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The Ultrasound and the Fetus—A Scary Article in *Newsweek*

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“Visit the household of any expectant parent, and you are likely to see a printout of a sonogram on the fridge. You may even be offered the chance to watch a live-action video of a three-dimensional fetus, the newest ultrasound option,” reflects Gayle Kirshenbaum, writing in the “[My Turn](#)” column of this week’s edition of *Newsweek*. But, Kirshenbaum’s article is not sentimental in the least. To the contrary, when she saw her baby on the screen, she didn’t feel “maternal” at all. She described the image of the fetus as “suggestive of the human,” but with “its oversize head and flipperlike appendages,” it looked “closer to the amphibious.” Later, she described the baby’s image as “a squidlike creature.”

Kirshenbaum argues that the developing baby is “caught in the act of becoming” through the imaging technology. Here’s a truly worrisome passage: “While this astonishing technology provides invaluable medical information, reassurance and joy to many pregnant women, it has the capacity to alter our experience of ourselves. When our sonograms are called ‘Baby’s first picture,’ the turbulent dream that is pregnancy begins to fade. We strive to feel as clear as the high-resolution image on the screen. When my prenatal-yoga teacher asked the women in the class to ‘send messages of love to your babies,’ I dutifully conjured my latest sonogram image. But the message immediately bounced back: there is no one here by that name. Only the other words—zygote, blastocyst, fetus, terms appropriately cosmic and necessarily clinical—approximated my deepest sense of the precarious and still-mysterious reality of gestation.” Good morning, Comrade Blastocyst.

No surprise by this point, Kirshenbaum was “in a state of ambivalence about my impending motherhood.” Her language reflects more than ambivalence: “When I’d first heard what turned out to be my son’s heartbeat on the monitor, I wasn’t convinced of the inevitability of his birth; what I heard was a new, anonymous heart testing itself—and me—demanding to know whether I had the will and means to sustain it through a lifetime.” Here we face what Barbara Katz Rothman calls the “tentative pregnancy.” A mother might decide to continue a pregnancy if she feels like a mother, but abort if she doesn’t feel sufficiently maternal. Gayle Kirshenbaum’s “[My Turn](#)” column is a tragic portrait of motherhood.

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