



Telling Bodies Performing Birth

Della Pollock

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Birth stories, Della Pollock tells us, "are everywhere and nowhere," permeating and haunting our everyday lives. In this remarkable volume Pollock explores the myriad ways in which men and women recount the ritual performance of giving birth.

Many of these stories, Pollock observes, rise out of the depths of terror, flirting with disaster only to end with a profound sense of relief at what medical discourse calls a "good outcome." Others represent pain, make counterclaims on reproductive technologies, and suggest complex associations between maternity, sexuality, and body politics in the contemporary United States. Pollock retells stories about some of the injustices that structure giving and telling birth—finding there a reckoning with the unknown and unknowable.

Focusing on the performances of birth stories, Pollock writes an intimate ethnography: an account of listening "body to body" to stories that press the borders of cultural critique with virtuosity, possibility, desire, and risk. She draws on cultural criticism, performance studies, and narrative theory to unpack this long-ignored practice. Most striking, however, are the stories presented here: unsanctioned, bold, fragmentary, and often furtive, they both unnerve and inspire even as they realize and resist cultural norms.

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