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Racism, Disable-ism, and Heterosexism in the Making of Helen Keller

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Abstract: In his paper "Racism, Disable-ism, and Heterosexism in the Making of Helen Keller" Andy Prettol offers an analysis of prevailing narratives about Helen Keller. Prettol focuses on the dynamic interplay of race, (dis)ability, sexuality, and gender inherent to all Keller stories of triumph that are so popular in elementary schools across the U.S. He examines three specific works: William Gibson's playscript *The Miracle Worker*, written in 1956; the film of the same title directed by Arthur Penn in 1962; and the compiled letters of Anne Sullivan in Helen Keller's *The Story of Life*. Prettol's analysis works to unpack the articulations of race, ability, and sexuality on the formulation of the modern subject narrative.

Andy PRETTOL

Racism, Disable-ism, and Heterosexism in the Making of Helen Keller

The most popular narratives about Helen Keller portray a child who achieves modern and mature subjectivity through the acquisition of sign language. These stories are predicated on a modern disability narrative where Keller's disabilities of blindness and deafness are made as mere obstacles to modern and mature subjectivity. But while Keller achieves extraordinary fame her childhood "companion," or perhaps more accurately described, black child servant, Percy, dissolves into obscurity in spite of both his literal presence in some Helen Keller stories and his figurative centrality in that very plot that is typical of nearly all of the popular narratives concerning Keller's development, her achievements of both language and civility. In contrast to Keller, Percy desires nothing but to sleep which will be regarded as a desire for nothing, or even, in effect, no desire or drive for life or being whatsoever. Regardless of literal presence in any of the child-aimed Helen Keller stories, Percy represents the figurative ground apart from which the normative modern child, or simply "the child," must be absolutely distinct. In these stories of Helen Keller blackness is disabling. In this model of modern child development, black-disability is not even privileged as a mere condition of being that the modern subject will ultimately exceed. In this model the black child will not even achieve the signification *of* "child." Percy "exists" outside of the contexts of the child, being, in effect, a child that is not-one alongside Helen Keller who succeeds in that taken-for-granted image of the modern child that promises life, growth, development and an actual future through her unquestionable desire to learn. For Keller, her blindness and deafness are mere obstacles; for Percy his blackness alone is disabling. Substantiated then through racism and a discourse that consigns disability to immobility and lifelessness, this model concerning child development excites modernity on a broad metaphysical scale, one that concerns the very possibility of "future" itself. Finally, uniting race, ability, and sexuality the child promises to always promise a future. The child will guarantee the reproduction of promising children to forever configure "future." But for the child that is not-one, there is no growth and no maturity, the consignment -- if it can even be termed a consignment or delivery -- is death, no future.

I draw heavily upon Lee Edelman's book by the very title *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*. Edelman describes how the figure of the Child frames the very field of the political, such that politics are only political if conditioned on that heteronormative Child figure of promise. I extend his thesis but consider it under the conditions of modern subject formation narratives in order to integrate the interconstitutive dimensions of race, disability, and gender. This is all in regards to a narrative about children, for children, and even for children who are not children, but of course not restricted to an audience of children and -- not alone. Edelman's Child is a particularly privileged and invested child figure through all terms of race, class, sexuality, gender, ability, and ethnicity. When citing, for example, how through political rhetoric a party announces that their campaign "stands on behalf of the children" or that they are the party that "will fight for our children" (2-3), these declarations are clearly only invested in a specific child trope. Only certain children attain the status of "children," and only certain adults might claim that previous "childhood."

In the following pages I provide textual analyses of the prominent characters of Keller's supposed life as a well as a particularly indicative "scene" or event, a small turning point in Keller's process of modern development. I focus on this episode as it offers the most explicit portrayal of the structural dynamics of race, (dis)ability, sexuality, and gender inherent to all Keller stories of triumph that are so popular in many elementary schools across the U.S. and not limited to the boundaries of that nation alone. I draw here from three "transhistorical" texts: William Gibson's playscript *The Miracle Worker*, written in 1956; the film of the same title directed by Arthur Penn in 1962; and the compiled letters of Anne Sullivan in Helen Keller's *The Story of Life* which read as the primary sources for the two subsequent fictions. I focus on all three texts, not in efforts to determine any facticity in the succeeding

productions or to the authentication of an "original," but to tease out the dimensions of the modern subject narrative.

The texts in themselves diverge quite markedly in many ways. Most noticeable perhaps, is the explicit racism in the letters of Anne Sullivan. Through not just terms but attitude her statements can be surprising for a reader who has only been introduced to her character through either of the more popular *Miracle Worker* texts. Though Sullivan may eschew normative gender and sexual roles and be aptly hailed a certain kind of feminist within her given socio-historical sphere, her character nonetheless contributes to and reinforces racism, disable-ism and heterosexism found in the dominant U.S. feminism of this late nineteenth century U.S. Addressed to Sophia C. Hopkins, a woman whom some describe as Sullivan's surrogate mother-figure, Sullivan writes that "the little darkies [were Helen's] constant companions before I came" (Keller 229). Not only through terms, but through racialized temporal deployments, a particular progress directed teleology through "*before I came*", Sullivan describes how her singular influence has reconditioned Keller into more appropriately modern and mature activities in contrast to the racially deleterious companionship of her "pre-development," the black child servants of the Keller homestead. There are additional explicitly racist comments throughout her letters, but reasons why the producers of the *Miracle* texts erased or effaced such racism (and even recommitted such racist acts by attempting to erase or forget this history) are likely multiple and common arguments in mainstream public discourse. Perhaps the producers were afraid that such unabashed racism would "offend" their more "race sensitive" 1950s and 1960s audiences. Perhaps they thought that a "race issue" would detract or even damage the uplifting modern narrative of disability triumph. Whatever the case this appears to be an example of the excusing of the racism of "the past" -- as the past -- in order to both distance the present from this time and to excuse that past as ignorance and as a pre-developmental stage of a cherished and just American nation that excuses the racism of the present for an idealized future. It is as if pretending racism or heterosexism does not exist will make it not exist in the future.

The incongruities between the Child figure and children, and children who are not children are extreme if the discursive is forced to be made distinct from any material "real." But even if that distinction is to be made the figurative itself has very obviously real effects. The story of the early life of Helen Keller is set in a post-Civil war rural U.S. South. The Keller homestead employs numerous black servants. And yet nowhere in these stories is there a discussion of race. At times the plantation may not even be provided as the backdrop to the setting. If Percy were afforded the status of the child he would "exist" only to juxtapose Helen Keller. This is not to dismiss the difficult childhood struggles of Keller or to simply highlight how Percy was not even afforded a childhood. This is not to proclaim that one racialized "child" had it worse than another disabled child. Both "children" have been prescribed to reify a social order that would disavow them both: Keller reaffirms the immanence of modern and mature subjectivity by overcoming disability (a disabled "condition" of being is deemed inferior in the process), while Percy reaffirms the dire alternative, disabled being through blackness.

This narrative of modern subject formation does not require the empirical presence of the racialized subject. Racism, disable-ism, and heterosexism are of structural necessity for this modern child development narrative. It is for this very reason that it is possible and that I do in fact turn toward a text perhaps not intended expressly for children even though this journal edition would concern "texts for kids." Arthur Penn's film *The Miracle Worker* (1962) is perhaps "too hardcore" for the assumed "normal" and supposed innocent child with its intense dramatic acting and scenes of prolonged physical distress and violence in the excusable modernist demand for discipline. I turn toward this particular narrative of Helen Keller's triumph (although I do not limit myself to this narrative) because of how it would more explicitly depict the mode of racism, heterosexism, and disable-ism that is ubiquitous to all narratives regarding Helen Keller's developmental accomplishments, typical to most all of the popular child-directed texts.

In the introduction of her book, *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives*, Judith Halberstam writes that, "in Western cultures, we chart the emergence of the adult from the dangerous and unruly period of adolescence as a desired process of maturation; and we create longevity as the most desirable future, applaud the pursuit of long life (under any circumstance), and pathologize modes of living that show little or no concern for longevity" (4). This process of maturation that Halberstam describes is based upon what she terms "reproductive temporality," something that many people consider both natural and desirable (4-5). What I am taking from Halberstam is the idea that reproductive temporality grounds particular notions of living, life, and the human, into an inner-sustaining logic that maintains heterosexuality, racism, and disable-ism as the basis of living. Reproductive temporality is decidedly racist and disable-ist in that the human subject's maturity depends upon the condition of a dangerous and unruly period not just made distinct from a particular fantasy figure of an unruly or unfit child, but one inflected, if not constituted through the figure of the childlike savage that emerges through colonialism. Racism, disable-ism and heterosexuality as they are configured through reproductive time are mutually constitutive. Perhaps notions of the child and projects of colonialism have been "born" in and through one another. This might also be to propose that the child and colonialism will even, at times, coalesce—without distinction.

In *Race and the Education of Desire: Foucault's History of Sexuality and the Colonial Order of Things* Ann Laura Stoler questions and expands Foucault's genealogy of the nineteenth-century European bourgeois self by turning toward the prevalent discourse on race and colonialism in the period. In her chapter entitled "Domestic Subversions and Children's Sexuality" Stoler focuses on debates concerning domestic servants and nursemaids in relation to the European child by examining housekeeping manuals, childrearing guides, and pedagogic and medical texts. Stoler argues that these texts suggest that the surveillance of children's sexual desires is not auto-erotic (centered on themselves) as Foucault contends when he writes about the threat of the masturbating child, but pertains more toward their children's "savage"-like behaviors and desires. Stoler cites guidebooks that express concern over European children's development under the charge of racially Other servants and maids. Sexual desires, behaviors, and cultural cross-identifications are a central and worrying theme to be found in child-rearing guidebooks of the nineteenth century. Children's sexuality is understood as both dangerous and endangered but this very threat to the race and to the specific European child and family is not simply to be understood as a concern with cross-cultural socialization as if there are "these cultures" -- in the plural -- that are simply distinct and isolatable. Stoler writes that children "must be protected against exposure to the dangerous sexuality of the racial and class Other, not because their sexuality is so different, but because it is 'savage,' unrestrained, and very much the same" (141). Stoler describes this as a "discursive connection between the 'savage as child' and 'child as savage'" making it possible to consider how the racial Other and the bourgeois European child are mutually constitutive -- made into and sustaining what they are imagined as through each other -- and how sexuality itself, modern reproductive heterosexuality, is established through relations under colonialism (141). Like Stoler, in *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* Lee Edelman directs his attention toward the discursive deployment of the child. As briefly described earlier, Edelman focuses on the temporal dimensions of what he describes as the figure of the Child. For him, the Child incites an unquestionable futurity, a social order and a field of the political where all politics are only politics on the condition that the Child figures as its organizing principle, politics that work toward a future. Picturing a similar order to that expressed by Halberstam in her description of reproductive temporality, Edelman writes of what he describes as "reproductive futurism." He writes that the terms of reproductive futurism "impose an ideological limit on political discourse as such, preserving in the process the absolute privilege of heteronormativity by rendering unthinkable, by casting outside the political domain, the possibility of a queer resistance" (2). While Edelman describes a similar order to that of Halberstam in that heterosexuality is made natural, normative and timeless while queers are pathologized or politically neutralized, he diverges from Halberstam here in his contracted view of re-

sistance. For Edelman it seems that any resistance that intimates a future is one that capitulates to the Child and to heteronormativity. His is something of a more absolutist image of the social order. While defining the boundaries of what is queer may be a practice in itself that contradicts queer theory, one might question whether Edelman's picture of the political domain is a queer one as it appears to attempt to define such boundaries between what is queer resistance and what is not. Is a resistance that fantasizes a future never possibly queer? Is queerness always disengaged from reproduction? What if 'future' itself is reconceptualized, not to ground longevity and reproduction as heteronormative politics do, but possibly 'short-term' aspirations or even otherwise?

Despite these concerns, Edelman's figure of the Child is particularly useful for thinking through popular texts on childhood and child development. In *The Miracle Worker* film Keller's teacher Anne Sullivan describes a child's desire to know as an "immortal nature." Development is understood as both natural and progressive, an always future-oriented ontology, through the figure of the Child, no less the disabled child. The future is predestined through the very being of a child. The stories of Helen Keller taught in U.S. elementary schools also attest to this. These stories are not only to imply that, if a disabled student can succeed in education then so can the abled. The espoused truth is that this supposed "drive" to develop is synonymous with, part and parcel with, the unquestioned *fact* of growth, understood as something normal, natural and inherent to the human. Forget the "fact" that every human does not necessarily "grow" in the popular sense. Within every child is that drive. Disability is constituted as merely an obstacle as it is configured in this modern take on development, education and disability.

In their introductory chapter to *Curiouser: On the Queerness of Children*, editors Steven Bruhm and Natasha Hurley note how queer children's desire, desires that appear as insatiable, inextricable, or irrational, are only acceptable if made to pertain to a condition of innocence. In an analysis of Felipa, the queer child in Constance Fenimore Woolson's novel entitled *Felipa* (1876), Bruhm and Hurley write that her "queerness is assumed to be incompatible with her future, but it will be okay for it to be part of her past" (vxiii). The temporal is configured here to foreclose all except a heteronormative future by making the present a temporary and unknowing condition: Felipa's queerness "can be acknowledged in the present among adults only with the reassuring proviso that 'she does not know'" (xviii). The assumption of a heteronormative future, a "normal" destiny for children, is what drives Helen Keller's parents to seek disability specialists to begin with. For Keller, her pre-linguistic existence is refashioned in this present with an expectant and predestined future in mind. This queer pre-linguistic present *will be* made the past, dismissed as immaturity, and as pertaining to the dangerous and unruly though innocent condition of a pre-modern subjectivity. There are now important distinctions to be made here: there are three "child-types" to contend with in this modernist narrative of development. There are children in the popularly banal yet intensely political sense; these are "normal" children of promise that ironically cite a future social order of the status quo. It is ironic because the promise is couched on liberation -- "Oh, what the future will bring" -- even though the future is going to be the same, a future of more promising children. The second "type" is the pre-modern child. Here pre-modernity is configured more like a condition rather than a state. This is temporary. Sometimes all that is required is a little "help" in this child's track of development. Helen Keller is a prime example. Under the guidance, direction, and eventual submission to a wholly already modern subject, in this case urban feminist from the U.S. North, Anne Sullivan, Keller is provided the aid to conquer her pre-modern stumbling blocks of blindness and deafness to achieve that supreme state of modern and mature subjectivity. Arguments for imperialism and colonialism are espoused through similar logic making violence, which is colonialism, appear benevolent and humanitarian. Finally, there is the third "type," the child that is not one but is the primary subject of this paper. Stoler is concerned primarily with the dynamics between the modern child and its pre-modern threat, a closed dialectic that would constitute both the modern and pre-modern subject. That pre-modern subject would threaten to degenerate the European race if not tear down all of humanity in the process, a future gone bad. But the

child that is not one is also and always, if implicitly, summoned in any modernist narrative of development. The child that is not one figures the possibility of no future at all. The pre-modern child conjectures a dystopia, a deleterious future, but a future nonetheless. The child that is not one offers no future, period.

Keller is often discussed in terms of the extraordinary as well as the ordinary. Her childhood education, particularly her grasp of sign language, is often described as miraculous while her life and persistence on living and on learning have been made to serve as examples for many elementary school students in the U.S. for some time now. Keller has been made into an exemplary figure with her triumph over and beyond her disabilities of sight, hearing and speech on the one hand, while on the other, made into a figure just like any other; Keller is not meant to inspire so much as she is meant to depict what is natural and normal for the human child, an always ingrained desire and perseverance both for and of life. Indeed it is this very presumption that appears to have motivated her life-long teacher-companion Anne Sullivan to even attempt to teach her to begin with. Although Sullivan is portrayed regularly as an unyielding disciplinarian, her theories toward pedagogy seem based more upon guidance toward knowledge rather than inculcation, presuming an underlying fundamental desire in the child to simply know. Writing on pedagogy in one her many letters to Hopkins, Sullivan writes: "I am beginning to suspect all elaborate and special systems of education. They seem to me to be built up on the supposition that every child is a kind of idiot who must be taught to think ... [If] the child is left to himself, he will think more and better ... instead of sitting indoors at a little round table, while a sweet-voiced teacher suggests that he build a stone wall with his wooden blocks, or make a rainbow out of strips of coloured paper" (Keller 233). The subtext of Sullivan's biting "monologue" is that the desire to know is innate on the scale of an "immortal nature" to use her character's terms (Penn). Through the child, a figure in itself meant to signify the fundamentals of what is naturally human-to-begin-with Sullivan reasserts a theory of an always inbuilt and persistent desire to develop, to strive toward the future. Children will naturally develop and develop into mature and reproducible subjects irrespective of the guidance of the already modern and knowing adult. Maturity is inevitable. An insistence upon a "natural" classroom environment (apparently outdoors) as opposed to the "prefabricated" schoolhouse only reinforces the absoluteness of nature and reproductive futurism.

Although not explicitly hailed as such, Sullivan's seemingly abrasive yet witty critique of popular education methods provides her the mark of a feminist given the particular socio-historical contexts, if not at the least, a kind of modern U.S. urban femininity. Sullivan's performance of gender contrasts greatly to the overly sentimental mothering of Mrs. Keller in both the playscript and the film, *The Miracle Worker*. In her chapter entitled "Redefining Disability and Sentimentality: *The Miracle Worker*" Mary Klages finds that Sullivan and Mrs. Keller embody a distinct historical shift in the attitude towards disability: Mrs. Keller represents the Victorian sentimental version urging pity for the "afflicted" to the point where mothering takes the form of smothering, whereas the "modern" attitude insists that disability is something correctable and/or transcendable, merely an obstacle to normative development (197-98). In either version, this -- today -- modern take on both sentimental and modern approaches to disability rely upon a naturally developmentally inclined ontological subject as the basis of human 'being,' and embodied by the child. No doubt, additional mutually constitutive dynamics of place and time also contribute to this dichotomy of motherly-inclined femininities, one modern and one outmoded, through the highlighted tensions between the rural and the urban, and the South and North in depicting the mid-1880s. Sullivan is associated with the modern and advanced post-civil war urban space of Boston while the Keller homestead (plantation) is set in the backward "pre-civil war" space of a rural Tuscumbia, Alabama, complete with black fieldworkers and domestic servants. Even though the civil war and Emancipation has past, the South is slow to progress and to modernize to the degree already achieved in the North. Such distinctions are even voiced by the "disadvantaged" subjects in this overarching time/space dichotomy. Speaking at Sullivan, Captain Keller, the father of Helen, claims to have tolerated the unconventional antics of Sullivan if only because, he proclaims, "you

come from a part of the country where people -- women, I should say -- come from, for whom -- allowances must be made" (Penn). Gender, sexuality, and physical age are the only elements that occasionally disrupt this modern versus antiquated, urban versus rural narrative with Captain Keller, the propertied and married with children hetero-male confronting the single and un-rooted "Miss" Sullivan. In this story, however, Captain Keller is made more as an obstacle to be overcome in the modernity process, a disability not unlike his child's blindness and deafness. Also complicit in this dichotomy are the dynamics of mobility and travel. Anne Sullivan, the modern feminist subject, travels by train into the temporally stunted South to teach the increasingly volatile and pre-conscious "creature" that is Helen Keller. Whereas Keller cannot escape the immobilities of the South, Sullivan is able to travel to her. Managing to teach Keller not only in spite of her disabilities but in the face of the pronounced defunct backwardness of the South is yet another reason why Sullivan is described as "The Miracle Worker."

Although the South is outmoded, the apparent root cause of debilitating, or disabling, backwardness is the contamination of the Southern family itself. The role of Anne Sullivan, the modern outsider, establishes a firmer break between whiteness and blackness in the interests of the child Helen Keller. Playing is no longer allowed between Keller and "the little darkies" (Keller, 229) and it is Sullivan who now sleeps with Helen rather than the nurse, "a stupid, lazy negress," recommended by Mrs. Keller (Keller 230). This modern, post-Civil war critique of the South is not a critique of racism but a reconfiguration of it. Slavery, it seems, demanded intimate cross-race and cross-cultural relations in the Southern home. Modern post-slavery rhetoric stresses a more definitive separation that the modern North had always already achieved. Percy, near the same age as Keller, figures the "darkness" and developmental nothingness from which the child Keller must be distinct. In all of the three Keller texts all of Percy's actions are conditioned through force, through servitude. Percy would otherwise sleep, that desire for nothing, that lack of desire and motivation, period. This modern narrative of disability, one that Klages distinguishes from the Victorian American sentimental version, is ultimately an account that depends upon a particular U.S. version of racism, disable-ism, and that heteronormative future.

Some might describe Percy as a mere foil or tool in something of an "educational moment"; a short scene among many otherwise more significant ones. But it is through this moment that the model of Keller's development is made most transparent. In this scene Anne Sullivan requires the physicality of Percy who functions not just as the tactile instrument between teacher and pupil but as the model of existence that Keller can absolutely not be. At best Percy occupies only ten minutes of marginal screen time in the entire film, but this scene is perhaps the only most explicit moment available for outlining the modern narrative of development and maturation. The setting is an isolated garden house on the Keller property and the time is past midnight. The site of sentimental (s)mothering, Sullivan considered it necessary to remove Helen from the main house to these garden quarters in order to make any kind of developmental progress. The main room is shared by Sullivan and Helen while the back room, only perceptible by a door, is Percy's temporary sleeping quarters. A direct challenge motivates Sullivan. Keller's older half-brother, James, has just told her to give up in her efforts in teaching his sister. In Victorian sentimental tradition he insists, "Have some pity on her for being what she is." His testament and this tradition makes disability disabling. Having already overcome her own disabilities of class and partial blindness, with outrage Sullivan exclaims, "If I ever once thought like that, I'd be dead." Shutting James out she continues, "No. No pity. I won't have it on either of us." Though Sullivan's modern take on disability refuses victimization this stance also correlates an absence of a desire for progress and the inability to develop with death. Had Sullivan accepted pity, had she not strived for something better, she would be dead -- without future, without current presence. Sullivan is not only a purveyor of modernity but her own very present presence as a formerly pre-modern (disabled) subject makes modernity incontestable. That present presence of 'being' affirms the absolute immanence of modern life.

From the start of the scene Keller will have nothing to do Sullivan; she recoils or strikes out at every touch because unlike Mrs. Keller, Sullivan does not tolerate "improper" behavior. Sullivan is a strict disciplinarian and discipline, it seems, is required before progress is at all possible. The principle of order effects the organization of the present. Discipline is demanded, not solely due to the threat of a reprimand, but to control the direction of a future. Throughout the film Sullivan teaches Keller that if she is to sign a certain word, like "cake", afterwards, she will receive it. In the play's script Sullivan is found composing a letter and she writes, "The more I think the more certain I am that obedience is the gateway through which knowledge enters the mind of the child" (217). Predicated on obedience, this means that "knowledge" is knowing the possibility of the future, something always held out and beyond. Percy is obedient but his is an obedience of another kind. The obedience expected of and performed by Percy is that expected in servitude, that of rote obedience, of merely doing what one is told; compliance in the absence of desire. The promising obedience expected of Keller on the other hand, is introspective as she is figured through the Child and even relating to accumulation: "If I do this, then I will get that." This is a civil and civilizing obedience of the self and for the development and procurement of the self. The possible slippage between these two forms of obedience is potentially devastating. Prior to social language, like Percy, the desires of Keller centered on the immediate. If Keller wanted food she would simply take it in her hands from anyone's plate. If Percy wanted sleep, he would sleep unless compelled otherwise. The desires of the immediate disregard obedience, fail to grasp knowledge and subsequently pertain to no future.

Sullivan is compelled to draw upon this slippage in the hopes of eventually securing the distinction between modern and never-modern being, between the child and the child that is not one. When Keller rejects her touch, Sullivan concocts a plan. She is so modern as to provide the viewer with a hint of what will happen when she proclaims, "I will touch you!" and then questions, "but how?" That future to come becomes clear through her expression just prior to disrupting Percy. It is clear that she has a plan and structures the environment to make it happen. Sullivan turns on the light and wakes Percy from his sleep. Wearily, he comes to Sullivan only to be handled like a puppet. She forces his hand upon Keller's. Failing to recognize his touch she scrambles to the other side of the bed. Half pushing, half carrying Percy, Sullivan forces him around the bed. Upon recognizing Percy, Keller squeezes him, near strangling and tackles him to the floor as she appears happy to have her familiar "companion." Taking then, this line of contact and communication through Percy, Sullivan asks him if he wants to play a game. His response is "no" but she forces her own and his hand together anyway to play sign language games with the intent to peak Keller's immediate interests and jealousy. At this point Sullivan, Keller, Percy and the viewer's perspective are all on the floor, the veritable base of existence. Then in a particularly evocative moment Keller's hand moves from Percy's left shoulder to his far right hand that is in contact with Sullivan's. Traveling across the temporally void, Keller reaches Sullivan. This is when her pre-modernity is most acute. As a child, she has within her the requisites for modern subjectivity. Keller clearly desires something beyond the immediate. In the future these immediate desires will be reconstituted, not as immediate desires, but as desirings for something more. Her fits and tantrums will be construed as frustrations of a pre-modern subject, not the incoherentness of the never-modern. When Keller attempts to join in Sullivan immediately throws her hand aside; but this was her plan. Enraged, Keller pushes and hits at Percy until he is against the wall. And finally, content with her attention, Sullivan excuses Percy, touches his knee as he has fallen asleep against the wall and excuses him, "You could go to bed now." And then, patronizingly, "You've earned your sleep."

While Keller's temporal present is made into that expectant modern and mature future proffered by the child, Percy exists without future. His being is that of rote obedience and instant gratifications, submission to the self without reflection and toward the most immediate and base desires. He is not a child like Keller is. He is used, not as the ground, but as the distinction through which Keller achieves modern subjectivity. A child that is not one, he is thrown by the normative child against the wall, ex-

cused to sleep, and thanked for his forced obedience. Interestingly, however, Percy is not always portrayed as this child that is not one. In Sullivan's letters she describes the event otherwise: "Yesterday I had the little negro boy come in when Helen was having her lesson, and learn the letters, too. This pleased her very much and stimulated her ambition to excel Percy. She was delighted if he made a mistake, and made him form the letter over several times. When he succeeded in forming it to suit her, she patted him on his woolly head so vigorously that I thought some of his slips were intentional" (Keller 227). Sullivan's narrative provides Percy the "child-type" of the pre-modern to parallel Keller's pre-modernity if only to juxtapose him. But I do not offer this divergent narrative to suggest that the "older" version might somehow be more progressive than the later reproduction, as if the consignment of pre-modernity is preferable to a non-modernity or to simply challenge the notion that, "with time" it will all get better. The model of modernity in how it would construe time, fix and temporalize race and ability, while consigning this to "nature" synonymous with reproduction which will only be allowed to be conceived as heterosexual, is in itself entirely the problem. This is what "life" is and what Edelman's Child effects by making certain ontological subjects ontological and as the basis of the metaphysical order. In any narrative of Keller's triumph the figures of the child, the pre-modern child, and the never-modern child, the child that is not one, are always conjured to effect the very possibilities of triumph, near triumph, and to disavow the never-attemptable. In those encouraging if only explicitly "partial" narratives for children that forget Percy, his presence as the child that is not one is always cited as the dire possibility of going nowhere and no-when.

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