reproductive body (Calkin *et al.*, 2022). It is only by recognising that reproducing/reproductive bodies are denied grounding in their external spatiality that we can understand the disputed right that these bodies have to these spaces, as well as a disputed right to their bodily space, which is consequently under surveillance (Hanmer and Saunders, 1984; Rose, 1993; De Vignemont, 2023). As such, if we understand abortion's spatialities as traditionally defined, reproducing/reproductive bodies are forced to occupy spaces which do not extend to their shape and are devalued as a result (Ahmed, 2006). Yet, through reorientations, that is, through reclaiming and recentring the reproductive body in its multiple iterations, Frappier and Mermilliod succeed in creating space that literally extends to their bodily shapes. The inscription of the narratives into contemporary graphic narrative allows for a physical reorientation of space both on and beyond the page, offering an unregulated and dysregulated spatiality of abortion.

Both narratives in question, *Le Choix* and *Il fallait que je vous le dise*, offer haptic portrayals of an embodied abortion experience, privileging the corporeal event as lived and felt by the *avortée*, rather than the sociolegal spaces of governance. The bodily space and beyond bodily space – referring in these examples to hospitals and clinics – are depicted as porous, implicitly so in Frappier's depiction and explicitly so in Mermilliod's. To an extent,

both narratives are bound by the epistemic authority exercised by paternalistic healthcare providers in a medical setting, a relationship reflected in Frappier's claustrophobic framing of her procedure, and the buttressing of Mermilliod's narrative by Martin Winckler's experience of providing abortions (Popowicz, 2021). Moreover, both narratives seem to reify the promulgation of the Veil law as a silver bullet for abortion access, even though Frappier criticises its shortfalls, reflecting a form of iterative reification which seeks to mirror the discursive forms of prior abortion narratives (Allen, 2014). However, Frappier demands privacy and makes her body unreadable/unviewable for the reader/viewer, reorienting the clinic into a place which focuses on her bodily space by deflecting from it. Although we are invited to feel what it means to live her abortion, we are denied sight of it. Whereas for Frappier it is the violence of the procedure and her engagement with extradiegetic sound-as-text which causes her to experience her abortion out of her body, for Mermilliod it is the out-of-body nature of this embodied experience which causes her to dissociate as well as her ambivalent relationship to this reproductive decision (Froidevaux-Metterie, 2023; Macleod, 2024). *IFJVD* also conveys the symbiotic porosity of bodily space and the beyond bodily space; Mermilliod becomes her abortion, which spills out into the clinic, just as the regulated space of the clinic invades this corporeal experience. Putting this body on visual display with their respective emphases on hapticity and visceral corporeality "means the world acquires a new shape and makes new impressions", both lasting, complexified impressions on the reader/viewer's psyche, as well as the immutable marks on the page (Ahmed, 2006, p.20). By harnessing visual aesthetic and communication devices, Frappier and Mermilliod layer representations of the aborting self and abortion's ambiguities, made possible by the visual-textual medium. This visibility allows for a literal (re)centring of the self, experience, and experiential knowledge, in which affect is at the forefront. Complexifying our readings of abortion which have traditionally been analysed via legal paradigms, graphic narrative

therefore goes beyond advocating for an abortion politics of love and goodness to actively become these politics (Ludlow, 2012).

A similar experience of space is evoked in Frappier's portrayal of sexuality, which occurs in an outdoor setting fraught with the tensions between safety/danger and speakability/unspeakability. This ambiguity is reflected through the invisibilisation of reproductive bodies and their discussion via euphemisms. Although ecofeminist critiques imply that women find solace in the natural environment, this perspective neglects the inherent unsafety of inhabiting an unbounded space in a marginalised body (Gagné, 2010). Yet, by the end of her narrative she is grounded in this outside space thanks to the legitimisation of her own existence. Previously disenfranchised in the beyond bodily space, whether inside or outside, Frappier is no longer confined to her body or panels contained by four rigid borders, allowing her to exhibit a previously denied explicit porosity. Mermilliod also encounters a complex relationship to inside and outside, affirmed by her use of foetal imagery which returns the foetus to the space of her body, whilst pushing her body to the centre of the narrative. Although contemporary manipulation of foetal imagery has deviated from its original diagnostic purpose, *IFJVD* rejects pregnant disembodiment, becoming inside herself, whilst acknowledging the protagonist's grief in the face of this unwanted abortion. Such a display of abortion complexity can also be found in *LC*, as despite Frappier's traumatic and violent procedure, she nevertheless emerges from her narrative as a fulfilled subject. Mermilliod's portrayal of sexuality similarly oscillates between the tropes of female objectification and subjectivity found in both *LC* and *IFJVD*, as she depicts herself experiencing sexual pleasure whilst being subjugated by the invasive gaze of the reader/viewer who automatically reads her body as an erotic object. Similarly, as her narrative closes, Mermilliod too becomes outside herself, becoming grounded in the boundless outdoors, able to move on because she has found a dwelling place for her grief

(Ahmed, 2006). Reorientating abortion's spatialities grounds aborting bodies in a beyond bodily space to provide a source of solace, comfort, and grounding, as well as a means of moving forward, towards abortion complex representations and realities. In *LC* and *IFJVD*, the *avortée* finds roots “as well as a route through the contours of the world, which gives our world its own contours” (*ibid.*, p.17).

Chapter Two

Writing an Abortion of Our Time: On Subjectivity, Interruption, and Transmission

My words are taken away as I give them, interrupted by the time of a discourse that is not the same as the time of my life. This “interruption” contests the sense of the account’s being grounded in myself alone, since the indifferent structures that enable my living belong to a sociality that exceeds me.

(Butler, 2005, p.34)

Mais quand l’avortement se termine-t-il réellement ?

(Harmange, 2022, p.53)⁴⁷

2.1 Introduction

Interruption. To interrupt; to stop *temporarily*; to *temporarily* stop a person speaking by something you say or do; to stop something from happening *temporarily*; to cause something to stop *temporarily*. There is, in the official definition, no permanence to the act of interrupting; it is a temporary state, a pause. As Adrienne Rich points out, women are so often tasked with waiting, occupying a suspended, liminal state, whether because they are “waiting to be asked, waiting for our menses [...] waiting for men to come home from wars, or from work, waiting for children to grow up, or for the birth of a new child, or for menopause” (1992 [1976], p.39). In this perspective, women spend their lives in a cyclical

⁴⁷ “But at what point does abortion truly end?”

waiting room, always awaiting and anticipating the next part of a cycle, or for a new cycle to begin; they are trapped in the paradox of a permanent impermanence. This cyclical time, which demands a forward, future-facing conception of time, is one of two times Julia Kristeva associates with womanhood, as it is intrinsically linked to “cycles, gestation, éternel retour d’un rythme biologique qui s’accorde à celui de la nature”, but also the repetitive cycles of life associated with daily childcaring and domestic tasks (Kristeva, 1979, p.7; Baraitser, 2014).⁴⁸ Yet, the act of “interrupting” pregnancy, or terminating, as would be the colloquial English equivalent, is a permanent state, unable to be suspended. Abortion, as well as other types of pregnancy loss, are eruptions of this cyclicity. Whilst abortion is of course inherently linked to the rhythms of menstruation and pregnancy, abortion puts a permanent stop to the cycle of pregnancy. Pregnancy *postpones* menstruation, just as menstruation *postpones* pregnancy, but these are merely temporary interruptions to biological cycles, whereas abortion is an eruption of these cycles, throwing them into disarray, in which cycles are unable to reach a state of resolution. Indeed, pregnancies which do not result in a live birth leave women “in a state of liminality where resolution does not occur” (Côté-Arsenault *et al.*, 2009, p.85). The rite of passage of becoming a mother remains unsettled due to the non-continuation of pregnancy. I argue in this chapter that the same is true for abortion, which manifests as an unsettling yet simultaneously comforting liminal event, a temporary yet permanent experience, consequently calling into question linear conceptions of pregnant time.

⁴⁸ “cycles, gestation, the eternal recurrence of a biological rhythm which conforms to that of nature” (Kristeva, translated by Alice Jardine and Harry Blake, 1981, p.16).

2.1.1 Abortive temporalities

In the previous chapter, the term *IVG* – *interruption volontaire de grossesse* – has already been problematised, with a focus primarily on the issues posed by “volontaire” in a context where free will and choice often feel like arbitrary concepts to the people directly affected. Yet now I seek to further unpick this terminology throughout this chapter, highlighting that the concept of “interruption” is also imbued with political assumptions. Whilst the previous chapter focused on the *spatiality* of abortion as represented in graphic narrative, and the act of taking up space within a page, genre, or topic, this chapter is concerned with the *temporality* of abortion, building on Browne’s work on miscarriage to argue that any kind of pregnancy loss, whether miscarriage, stillbirth, or abortion, disrupts pregnant time, which is ordinarily conceived as a linear, futural passage towards a live birth, traced by the gestational development of the foetus (2017; 2022; 2023). As also argued in the introduction to this thesis, I understand abortion as a form of perinatal loss and seek to integrate this reproductive event into its phenomenologies, as well as those of pregnancy, with the objective of facilitating solidary, empathetic, and compassionate approaches to complex abortion narratives. Browne advocates for constituting pregnant time in terms of the present pregnant subject, rather than in terms of the developing foetus. Rather than the futurity of pregnant time, in which the role of a pregnant person is acknowledged by society as one leading toward motherhood, I posit that abortion time is one of a progressive present tense, much like Harmange’s question in the epigraph above, mirroring the temporal fluidity associated with women’s time (Kristeva, 1979; Côté-Arsenault *et al.*, 2009; Apter, 2017). This fluidity and continuum are evidenced by the narrators’ privileging of a present tense which does not distinguish between a narrative or enunciative present and instead is more akin to a gnomic present. This allows us to “think more in terms of a spectrum of pregnancy, rather than a norm or ideal of pregnant embodiment that specific pregnancies either approximate

or deviate from” (Browne, 2017, p.41). In this sense, abortion time is much like care time, which rather than consisting of connections founded upon the concept of waiting *for* others, seeks to “[foster] forms of connection that consist of waiting *with*” (Baraitser and Brook, 2021, p.244, emphasis in original). Care time can be conceived as a means of suspending the future and caring in the present (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017). In the previous chapter I suggested that contemporary aborto-socio-biographies in the form of graphic narrative reject linear reading habits through their dynamic reorientation of space, as well as reorienting monolithic abortion discourse towards a complex one which rejects extraneous and reductive dichotomies, such as the pro-life versus pro-choice paradigm. Here, I propose that the texts constituting the corpus of this chapter, *Interruption. L’avortement par celles qui l’ont vécu* (Vizzavona, 2021) and *Avortée. Une histoire intime de l’IVG* (Harmange, 2022), which will be introduced presently, reorient linear conceptions of time, rejecting that only men are “moving and active and thus [an] expression of time”, an assertion already refuted in the previous chapter which illustrated the ways in which *avortées* become active space (Löw, 2006, p.126).

The question of time is also pertinent insofar as it relates to the reading of abortion narratives as aborto-socio-biographies. As a reimagined form of auto-socio-biography, aborto-socio-biographies seek to highlight the inherent collectivity and intersubjectivity of autobiographical abortion narratives. They are all bound up with one another, existing through, because of, and in relation to one another, in “a sociality which exceeds [them]” (Butler, 2005, p.34). Naming these narratives aborto-socio-biographies also emphasises the significance of their authentic and audacious accentuation of a reproductive event historically confined to the literary margins. However, these works are not just transpersonal, making connections between the subjective experiences of *avortées* in a sororal sense, but also transtemporal. Much like the representation of embodiment in Chapter One, this

transtemporality exposes first-person experiential knowledge, particularly that which is related to bodily and reproductive events, as one which does not solely belong to the self (Budgeon, 2021). Just as aborting for Ernaux represented following in the footsteps of a long cohort of women, as detailed in *L'Événement*, *avortées* are bound together by an invisible chain, bridging the past to the present (Bryan, 2025). The existence of this invisible chain facilitates the transmission of these experiences through time, from one *avortée* to another, one time to another, one generation to the next, making them ever-present across multiple planes of time. Understanding these works in this way leads me to consider Kristeva's second conception of time associated with womanhood, such as it relates to the transmission of (hi)stories from one generation to the next: "une temporalité monumentale, sans faille et sans fuite (...) englobante et infinie comme l'espace imaginaire", also understood as the time of the reproduction of the species and the genetic chain (Kristeva, 1979, p.7).⁴⁹

Whilst there is indeed a futurity in these narratives linked to the notion of transmission, by situating pregnancy as unfolding firmly in the present this process is (largely) distended from fetocentric paradigms (Gentile, 2014; Browne, 2017; 2022). The rejection of pregnant futurity in these narratives are, in a similar fashion to their graphic counterparts discussed in the previous chapter, a rejection of pregnant disembodiment which focuses on the tenuous future of the foetus, in favour of a pregnant embodiment of the lived present. Harmange and Vizzavona reorient the concept of a quintessentially futural pregnant time by positioning their experiences in the present, thus aligning themselves with "feminist accounts of abortion [which] also claim pregnancy as a lived present rather than the pre-emptive "past" of a future "mother-and-child" (Browne, 2022, p.462). This conception of abortion posits this (non-)reproductive act as a constitutive, constructive event, rather than a

⁴⁹ "a monumental temporality, without cleavage or escape (...) all-encompassing and infinite like imaginary space" (Kristeva, 1981, p.16).

destructive one. By allowing the presence of this absent child or pregnancy into the present tense, the past is no longer an absent presence, an unspoken taboo never to be spoken of again, but rather one that *is* spoken about and *will be* transmitted.

I speak of “reorienting” time in the same sense as Ahmed’s notion of spatial reorientations used in the previous chapter. Just as contemporary graphic abortion narratives literally provide “new contours of what we could call livable or inhabitable space”, I suggest that reorientations can also provide us with livable and inhabitable *times* which enable us to find our way through the complexity of the world, or in this case, abortion (Ahmed, 2006, p.11). Time is inherently bound up with space: gender relations governed by patriarchal and phallogocentric structures orient time just as much as space (Rose, 1993); the feeling of being “out of place” – or “out of space” – is often simultaneously experienced as a feeling of being “out of time” or “out of step” in relation to one’s surroundings (Ahmed, 2006). Time can also be translated into space and back into time again, as in graphic narrative. Time and space are thus two sides of the same coin, “[enabling] us to find our way to find our way through the world” (*ibid.*, p.6).

2.1.2 Avortée. Une histoire intime de l’IVG and Interruption. L’avortement par celles qui l’ont vécu

Harmange’s intimate essay, *Avortée. Une histoire intime de l’IVG* (2022) – hereafter *Avortée* – is a solo-written, individual account of her own abortion story, a straightforward medical abortion undergone at home in 2018. Yet the narrator acknowledges from the start that as much as she is seeking only to recount her individual story, it is nevertheless imbued

with “tant d’intimité, tant d’émotions, à la portée éminemment politique” (p.11).⁵⁰ Whilst there is not a direct co-authorial relationship as in graphic narratives, this text situates itself in the realm of aborto-socio-biographies via numerous references to the collective and plural dimension of abortion, superposing her singular, individual experiences with the collective experience. Once again, experiential knowledge is not necessarily as untouchable as we may traditionally conceive it to be (Budgeon, 2021). Significantly, abortion complexity manifests in Harmange’s work via an expression of the constellation of emotions she experienced in the wake of her abortion and unplanned pregnancy, from anger (p.11), to rage and jealousy (p.15) to relief and devastation (p.22), and defiance and certainty (p.23 and p.26), whilst also arguing for the need for a multitude of abortion representations which both reflect and deviate from her own (p.32).

Meanwhile, Vizzavona’s collection of *témoignages*, *Interruption. L’avortement par celles qui l’ont vécu* – hereafter *Interruption* – intertwines the accounts of other *avortées* alongside that of her own, as well as her personal reflections on this event and her experience of infertility. That it is collective in both form and content literally incarnates the act of aborto-socio-biographical writing, specifically through its collective authorship similar to that of *Le Choix* and *Il fallait que je vous le dise*. Vizzavona’s book combines twenty-seven abortion stories in total, arranged in chronological order according to age, an order which is just as personal as it is political, as this ordering follows the “déroulé” of her own trajectory (Vizzavona, 2021, p.19). She opens her narrative by evoking her own abortion experiences, noting that in and of herself she is “la preuve qu’un avortement peut provoquer l’indifférence ou une déflagration” (p.7).⁵¹ This introductory passage is almost immediately followed by a fragmentation in which the narrative of Lila, another *avortée*, unfolds. Vizzavona deliberately

⁵⁰ “so much intimacy, so many emotions, within an eminently political reach.”

⁵¹ “evidence that an abortion can provoke indifference or total eruption”

fragments her trajectory to give space to other experiences: “J’attends que l’on se réponde les unes aux autres, que l’on se contredise pour faire émerger la diversité de nos histoires”

(p.19).⁵² She represents abortion complexity not just in her own trajectory, but by providing an outlet for a diverse range of stories.

This chapter will begin by addressing the narrators’ subjective experiences of pregnancy and abortion, in contrast to the embodiment so evident in the works covered in the previous chapter, and the ways in which their use of the present tense reorients Browne’s conception of pregnant time, moving pregnancy and abortion into the time of the subjective present progressive. Subsequently, I will turn to the notion of interruption and the contrast between its temporary connotations and the permanency of terminating a pregnancy. I will consider what it means to interrupt a pregnancy and the implications of this for how these particular *avortées* perceive the passage of time and the self. The chapter will then turn to examine the ways in which their foregrounding of transmission ties the two texts to each other and the notion of aborto-socio-biographies.

2.2 Abortive subjectivities

Whilst the previous chapter primarily focused on the *embodied* experience of pregnancy and abortion, this section will begin by considering the *subjective* experience of pregnancy and abortion in both Vizzavona and Harmange’s texts. By this I mean that rather than analysing the bodily experience, which constituted the focus of Mermilliod and Frappier’s works, the analysis of Vizzavona and Harmange’s texts focuses on the cognitive perception of the event, particularly its aftermath. Indeed, the bodily experience is largely

⁵² “I want us to respond to one another, for us to contradict one another to make the diversity of our stories emerge.”

absent from the latter two's texts, entirely so from Vizzavona's and appearing only briefly in Harmange's. Not only does this chapter therefore link the spatiality of abortion to its temporality, but illustrates that the embodied experience of abortion, as addressed in the previous chapter, is inextricably linked to the cognitive perception of this reproductive event. In this sense, this thesis perhaps engages in a kind of haptonomic practice, creating an emotional connection between the bodily experience and the cerebral via touch (Ksycinski *et al.*, 2010; Ozbek and Pinar, 2023). This occurs both physically and metaphorically. Physically, through the physical act of writing – touching –, the physical document this has created – to be touched –, and the engagement of the reader's own body and mind in the reading process, applicable to both the texts at hand and this thesis. Metaphorically, this haptonomic engagement transpires in the sense that the chapters *touch* on the subjects of the body and the mind and are bound together by the acts of touching which created this thesis. Just as in Chapter One, touch, or the haptic experience, is an important concept here as *Avortée* similarly utilises a literary hapticity to implicate its readers into the moment of abortion, inviting the proximal senses into reading as well as distal ones (Roberts, 2022).

2.2.1. Timely reorientations

Vizzavona underwent her first abortion as a white, privileged, sixteen-year-old adolescent living in Abidjan on the Ivory Coast. Abortion was and remains illegal there except in cases where pregnancy threatens the life of the mother, in which case it must be approved by two medical providers (Bell *et al.*, 2020). Upon discovering the blood test results which Vizzavona had left in her pocket and inadvertently discovering her pregnancy, Vizzavona's parents immediately decide that they will “s'en occuper” (Vizzavona, 2021,

p.14).⁵³ The use of the adverbial pronoun *en* is used euphemistically to avoid directly speaking about her abortion. That her parents immediately reverted to omitting any mention of her abortion is indicative of the shame surrounding this reproductive act – especially at the time and place in question – and the need to remain silent and deal with *it* as quickly and discreetly as possible. This is a common trope in unwanted – or “unaccepted” – pregnancies, referred to by Luc Boltanski (2004) as the *foetus tumoral*. The procedure and language surrounding these pregnancy experiences seeks to avoid inferring any kind of potential life or personhood to the embryo. As the manifestation of a future that will not happen, the foetus is not acknowledged as a future child.

A similar linguistic circumvention is present in the narratives interwoven with Vizzavona’s own. As Camille undergoes her abortion in hospital, she watches a fellow patient and feels alone in her suffering: “je n’arrêtais pas de me demander pourquoi *ça* ne lui faisait pas mal. Je trouvais *ça* injuste qu’elle soit tranquille comme *ça*” (p.29, my emphasis).⁵⁴ Valentine writes that “j’aurais clairement préféré ne pas avoir à *le* faire mais je savais que je n’avais pas le choix; *c’était* désagréable et je n’avais pas envie d’y aller. Mais une fois que *c’était* fait, *c’était* fait” (p.61, my emphasis).⁵⁵ Rachel explains that “si *c’était* à refaire, je ne *le* referais pas. *C’est* un immense regret” (p.87, my emphasis).⁵⁶ There is a continual dodging of the word “abortion” which is replaced by the indefinite demonstrative pronouns *ça*, *ce*, the adverbial pronoun *y*, and the direct object pronoun, *le*. Although there is a desire to talk about their abortions, there is nevertheless a hesitation, which is evidenced through the elusive language. Abortion therefore becomes an absent present, simultaneously there and not, occupying a liminal, complex space. The abortion exists in the *avortées*’ present as an

⁵³ “take care of it”

⁵⁴ “I couldn’t stop wondering why it wasn’t hurting her. I found it unfair that she was peaceful like that.”

⁵⁵ “I would have obviously preferred to not have had to do it, but I knew I had no choice; it was unpleasant, and I didn’t want to go there. But once it was done, there was no going back.”

⁵⁶ “if I could go back, I wouldn’t do it again. It’s a huge regret of mine.”

event they want to talk about, but the language is stuck in the past, which is a thread running through all the accounts in *Interruption*. Although the stigmatisation of abortion results in a desire to remain silent, there is simultaneously a need for the self to acknowledge this event as a formative one for the lived present. The self finds itself in a double bind as “there is no ‘I’ that can fully stand apart from the social conditions of its emergence, no ‘I’ that is not implicated in a set of conditioning moral norms” (Butler, 2005, p.7).

The unspeakability of abortion is reinforced through further use of euphemistic language, specifically when Vizzavona describes feeling as if the decision to abort is taken out of her hands: “Comme il n’est pas question que l’on me laisse *en avoir un*, c’est moi que l’on traite *comme un enfant pour lequel* on décide ce qui est bien et ce qui ne l’est pas, sans rien *lui* demander, sans rien *lui* expliquer” (p.15, my emphasis).⁵⁷ The adverbial pronoun *en* once again replaces the subject matter at hand, this time to avoid mentioning a child rather than the act of aborting itself, and the use of the present tense removes Vizzavona’s pregnancy from the quintessential futurity of pregnant time (Browne, 2017; 2022). Indeed, there was never any possibility of futurity for Vizzavona’s pregnancy, as her parents’ intention was to confine this event to the past. Her parents’ refusal to mention the child/embryo - “*en avoir un*” - is a means of not speaking this futurity into reality; if there is no child/embryo, then Vizzavona is not a mother-to-be. There is therefore perhaps an element of rebellion in this use of the present tense, in which Vizzavona may seek to defy the expectations placed on her by her parents and society. This event does not belong to her past – as her parents desired – or to her future – as society expects – but rather to her present.

Not only is there an obvious avoidance of mentioning Vizzavona’s embryo/child, but the emphasis is heavily placed on her being the child in this situation. She compares

⁵⁷ “As it’s out of the question to let me have one, I’m the one treated like a child, for whom they decide right from wrong, without asking them anything or explaining anything to them.”

herself to “un enfant”, with an indefinite, universal article, not referring to any specific child, followed by the anaphoric references “lequel” and “lui”, which further reinforce the impersonality of this clause. By removing any direct references to herself, this impersonality reflects Vizzavona’s feelings of being left out of the decision: “Personne ne me demande ce que je ressens, ce que j’en pense, ni ce que je désire faire. Personne ne prononce les mots. Pas même moi” (p.14).⁵⁸ Note once again the euphemistic use of *en* to refer to her abortion or her would-be child, instead of the actual substantive. To one of her gynaecology appointments preparing for her first abortion, Vizzavona wears “un débardeur couleur saumon et [une] salopettes en jean” and wonders if this was her way of unconsciously signifying to the healthcare professionals that she was practically still a child herself, or rather a choice which sought to mimic “un vêtement que portent souvent les femmes enceintes” (p.15).⁵⁹ Pregnancy is typically perceived as a time of reflection for women as they think back to their childhood and the care they received, using this to found an ideal of the type of parent they want to be (Davis and Narayan, 2020). However, for Vizzavona, this pregnancy was a time when her childhood was being lived out at the same time; the present time of her pregnancy was/is also the present time of her childhood. Although there is typically a sense of retrospectivity which is considered central to the experience of pregnancy – and also to the act of auto-socio-biography – this retrospectivity is called into question in Vizzavona’s account through the simultaneity of her childhood and her pregnancy, as well as her use of the present tense. Consequently, Vizzavona complexifies her and her readers’ perception of time and abortion. Interestingly, it is this moment of her adolescent pregnancy which later forms the primary focus of Vizzavona’s reflection throughout her planned and completed pregnancy in her forties, notably her resentment towards her parents’ disparate responses to

⁵⁸ “Noone asks me what I’m feeling, what I’m thinking, or what I want to do. No-one utters the words. Not even me.”

⁵⁹ “a salmon-coloured vest top and denim dungarees”/ “a get-up which pregnant women often wear”

these pregnancies, which I will address presently. There is therefore a degree of retrospectivity in Vizzavona's later pregnancy, one which once again seems to replace a sense of futurity (Browne, 2022).

Harmange similarly deviates from normative conceptions of time, situating pregnant time as a progressive present rather than futural or cyclical, the latter of which is “traditionnellement [liée] à la subjectivité féminine pour autant qu'elle est pensée comme nécessairement maternelle” (Kristeva, 1979, p.7; Browne, 2017).⁶⁰ She writes that “malgré ce désir d'enfant qui existe en moi, ce n'est pas comme ça que je voulais que ça se passe et à cet instant précis, l'image d'Épinal que je me suis inventée, qui montre à quoi ressemble l'accueil d'un enfant, est plus important que tout le reste” (Harmange, 2022, p.23).⁶¹ Harmange has an idealised vision of the conditions under which she wishes to welcome a child into this world, and currently does not have the necessary material circumstances to realise this vision. Yet, whilst this is a futurity tying herself to a project(ion) of motherhood, it is not one bound up with a pregnancy, but rather a future ideal which supports her decision to abort. This is another means of reorienting pregnant time in which Harmange binds abortion, rather than pregnancy, to motherhood, in which abortion is the enabler of a maternal project (Kristeva, 1979). It is true that this ties into nationalistic acceptability politics, which dictates that abortion is acceptable so long as it later facilitates the emergence of a (re)productive citizen; an aborting subject desiring of a child is perceived as more morally tolerable than an aborting subject who fully rejects motherhood. In line with this, it is significant that Harmange chooses to describe herself as “une mère en devenir” (Harmange, 2022, p.23). Describing herself as a mother-to-be gives a futurity to her role as a mother, the same futurity that we

⁶⁰ “traditionally linked to female subjectivity insofar as [it] is thought of as necessarily maternal” (Kristeva, 1981, p.17).

⁶¹ “Despite the desire for a child which exists inside me, this is not the way I wanted it to happen, and at this precise moment, the ideal image I had made for myself, showing what I wanted welcoming a child into this world to look like, is more important than anything else.”

typically associate with pregnancy rather than non-pregnancy. During pregnancy, one is neither a mother nor a non-mother, but in a liminal space, “in the act of creation, between the idea of the finished product” (Côté-Arsenault *et al.*, 2009, p.76). Despite no longer being pregnant, Harmange still positions herself in this creative state, or rather, in this process of creativity (Walia, 2019).⁶² She is *creating* her ideal maternal project for herself, whilst also creating through the (social) act of writing. This notion of creativity is pertinent to the reorientation of cyclical women’s time, as Simone de Beauvoir posits that women’s inability to create, or lack of access to the means of creativity, leave them trapped in cyclical time which “n’a pas pour elle une dimension de nouveauté, ce n’est pas un jaillissement créateur” (Beauvoir, 1949, p.475; Felski, 2000).⁶³ In other words, creativity offers an escape from cyclicity. Certainly, the creativity inherent in pregnancy ultimately results in an inscription into cyclicity of some kind (Kristeva, 1979; Browne, 2017). Nevertheless, in this instance, it is creativity which arises from destruction (of an embryo) which allows Harmange to produce her maternal and writing projects, which subsequently offers her the possibility of escaping this instance of cyclicity. By positing abortion as potentially generative – which is by no means an imperative for aborting subjects – rather than solely destructive, *Avortée* complexifies our understanding of an abortion politics of love. Harmange demands an abortion politics of love and goodness not because there has been a loss, but because her abortion has transformed her into fulfilled subject, conscious of her worthiness of love and compassion. Empathetic abortion politics are not dependent on harbouring certain feelings towards one’s abortion; they are a right for all *avortées*.

⁶² I use ‘creativity’ as opposed to ‘creation’ as defined by Walia (2019), to emphasise that it is an ongoing, continuous process which does not necessarily result in a fixed, immutable creation.

⁶³ “time has for her no element of novelty, it is not a creative flow” (Beauvoir, 1988 [1953], p.610).

Harmange insists that her abortion is central to creating this future maternal project: “l’avortement était une étape dans ma vie de personne qui veut devenir mère” (p.60).⁶⁴ The way in which she projects a future image of herself as a mother is definite, absolute, to the extent that it replaces the “femme indépendante” that she is at this present point in time (*ibid.*). This is close to being a quintessential example of pregnant time which definitively projects the outcome of pregnancy as motherhood, only this time it is her abortion which makes this maternal project possible. Harmange also acknowledges that in “cette dimension parallèle” (p.62)⁶⁵ – which is neither her present nor her future – in which she does become a mother because of this pregnancy, “l’écriture n’était plus au centre de [son] existence” (*ibid.*).⁶⁶ The resolution of a quintessentially futural maternal project would have made her current present as a writer impossible. Whereas Kristeva argues that an increasing number of women find motherhood “indispensable à leur découverte non pas de la plénitude mais de la complexité de l’expérience féminine”, for Harmange it is non-motherhood which allows her to access the complexity of womanhood, in that it provides her with alternative avenues of self-flourishing (Kristeva, 1979, p.15).⁶⁷

2.2.2 (Repro)normative language

Importantly, and somewhat ironically, this projection which reorients pregnant time and repronormativity is done so in a highly (repro)normative context: “Quand vient le *choix* à faire, ce n’est pas une femme indépendante aux rênes de sa propre vie qui formule sa décision” (p.62, my emphasis).⁶⁸ Harmange frames her abortion as a choice she actively

⁶⁴ “abortion was a step in my life of someone who wants to be a mother one day.”

⁶⁵ “this parallel dimension”

⁶⁶ “this parallel dimension (...) writing was not the centre of [her] universe”

⁶⁷ “indispensable to their discovery, not of the plenitude, but of the complexity of the female experience” (Kristeva, 1981, p.30).

⁶⁸ “When it comes to making the choice, it’s not an independent woman formulating her own decision.”

makes, rather than a decision made for her and her partner who are currently living in less-than-ideal circumstances. The use of the word “choice” is highly typical for talking about abortion, with its connotations of a “pro-choice” discourse, and by deliberately framing her experience in these terms Harmange explicitly expresses her desire for *Avortée* not to be coopted as an anti-abortion text. This also reflects the classic iterative reification of abortion narratives in which their narrators often opt for similar discursive forms as their predecessors, requiring an emphasis on the notion of choice, as well as the fact that the language we use to discuss abortion is inadequate (Allen, 2014; Fuller *et al.*, 2025).

Interestingly, she reveals herself to be critical of the way that “choice” is perceived in abortion discourse, writing: “Elles me disent que la société veut que l’avortement, puisqu’il est un choix, soit un choix forcément apaisé et serein” (p.53).⁶⁹ She also condemns the perpetual emphasis on the legal status of abortion, decrying the fact that abortion is only spoken about in the public sphere “quand il est question de son interdiction ou de sa permission” (p.27).⁷⁰ Yet, as she begins to reckon with her trauma which arises as a result of feeling unsupported and isolated in her experience (Harris and Ayers, 2012), she is mindful of her own response, precisely because of this concept: “Pourquoi cette tristesse accablante, n’ai-je pas fait mon *choix* en toute conscience?” (p.16, my emphasis)⁷¹ The ambiguity of her relationship to this term embodies abortion complexity by illustrating that regardless of how much an abortion is wanted, there is no straightforward, linear affective response. Indeed, it may also reflect her desire to flagrantly align her narrative with her predecessors’. Harmange did not “choose” to have an abortion because she wanted to exercise her right to do so, but rather because her life was too complicated for a child at that moment. It is in the rejection of such reductive paradigms that complexity and ambiguity can emerge, which consequently

⁶⁹ “They tell me that since abortion is a choice, society wants it to be a choice that is necessarily calm and serene.”

⁷⁰ “when it’s a question of banning it or allowing it”

⁷¹ “Why this overwhelming sense of sadness? Had I not made my choice out of my own free will?”

facilitates compassionate abortion politics (Ludlow, 2012). However, Harmange does not merely advocate for or suggest a need for these politics, but rather incarnates them, just as Vizzavona does. Much like *LC* and *IFJVD*, *Avortée* is an example of an abortion politics of love and goodness, in its aborto-socio-biographical act of transmission and care. These narratives represent a new era of audacity and ambiguity for abortion representations and realities, suggesting that an era of abortion politics of love and goodness has perhaps already arrived.

A similar complex relationship to choice manifests itself in *Interruption*. At the age of eighteen, Lila never once questioned her decision to abort, explaining that “chez [elle], une femme intelligente ne fait pas un enfant à dix-huit ans si elle n’a pas les moyens de l’assumer correctement” (pp.21-2).⁷² Her familial culture greatly influences her decision, as she knows that she will be financially and emotionally unsupported, as “social support for pregnancy is highly conditional and variable, depending upon who is pregnant” (Browne, 2023, p.129). For Julia, it was “une décision extrêmement douloureuse mais, considérée de la sorte, elle s’imposait” (p.59).⁷³ The use of the pronominal verb “s’imposer” with its reflexive pronoun reinforces that the decision made itself for her, rather than her actively partaking in it. Valentine would have “préféré ne pas avoir à le faire mais [elle savait qu’elle n’avait] pas le choix” (p.61), clearly stating that the notion of choice was obsolete in her case.⁷⁴ After Andréa lost her daughter Emma at just seven days old, she felt she didn’t have the right to abort (pp.88-90). Her previous experience of pregnancy and birth left her without a choice. As for Virginie, she was in the process of deciding – although arguably, her indecisiveness was a decision in itself – when she had a miscarriage, taking this choice out of her hands. There is not the same deference to (repro)normative language, but the eschewal of a

⁷² “in [her] family, an intelligent woman doesn’t have a child at eighteen years old if she can’t be self-sufficient”

⁷³ “an extremely painful decision, but ultimately, it was necessary”

⁷⁴ See footnote 57.

defiantly pro-choice sentiment runs throughout all the accounts. Indeed, all these experiences acknowledge that there are a multitude of factors underpinning the decision to abort (Smith, 2005). By reinforcing that abortion is so often tied up with complicated lives and circumstances, the accounts collected in *Interruption* therefore also participate in the establishment of an abortion politics of love and compassion, by acting *as* these politics. Vizzavona rejects a hierarchy of empathy-inducing abortions, insisting that all abortion experiences are just as worthy of these love-based politics (Grenouilleau-Loescher, 2023). That is not to say that these experiences are the same, but that each *avortée* is worthy of love, compassion, and empathy in their own way. An abortion politics of love and goodness looks different for every aborting subject and cannot be generalised under a single piece of legislation, speaking to the importance of affect in my analyses.

Despite Harmange's attempt to distance herself from a (repro)normative discourse by criticising it and advocating for this love-based approach to abortion, she simultaneously inscribes herself within it, suggesting that this normative viewpoint is ingrained in our conversations about abortion, even in contemporary, complex representations. Over the course of eighty pages, Harmange evokes the notion of choice twenty times. Whilst the text certainly offers an abortion complex representation, it does so within the confines of an existing paradigm which oversimplifies abortion representation, using a language which "dares not make amends with the undecidable side of abortion" (Runde, 2019, p.50). Her use of (repro)normative language is of particular interest because although the text overall contributes to a destigmatisation of abortion complex experiences and normalises grappling with complicated feelings about abortion, motherhood, and oneself, the language used for this same purpose perpetuates certain widespread ideas about what it means to have a child or an abortion. This is similar to the consistent use of euphemistic pronouns to refer to abortion in many of the accounts in *Interruption*. Whilst the collection promotes abortion

complexity through a portrayal of diverse emotional responses, it does so whilst upholding the dictat of unspeakability surrounding abortion. As this thesis has continually alluded to, the concept of choice is a slippery one in the context of abortion. This is certainly the case for Mermilliod, Frappier – particularly her mother –, Harmange, and the *avortées* in *Interruption*, whose abortion experiences and affective responses are complexified by the fact that their personal circumstances and external influences reduce their agency. Although *Avortée* and *Interruption* undoubtedly offer a reorientation of pregnant time and foreground this slipperiness, they must do so within the confines of a “linguistic order that has not created a space for women’s diverse reactions in the aftermath of this liminal event” (*ibid*, p.50). Indeed, Butler affirms that there can be “no self-making outside of the norms that orchestrate the possible forms that a subject may take” (Butler, 2005, p.17). However, whilst we can recognise the problems with this linguistic order and the constraints it places on *avortées*’ self-expression, we can also acknowledge the potential desire to share one’s experience in familiar and relatable terms for the readership.

2.2.3 Pregnant presentness: entrapment or empowerment?

Returning to Vizzavona’s account of her first abortion undergone in Abidjan, as well as the continual use of euphemistic language, the reader is subject to an account almost entirely written in the present tense. The feeling of being silenced, pressured, and unsupported, expressed initially in an enunciative present, also features in Vizzavona’s narrative present.⁷⁵ Vizzavona criticises her parents for maintaining their silence on her first abortion all the way from her childhood into her adulthood, so much so that when she

⁷⁵ This slippage between a narrative and enunciative present is similarly found in Ernaux’s *L’Événement*, in which as she writes and reflects on her traumatic abortion in the present tense, her abortion is relived in the present tense, despite a gap of thirty-seven years between the discovery of her unplanned pregnancy and her writing about it.

announces her sought-after pregnancy following a struggle with infertility, her anger overflows into what should be a joyful moment: “Je leur en veux d’avoir à partager cet événement maintenant qu’il est joyeux alors qu’ils m’ont laissée si seule lorsqu’il ne l’était pas. J’en suis donc encore là, le couteau entre les dents, plus de vingt ans après” (p.94).⁷⁶ The use of the present tense in her enunciative and narrative voices indicates that her past and present are confounded, suggesting that her lived present is defined by the trauma of her past adolescent pregnancy and abortion. In Freudian trauma theory, “trauma (...) breaks down the distinction between present and past, as the past is repeatedly and unwillingly relived in the present” (Freud, 1981 [1917]; Robson, 2004, p.18). Trauma is figured as a porous, cognitive wound, incarnating “the fissure at which one life, and one story, seeps into another” (Caruth, 2016 [1996]; Lawlor, 2024, pp.9-10). As Vizzavona has not yet processed this first abortion experience, an experience which resulted in her feeling excluded, unsupported, and pressured, this past continues to intrude on her present (Robson, 2004; Harris and Ayers, 2012; Lawlor, 2024). Reorienting pregnant time into a situated (gnomic) presentness is therefore also a means of expressing trauma. Indeed, the insistence on the present tense reflects an alternative dimension of trauma, in which a traumatic past cannot be bridged to a lived present, as it is both porous and impermeable (Lawlor, 2024). In this sense, there is a degree to which abortion, especially if experienced as a trauma, does not necessarily allow for an escape from the cyclicity of women’s time (Kristeva, 1979).

Vizzavona begins reckoning with the trauma of her first abortion when she is five months pregnant with a planned child in her forties: “Mon ventre s’arrondit depuis bientôt cinq mois et les insomnies commencent” (p.11).⁷⁷ Here Vizzavona writes in the enunciative present, right before launching into the account of her adolescent pregnancy and abortion,

⁷⁶ “I’m mad at them for wanting to share this experience now that it’s a joyful one, after they left me so isolated when it wasn’t. So here I am more than twenty years later, still with a knife between my teeth.”

⁷⁷ “My stomach has been getting rounder for almost five months and the insomnia has begun.”

which is also written in the narrative present: “Je suis heureuse et, ignorant que je ne le serai plus jamais pleinement, je suis légère et insouciante” (p.13).⁷⁸ Vizzavona uses the simple future to indicate that she will never fully be at peace again following her abortion, - “je ne le serai plus jamais” – a tense which would typically designate the futurity of pregnant time, which is “consistently aligned with the developmental trajectory of the gestating fetus” (Browne, 2022, p.447). The overlapping of the narrative and enunciative present tenses with the simple future in this clause illustrates that this past trauma will continue to behave porously, intruding on her lived present, resulting in a superposition of both past and present selves (Lawlor, 2024). Whilst the act of aborting may have distended her pregnancy from its futurity, Vizzavona’s first pregnancy nevertheless remains futural, but only in the sense that this experience constituted a source of trauma, an absence which will remain present long into her adulthood and future. That Vizzavona is stuck in the present because of continually carrying this trauma forward, once again illustrates that the presence of trauma greatly complexifies the possibility of escaping cyclicity; this presentness becomes entrapment, rather than empowerment. Yet, creating this collection perhaps permitted her to begin reckoning with this trauma, which I will address presently, thus supporting the proposition that creativity offers the possibility of escaping cyclical time (Beauvoir, 1949).

In contrast to Vizzavona’s personal account which is for the most part written in the present tense, evoking her past trauma – both its tendency to seep into her lived present and the difficulty of willingly bridging the two (Lawlor, 2024) – the other *avortées*’ accounts mostly appear in the past tense, transcribed for the reader exactly as they were shared with Vizzavona. The use of the *passé composé*, rather than the *passé simple* which is typically more common for literary works, creates a bridge between the past and the present through its compound construction of an auxiliary verb conjugated in the present and a past participle.

⁷⁸ “I am happy, and ignorant of the fact that I never truly will be again, I am light and carefree.”

This narrative choice suggests an invitation of the past into the present rather than an intrusion, suggesting that any existing trauma has begun to be reckoned with (Robson, 2004). For Delphine, it is in spite of “la tristesse insondable qu’il suscite encore chez moi et les nombreuses années qu’il m’a fallu pour m’en pardonner, [que] je sais aujourd’hui que cette décision m’a menée vers l’homme que j’aime et avec lequel ma famille s’est agrandie” (p.54).⁷⁹ Through employing both past and present tenses, the *passé composé* itself being a combination of the two, Delphine invites the past into her reflection on her present, reconciling them both. The same is true for Lila, who has “très peu repensé à cet avortement par la suite, (...) ne regrette rien de cette décision, (...) ne [croit] pas mentir en disant qu’il ne [l]’a pas du tout bouleversée” (p.25).⁸⁰ The combination of past and present tenses again conveys a sense of reconciliation between her past and her lived present, rather than the existence of a past which “is repeatedly and unwillingly relived in the present” (Robson, 2004, p.18; Lawlor, 2024). For some, such as Ludivine, the past has never once imposed on their present, whether through invitation or intrusion: “tout a toujours été simple: aucune question, aucun doute, aucune douleur sauf un peu la dernière fois, aucun état d’âme, aucun remords. Pas de sujet” (p.91).⁸¹

There is a singular instance of Vizzavona employing the *passé composé* for her own account, towards the very end of the book: “Il y a quelques mois j’ai rangé mon dictaphone et mes cahiers” (p.119).⁸² That this appears towards the end of the book is perhaps indicative of Vizzavona’s journey to recovery from her traumatic abortion experience as an adolescent. By breaking the silence surrounding her abortion and others’, the act of creating *Interruption*

⁷⁹ “the unfathomable sadness that it still makes me feel and the many years it took to forgive myself, [that] I know today that this decision led me to the man I love and thanks to which my family grew.”

⁸⁰ “very rarely thought about this abortion after the fact, [she] doesn’t regret this decision at all, and [she] feels it is truthful to say that it did not shake her up in the slightest.”

⁸¹ “it was always straightforward: no questions, no doubts, no pain except a little bit the last time, no qualms, no bad conscience. Not a subject.”

⁸² “A few months ago, I tidied away my dictaphone and my notebooks.”

allowed her to bridge her past to her present and escape the cycle of trauma, for “c’est dans l’aspiration à la création artistique et en particulier littéraire, que se manifeste maintenant le désir d’affirmation féminine” (Kristeva, 1979, p.16; Caruth, 2016 [1996]).⁸³ This creativity invites her abortion into her lived present and who she is today, rather than involuntarily intruding (Beauvoir, 1949; Robson, 2004).

Similarly, Harmange tends to favour the present tense throughout her narrative. Notably, she describes her abortion experience in a detailed narrative present, rather than the imperfect which is traditionally the descriptive tense: “tandis que je descends l’escalier, je [sens] glisser hors de mon vagin, dans ma culotte menstruelle, le sang et l’embryon. Il a la consistance d’un très gros caillot menstruel, mais la couleur grise d’une autre chose que je n’avais jamais vu. Je sais alors que c’est fini, et c’est allé très vite, peut-être un peu trop” (p.48).⁸⁴ This passage is of interest because of its visceral, haptic, graphic description of Harmange’s abortion experience. The previous chapter examined works considered to be “graphic”, insofar as this term situates them within the genre of graphic narrative. Yet there is an alternative definition of graphic, referring to explicit, vivid, realistic, and sometimes obscene elements. Harmange’s use of the present tense situates this passage firmly in the present, as if it is being relived at the time of writing, similar to the slippage between the narrative and enunciative present also found in Vizzavona’s narrative. The viscosity of this passage is heightened by the use of sense-related verbs, in particular *sentir* and *voir*, which allow the reader to be present with the narrator in this experience. The description of the consistency of the expelled embryo offers an additional haptic dimension to the passage, enabling the reader to imagine how the embryo feels to touch, inviting a haptic and tactile

⁸³ “it is in the aspiration toward artistic and, in particular, literary creation that woman’s desire for affirmation now manifests itself”

⁸⁴ “As I descend the staircase, I feel, slipping out of my vagina onto my sanitary pad, blood and the embryo. It has the consistency of a very large blood clot, but the grey colour of something else I’d never seen before. I know then that it’s over, and that it was over very fast, perhaps too much so.”

reading (Paterson, 2022; Pugh, 2022). There is also an extent to which this description, as well as belonging to the progressive present of abortion time and subscribing to a lineage of graphic abortion representation, is educational, and therefore perhaps healing in its authenticity, although that is not to say that *avortées* owe their readers remedial narratives (Gefen, 2017; Baird and Millar, 2019). Representations of the foetus tend to be anthropomorphic, depicting the foetus as fully formed at every stage of development, increasing only in size rather than (epi)genetic complexity (Maher, 2002). However, Harmange's developmentally accurate description compares the expelled embryo to a blood clot, reminding us of Mermilliod's rejection of the image of the anthropomorphic foetus in her use of foetal imagery. This passage does not employ hapticity as means to manipulate abortion experiences or imagery (Newman, 1996; Hurst, 2020), but as means of reinforcing abortion time as the progressive present; progressive both in the sense of ongoing, as well as innovation and reorientation of abortion representation, which is being complexified.

Harmange also employs the present tense as she describes discovering her positive pregnancy test, as well as the moment she makes the decision to have an abortion: "Il n'y a ni tergiversation, ni même conversation. Je sais, il sait, nous savons" (p.22).⁸⁵ A narrative present tense is similarly employed for moments of reflection on her abortion: "Je *peux* regarder en arrière et considérer avec tendresse la femme meurtrie que j'étais" (p.16, my emphasis).⁸⁶ She describes both past and present events as if they are happening in the present, at the moment of writing, blurring the retrospectivity typically hailed as central to autobiographical writing and the supposedly inherent futurity of pregnancy (Browne, 2022).⁸⁷ Harmange concludes her essay in an enunciative present, writing about her attempt to start a

⁸⁵ "There's no procrastination, not even a conversation. I know, he knows, we both know."

⁸⁶ "I can look back in hindsight with tenderness at the wounded woman I was"

⁸⁷ After the birth of her daughter, Harmange published *avant/après. cinquante-deux brèves sur la brèche* (2023), a zine compiled of weekly reflections from the final six months of her pregnancy and the first six months of motherhood, all written in the present tense.

family with her partner, and she ultimately discovers she is pregnant during the period between finishing her first draft and completing the final edits. For her this was a “*décalage énorme*”, much like it was for her as she promoted her personal essay on her abortion whilst pregnant with her first child, as she tried to reconcile her pregnancy with the non-pregnancy story she was telling.⁸⁸ In Harmange’s case, both were inextricably linked, as her pregnancy trajectory and (the writing of her) abortion story in some ways “[s’écrivent] en même temps” (p.71).⁸⁹ That she is so open about her attempts to complexify her abortion trajectory by reconciling it with her maternal project, in admitting that the latter was made possible by the former, ultimately results in intertwining the two reproductive events. Harmange combats the opposing moralising framework of venerating completed pregnancies and vilifying abortions, which in France manifests itself not through anti-abortionist stances but through the diktat of silence imposed upon *avortées* compared with the openness associated with completed pregnancies.

Importantly, Harmange draws many parallels between her experiences of continuing and terminating a pregnancy: “Pendant toute la durée de ma guérison d’un avortement choisi mais douloureux, j’ai évité de comparer ce que j’ai vécu à la grossesse et à la maternité. (...) Pourtant, plusieurs années plus tard, les parallèles se rappellent à moi, jusque dans les conversations que j’ai avec des mères d’aujourd’hui qui ont avorté hier” (p.53).⁹⁰ This passage returns us to the notion explored in the introduction to this thesis that abortion is not a rejection of motherhood, reinforcing that for Harmange, both these reproductive events occupy the same passage of progressive present time (Swafford, 2020; Froidevaux-Metterie, 2023). Her futural project of motherhood is possible because of this abortion, which occupy

⁸⁸ Quote from an interview conducted by the author of this thesis with Pauline Harmange in February 2023. See Appendix 1.

⁸⁹ “are writing [themselves] at the same time”

⁹⁰ “Throughout the duration of my healing process from a wanted but painful abortion, I avoided comparing my experience to pregnancy and motherhood. (...) Yet, several years later, I am reminded of the parallels through the conversations I have with today’s mothers who aborted yesterday.”

different planes of time, in the most literal sense, but in an emotional, perhaps even physiological sense they both exist in the progressive present of who she is in this moment. We can also interpret this idea of progressive as one linked to the notion of care, in which one can progress, improve, move forward. Harmange recognises that she has emotionally healed from her abortion, or emotionally progressed, even though she will never forget it: “ce n’est pas parce que je n’oublierai jamais mon avortement que je n’ai pas avancé. (...) J’ai mis du temps à m’en défaire, pas parce que c’est horrible et souillant” (p.74).⁹¹ Her future maternal project is also one in which her abortion experience will be ever present, not because it remains traumatic but because it is now an additional part of who she is. Like Vizzavona succeeds in doing at the close of *Interruption*, Harmange bridges her past and present, inviting the former to exist peacefully within the latter. During the four years separating her abortion from the publication of *Avortée*, Harmange turns her abortion into a parenthetical event, but, as I will proceed to argue in the section on interruptions, not in an interruptive sense, rather in a supplementary sense, one that offers generative potential to a life (story) or person (Beck, 2023).

2.2.4 Caring in the conditional

Although many accounts in *Interruption* convey a sense of peace and reckoning with trauma, bridging the past and the present (Lawlor, 2024), there are some which are imbued with a conditional sense of futurity. Rachel writes that si “c’était à refaire, je ne le *referais* pas. C’est un immense regret” (p.87, my emphasis).⁹² Valentine explains that “j’aurais clairement préféré ne pas avoir à le faire mais je savais que je n’avais pas le choix; c’était désagréable et je

⁹¹ “Just because I will never forget my abortion doesn’t mean that I haven’t moved forward. (...) I took time to recover because it was horrible and scarring.”

⁹² See footnote 58.

n'avais pas envie d'y aller. Mais une fois que c'était fait, c'était fait" (p.61).⁹³ Both these accounts, whose use of euphemistic language were addressed previously, combine the imperfect with the conditional tense. Unlike the *passé composé*, the imperfect tense belongs solely to the past. There is no bridge inviting this experience into the lived present, suggesting a longing to return to this past. Furthermore, the use of the conditional imbues the clause with futurity, as is typical of pregnant time, but one of a conditional future, the futurity of what could have been: the conditional past. Indeed, there is an argument to be made that all pregnancies, regardless of whether they result in the birth of a live child or are suspended, cut short because of pregnancy loss, whether that be miscarriage, stillbirth, or abortion, are perhaps more productively framed as a conditional time, acknowledging that there are no guarantees surrounding the outcomes of pregnancy, despite the fact that pregnant temporalities have historically operated on the basis of futural projections (Gentile, 2014; Browne, 2017, 2023). By expressing the future seen from a past point of view via the conditional tense these accounts reject the reorientation of pregnant time into the progressive present. Also understood as a mood, the conditional tense allows Rachel and Valentine to talk about a hypothetical or imagined reality in which they can continue and complete their pregnancies. Vizzavona's inclusion of feelings of regret amongst accounts of relief and happiness following abortion care illustrates the diverse and complex abortion representations featured in *Interruption*. In the words of Ludlow (2008), abortion may be a question of both a child and a choice, not necessarily either or. This expression of ambiguity unites all the works in the corpus; in *Le Choix*, the whole narrative is punctuated by this question of being a child who has choices despite not being the result of a similar choice, and *Il fallait que je vous le dise* depicts the protagonist holding her would-be child whilst lamenting the impossibility of this outcome.

⁹³ See footnote 57.

This conditional past can also be found in Harmange's text as she discusses feeling full of disappointment and jealousy upon learning of a close friend's pregnancy: "*Ça aurait pu être moi. Au même moment, dans ces eaux-là, ça aurait pu être moi, mon ventre et mon bébé. Ce n'est pas moi, parce qu'il y a un mois, j'ai avorté*" (p.15, my emphasis).⁹⁴ Like Rachel and Valentine's accounts, this is not imbued with the futurity of pregnant time which absolutely ties pregnancy to motherhood, but rather the futurity of what could have been. Harmange also employs the conditional past when discussing the context of her material circumstances – "*j'aurais dû continuer à grimper l'échelle sociale*" (p.19)⁹⁵ – as well as that of her unplanned pregnancy – "*il aurait fallu tenir ce pénis éloigné de mon vagin*" (p.21),⁹⁶ "*J'aurais voulu me protéger de ce qui pouvait me blesser*" (p.40),⁹⁷ and "*J'aurais dû, peut-être...*" (p.49, emphasis in original).⁹⁸ Harmange's pregnancy is associated with a would-have-been, whereas her abortion is the act imbued with futurity. Meanwhile, Vizzavona never stops thinking about her would-have-been child, perhaps because the idea of this child is confounded with herself, who was also a child at the moment of her abortion. She writes: "*C'était un garçon, j'en suis sûre. Je fixerai arbitrairement son anniversaire au 16 mars, mais il ne grandira pas. Il n'aura jamais d'âge, pas de visage, pas de nom*" (p.18).⁹⁹ Arbitrarily she gives him a birthday – the sixteenth of the month, perhaps subconsciously choosing this number because she herself was a mere sixteen year-old at the time – and a gender. She imbues her embryo with personhood, but leaves him without an age, a face, or a name; this child is liminally suspended in her memory between absence and presence, life and death. By choosing the number sixteen, she is also perhaps projecting herself onto this child; she is this child, having

⁹⁴ "It could have been me. At the same moment, in these waters, it could have been me, my belly and my baby. It isn't me, because one month ago I had an abortion."

⁹⁵ "I should have continued climbing the social ladder."

⁹⁶ "I should have kept this penis far away from my vagina."

⁹⁷ "I would have wanted to shield myself from the thing that could hurt me."

⁹⁸ "I should have, perhaps..."

⁹⁹ "It was a boy, I'm sure of it. I arbitrarily fix his birthday on March 16th, but he will never grow up. He will never have an age, a face, or a name."

been a child herself at the time, but also in deciding that her would-have-been child is a boy, she also opens the possibility that it could *not* have been her, but rather her child instead of her *as* a child. In this passage, the futural project of motherhood is simultaneously realised through the use of the future tense and refuted through the negation.

Vizzavona's experience is somewhat similar to Mermilliod's in *IFJVD*, insofar as she too felt she did not have a choice yet absentmindedly gave her embryo a name. In both instances, there is simultaneously futurity and non-futurity, an ambiguity forming in the definite futurity of pregnant time. It is in this ambiguity that abortion complexity exists, belonging to multiple points in time – as well as multiple points in space – and the diversity of abortion experiences emerges both between and within these accounts. Harmange affirms that she is becoming accustomed “de confier [ses] zones d’ombre à la littérature, en espérant qu’elle fasse des ponts avec les mots qui manquent à [sa] voix” (p.65).¹⁰⁰ Simply put, she is putting this ambiguity or grey area into literature, hoping that this complexity will find a space in which to emerge, “des espaces où ce qu’on ressent d’ambigu, de négatif, de triste et de collant, doit pouvoir être dit, reçu, dans la société et en dehors du secret” (p.74).¹⁰¹

To some extent Mermilliod also situates her abortion firmly in the present by keeping the memory of this event alive through the memorial tree, as do all narrators/creators when creating aborto-socio-biographical works addressing this experience. These works allow readers in the present to access these stories, which therefore exist on a continuum, in a progressive present (tense), embodying the notion that many people who have faced pregnancy loss continue remembering, memorialising, and incorporating this event into their everyday lives (McIntyre *et al.*, 2022). Vizzavona too integrates this event into her present

¹⁰⁰ “Confine [her] grey areas to literature, hoping that it creates a bridge to the words [she] lacks.”

¹⁰¹ “spaces where the ambiguous, negative, sad, and leech-like things we feel can be said and heard, in society and no longer in secrecy”

(pregnancy): “Ils ne savent pas que, depuis vingt ans, j’abrite l’enfant que n’ai pas eu et l’adolescente frivole qui est bêtement tombée enceinte à seize ans” (p.49).¹⁰² She has guarded and nurtured the child she did not have and carried the idea of him into the present, which is evoked by the use of a progressive present tense. That she directly references the notion of nurturing and caregiving, not just for her would-have-been child but also her adolescent self, situates Vizzavona’s present pregnant time firmly in care time, insofar as she is choosing to suspend the future and care in the present for a past self (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017). Indeed, a reorientation of pregnant time beyond futurity allows for “present-oriented forms of adjustment and sensing, attachment and intimacy, maintenance and care” (Browne, 2022, p.449). This presentness of caring returns us to the notion of care time, founded upon the concept of forging “connection[s] that consist of waiting *with*” (Baraitser and Brook, 2021, p.244). As I posited in the introduction to this chapter, equating abortion with care, and situating abortion time as a concept overlapping that of care time, allows me to argue for a conception of abortion as care, not just health*care*, but also in the sense that at its core, abortion is about radical, collective care for the self.

2.2.5 Conclusion

That both narrators decide to play with the notion of pregnant time by situating their narratives firmly in the present, but also by tinkering with the boundaries retrospectivity, futurity, and a conditional past, nicely surmises a conundrum raised by Harmange in her essay, and which serves as one of the epigraphs to this chapter: “Mais quand l’avortement se termine-t-il réellement ?” (p.53)¹⁰³ *Avortée* and *Interruption* illustrate that abortion suspends a

¹⁰² “They don’t know that for twenty years I have been sheltering the child that I didn’t have and the frivolous teen who stupidly fell pregnant at age sixteen.”

¹⁰³ See footnote 1.

quintessentially futural time but also the difficulty of leaving one's abortion at a fixed point in the past, particularly in cases where trauma is prevalent, which attests to its "endless impact on a life" (Caruth, 2016 [1996], p.7; Browne, 2022; Lawlor, 2024). However, as I will come to argue, this demonstrates the extent to which abortion is allowed to become a constructive, generative event, rather than a destructive one (Beck, 2023). By allowing the presence of this absent child or pregnancy into the present tense, the past is no longer an absent presence, an unspoken taboo never to be mentioned again. Harmange even poses the above question in the present tense, asking in a gnomic present rather than a perfect tense or simple future, because her abortion is firmly situated in her present, with who she is today. The same can be argued for Vizzavona, in the sense that her abortion experiences and her later pregnancy which resulted in the live birth of a child are confounded into a singular present. However, for Vizzavona, this blurring of temporal boundaries arises because of trauma, illustrating the limits of abortion permitting an escape from cyclicity (Kristeva, 1979; Robson, 2004; Lawlor, 2024). The past abortions recounted in *Avortée* and *Interruption* are largely posited as constitutive to the reproductive and life trajectories that these *avortées* are undergoing in their lived present, meaning they are events unable to be confined to the past. Vizzavona and Harmange therefore defy the expectations typically placed on *avortées* to remain silent and on their experiences to remain invisible, complexifying perceptions of what it means to have an abortion.

2.3 Interruptions

This chapter began by evoking the polysemy of interrupting, as a temporary act in everyday life, but a permanent one in the context of abortion. To interrupt – terminate – a pregnancy is to bring this biological, forward-facing cycle to a halt, defying the cyclical nature

of women's time, even though there are limits to escaping this cyclicity (Kristeva, 1979; Robson, 2004; Apter, 2017). Vizzavona prefaces her collection of *témoignages* by stating her aim for these stories of (permanent) interruption to simultaneously interrupt the silence, shame, and anger which many believe to define abortion experiences: "Ce sont quelques histoires d'interruption. (...) Une interruption aussi je l'espère, quand bien même furtive, du silence, de la honte et de la colère" (p.10).¹⁰⁴ Aborto-socio-biographies are therefore more than a mere transmission of abortion stories between *avortées* – a notion which will be addressed in the final section of this chapter – they are a means of reorienting the cyclicity of abortion narratives which rehash experiences of silence, shame, and anger. To borrow Kristeva's argument, literature offers "un discours plus souple, plus libre, sachant nommer ce qui n'a pas encore été objet de circulation communautaire" (Kristeva, 1979, p.16).¹⁰⁵ Aborto-socio-biographies turn traumatic memory, which is "wordless and static" and results in an inability to reconcile the past with the present, into narrative memory, which is a form of storytelling (Herman, 1994 [1992], p.175; Caruth, 2016 [1996]; Lawlor, 2024). This storytelling or creativity allows for this suspension to be broken, for the past to be reconciled with a lived present, for the *avortée* to perhaps reckon with the cyclicity of trauma (Beauvoir, 1949). In this sense, the texts align with and bring a new feminist perspective to Alexandre Gefen's assessment of twenty-first century French literature as a source of healing, of caring for the self and others, particularly those harmed by or forgotten from history, and of interrupting cycles of trauma or harm on both societal and individual levels (Gefen, 2017).

The first part of this chapter illustrated how *Avortée* and *Interruption* interrupt the quintessentially futural idea of pregnant time to express or escape from cycles of trauma

¹⁰⁴ "These are some stories of interruption. (...) Also, I hope, an interruption, however furtive, of silence, shame, and anger."

¹⁰⁵ "a more flexible and free discourse, one able to name what has thus far never been an object of circulation in the community" (Kristeva, 1981, p.32)

(Browne, 2022). Once again building on theories developed around perinatal loss, this section will argue that it is not just a question of interrupting linear time or abortion narratives, but also of interrupting linear conceptions of how the self is construed after an abortion (Beck, 2023; Browne, 2017; 2022; 2023). I suggest that abortion becomes a parenthetical act which supplements and extends the narrating self, but which may also evacuate the self of a sense of direction. This section therefore proposes to explore the interruptive potential of abortion through the lens of extension and evacuation.

2.3.1 Extensions

As outlined in the introduction to this thesis, *Avortée* and *Interruption* are aborto-socio-biographies, whose form is characterised by an overlap of multiple voices. This acknowledges the intersubjective and mutually constitutive nature of abortion (hi)stories, as well as the authenticity and audacity implicated in this act, traits which are evidenced in both *Avortée* and *Interruption* (Elliott, 2023). Harmange's essay reflects her desire to write about herself and her experience, whilst also acknowledging that this experience surpasses her own, writing: "tout ce que je veux faire, c'est raconter mon histoire. Mais parce que je ne suis rien qu'un animal social, mon histoire est émaillée de celles que je croise sur ma route" (p.41).¹⁰⁶ Similarly, Vizzavona prefaces the collection of multiple accounts with an acknowledgement that "il semble impossible d'évoquer une expérience personnelle sans qu'elle soit chargée d'un propos qui la dépasserait" (p.8).¹⁰⁷ This is not a writing of the self, but rather a writing greater than the self, a life writing which surpasses the individual experience to situate itself in a collective history, this collective history being an invisible chain of *avortées* (Bryan, 2025).

¹⁰⁶ "All I want to do is tell my story. But because I am nothing if not a social animal, my story is interwoven with those I encounter on my path."

¹⁰⁷ "it seems impossible to share a personal experience without it being charged by a discourse which surpasses it"

These texts therefore constitute an extension of the self as they do not, because they cannot, recount the life experience of a single individual.

The non-unitary, plural dimension of aborto-socio-biographies which integrates multiple voices has long been considered a hallmark of women's autobiography (Edwards, 2011). This multiplicity of voices is achieved implicitly in *Avortée*, via Harmange's desire to "participer au chœur des voix sur l'avortement" (p.13) and acknowledge that her story surpasses her individual self (Courbet, 2022).¹⁰⁸ Meanwhile, a similar feat is achieved explicitly in *Interruption* through the incorporation of multiple stories into a single collection. As the narrating, aborting self is not a singular, isolated self, it gives rise to a "collective or plurivocal narrative of self in which 'I' and 'we' are either interchangeable or indissociable" (Edwards, 2011, p.23). Harmange argues that women do not have this right to multiplicity in the social sphere, that "nos dimensions multiples n'ont pas le loisir de se déployer, tant l'espace qui nous est octroyé est encore trop étroit" (p.54).¹⁰⁹ It is only through writing, this act of creativity, in which multiplicity is made possible, through an extension of the narrating self (Beauvoir, 1949; Cosslett *et al.*, 2000; Edwards, 2011). Here, I imagine an extension of the self as the physical act of reaching out, of joining hands with and touching another, just like the nurse caring for Frappier in *LC* – calling us back to the haptic practice of this thesis and the literary hapticity of the corpus – or of lending a pen to someone, all to shoulder and highlight others' voices. Particularly in *Interruption*, there is a physicality and materiality to this extension of the self, as the book came together through collecting testimony in-person and is thus literally formed of multiple voices. To give an account of oneself necessarily involves extending, or addressing, the self to another: "one can tell an

¹⁰⁸ "take part in the chorus of voices on abortion"

¹⁰⁹ "our multiple dimensions aren't allowed to unfurl, because the space given to us is still too small."

autobiography only to an other, and one can reference an ‘I’ only in relation to a ‘you’: without the ‘you,’ my own story becomes impossible” (Butler, 2005, p.32).

This physical dimension of the extending self is also pertinent as we place abortion within phenomenologies of pregnancy. As a foetus develops, the uterine space expands to facilitate its growth. It is understood that pregnancy requires a literal extension, or expansion of the self, but such taking up of space is not necessarily considered in the case of abortion. Pregnancy is often already perceived as a liminal, in-between state for a person who is at once mother and not-yet-mother (Côté-Arsenault *et al.*, 2009). Pregnancy loss may leave the (once) pregnant person suspended in a journey which came to a standstill, never arriving at its predetermined destination (Browne, 2017). Abortion is therefore suspended between a suspended state of expansion and a suspended state of evacuation, occupying a complex, liminal state. In this perspective, as much as contemporary narratives such as *Avortée* and *Interruption* reorient the futurity of pregnancy, abortion still constitutes a temporary suspension, even if this suspension unfolds in the ongoing time of the progressive present. Harmange’s describing of time as parenthetical seems reflective of this suspended state of abortion. She speaks of a “temps entre parenthèses qu’est le travail autour de ce livre” (p.35).¹¹⁰ The time spent on this act of creativity – aborto-socio-biographical writing – is parenthetical, evoking a rupture with the cyclicity of everyday rhythms, just as the social act of abortion constitutes a rupture with the cyclicity of pregnancy (Beauvoir, 1949; Kristeva, 1979; Baraitser, 2014). This time is set apart from linear time, similar to the way in which parentheses break the linearity of a clause. Parentheses constitute a break in any given clause to add in extra information or a side comment related to what the narrator is saying before returning to the original point. In other words, they interrupt – albeit temporarily – the

¹¹⁰ “time in between parentheses which was the work on this book”

trajectory of a clause, which permanently alters the final meaning of the clause, because of the information contained within the parentheses (Nevin, 2024).

There is also a parallel to be drawn between rupturing the linearity of the text – in a similar way to which the reader/viewer of the *bande dessinée* is required to reject linear reading processes in favour of multileveled, dynamic reading methods – and the narrator who is rupturing linear narratives and timescapes of pregnancy. Indeed, “a conceptual suspension or ‘bracketing’ of the presumption of birth and postnatal relations” is required to distend, or reorient, pregnancy away from its futurity (Browne, 2023, p.15). I suggest that this parenthetical value of time, represented by the abortion, can be interpreted as an addition, rather than an element which necessarily takes away from the self. It can be a question of enhancing, extending, or expanding the self, instead of merely compromising (Beck, 2023). Abortion, as well as pregnancy, can be a process of expansion. Whilst the reader is still required to suspend reading the main clause to digest the extra information provided in the parentheses, the clause itself is not being suspended, but rather complexified. Considering abortion as a parenthetical act acknowledges abortion’s potential to be transformative and generative, not just traumatic (Runde, 2018; Beck, 2023).

Harmange also refers to a “fenêtre, entre les saignements et l’écriture de ce texte où [elle a] douté de vouloir, finalement, devenir mère” (p.62).¹¹¹ This period in between her abortion and writing this text is a window, suggesting a period of introspection, of looking into oneself and subsequently extrospection, as she publishes this intimate and introspective window of time. This window, much like her abortion, is constitutive to a moment of creativity, one not derived from her pregnancy but her non-pregnancy. Whilst the window perhaps physically separated her from the rest of the world for a while – she describes how,

¹¹¹ “window, between the bleeding and the writing of this text where [she] doubted ultimately wanting to become a mother.”

in the early days following her abortion, she disposed of a friend's pregnancy announcement and avoided the pregnant women in her entourage – this time set apart ultimately resulted in her progression, both in the sense that she was able to emotionally move forward, but also that she was able to transform her abortion into an extension of herself, a greater version and writing of herself. This notion of abortion adding rather than subtracting from the self is present in Harmange's concluding remarks: "Avoir avorté n'est pas mon identité, j'ai d'autres choses à apporter, mais j'ai *aussi* cela à apporter, *aussi* cette parole à donner" (p.78, my emphasis).¹¹² She does not dismiss the significance of her abortion but recognises that it does not define her. This experience makes her both *autre*, for as a reproducing/reproductive body, she is a marginalised and Othered body, and *aussi*, for it has added to and extended the self.

Similarly, Vizzavona makes direct reference to time as a parenthetical object containing her abortion experience as she undergoes her second abortion in her early twenties: "Car cette parenthèse est certes faite de vapeurs, de fumée et de poudre aux yeux mais elle n'est pas une fuite. (...) Un moment suspendu avant la mue" (p.50).¹¹³ The choice of the word "mue", meaning – in a literary sense – metamorphosis or transformation, typically with an emphasis on development or maturing, which follows the suspended moment, acknowledges that this event did not take away from herself or transform her into a lesser being, but rather resulted in an extension of herself. This time made of smoke and mirrors allowed her to "[sortir] de [sa] léthargie et de [se pousser] à reprendre [sa] vie en main" (p.36).¹¹⁴ In other words, this parenthetical experience was one of deep clarity and introspection, allowing her to create both her book and her life, just as the information

¹¹² "My abortion is not my identity, I bring other things to the table, but I also bring this, I also have this voice to give."

¹¹³ "Because this parenthesis is certainly made of vapours and smoke and mirrors, but it's not an escape. (...) A suspended moment before the metamorphosis."

¹¹⁴ "leave behind [her] lethargy and push [herself] to take charge of [her] life again."

contained in parentheses is necessary to make the fullest sense of the clause in question. This supports the hypothesis that abortion can be a generative, catalytic event, allowing maternal capacity, among other things, to be “enhanced, not compromised, by maturity that has been gained in the interim” (Beck, 2023, p.161; Jones, 2023; van der Waal, 2025). This suspension, “parenthèse”, or “moment suspendu”, provided Vizzavona with the clarity she needed to take hold of the reins of her life once more.

Parentheses can also provide greater meaning and layers to a clause. Chloé, whose account appears in *Interruption*, is adamant that in not having a child “on ne m’avait rien volé; ce qui s’était passé avait très exactement correspondu à mon souhait.” (p.109) Her abortion did not take motherhood from her, but rather gave her “cette existence que j’aime tant [qui] n’aurait jamais été possible avec un enfant.” (p.103) She was fulfilled in the life her abortion gave her, one which allowed her to expand her travels and her career. This expansion was more keenly felt than the evacuation which prompted zero worries or regrets, making her abortion a generative experience and a catalyst for the life she wanted (Beck, 2023).

Harmange also highlights the ways in which her abortion allowed for an extension of her identities and life trajectory, creating “[herself] in new form, instituting a narrative ‘I’ that is superadded to the ‘I’ whose past life [she seeks] to tell” (Butler, 2005, p.39). For example, she insists that her abortion propelled her into adulthood, despite already being in her mid-twenties: “Je commence à me demander si, peut-être, c’est avorter qui m’a rendue adulte” (p.71).¹¹⁵ Her abortion was generative, provoking a process of development and maturity and propelling her into a new state of adulthood. She states that choosing her abortion “[lui]’a donné l’espace pour [se] réaliser” (p.62) since it provided her with the time and space to pursue a writing career, somewhat tying in with the acceptability of abortion when it

¹¹⁵ “I begin to wonder if, perhaps, it was my abortion which made me an adult.”

produces (re)productive citizen.¹¹⁶ This self-expansion is therefore arguably an expansion of the national project. Becoming a writer and expanding her identity in this direction was a sacrifice she was willing to make for the evacuation of the embryo: “je me disais que je préférerais ne pas être mère, si ça voulait dire que je pouvais être écrivaine. Mon avortement avait aussi été ce choix-là” (p.63).¹¹⁷ For Harmange, her abortion was a constitutive, generative experience which enabled her to transform, to become herself, become an adult, and become a writer. This parenthetical act therefore generated additional layers of meaning in her life and identity.

In a display of abortion complexity, Vizzavona notes in her own account that she is “la preuve qu’un avortement peut provoquer l’indifférence ou une déflagration” (p.7).¹¹⁸ She later highlights the difference in how she perceived her two abortions, explaining that her first abortion “avait convoqué les questions de la sexualité, de la vie, de la mort, de la responsabilité” (p.36), whereas her second, “concerne ma liberté, mon désir, mon rapport intime à la maternité” (*ibid.*).¹¹⁹ Vizzavona recognises that her two abortions meant different things to her, perhaps due in part to her difference in age and life experience. Her first evoked existential, universal questions about her sexuality and fertility, a genericism designated by the definite article. This experience belongs to monumental time, “qui englobe dans des entités encore plus grandes ces ensembles socio-culturels supranationaux”, with its philosophical considerations of life, death, and sexuality (Kristeva, 1979, p.6).¹²⁰ Meanwhile, her second abortion provoked intimate, personal questions about her desire to be a parent, a specificity designated by the possessive article. This belongs to cyclical time, the personal

¹¹⁶ “gave [her] the space to fulfil [herself]”

¹¹⁷ “I said to myself that I would prefer not to be a mother if that meant I could be a writer. My abortion was also this choice.”

¹¹⁸ “I am proof that an abortion can provoke indifference or an explosion.”

¹¹⁹ “brought up questions of sexuality, life, death, and responsibility” / “concerned my freedom, my desire, my intimate relationship to motherhood”

¹²⁰ “englobes these supranational, sociocultural ensembles within even larger entities” (Kristeva, 1989, p.14).

time of women, raising questions around her own freedom, desire, and perspective on maternity (*ibid.*). The final *témoignage* of *Interruption*, contributed by Chantal, includes the following phrase: “Entre la vie et la mort, les femmes choisiront toujours la liberté” (p.137).¹²¹ I observe here a parallel of Vizzavona’s personal experiences, insofar as we can trace her metamorphosis and maturing within this passage, from the considerations of life and death tied to her first abortion, to the question of her own freedom associated with her subsequent experience. Vizzavona’s personal account therefore contains a complex constellation of metamorphoses; each abortive event is parenthetical in and of itself, a complete set of parentheses, yet at the same time a singular parenthesis, as the metamorphosis is not complete until the set is completed by the second abortion, the second parenthetical event. Like Harmange, Vizzavona’s abortion experience is also defined by a process of development and maturity of the self, of becoming an adult – literally in her case – and of generating additional layers of meaning in her life and identity, in order to expand and extend the self; a self is “superadded” to the self she seeks to give an account of (Butler, 2005, p.39).

2.3.2 Evacuations

Despite this reading of abortion time as a generative and transformative event which extends and creates a greater self and a writing greater than the self, there is nevertheless a continual reference throughout both texts to a feeling of vacuity. Evacuation and extension are not diametrically opposed, as evacuation of the self (abortion) may make extension (of the self) possible. Nevertheless, we must simultaneously recognise that evacuation does not necessarily lead to extension, particularly if an abortion is experienced as traumatic. In

¹²¹ “Between life and death, women will always choose freedom.”

keeping with the idea of abortion as a parenthetical act, here I seek to consider the ways in which an abortion may be experienced as an evacuation of the self, a child, or a particular future rather than an extension, just like parentheses may become a vacuum in which the reader becomes distracted and the meaning of the clause is lost. Recognising that evacuation and extensions of the self are both possible abortion experiences, at times even within a singular experience, is central to embracing abortion complexity.

Although Vizzavona's personal abortion experience is mostly characterised by a sense of extension, many of the accounts in *Interruption* convey a feeling of vacuity. Camille explains that she was “dominée par le sentiment d'un grand *vide*, un *manque* de quelque chose mais sans savoir quoi, de la culpabilité mais sans savoir pourquoi” (p.29, my emphasis).¹²² The language used here following her abortion – lack, emptiness – is indicative of the way society perceives the uterine organ as a hollow entity which should necessarily be used for reproduction. Yet the uterine organ is both metaphorically dense, imbued with heavy symbolism and cultural meaning – notably, what it means to be a woman – and biologically dense, in the sense that it is remarkably thick for an organ typically associated with being hollow (Nicolas *et al.*, 2022). Camille also shares her desire to “mettre en pause ce qu'il y avait dans mon ventre pendant dix ans et le retrouver le moment voulu” (p.30).¹²³ This sentiment of lacking or emptiness is therefore also indicative of a resentment for the permanency of abortion next to her desire to suspend this pregnancy and reengage at a later date. The sense of loss comes not just from the termination of *a* pregnancy, but from the terminating the potential of *this* pregnancy, of a particular foetus who can only exist or continue to exist in this specific time. Any future pregnancy which comes to term will result in a different child. I have spent much of this chapter arguing that *Interruption* largely reorients the futurity of

¹²² “overcome by a feeling of a huge emptiness, a lack of something but not knowing what, of guilt but not knowing why”

¹²³ “pause the thing growing inside me for ten years and come back to it at the moment I felt ready”

pregnancy, and in doing so reorients pregnancy away from fetocentric paradigms (Gentile, 2014; Browne, 2022). However, there is also a need to acknowledge that “the way time is lived and may indeed be experienced as an arrest, suspension, or undoing of time” (Browne, 2017, p.36). Camille wants to suspend her pregnancy precisely so that this foetus can become a child. She does not want to distend her pregnancy from futurity or to escape the suspended state of abortion, but wishes to remain in a liminal state between extension and evacuation, to be pregnant but not have a child. It is therefore conducive to suggest that displays of foetal personhood are not opposed to abortion complexity, despite concerns that a focus on the foetus always results in an erasure of the pregnant woman (Petchesky, 1987; Hartouni, 1992; Adams, 1994; Maher, 2002). Indeed, pregnant embodiment and foetal considerations are not biologically opposed, as “the location and function of the placenta indicate the irreducible and complex interconnectedness of the various entities in this process” (Maher, 2002, p.104). In a purely biological sense, the pregnant person and the foetus cannot be held in opposition. Whilst many of the narratives in *Interruption* reorient pregnancy away from its supposedly inherent futurity and consequently decentre the foetus as the primary focus of pregnancy, abortion complexity allows for the two occupy a state of liminality, holding but not resolving the tension between seemingly opposing principles.

Rachel’s account in *Interruption* evokes a similar desire for liminality. Her abortion left such a sense of emptiness that she has never stopped thinking of the child she did not have, to the extent that when looking at both her children she feels she can visualise him at their side (p.87). She imagines this foetus as a fully formed child, imbued with personhood and gender and without whom her family does not feel complete. There is thus a sense of lacking both within herself, as she did not continue and complete this pregnancy, and within her family dynamic. Like Camille, she does not want her pregnancy to be distended from futurity. Yet, in the face of this evacuation that she still views her family as extended,

imagining and longing for what this child and extension of herself and her family could have looked like. Once again, the reader witnesses an account of tension between pregnant embodiment and foetal personhood which reaches no resolution, but which is not necessarily a negative outcome. Narratives which speak of regret in relation to abortion tend to be coopted by antiabortion groups to further their political agendas, groups who also often adopt notions of foetal personhood (Ehrlich and Doan, 2019; 2022). Since these narratives are deemed to perpetuate the “awfulisation” of abortion, and in doing so prevent the elimination of abortion stigma, they are kept far away from abortion-positive representations which often focus on experiences of non-regret and relief (Baird and Millar, 2019; Ludlow, 2020; Mathieu and Thizy, 2023). By incorporating Rachel’s account, which occupies a liminal space between extension and evacuation through an explicit foregrounding of her “immense regret” as well as a subscription to foetal personhood, *Interruption* validates her experience as legitimate alongside others which entirely contradict hers. Yet the tension between extension and evacuation in Rachel’s own account, as well as between the accounts in *Interruption* can remain unresolved. As we saw in the previous chapter with *LC* and *IFJVD*, there is therefore a blurring of boundaries with regards to the ideas of “pro-life” and “pro-choice” and the stories which define them, allowing for abortion complex representations.

For Sarah, who underwent her abortion during a period of bereavement just months after losing her mother, there is no sense of this extending self: “La mère, ça ne peut pas être moi. La mère, c’est celle qui vient de partir” (p.78).¹²⁴ Her abortion is intrinsically tied up with the loss of a mother figure who is irreplaceable.¹²⁵ Sarah’s abortion therefore becomes a double sense of evacuation, of her mother, the person who created her, and the foetus,

¹²⁴ “The mother, that cannot be me. The mother is the one who just left me.”

¹²⁵ The parallel drawn between the act of aborting and the death of the mother is similarly expressed in *L’Événement*: “J’ai tué ma mère en moi à ce moment-là” (p.85) and “cette femme sans doute cupide (...) m’a arrachée à ma mère et m’a jetée dans le monde” (p.123).

created by and part of herself. This sense of loss, not just for Sarah, but also Camille and Rachel, is compounded by the fact that their experiences are excluded from the phenomenologies of pregnancy and perinatal loss (Côté-Arsenault *et al.*, 2009; Browne, 2022, 2023). Having not previously been offered the time and space to openly share their experiences, they have keenly felt a pressure to remain silent and a lack of support, consequently trapping them in a cycle of trauma. This sense of the self being empty and evacuated, is therefore also tied to the fact that trauma is diluting their selves, “wreaking devastating effects on the survivor’s memory and identity” (Robson, 2004, p.11). Unless the trauma is reckoned with, extending the self is not possible. Yet, by providing a supportive time and space for these experiences to exist, *Interruption* becomes this extension; their accounts exist outwith the self, making the book an extension of multiple selves, and subsequently an extension of Ernaux’s invisible chain of *avortées* (Bryan, 2025). Transmission, which will be addressed in the final section of this chapter, is therefore a means of reckoning with trauma and countering an evacuation of the self, towards an extension.

Vizzavona speaks of a metaphorical hole or fissure that her first abortion opened inside her, creating an empty, vacuous space: “Et pourtant il sera toujours là, un compagnon silencieux et constant. Dormant. Le seul à connaître la brèche qu’il a ouverte en moi et auquel je ne cacherai jamais la complexité de mon rapport à la maternité. Il peut comprendre” (p.18).¹²⁶ Here, the future tense – “sera” – is used to designate what is in fact a conditional past, her would-have-been child. Although I have previously maintained that Vizzavona’s account belongs to the progressive present of abortion time, this passage evidences a desire to maintain the futurity associated with pregnancy, like Camille and Rachel’s accounts. As I have previously suggested, Vizzavona’s use of language and tenses

¹²⁶ “And yet he will always be there, a silent and constant companion. Dormant. The only one who will know the hole he opened in me, and the only one from whom I will never hide my complex relationship to motherhood. He understands.”

are indicative of her being caught in a cycle of trauma; the metaphorical hole which her abortion opens inside her is a manifestation of this trauma causing an evacuation of the self, acting as “the fissure at which one life, and one story, seeps into another” (Robson, 2004; Lawlor, 2024, pp.9-10). Perhaps the most significant aspect of this passage is Vizzavona’s use of the word “dormant” to describe her child/abortion, implying a temporary, suspended state from which this child will eventually awake. Once again, there is a desire for an impossible temporary suspension, one imbued with foetal personhood; Vizzavona desires *this* pregnancy and *this* child, which she cannot have because of the permanency of abortion. This metaphorical “brèche” or fissure inside her also perhaps expresses a longing for the physical, open wound left by the placenta after childbirth. By expressing both desire and non-desire for her pregnancy, Vizzavona blurs the boundaries of “pro-life” versus “pro-choice” discourse, providing an abortion complex representation.

This dormancy may also refer to the subject of her abortion as a dormant one between her and her parents, whose reawakening towards the end of the book is witnessed by the reader (p.109). Dormancy may be understood in its geological, volcanic sense, as an entity which is quiet now but may erupt in the future. This is precisely what Vizzavona’s abortion achieves, both in the reawakening of the subject with her parents, and the production of *Interruption*, which erupts perceptions of pregnant time, the aborting self, and linear abortion narratives. Vizzavona ultimately succeeds in creating a greater, extended version of herself, because of and despite her evacuative experience, referring here to both the physical evacuation of her abortion and the evacuation of her self caused by her trauma. This evacuation, or dispossession of the self, also forms part of the ethics of giving an account of oneself. In addressing one’s account to another, we are “compelled to give the account away, to send it off, to be dispossessed of it at the very moment that I establish it as my account” (Butler, 2005, p.36).

In *Avortée*, this evacuation or dispossession exists alongside and in tandem with an extension of the self. In the aftermath of her abortion, Harmange initially struggles with being around any of her friends who are pregnant or who have just given birth (pp.15-6). The evacuation of her embryo makes the expansion of her friends' uteruses and families unbearable, like Mermilliod who cannot bear to be around her sister who recently announced her pregnancy. Harmange cannot stop herself from comparing herself to her friend, highlighting "son corps rempli et le mien vide" (p.16).¹²⁷ She later continues this comparison of pregnant women as "plein" and non-pregnant women as "vide": "On partagerait alors le même bateau, femmes au ventre *vide* et femmes au ventre *plein*" (p.55, my emphasis).¹²⁸ Once again, Harmange draws parallels between her experiences of abortion and motherhood, rather than vilifying one and venerating the other, returning us to Swafford's assertion that her abortion taught her the meaning of mothering and being a mother (2020). Even after the manifestation of her abortion as a parenthetical, constitutive event, Harmange still experiences moments when "ce ventre à *nouveau* vide se rappelle douloureusement à moi" (p.52, my emphasis).¹²⁹ Once again, we are reminded that in giving an account of oneself, in which one is not "an interior subject, closed upon [itself], solipsistic, posing questions of [itself] alone" (Butler, 2005, p.32), there is also a necessary element of dispossession. Speaking to me in February 2023, Harmange explained that doing promotion for *Avortée* whilst she was pregnant with her daughter constituted "un décalage énorme entre ce que je disais et comment je présentais – parler de ventre *vide* en ayant le ventre *plein*".¹³⁰ This continual reference to emptiness subscribes to a (repro)normative image of the non-pregnant body as a mere vessel of reproduction (Nicolas *et al.*, 2022). Yet it is also necessary to

¹²⁷ "Her full body, and my empty one."

¹²⁸ "Perhaps then we share the same boat, pregnant women and non-pregnant women."

¹²⁹ "This once again empty womb painfully makes itself known to me"

¹³⁰ "An enormous misalignment between what I was talking about and the way I looked – speaking of an emptiness whilst being full of a life." My emphasis.

highlight that these feelings of emptiness and vacuity do not negate Harmange's feeling that her abortion is also parenthetical in a supplementary sense, as is demonstrated in the ways she feels her abortion added to her life.

2.3.4 Conclusion

In many ways, this thesis is about openness: being open to new ways of reading and representing, opening up our understanding of affectivity and abortion, *avortées* opening up their arms to one another and opening themselves up to a reader, readers opening their eyes and their arms to receive these new ways of seeing, reading, and being. There is also the question of open spaces to be filled in, on a page, in a topic, in a genre, as was considered in Chapter One, and, as I will now conclude this section with, open wounds to be healed and which will always leave a trace.

If “writing finds its roots in the open wound rather than the closed scar” then the writing of these texts allows a wound to heal and a scar to form (Robson, 2004, p.28). Writing trauma uses words to form sutures, making the self whole again; creativity is therefore central to escaping the cyclicity of trauma, as well as time (Beauvoir, 1949; Caruth, 2016 [1996]). Once this wound is closed and healed it can become a scar, an addition to a whole self, a physical extension of the body, a sign of life carrying on and of healing. Yet we may also consider the wound as a veil, a complex, liminal space between inside and outside (Lawlor, 2024). The act of aborto-socio-biographical writing can therefore be understood as the closing parenthesis on this parenthetical act, completing the extension and/or evacuation of the self. Harmange speaks of her abortion leaving a scar: “on se transmet son fantôme ou sa cicatrice de génération en génération” (p.35).¹³¹ Creating aborto-socio-biographies carries

¹³¹ “we transmit our ghosts or our scars from generation to generation”

the self from a state of evacuation to a state of extension, in which the evacuation may still be present, as extending the self through scarring leaves a visible mark of this evacuation. Harmange's scar is not confined to the past but acts as a universal instrument of intergenerational transmission in the present and towards the future. This evidences that trauma cannot simply be relegated to the past, as it will always "intrude" on the present (Robson, 2004, p.11). But an open wound cannot be transmitted, as it will only continue to bleed and become deeper and wider. Only a healed scar can be passed on. The act of writing, of forming this scar, therefore facilitates transmission, a key notion in both *Avortée* and *Interruption*.

2.4 Transmission

Where there is healing there is caring, and between the open wound and the closed scar there must be some act(s) of (self-)care. Care represents the liminal space between being stuck in a cycle of trauma and reckoning with this trauma; it is the bridge which reconciles the two (Lawlor, 2024). As I have previously alluded to, this liminal space is occupied by abortion complex representations. Although Hélène Cixous maintained that the writing of bodily cycles constituted a means of countering masculinist and phallogocentric discourse, I posit that the writing of abortion, loss, and bodily *non*-cyclicity is just as much a means of countering such discourse (Grosz, 1995). If it is abortio-socio-biographical writing whose words form the sutures, close the scar, and facilitate transmission, then this must be the act of care. Through writing and transmission, this aborting body is a giver and a receiver of care, establishing "relations of care and affinity that flourish outside, or in defiance, of the nuclear family" (Jones *et al.*, 2014, n.p.; Lewis, 2021; 2025). In this section I argue for a reading of these texts as a radical, collective act of (non-)reproductive care for the self and

the body, like abortion itself.¹³² Recognising abortion as an act of care represents a practical application of compassionate abortion politics, providing an alternative framework of abortion care (Ludlow, 2012).

As asserted in the introduction to this thesis, aborto-socio-biographical narratives are simultaneously a reproductive act of non-reproduction and a non-reproductive act of reproduction. Abortion is literally non-reproductive, stopping the biological processes of reproduction, but is a form of reproductive act (Runde, 2018). The creativity conceived in the wake of this event is non-reproductive, through its interruption and complexifying of stereotypical abortion discourses, refusing to reproduce damaging and stigmatising depictions. Yet, aborto-socio-biographies are also a form of reproduction. They are generative, reproducing through their continuation and extension of a feminist lineage. Most notably, these texts are reproductive by way of their inherent collectivity, which manifests itself through their intersubjective and interreferential nature. Indeed, the ethics of giving an account of oneself necessarily involves the conditions of its own emergence, becoming grounded in the inherent sociality of the narrative “I” (Butler, 2005). Simply put, the self exceeds the singular “I” or “je” as it must interpret its own socially constituted ethical position, offering up an account containing multitudes of the self and of the collective, of a “we” or “nous”. As the self must interpret its own socially constituted position, so the aborting self must do the same.

Avortée directly references other stories in Ernaux’s chain, notably Ernaux’s itself (p.32), as well as Vizzavona’s and Mermilliod’s (p.33), like Mermilliod’s reference to *Le Choix*. In doing this, Harmange acknowledges the collective conditions of emergence of her own

¹³² An interesting research study would be an examination of the effects of abortion complex productions on abortion care seekers to see if they have positive impacts on care experiences, for example by making the works in this corpus available in abortion clinics.

text, adhering to the ethics of giving an account of oneself (Butler, 2005). The cited texts which emerged prior to Harmange's own allow her and her text to take shape. Through citation, *Avortée* inscribes itself within its own conditions of emergence and extends the feminist lineage of abortion narratives, a lineage which in turn reproduces, in the creative, generative sense of the word, further abortion narratives and aborting selves and encourages a continued transmission of stories (Collette, 2025). Harmange aligns her text with this lineage from the very beginning, employing an indefinite article in the title – “une histoire” – to suggest that even though *Avortée* is first and foremost her story, this is also one story among many, thus allowing this text to contribute to the invisible chain of *avortées*. In this perspective, aborto-socio-biography thus becomes a “rather successful reproductive technology, a way of reproducing the world around certain bodies” (Ahmed, 2013, n.p.).¹³³

Harmange does not only cite this collective, but at times also writes *as* this collective, through references to “notre chemin”, “nos vérités” “nos corps” “notre droit à disposer de notre corps” (pp.56-7) and “nous, féministes” (p.59).¹³⁴ Here the “je” and “nous” are indissociable, entering into a constitutive relationship with one another, which results in a multiple and plurivocal account (Cosslett *et al.*, 2000; Edwards, 2011). Through this intersubjective transmission of the self and of abortion, Harmange engages in an act of care by combatting the solitude of the aborting self: “J’écris mon histoire pour combattre cette solitude” (p.13).¹³⁵ Care ethics attends to this interconnectedness of selves, of being inherently bound to a collectivity, “bringing renewed moral attention to human relationships,

¹³³ If we consider citation as a means of non-reproductive reproduction, there is a similar paradox in which this reproduction is both reproductively and non-reproductively. The heteronormative moral order which dictates who is allowed to reproduce and what is considered as acceptable reproductive behaviour is reproduced by the continual citation of white, mostly heterosexual and middle-class cisgender women who have undergone abortions, yet also terminated in the reproduction of non-reproductive and therefore non-reproductively behaviours such as abortion.

¹³⁴ “our path”, “our truths”, “our bodies”, “our right to do what we want with our own bodies”, “we, feminists”

¹³⁵ “I am writing my story to combat this solitude.”

and new moral attention to the role of dependency in human life” (Keller and Kittay, 2017, p.551). The ethics of giving an account of oneself is also an ethics of care, insofar as they are both inherently bound up with a sociality which exceeds and constitutes the self, reflecting the symbiotic relationship between caring for others and caring for the self; the former is possible only through the latter. Harmange is adamant of the necessity of this “multitude d’histoires pour nourrir notre vision du monde (...) pour avoir plusieurs points de référence auxquels se raccrocher” (p.32).¹³⁶ She recognises that multiplicity and plurivocality is crucial for *avortées* to find a sense of belonging, as the (aborting) self finds meaning only through its sociality (Butler, 2005). The provision of multiplicity and plurivocality is therefore an act of care, meaning that these texts can and should be read as such. It is in this multitude of stories, experiences, and complicated emotions that Harmange finds a sense of belonging (p.34). Harmange knew that she would both want and need to write about her abortion experience (p.11), and in doing so she not only interrupted the cycle of solitude, shame, anger, trauma, and taboo for herself, but also for her close circle of friends and for those who will ultimately read her text. Aborto-socio-biographical writing is therefore an act of care on multiple levels, and as suggested previously, aligns with Gefen’s notion that much contemporary literature offers un “nouveau paradigme clinique” in which it seeks to “réparer nos conditions de victims, corriger ces traumatismes de la mémoire individuelle ou du tissu social” (Gefen, 2017, p.11). In doing so, it places concern for others at the forefront of the writerly project. As such, whilst Harmange firmly situates her work in a progressive present of abortion time and links this to a past chain of *avortées* (Bryan, 2025), she also projects her work into the future, within this “paradigme clinique”, hoping that other *avortées* will feel empowered to come forward and share their stories and that her story in and of itself will contribute to this multitude.

¹³⁶ “multitude of stories to nourish our vision of the world (...) to have several points of reference to cling to”

Meanwhile, the contradicting accounts featured in *Interruption* give rise to “a relational matrix composed of points of conceptual and emotional juncture” (Grenouilleau-Loescher, 2023, p.131). Each voice exists relationally, allowing for the voices around it to emerge. *Interruption* is thus a multiple and plurivocal autobiographical undertaking, with each individual self surrounded by the conditions of its own emergence, indistinguishable from the collective constituting it (Cosslett *et al.*, 2000; Edwards, 2011). In aligning with Butler’s ethics of giving an account of oneself, *Interruption* also gives and receives care via an inscription into and extension of the feminist lineage of abortion narratives, reproducing further abortion narratives and aborting selves, such as Harmange and her text (Collette, 2025). These texts therefore contribute to the (re)production and visibilisation of Ernaux’s invisible chain rather than Kristeva’s genetic chain. Importantly, Vizzavona also rejects the possibility that any one narrative might take precedent over another, reminiscent of Ernaux’s assertion that “Il n’y a pas de vérité inférieure” (Ernaux, 2000, p.53).¹³⁷ *Interruption* therefore incarnates abortion complexity not just in individual accounts, each with their own complex constellation of emotions, but also through its provision an outlet for the emergence of a multitude of stories, which is an act of care for others. Not only are aborto-socio-biographies and their transmission acts of care, but they are a trauma-informed approach to care. By integrating patient experience into care approaches, care structures assist in the reckoning and contending with trauma (Cahill and Doyle, 2021). Furthermore, in granting herself time and space to create, Vizzavona cares for her present self in the same way she cares for her would-have-been son and her sixteen-year-old self in the present. This allows her to reckon with her past trauma, similar to the way in which she grants other *avortées* time and space to create, encouraging a continued transmission of stories. The creativity of aborto-socio-biographies is therefore a form of care time breaking the cyclicity of trauma in Kristeva’s

¹³⁷ “There are no inferior truths.”

women's time (1979), and breaking women out of Adrienne Rich's liminal waiting room (1992 [1976]).

This chapter has spoken extensively of the ways in which *Avortée* and *Interruption* seek to reorient temporal cyclicity and linearity, as well as the need for such a reorientation to create livable and inhabitable times which enable us to find our way through the complexity of abortion experiences (Ahmed, 2006). This chapter has therefore focused on reproduction in the sense of *revising*, *redoing*, and *reorienting* existing productions of time (Neuman, 1993). Yet, given the role of transmission in both texts, a notion grounded in part in repetition, it is necessary to return to the idea of cyclicity and repetition in reproduction. According to Kristeva (1979) women's time is grounded in a repetition of cycles, whether biological – menstruation, pregnancy, the biological clock – or cultural – the repetitive cycles of life associated with daily childcaring and domestic tasks. Repetition is also central to the manifestation of trauma, as a traumatised person lives “with and within repetition such that, temporally, one's future seems blocked and impossible” (Ingerslev, 2024, p.215). However, repetition is not necessarily a relentless, unforgiving cycle (Beauvoir, 1949). Our social and cultural existences are organised by repetition, both in the ways in which we organise our day-to-day existences and ourselves. Repetition connects us to our ancestors and traditions, situating the self “in an imagined community that spans historical time” (Felski, 2000, p.83). It is therefore repetition which facilitates the reproduction of the invisible chain of *avortées*, connecting the present individual to a past, or lineage, of collective abortion care (Bryan, 2025; Collette, 2025). Repetition is vital for transmission and the continuation and extension of the invisible chain.

Abortion is an act which has been repeated throughout history and continues to be repeated by thousands of people in France every year, with 243, 623 abortions recorded in 2023 (Vilain and Fresson, 2023). Its ubiquity throughout history and today renders it a

mundane act, rooted in the everyday lives of the *avortées* who came before. As attested to by the ethics of care and of giving an account of oneself in *Avortée* and *Interruption*, these aborting selves exist alongside each other in a constitutive relationship and superpose their lived experiences onto one another. Aborting selves occupy the here and now, rather than the there and then, sharing in the progressive present tense which serves as the time of abortion, which is central to this notion of transmission and its interconnectedness with care. The present tense of abortion time is also the time of care. As previously explained, care time fosters relationships of nurturing in the present tense; it is a question of waiting with or alongside others in the present, rather than waiting *for* a point in the future (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017; Baraitser and Brook, 2021). This conception of time allows us to relativise abortion as a radical, collective act of care for the self and the body, a feminist ethics of caring which transcends the normative structures of caring relationships within the healthcare system. Indeed, abortion is an act of healthcare, but one that has traditionally existed outside these structures, before the patriarchal institutionalisation of medicine transferred medical knowledge from the public to the private sphere. Prior to this, abortion care was a collective act, a community endeavour consisting of transmitting knowledge on contraceptives and abortifacients between generations of women and actively providing this care in settings such as MLAC groups, referring to the *Mouvement pour la liberté de l'avortement et de la contraception* (Ruault, 2016). Abortion care has always been, and remains, collective, and is therefore by extension interruptive, shirking the norms of individualism in French society and traditional conceptions of autobiography which date back to Rousseau and Montaigne. If we therefore return to a timescape in which abortion is interruptive, radical, collective care, then we can expand its reach to other elements, such as the act of writing aborto-socio-biographies, which constitutes the act of care in between open wounds and closed scars.

As well as occupying space, which the previous chapter addressed, aborto-socio-biography occupies time. The previous chapter referenced the need to employ a more dynamic and multileveled conception of the reading process in graphic narrative, as a result of the dynamic use of spatiality in superposing pictorial and textual elements. In the case of *Avortée* and *Interruption*, the reader must perhaps interrupt the cyclicity of their everyday rhythms and routines, of their own time, to engage in texts which employ a dynamic use of temporality. The act of creativity which permits an escape from cyclical time thus does so for both writer and reader (Beauvoir, 1949, p.82). Just as the interruption of linear abortion narratives requires an initial interruption of pregnancy, so the interruption of pregnant time requires an initial interruption of one's own time, whether in the act of creativity or engaging with this act of creativity through reading. Transmission of these aborto-socio-biographies therefore necessitates interruptive processes in multiple, complex forms, and in doing so lead to greater openness and compassion. Transmission constitutes an act of care for the self and for others, including other *avortées* in Ernaux's invisible chain and the reader. All these aborting bodies and their aborto-socio-biographies are united in the space of Ernaux's invisible chain and in the time of abortion defined in this chapter, and transmit, in the words of Harmange, one's ghost – the remnants or essence of the self, through the social act of writing – and one's scar – the abortion. Consequently, transmission and care are at the core of aborto-socio-biographical practice.

2.5 Conclusion

This chapter has problematised the notion of interruption, addressing both its permanent and temporary iterations in *Avortée* and *Interruption*. By conceptualising an “abortion time”, an interruptive care time of the progressive present, I have illustrated the ways in which the narrators attempt to reorient pregnancy away from its quintessential

futurity. Building on Browne's work (2017; 2022; 2023), this dynamic conception of temporality, in tandem with the dynamic conception of spatiality examined in the first chapter, is a facet of abortion complexity in that it demands an audacious creativity for the development of new timescapes. Abortion time consists first and foremost of the progressive present, which takes on a twofold meaning of both ongoing and innovative; it is ongoing, existing on a spectrum of experience, and innovative, extending our conceptions of abortion and the self. Its inherent presentness foregrounds the embodied, subjective experience of pregnancy for the aborting self, rather than the tenuous future of the developing foetus. However, the presentness of "abortion time" may also express the difficulty of escaping the cyclicity of trauma, at once the seepage between past and present as well as the difficulty of bridging the two.

This notion of "abortion time" interrupts the cyclicity of Kristeva's women's time, as well as the genetic reproduction of Kristeva's monumental time. The rejection of fetocentric paradigms allows for the emergence of a transtemporality, including, alongside the progressive present, a conditional past and retrospectivity. Although the latter tends to already be included in normative conceptions of pregnant time, in that pregnancy provokes retrospection on one's own childhood (self), the shift away from futurity allows subjectivity and embodiment to take priority. Yet it is also important to consider that foetal personhood and pregnant embodiment can exist in tension with one another without a need for resolution, as attested to by several accounts in *Interruption*. It is in the liminal space between absence and presence, in the tension between two opposing concepts, in the web connecting the unspeakability of an event to the ethics of giving an account of oneself, that abortion complexity is conceived.

Abortion was subsequently posited as a parenthetical act which allows for extension and evacuation of the self. The ambiguity and polysemy of interruption was explored,

including the way in which there may be an impossible desire to temporarily suspend the permanent act of terminating a pregnancy, as well as the complexity of affective responses to this permanent interruption. This tension reflects the ambiguity of abortion time, which is commonly evoked by a slippage between the narrative and enunciative “I”, designating the emergence of multiple selves. Furthermore, I suggested that the transpersonality of abortion narratives can be understood as applicable just as much to the aborting *self* as to aborting *selves*. It is only through evacuation, the physical act of abortion, that this extension of the self/selves is made possible. Such an extension means abortion can be generative, creating and revealing additional layers of meaning, truth, and dimensions to the abortion experience and the aborting self. However, in cases where abortion is a source of trauma, there is a distinct sense of lacking and emptiness. This is a manifestation of the detrimental effects of trauma which cause an evacuation of the self. Acknowledging that abortion can be a source of trauma, but that this trauma can be reckoned with, whilst simultaneously acknowledging that it may not necessarily be a source of trauma, illustrates the diverse realities of abortion. There is a complex array of experiences, and the very creativity and transmission of this abortion complexity allows narrators to reckon with trauma.

Finally, I addressed the significance of transmission in these texts, arguing that the transmission of aborto-socio-biographies and the aborting self is a radical act of collective and interruptive care for the self and for others. Extending the self is an external as well as internal act. By recognising abortion as care, both as part of and beyond normative structures of care, we are reminded of the inherent collectivity of abortion care, both past and present, as well as the ethics of giving an account of oneself, in line with Butler’s philosophical framework. These ethics represent the conditions of the emergence of aborto-socio-biographies, as every abortion experience and aborting self belong to a complex lineage of

similar yet so dissimilar selves, united in the space of Annie Ernaux's invisible chain and the time of abortion.

Conclusion

Notes on Courage, Compassion, and Complexity

*Inside the word “emergency” is “emerge”; from an emergency new things
come forth. The old certainties are crumbling fast, but danger and
possibility are sisters.*

(Solnit, 2016 [2004], p.12)

The thesis introduction cited Solnit’s *Hope in the Dark*: “people have always been good at imagining the end of the world, which is much easier to picture than the strange sidelong paths of change in a world without end” (Solnit, 2016 [2004], p.27). This thesis has tried to encourage its readers down one of these “strange sidelong paths of change”, by offering new perspectives and approaches to contemporary abortion representation, and more broadly, by considering how we can perceive and discuss abortion in the twenty-first century when reproductive rights are globally threatened. As the epigraph alludes to, it is in the danger and uncertainty of such a time that possibility is born, in which the action of hope acts as a catalyst for change. Reproductive dystopias, whose emergence and longevity are compounded by the rise of the far-right, have attempted to cull this hope across the world.

In May 2025, Nicola Packer was acquitted by a jury at Isleworth Crown Court in the United Kingdom, found not guilty of “unlawfully administering to herself a poison or other noxious thing” with the “intent to procure a miscarriage”, after five years of intense judicial and media scrutiny (Wise, 2025). Just like the stories of Sammy, Katie, Bethany, and Carla, these aborting subjects faced injustice when they needed compassion, because of regulatory spaces and times not fit for purpose. Yet, in June 2025, abortion was decriminalised in

England and Wales, meaning that no more abortion care seekers would be subject to the same inhumane interrogations. Even though decriminalisation could and should be taken further, and we must not consider this battle won, this marks a positive step for abortion rights in the United Kingdom. In Atlanta, Georgia, at the time of writing this conclusion, Adriana Smith, who is pregnant and has been declared brain dead, is being kept on life support due to concerns over abortion laws which require doctors to preserve the life of her fetus (Tanne, 2025). Adriana, Amber, Candi, and so many others, deserved long, dignified lives, which they were denied because of dystopic laws facilitated by the repeal of *Roe v. Wade* in 2023. In Palestine, as the Israeli-led genocide rages on, Palestinian women continue experiencing reproductive injustice, including unsafe birthing conditions and lack of access to safe abortions, menstrual products and contraception, whilst Israeli women rarely face these same limitations (McGonigal, 2024). Moving to France, even though the literary landscape of the *extrême contemporain* frequently produces displays of abortion complexity, as attested to by the corpus of this thesis, there remains a flagrant disparity in accessing abortion care and reproductive care more broadly (Potente, 2023; Erdman and Bergallo, 2024; Querrien and Selim, 2024). With the constitutionalisation of the freedom to abort harnessed as the end of the fight for reproductive justice, abortion rights remain on a cliff edge.

This lived experience of reproductive injustice is unfortunately one which unites these geographically disparate places, whose subjects share in the space of Annie Ernaux's invisible chain of *avortées* and in the presentness of abortion time. However, abortion complexity undeniably manifests itself heterogeneously in different contexts, its figuration as varied as the experiences this term encompasses. Abortion's spatialities and pregnant temporalities have historically disenfranchised reproductive/reproducing bodies, painfully confining their bodies to the claustrophobic regulations of clinical and policymaking spaces

and disembodied their subjective temporalities into ones centring the foetus. Aborto-socio-biographies, especially those analysed in the present work, represent a desire to embody what has been disembodied, an appeal to interrupt a supposedly linear narrative of womanly ideals. There are transgressions, be they literal or metaphorical, of geographical borders and timezones, and crossings of linguistic, temporal, and spatial boundaries in the search for the reproductive care they need. Reconfiguring abortion's spatialities and temporalities by analysing experiences through the lens of abortion complexity shows courage in times of danger, as we demand reproductive justice and freedom as the possibilities of tomorrow.

At the start, I asked: what else could pregnancy and abortion look like? How should we be conceiving and discussing abortion representation in the 2020s, an era marked by both rollout and repeal of reproductive freedoms? In what ways do our existing conversations fall short, and is there an alternative, or perhaps a remedy, to the shame and stigma shrouding this reproductive act, shame and stigma which is often compounded by its representations? To address these questions, I have analysed four ultra-contemporary aborto-socio-biographical narratives: *Le Choix* (Frappier and Frappier, 2020 [2015]), *Il fallait que je vous le dise* (Mermilliod, 2019), *Interruption. L'avortement par celles qui l'ont vécu* (Vizzavona, 2021), and *Avortée. Une histoire intime de l'IVG* (Harmange, 2022). By no means do I claim to have fully answered these questions, nor do I believe these works contain all the solutions. This thesis has sought to explore some of the many possibilities of abortion complex representation. Whilst Frappier, Mermilliod, Vizzavona, and Harmange undoubtedly offer potential remedies to abortion stigma and harmful paradigms by illustrating abortion complexity, the corpus nevertheless perpetuates the idea that only certain types of aborting bodies are worthy of sharing their narratives. By centring mostly white, middle-class bodies, and ones which ultimately became maternal, (re)productive citizens, these narrators and the literary landscape more broadly reinforce the legitimacy and domination of these bodies in the field of

reproductive care, and thus the palatability of these bodies as aborting ones. The selection process for the corpus was not an exclusionary one, but the unsafety that queer, racialised, and less socioeconomically privileged persons may feel when accessing such care and openly sharing their experiences undeniably excludes them from aborto-socio-biographies (Vergès, 2017; Price, 2020; Browne, 2023). Abortion complexity will surely figure differently for *avortées* facing intersecting discriminations, which will ultimately require its own languages and discourses beyond Anglo-European articulation of these experiences (Hoagland, 2020). Whilst reproductive and reproducing bodies – whether birthing, gestating, lactating, labouring, menstruating, or aborting – may be Othered in ways that cisgender male bodies are not, there remains a systemic process of imbuing certain reproductive/reproducing bodies with value and devaluing others.

This thesis has also explored the ways in which abortion and its writing may act as therapeutic, suggesting that abortion may be conceived as a catalytic and generative event rather than necessarily destructive (Beck, 2023). This holds true for Frappier, finally able to derive a sense of legitimacy for herself, Mermilliod, able to find peace through memorialising her abortion, Vizzavona, through reckoning with the trauma of her unwanted abortion as an adolescent, or Harmange, who uses writing as a means of reconciling her past abortion with her present pregnancy, however, we must not demand happy endings from *avortées*. We must ensure that abortion continues to be understood in its complex, ambiguous, and multiple iterations, “perhaps guided by the same intuition, perhaps arguing towards the same thing, but remaining evasive, collecting arguments, addendums, revisions” (Harmange, 2022; van der Waal, 2025, p.45).

All the works examined in this thesis emerged in a post-MeToo political context, marking a pivotal moment of reclaiming embodied narratives of pregnancy and maternity. By extension, these narratives also offered the occasion to reclaim ownership over the embodied

experiences of not just non-motherhood, but also non-repronormativity, to the extent that this is possible within current systems of repronormative reproductive care (Froidevaux-Metterie, 2023). *LC*, *IFJVD*, *Interruption*, and *Avortée* have served not just to illustrate the potentiality of the abortion complexity framework, but as first-person, aborto-socio-biographical narratives which audaciously divulge an intimate corporeality and authenticity, they also remind us that abortions are first and foremost a bodily event, moving from observation of the reproducing/reproductive body towards narratives of ownership. They are atypical in their refusal of this experiential knowledge as untouchable truths; these narratives exist because of and in relation to their peers', connected by an invisible chain which necessarily influences their form, content, and very existence (Budgeon, 2021; Bryan, 2025). By labelling these works as aborto-socio-biographies, I have not sought to categorise and constrain them and their authors but rather to recognise the impossibility of such categorisation. This term acknowledges the impossibility of containing oneself and one's narrative, of telling only a single person's story, as this singular self is *de facto* a multiple, changing self, inherently tied to a community. As a subject historically on the literary and visual margins, or spoken about only euphemistically and negatively, such nomenclature also seeks to highlight the emphasis on the act of aborting. As we work towards the day abortion (complexity) becomes a boring, unproblematic fact of our everyday existences, may we find comfort in this outspokenness and audacity (Bordowa, 2022). In a time and space where abortion stigma is rampant, I have proposed that the remedy to the current sociopolitical conjuncture of dystopia is not law or politics, but compassion, or rather a law and politics informed by compassion, aligning with the work of Ludlow who advocates for an abortion politics of love and goodness (2012). Yet, Frappier, Mermilliod, Vizzavona, and Harmange do not just advocate for these politics but act as these politics, offering complex spatialities and temporalities which privilege affect, love, and empathy. To write not only the personal,

but the transgressive, the marginalised, the aborted, is a political act; the ultimate abortion politics of love and goodness is an action, just like hope. By actively challenging repronormativity and the accepted rhetoric on abortion, these visual/textual experiments offer new contours of abortion narratives and realities encompassing the “the never-monolithic facets of women’s experiences,” which always have and always will exist (Runde, 2018, p.182). Using reproductive justice as a tool for literary analysis, and literary analysis as a tool for reproductive justice, offers the possibility of taking the strange sidelong paths of change, rather than encountering the end of the world, illustrating that there is indeed hope in the dark for the becoming of abortion representation in the *extrême contemporain*.

As the site of the self, the body demands empathy and compassion; we are our bodies, our bodies are the site of our experiences, and so we are our experiences. It is because non-repronormative bodies transgress and are transgressions that they are deemed unworthy of love and goodness. However, this thesis has offered reorientations of spatialities and temporalities which place the aborting body at the centre of their narratives to draw our attention to the complex processes of embodiment and interruption. Chapter One considered the embodied experience of abortion in graphic narrative, focusing on contemporary *bédéistes*’ transgressive reorientations of space, and the way in which embodiment allows for them to reclaim the spaces which have traditionally sought to contain their porous bodies. Despite the focus on these spatial politics, graphic narrative is inseparable from temporal politics, insofar as space is time, making Frappier and Mermilliod active subjects and drivers of their own narratives, which binds them to other *avortées* in the progressive presentness of abortion time theorised in Chapter Two (Löw, 2006; Tally, 2017). In *LC*, Frappier experiences a violent and traumatic procedure but unlike her mother is still able to access an abortion and finds fulfilment in a later maternal project. Her abortion is a visceral, haptic experience, lived and felt by the reader/viewer as they read/view her body,

although Frappier often denies us sight of this experience and the reproductive/reproducing body, preventing us from policing, gazing, and monitoring her existence as is so often the case for bodies forced to inhabit the confines of the spatialities of abortion (Calkin *et al.*, 2022). Through reorientations of bodily and beyond bodily space, Frappier redefines abortion's spatialities, creating her own, tailor-made space for her embodied narrative, beyond regulation. She thus takes up space in and beside her implicitly porous body, in a paternalistic medical setting, on the page, and within a genre in which abortion has historically occupied a marginal stance.

Mermilliod similarly comes to occupy space inside and outside her body, offering ambiguous and complex representations of inside versus outside which are at the core of embodied experiences of pregnancy and abortion, as well as the regulation of reproducing/reproductive bodies. This is particularly evident in her portrayal of her ambivalent relationship to foetal imagery, as well as her explicitly porous body which enjoys symbiotic interactions with its external surroundings, notably that of the clinic, in which her organic bodily matter contaminates the inorganic clinical materials. Although I have been critical of the inclusion of Winckler's narrative, arguing that his position as an epistemic authority implies that Mermilliod story requires legitimisation, there should be no limits on the form or content of aborto-socio-biographies. Abortion complexity is of course well-suited to understanding abortion and its narratives in the *extrême contemporain*, but *avortées* do not owe reader/viewers this complexity. Together, *Le Choix* and *Il fallait que je vous le dise* offer a new visual aesthetics of abortion, facilitated by the inherent layering of ambiguity in graphic narrative's multiple communication devices. This multiplicity is further reflected in their respective co-authorial relationships, as well as the figuration of multiple reproductive selves layered within the representational and diegetic space. Their complex relationship to outside (natural) and inside (built) spaces also permeate *LC* and *IFJVD*, considering the ways in

which the natural environment may offer solace but also danger, like the act of writing one's abortion. Mermilliod and Frappier delineate the contours of their bodies and spaces, becoming active subjects driving the narrative.

Recognising that abortion's spatialities and temporalities are inherently bound up with each other, especially when time dictates the space of abortion, Chapter Two focused on subjective narratives of interruption, taken in its French form as *interrompre une grossesse*, but also as a call to interrupt, disrupt, and erupt the concept of pregnant temporalities, allowing aborting bodies to share in a time that is their own. Just as Mermilliod and Frappier create a "space of their own", to fondly paraphrase Virginia Woolf (1929), so Vizzavona and Harmange do the same for time, privileging presentness and consequently allowing for a suspension of futural pregnant time which centres the self. Whilst centrality of the self is a hallmark of autobiography, such subjectivity has not always been granted to reproducing/reproductive bodies, whose archetype is the self-sacrificing mother. Harmange and Vizzavona offer a possibility of reckoning with and embracing the liminality of abortions, in which cyclicity cannot always be fully escaped, but in which this repetition becomes a form of empowerment via transmission rather than entrapment through trauma.

In the progressive presentness of abortion time, evoked by an insistence of figuring the self in the present, both trauma and caring may manifest themselves. This presentness is refracted with references to retrospectivity, futurity, and conditionality, creating a multifaceted layering of temporalities, which allows us to examine the ways in which abortion may extend, evacuate, entrap, and empower, all at once. Moreover, this presentness allows us to conceive of abortion time as care time, and thus abortion – and its writings – as care. As aborto-socio-biographical acts of transmission, which translates this presentness into futurity, but not one bound up with inevitable motherhood, *Interruption. L'avortement par celles qui l'ont vécu* and *Avortée. Une histoire intime de l'IVG* represent acts as care for the self and

others. Certainly, transmission is at the heart of all the narratives in this thesis, as their creators seek not just to find a space and time for themselves, but also spaces and times of collective resistance which combat the socially construed solitariness of abortion. As readers/viewers, we therefore “bear witness” to these stories, not as passive spectators of a crime or confession, but as persons contributing to the recounting and transmission of these testimonies. Just as in graphic narrative, the reader/viewer engages in multileveled and dynamic readings which extend beyond the material bookish object.

The multiple roles required of the reader are also present in the narrator’s diverse manifestations of the self. Harmange figures this multiplicity in *Avortée* via continual references to the collective *nous*, an acknowledgement of her inability to give an account solely of herself, and an intertextuality which references her aborting predecessors. She also represents herself as the possessor of multiple identities, placing her body in the positions of mother, writer, adult, and *avortée*, none of which negate the other. In doing so, Harmange posits abortion as a foundational event for her present sense of self. For Vizzavona, multiplicity is especially present in *Interruption*’s form as the layering of variable *témoignages* gives rise to a plurivocal and complex account. Multiple selves, meaning both the many identities of an individual, and the collective of *avortées* allow for a transmission of complexity. To return to Ahmed’s understanding of movement in reference to space, the “progression” inherent in this shared present time of abortion and care both grounds the *avortée* by *offering* a brave state of solace from trauma and biological cycles and moves abortion representation forward by rejecting linear interpretations of time. All the aborto-socio-biographies in this thesis thus occupy a liminal state in between movement and stillness, reflecting the liminality of abortion itself.

Together, these four narratives represent a new audacity of abortion representation, one that privileges this reproductive act rather than confining it to the literary margins, and

one that foregrounds authenticity and complexity. The creation of these new spaces and times encounters a conflict between normalising and exceptionalising. If we seek to normalise the complexity of this reproductive act, does creating spaces and times which only *avortées* occupy not reinforce their experiences as exceptionalist, marginalised ones? Yet it is necessary and important for *avortées* to have their own times and spaces, whether these be narrativised or lived, as to go without these times and spaces is to live in pain, trapped in cyclicity of trauma or reproductive experiences (Kristeva, 1979; Ahmed, 2006). The embodiment and interruption proposed by Frappier, Mermilliod, Vizzavona, and Harmange provide a sense of grounding and comfort for *avortées* in which they may exercise bodily ownership – to the extent that this is possible – which is also a sense of movement, of progress with regards to abortion representation, and of moving forward with their lives. The embodied and interrupted aborting subject is no longer prisoner to the paradigms which have historically monitored, surveilled, and regulated the spaces and times of its existence. In the *extrême contemporain*, the *avortée* delineates her own contours and sets her own timepiece. It is in the stillness and solace discovered in experiencing these new landscapes and timescapes, in the grounding and comfort they provide, that we find the necessary movement and vivacity to drive us forward to complex worlds. Beyond the body, beside the body, and in the body, may we continue to create such worlds in our own spaces and times so as not to die by the laws of somebody else's.

Say: No shame.

We can say: The

birth spectrum.

Choices are always field work,

freedom song, elegy,

captivity narrative.

This feeling won't forget them;

won't forget you.

— Alissa Quart

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Appendix One

Interview with Pauline Harmange, February 2023

1. *Qu'est-ce que la vérité pour toi ?*

Ah, c'est trop dur comme question ! Dans le contexte de l'écriture de soi, je pense que la vérité est une notion complexe. La mémoire nous trompe rapidement, ce qui reste de plus vrai ce sont peut-être les émotions, leur empreinte sur ce qu'on a vécu.

2. *Pour toi, est-ce que l'intimité évoquée dans le titre relève plutôt du sujet raconté ou du processus d'écriture/ du fait de révéler quelque chose de toi-même ? Le processus d'écriture t'a-t-il révélé certaines vérités sur toi et ton expérience ?*

L'histoire intime, c'est la mienne : je ne voulais pas écrire un texte qui serait une sommité sur l'avortement, je voulais qu'il soit clair dès le départ que je ne faisais pas un essai féministe sur l'avortement ni en France ni dans le monde. Je voulais raconter *mon* histoire, et tirer les fils de celle-ci pour essayer de toucher au plus général. Évidemment ça révèle, de fait, beaucoup de moi-même mais le but n'a jamais été de "raconter ma vie", qui n'a rien de très extraordinaire. Je voulais justement partir du pas extraordinaire pour aller explorer ce qui peut toucher au politique dans l'intime. Comme pour mon précédent essai, c'est en écrivant que j'ai compris certaines choses, que j'ai fait un certain travail sur moi et sur mon expérience. C'est peut-être pour ça que les écrivain·es écrivent, au fond, pour aller trouver une vérité inaccessible pour elleux autrement.

3. *Ecrire sur ton avortement était-il un désir ou une nécessité ? Pourquoi as-tu choisi d'écrire ce récit à ce moment-là ?*

J'ai commencé à écrire sur ma grossesse imprévue et sur mon avortement le jour-même où j'ai découvert que j'étais enceinte. C'est comme ça que j'avance dans les épreuves de la vie,

j'écris beaucoup, surtout pour moi. La décision a été celle d'essayer d'en faire un texte pour les autres aussi. C'est au bout d'un an, je crois, quand je n'avais toujours pas "mis" cette expérience "derrière moi" que je me suis dit qu'il y avait peut-être un travail à faire sur le texte, sur les mots, et que peut-être si je ne passais pas à autre chose c'est parce que j'avais besoin de textes que je ne trouvais pas, et que c'était à moi de contribuer à une œuvre qui me semblait lacunaire.

4. *Dans le processus d'écriture, avais-tu le sentiment de revivre ton avortement ou simplement de te le rappeler ? Pourquoi parles-tu de l'avortement au présent ?*

Non je n'ai pas eu le sentiment de revivre mon avortement, et je crois que justement, si j'en parle au présent dans le texte, c'était pour essayer de retourner au plus proche de ce qui avait été mon expérience à l'époque. Il y a eu plusieurs versions de ce texte, et celle qui a été publiée est celle aboutie alors que j'étais dans des dispositions à la fois matérielles, corporelles et mentales totalement opposées à celles qui entouraient mon avortement. J'avais sûrement besoin de me reconnecter au plus proche de l'expérience, mais si j'ai pu écrire dessus comme ça, c'est aussi parce que ce n'était plus à vif, et que revisiter ce moment n'était plus une douleur.

5. *Comment as-tu émotionnellement vécu le processus d'écriture, sa conclusion et enfin sa parution ? Avais-tu peur en l'écrivant ?*

Je n'avais pas peur parce que je n'imaginai pas que quiconque le lirait. Je faisais mon petit travail d'écriture dans mon coin, et puis advienne que pourra. C'était très dur à écrire – pas parce que c'était douloureux, comme je l'ai dit juste avant, mais parce que j'ai trouvé très compliqué d'agencer le récit pour qu'il ait du sens. La réalité est beaucoup plus désordonnée et chaotique que ce qu'on peut écrire et livrer si on veut être lue et comprise. Je me souviens très bien de la fin du texte : je l'ai terminé quelques semaines avant de tomber enceinte et j'ai

relu tout le manuscrit final avant de l'envoyer à mes éditrices dans la semaine entre Noël et Nouvel an, juste après avoir découvert ma grossesse. Quand le livre est sorti, j'étais enceinte de 3 mois et c'était très **très** étrange d'en faire la promotion avec mon ventre allant en s'arrondissant. Il y avait, évidemment, un décalage énorme entre ce que je disais et comment je présentais - parler de ventre vide en ayant le ventre plein.

6. *Pourquoi as-tu choisi l'essai comme format ? (pourquoi pas le roman ?) Avais-tu l'intention d'écrire quelque chose qui dépasse ta propre expérience ? Si oui, pourquoi cela était-il important pour toi ?*

J'avais, fondamentalement, besoin de parler de **mon** expérience. Je trouvais qu'elle disait quelque chose : on parle toujours, avec l'avortement, des cas les plus spécifiquement horribles : des personnes seules, des avortements qui se passent mal. Je voulais comprendre pourquoi, même quand sur le papier la situation est à la fois claire et facile, ça peut laisser l'arrière-goût amer que ça m'a laissé. J'aime que la fiction que j'écris ne parle pas de moi. J'y mets toujours de moi, c'est inévitable, mais ça ne raconte pas **mon** histoire. L'essai personnel peut parler de moi, mais ça me semble toujours important d'essayer d'aller au-delà de moi, sinon quel intérêt, comme je le disais plus haut mon histoire n'est pas exceptionnelle, elle n'a pas de sens si elle n'est pas là comme point de départ pour aller plus loin. Et je pense que c'était important pour moi parce que ça m'avait manqué. J'aurais sûrement aimé lire le livre que j'ai écrit pendant ou juste après mon propre avortement, quand c'était si compliqué de gérer les émotions ambivalentes qui me traversaient.

7. *Comment et pourquoi as-tu choisi ce titre ?*

Je suis très nulle en titres, ce sont mes éditrices qui l'ont trouvé. Elles m'ont raconté avoir essayé plein de titres en les criant face à la mer, en Bretagne (j'aime beaucoup cette genèse). Il leur a fallu écarter toutes les titres féministes à la mode ("Un avortement à soi", "ceci est mon avortement", ...) avant de trouver quelque chose qui colle. "Avortée", ce substantif que

j'utilise dans le texte, c'est une amie qui m'a dit : "personne ne veut entendre le murmure des avortées". On dit facilement "une accouchée", mais pas facilement "une avortée". J'avais envie de me réapproprier ce substantif, pour dire que j'ai avorté et que ça fait partie de mon histoire – même si j'entends que d'autres femmes dans le même cas ne veulent pas le revendiquer de la même manière.

8. *Avais-tu déjà lu L'événement d'Annie Ernaux avant d'écrire ta propre histoire ? Si oui, s'en-es tu inspiré pour raconter la sienne ? Selon toi, quelle importance le livre d'Ernaux a-t-il ?*

J'ai lu **L'événement** pendant l'écriture d'**Avortée**. J'avais commencé avant ça à lire la bibliographie d'Annie Ernaux, mais quand j'ai avorté l'existence de ce livre ne m'a pas apporté de réconfort, c'était une expérience tellement différente de la mienne, je me disais que ça ne pouvait pas me parler. Par contre, pendant l'écriture, la découverte de ce texte m'a donné du courage, et un sentiment de légitimité. En choisissant d'écrire son avortement alors clandestin en 2001, quasiment 30 ans après la légalisation de l'IVG, Annie Ernaux a créé une passerelle temporelle qui disait que même si "maintenant ça va", en fait la société n'est en réalité toujours pas OK avec l'avortement. Et ça m'a frappée de constater qu'encore 20 ans plus tard, il y avait toujours un tabou. Elle dit aussi dans **L'événement** que vivre quelque chose donne le droit d'écrire dessus. J'avais besoin de ça.



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