Introduction

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Introduction

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The year 2013 marks the fortieth anniversary of the US Supreme Court decision legalizing abortion, Roe v. Wade. This year has also witnessed the passage in Arkansas, North Dakota, Ohio, and Texas of some of the most restrictive legislation on abortion in the United States. Some of this legislation directly contradicts Roe’s establishment of a woman’s right to abortion until fetal viability (typically around twenty-four weeks) by banning abortions after a fetal heartbeat can be detected via ultrasound. Other new laws attack women’s access to abortion by creating licensing requirements that make it difficult, if not impossible, for abortion clinics to operate. Although some new legislation has already been overturned in the courts, this proliferation of anti-abortion measures highlights a central tension in US reproductive politics in the forty years since Roe. Even as the decision established a legal right to abortion, it also galvanized right-wing movements that have attacked abortion specifically and women’s reproductive rights more broadly. The result has been a relentless whittling down of the scope of abortion rights, ranging from the Hyde Amendment, which denies federal funding of abortion in most cases, to the “Global Gag Rule,” which prohibits foreign organizations receiving US aid from mentioning abortion. This toxic political environment has made abortion access difficult even for those women who can afford it; four decades after Roe, 35 percent of American women aged fifteen to forty-four live in counties with no abortion provider at all. In Ohio, from where I write, clinic closures prompted by this year’s legislation leave women with fewer options for safe abortions than perhaps at any time since the Roe decision, and the situation faced by Ohio women is hardly unique. In the face of these attacks on access to abortion feminist scholars and activists have called for a deepening and widening of reproductive politics that defends abortion rights while challenging the limitations of Roe. Perhaps the most important feminist legacy of the last forty years is the emergence of dynamic reproductive justice movements.
that extend abortion rights beyond Roe’s privacy doctrine, that expand reproductive rights beyond abortion, and that develop a field of reproductive activism that transcends individual choice to challenge systems of reproductive inequality and stratification.

The contributors to this special issue of Frontiers, “Reproductive Technologies and Reproductive Justice,” take this conversation forward. Drawing from diverse methods, sources, and frameworks, each of the pieces included here encourages us to reconsider the relationship between technologies of reproduction and the meanings of reproductive justice for women and their communities. These technologies may be relatively new developments in the fields of science and medicine, as in the case of noninvasive prenatal diagnosis (NIPD) or stem cell research, both discussed in this volume. But feminist research can also help us to understand how older technologies, including abortion itself, develop new meanings in changing political and scientific environments. Whether “old” or “new,” there is no automatic trajectory—either progressive or regressive—between reproductive technology and struggles for reproductive justice. The discourse and rhetoric that frame these technologies, the ways in which they become embedded in existing structures and hierarchies, and the circumstances of women’s access all shape how far reproductive technologies bend toward justice for all women. The recent anti-abortion laws in Arkansas and North Dakota are a case in point. Part of a longer history of the role of ultrasound technologies in sanctifying fetal life, the new laws offer the supposedly objective evidence of abdominal and transvaginal ultrasound to police the boundaries of women’s abortion rights.³ The meanings of ultrasound technology thus develop in concert with “pro-life” politics to produce these most recent examples of anti-abortion legislation. In her classic study of another reproductive technology—birth control—Linda Gordon reminds us of the very broad stakes at issue in these debates. Any stable consensus about reproductive politics, Gordon argues, “will probably require a new social consensus about gender relations and women’s rights.”⁴ If we bear in mind that rights for all women will require tackling pervasive inequality along multiple axes, Gordon’s insight suggests the importance of reproduction for feminist scholarship and praxis. We cannot understand reproductive politics without understanding dominant gender regimes; at the same time our analysis of gender shapes our study of reproductive technologies and reproductive justice. Feminists have long highlighted this interdependence of gender and ideologies about reproduction. The fortieth anniversary of Roe v. Wade, occurring at a moment when the fruits of feminist activism are under such relentless attack, is an apt moment for Frontiers to examine an issue that still remains critical to feminism and to the field of women’s studies.
This issue of *Frontiers* opens with articles that engage these questions through a focus on abortion. In each case they identify a series of tensions in abortion politics: tensions between “reality” and “fiction” in abortion narratives, between state regulation of abortion and individual and community actions, and between *Roe*'s privacy doctrine and other legal and political frameworks for abortion. Annika C. Speer begins the discussion with “The Feminist Potential of Docudrama: Destabilizing the Primacy of Primary Sources through Paula Kamen's *Jane*.” The *Jane* docudrama blends oral history interviews with fictionalized scenes of abortion to recount the history of the Jane collective, a Chicago group of students and housewives who created an abortion referral network and eventually performed abortions themselves in the pre-*Roe* era. Speer examines the text and her own staging of the production in 2011 to argue that the docudrama “opens a space through which the appeal of ‘reality’ operates alongside the imaginative potential of fiction, allowing practitioners and audiences a unique realm in which to tackle difficult and politically charged issues, such as abortion.” Challenging the claim that “fiction” in docudrama dilutes the “real,” Speer demonstrates that *Jane*'s representation of abortions onstage productively brings verbal recollections together with women’s embodied experience to offer us a new way of understanding, and imagining, abortion both pre-*Roe* and in our present moment. Karyn Valerius also explores the stories we tell about abortion in “A Not-So-Silent Scream: Gothic and the US Abortion Debate.” Identifying the “influential role of gothic narratives in abortion politics,” Valerius argues that both pro- and anti-abortion narratives provoke horror in order to influence opinions and demand action from their audience. In the case of anti-abortion texts this horror is meant to evoke empathy for the fetus. But in letters written to the National Abortion Rights Action League (NARAL) by women who sought abortions pre-*Roe*, Valerius suggests, the use of gothic conventions allowed the letter writers to “articulate the intensity of experiences that would otherwise overwhelm attempts at adequate representation in language.” Taken together with Speer’s analysis of representing abortions in theater, Valerius’s work invites us to consider the possibilities of narrating abortion in public discourse.

Eileen V. Wallis is similarly interested in public discourses about abortion in “‘The Verdict Created No Great Surprise Upon the Street’: Abortion, Medicine, and the Regulatory State in Progressive-Era Los Angeles.” Examining the limited ability of city authorities to regulate midwives and prosecute abortion and obstetrical malpractice during the 1890s, Wallis concludes that “many Angelenos still saw reproductive choice as a private matter, not a public one.” Although the public may have supported abortion restrictions on paper, in
practice they had little interest in enforcing laws or punishing the women who provided or sought abortions. As Wallis suggests, these disjunctures between state regulation and community beliefs may have implications for how we understand the effects of contemporary regulatory efforts to restrict abortion access. Chao-ju Chen also examines tensions and competing visions in abortion regulation, but her analysis takes us to Taiwan during the 1970s and 1980s. In “Choosing the Right to Choose: Roe v. Wade and the Feminist Movement to Legalize Abortion in Martial-Law Taiwan” Chen demonstrates that feminists adopted the privacy doctrine of the Roe decision to bolster their own claims about women’s right to abortion. Through a selective reading of Roe feminist interventions at once supported the Taiwan government’s population and eugenics policy and also advocated for women’s reproductive rights. As an example of how feminist and antifeminist discourses travel transnationally, Chen concludes, Roe’s legacy was both “empowering and limiting” in Taiwan.

To reflect further on Roe’s legacy, and to invite conversation on the broader global and American landscape of reproductive politics, Frontiers convened a roundtable for this special issue. Our roundtable contributors are scholars and activists who have each made major interventions in our understanding of this field, and I am grateful for the participation of Laura Briggs, Faye Ginsburg, Elena R. Gutiérrez, Rosalind Petchesky, Rayna Rapp, Andrea Smith, and Chikako Takeshita. The roundtable contributors address the multiple legacies of Roe, suggesting in Rapp and Ginsburg’s terms that the decision is both a “beacon of the successful US feminist struggle for reproductive rights and an icon of its limitations.” Smith highlights the central limitations of Roe, which are to “narrow the agenda of reproductive justice to abortion rights” and to frame “the right to abortion through the right to privacy rather than through the lens of gender equality.” Challenging these limitations, the roundtable conversation invokes a broader vision of reproductive justice that moves beyond individual privacy or choice. In Briggs’s terms the scale of reproductive injustices both locally and globally requires a “scholarship and reproductive movement that are about reproductive politics writ large—from neoliberalism to reproductive governance to welfare reform, from infant mortality and racial and geographic health disparities to reproductive technologies.” Scholars and activists must not only address issues that are typically identified with reproduction (abortion, contraception, etc.) but also challenge a range of systems that constrain women’s reproductive options—including economic inequality, an intensifying care-work gap, and unquestioned assumptions about fetal disability in women’s reproductive “choices.” Rapp and Ginsburg, in particular, highlight the necessity of a disability lens—so often absent from feminist scholarship—to challenge reproductive injustice.
The contributions in the second half of the volume investigate these broad questions in relation to several assisted reproductive technologies (ARTS): gestational surrogacy, stem cell research, and egg donation. Natalie Fixmer-Oraiz begins with “Speaking of Solidarity: Transnational Gestational Surrogacy and Rhetorics of Reproductive (In)justice.” Calling attention to US media representations of Indian surrogates, Fixmer-Oraiz identifies two rhetorical frameworks—of choice and of altruism—that obscure the profound injustices underpinning surrogacy arrangements. To highlight women’s “choice” in surrogacy is to ignore the structural inequalities that constrain women's reproductive decisions. This rhetoric of choice, as Fixmer-Oraiz demonstrates, adopts the language of feminism in the service of capitalist logics of markets and consumerism. The appeal to altruism—another frequent trope in surrogacy discourse—similarly conceals exploitative relationships to imagine a “global sisterhood” created by the surrogacy contracts. Daisy Deomampo’s “Transnational Surrogacy in India: Interrogating Power and Women’s Agency” further explodes any simplistic assumptions about global sisterhood. In her ethnography of surrogates in Mumbai Deomampo documents women’s resistance to systems of stratified reproduction; the two women at the center of her study attempt to negotiate payments, assert their autonomy, and gain some control over their conditions of reproductive labor. One of these women, Antara, has crafted a position of “surrogate agent,” whereby she recruits other women and supports them through the surrogacy process. While the position of agent accords Antara some measure of authority within deeply unequal reproductive systems, Deomampo notes, agents’ “efforts at resistance [also] recreated structural inequalities.” As both Fixmer-Oraiz and Deomampo suggest, therefore, the forms of reproductive stratification entailed in transnational gestational surrogacy are both locally deep and geographically wide-ranging. Surrogate women occupy multiple positions within these systems, which both authors attempt to make more visible and hence also more contestable. The question of women’s visibility, and of acknowledging their reproductive contribution, also motivates Richard F. Storrow’s “The Erasure of Egg Providers in Stem Cell Science.” Storrow demonstrates that research cloning in embryonic stem cell research has a reproductive aspect that is typically ignored in scientific and policy discourse. The women who provide the eggs—without which this research would be impossible—are left entirely outside the framework of discussion. Questioning the troubling ethical, legal, and policy implications of this erasure of egg providers, Storrow’s research is a call to consider research cloning a reproductive justice issue.

The conversation about reproductive justice continues with a special section entitled “Activist Knowledges” that highlights the relationship among re-
search, scholarship, and feminist praxis. The two articles in this section reflect on the feminist knowledges produced in the context of activism; they discuss not only empirical and theoretical findings but also the process of producing knowledge that furthers reproductive justice. The section begins with Su-jatha Jesudason and Katrina Kimport’s “Decentering the Individual and Centering Community: Using a Reproductive Justice Methodology to Examine the Uses of Reprogenetics.” Jesudason and Kimport document a conference, held in Philadelphia in 2008, of Indigenous and women-of-color reproductive justice advocates. The discussions at this gathering examined technologies that enable the manipulation or control of reproductive genetics. Based on these discussions, Jesudason and Kimport suggest, communities who “might appear to be distantly located from the epicenter of the technologies are in fact deeply affected and have as much, if not more, to gain or lose from the proliferation of the science.” Understanding these gains or losses depends on analyzing not only the race, gender, class, nationality and ability of individual women but also the impact on their communities. The second article in the section also examines the place of communities in furthering reproductive justice, but in this case the focus is on the Take Root conference, an annual event serving the conservative south-central region of the United States. In “How Not to Pimp Out Reproductive Justice: Adventures in Education, Activism, and Accountability” Carol Mason documents struggles for reproductive justice in Oklahoma, a state where high rates of female incarceration, low funding of education, pioneering anti-abortion legislation, and pride in being the reddest state in the nation “culminate in a perfect conservative storm that oppresses young women.” Confronting these challenges, Mason wonders how we might ask difficult questions about the history of eugenics and racism in reproductive politics when “the right is using the very same words . . . in an attempt to demolish reproductive health care.” Her moving essay recounts her struggles in organizing the first Take Root conference at Oklahoma State University while “stay[ing] true to the political and intellectual integrity of an idea called reproductive justice.” Now in its third year the conference centers student voices while creating a community of reproductive justice activists in an environment that has been far outside the centers of activism and struggle on these issues.

The special issue also brings artwork and a personal essay into our analysis of reproductive technologies and reproductive justice. Robin Silbergleid’s “The Donor Egg Essay” is a powerful meditation on the author’s experience of becoming pregnant through in vitro fertilization (IVF) with a donor egg. Her account, which invites us to rethink (in)fertility and parental love, situates supposedly abstract questions of reproductive technologies in relation to
bodily and emotional experience. These explorations are also developed in an image reproduced from Jasmine Begeske's installation *Surrogate*. As a record of the artist's experience with fertility treatment, *Surrogate* considers the “juxtaposition of sex and medically intervened intercourse, chance and order, organic and controlled, private and public.” While the experience of reproduction may be profoundly bodily, intimate, and personal, the “relentlessness of the infertility procedures” brings these intimate domains into deeply public view. Finally, this issue of *Frontiers* includes two images from the work of Marjorie Peñailillo (Gigi), whose art focuses on icons associated with Latin American indigenous identity. Both images reproduced here are from two walls of a graffiti mural she painted in Viña del Mar in Chile. Our cover image is of Pachamama, or mother earth, an Andean goddess who “presides over planting, harvesting, and the earth’s reproductive cycles,” an apt image, I hope, for an issue devoted to reproductive justice for all women.

If reproductive justice is the goal, this special issue of *Frontiers* suggests that, even as feminist scholarship has vastly expanded the boundaries of reproductive politics in the decades since *Roe v. Wade*, there is also much work yet to be done. New reproductive technologies that have developed in the last forty years, ranging from egg donation to stem cell research to transnational surrogacy, reinforce but also transform existing forms of reproductive inequality and stratification. At the same time the attack on *Roe* in the United States, coupled with a global rise of the right, has further narrowed even the limited rights won by feminists. In the context of neoliberal restructuring, often intensified in moments of economic crisis, states have withdrawn even further from providing women with access to healthcare and education, with broad implications for women's access to contraception, abortion, and prenatal and neonatal care. These shifting contexts are changing the meanings of both emerging and older reproductive technologies and require feminists to develop new languages to explain our pasts and reimagine our futures. It is all the more important, at this moment, for feminist scholars and for the field of women's studies, to bring our research on reproductive justice and technologies into public conversation.

The wide range of articles, essays, and art appearing in this volume make an important intervention in this conversation. Given the richness of current scholarship on this topic, the editors of *Frontiers* will also feature a special focus section on reproductive justice and reproductive technologies in the next general issue of the journal. I am grateful for the opportunity to bring you this special issue. My thanks go to all the contributors, who have made editing this volume both a pleasure and a privilege. I also thank the *Frontiers* editors, Guisela Latorre and Judy Tzu-Chun Wu, for inviting me to edit this special
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NOTES


