

**EDITOR'S PICK**

Skirt Full of Black, Sun Yung Shin (Coffee House): In Shin's glaringly alive first book of poems, the politics of transnational adoption and the ethics of language intersect. Poems like "Immigrant Song" explore a keen awareness of language's material nature: "From land over sea / It's a hard lyric ... Keep camping / Plant the flag / Bury the burial mound / Put the pop in popular / And the sigh in science." Elsewhere, Shin intersperses clinical-sounding statistics about the adoption of Koreans by U.S. families—"a full-fledged 'demand' / for adopted children has continued to rise in the industrialized world, fertility has fallen." The book ends with "Vestibular," a 25-page transformation of the Korean Hangul alphabet. Shin, a Minneapolis-based teacher and activist, has created some of most stunning new poetry to come out this year. (coffeehousepress.org)

— Julia Bloch

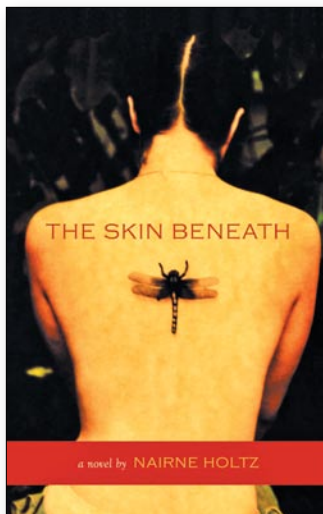
Death to Conception

We offer up unplanned death and planned birth. | **By Rachel Pepper**

From the mysterious death of a sister in a novel noir to the mysteries of conception explained in two new works, this month's picks span the spectrum of nonfiction. So whether you're looking for a novel to curl up with on a crisp winter night or prefer to read about the fascinating new world of assisted reproductive technology, these are the books for you.

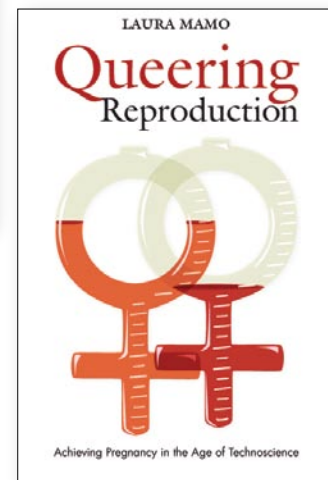
The Skin Beneath, Nairne Holtz (Insomniac Press)

Canadian author and editor Nairne Holtz delivers an atmospheric debut novel. The story, told retrospectively about the relationship between two sisters, Chloe and Sam, reaches back in time to discover the truth behind Chloe's death. Sam, a capable and somewhat boi-leaning 20-something dyke, puzzles over an anonymous postcard that arrives five years after her older sister supposedly died of a drug overdose in a New York City hotel. Sam moves to Montreal to retrace her sister's last year, meeting some shady characters along the way, and enters into a relationship with her sister's old roommate. Eventually, Sam does find the truth, but that turns out to feel much like an afterthought. Instead, the strengths of this mystery really lie in its smoky atmosphere and well-drawn scenes and characters. There's the restaurant where Sam ends up working in Montreal, the parties she attends, the nightclubs where her girlfriend works as a stripper. And the players themselves: Sam's gay father and his much younger lover, Steven; conspiracy theorist Francis; Sam's volatile new femme girlfriend, Romey; Omar, Chloe's mysterious ex-boyfriend; and Chloe herself, revealed only by association now, through the distant memories of those who knew her. Finally, there's Sam: tattooed, tall, slightly butch, emotionally detached but determined to find the answers, even if it puts her right in harm's way. So many lesbian mysteries are devoid of any detail, floating along on the merest shreds of evidence, with no meaty characters to care about. Enjoy *The Skin Beneath* for its depth and breadth and its long slow pull toward the finish line. (insomniacpress.com)



Everything Conceivable, Liza Mundy (Knopf) and Queering Reproduction, Laura Mamo (Duke University Press)

First came the how-to books for hopeful lesbian moms. Having written one of those, I know a bit about the topic. The next wave of books promoted the use of assisted reproductive technologies to achieve pregnancy, at any price. And now, riding the crest of that wave, come the books examining the ones that came before and critiquing the often unbelievable efforts of women who will stop at nothing to have a baby. Liz Mundy, a reporter for the *Washington Post Magazine*, strives high with *Everything Conceivable*. She introduces complicated legal and familial settings whereby people at last achieve a biological child—whether by surrogacy, egg transfer, sperm donorship by gay dads, single moms or lesbians. In fact, there are entire chapters on lesbian mothers and single moms (though not much overlap, unfortunately, for us single lesbian moms out there). Extensive research on the explosion in multiple births exposes the dangers to parents' finances as well as their mental and physical health. Mundy also tracks how the pro-life movement has actually contributed to the rise in super multiples and how families are bearing the brunt of this. There is a lot of queer inclusion here,



from profiles of gay dads to research on the identity-release sperm banks that women initiated, to an interview with past *CURVE* editor Gretchen Lee about the conception and birth of her daughter Rose. Mundy's tone is mostly upbeat, even while she describes the agonizing choices that parents-to-be and doctors must make on the path toward creating a healthy child, or decid-

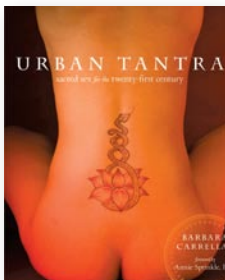
ing what to do with the rising glut of leftover embryos.

Queering Reproduction, by Laura Mamo, an assistant sociology professor at the University of Maryland, is a less enjoyable tome. Although well researched, it reads very much like a scholarly paper by a non-mother and thus may turn off some hopeful lesbian moms just looking for a good read on the topic. Still, (although a few important facts, like the popularity of the pregnancy books cited, seem wrong or extremely out of date) Mamo has done most of her homework well and works her way through topics such as selecting a sperm donor and what she calls technosperm, self-insemination, the biomedicine of assisted reproductive technologies, and the tensions between lesbian motherhood as both a mainstream and revolutionary activity. (dukeupress.edu)

PAGE TURNERS

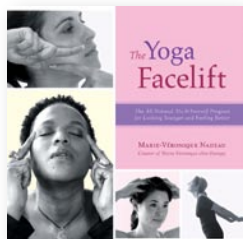


Longing, Lust and Love, Ed. Shonia L. Brown (Nghosi) Brown gets it just right with *Longing, Lust and Love*, a new collection of erotic tales by African American queer women from all over the country. *Longing's* authors range in experience; however, none of the women are the big names you might find in a mainstream anthology of lesbian smut, and the new voices are mostly refreshing. The book is divided into three sections, which compose the anthology's title, each beginning with a poem. In "Phase 1: Longing," women share stories of first encounters and unfulfilled wishes. In "Phase 2: Lust," one story tells of hot lesbian escorts working in New York City. Lastly, "Phase 3: Love" is full of real-deal, "let's-snuggle-by-the-fireplace-and-ignore-all-our-friends" stories, some dirtier than others. Though some of the stories are unpolished and amateur, the authors abound with spirit, sincerity and raw passion. Brown gives space and attention to voices that are never loud enough. (nghosi.com) — Catherine Plato

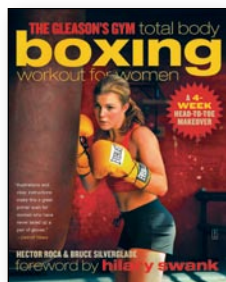


Urban Tantra, Barbara Carrellas (Ten Speed): Barbara Carrellas brings her experience as a queer urban sex worker and her lessons in Tantra together in *Urban Tantra*. Carrellas, who was dissatisfied with white, middle-class, New Age Tantra workshops, has carved out her own lessons on how to have passionate, spiritual sex. She outlines the basics of Tantra and explains how she has adapted it to

her own life. She covers the spectrum of sexuality, from mild to wild, and explains how her readers can find their own sexuality. (tenspeed.com) — Katie Peoples



The Yoga Facelift: The All-Natural, Do-It-Yourself Program for Looking Younger and Feeling Better, Marie-Veronique Nadeau (Conari): Finally, yoga for lazy people! Actually, that's not too far from the truth. *Yoga Facelift* does promote relaxation over exertion as a way of fighting sagging and wrinkling through the years. Her method of stretching and working out the facial muscles follows the same logic as exercise: work it out or it sags. There are general exercises as well as ones meant to target trouble spots like the eyes. And hey, it's cheaper than Botox. (conari.com) — KP



Gleason's Gym Total Body Boxing Workout for Women, Hector Roca and Bruce Silverglade (Fireside): After weeks spent training at Gleason's Gym for *Million Dollar Baby*, Hilary Swank came out looking fierce. She was so inspired by her transformation that she agreed to write the foreword to *Gleason's Gym*. In this new, user-friendly guide, boxing experts Roca and Silverglade show you how to swing by following their illustrated workout and nutritional training plan. Beginners will have no problem picking up the moves, while more experienced boxers benefit from specific tips. (simonsays.com) — Sarah E. Brown

War—What Is It Good For?

Exit strategy what? Whether you're sick of the never-ending "war on terror" or just sick of the longstanding order not to ask or tell, this reading list will increase your own military intelligence. — CP

One of the Guys: Women as Aggressors and Torturers, Ed. Tara McKelvey (Seal Press): Though we usually think of women as the victims of abuse and violence, when photos of the Abu Ghraib prison-abuse scandal surfaced in 2004, one of the most shocking was of then 21-year-old Lynndie England, holding a male prisoner by a dog leash. This collection of essays, including work by Eve Ensler and Angela Davis, uses the Abu Ghraib scandal as a jumping-off point for a discussion of women's involvement in abuse and torture. (sealpress.com)

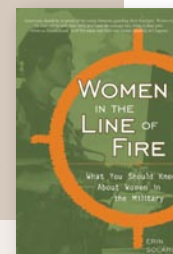


Ask and Tell: Gay and Lesbian Veterans Speak Out, Steve Estes (University of North Carolina Press): Estes interviews gay and lesbian veterans from World War II through Iraq, tracing the recent history of U.S. military service leading up to our current policy. This essential oral history collection tells the stories we were never meant to hear and ultimately calls for an end to one of America's bastions of homophobia. (unc.edu)



Hope in the Dark: Untold Histories, Wild Possibilities, Rebecca Solnit (Nation Books): It's easy to feel powerless when it comes to world politics, but Solnit defends optimism and the power of the individual in this slightly disorganized, ultimately inspiring celebration of activism. (nationbooks.org)

Women in the Line of Fire: What You Should Know About Women in the Military, Erin Solaro (Seal Press): Though women have traditionally served an invaluable role as auxiliaries or *in extremis* temporary combatants, the U.S. has resisted giving military women the same status and responsibility it gives to their male colleagues. In 2004 and 2005, journalist and former army reserve lieutenant Solaro traveled to Iraq and Afghanistan to find women actually fighting and doing so successfully. She deconstructs traditional arguments against women's full participation in battle and calls for an end to one of the last formal barriers to our equality as citizens. (sealpress.com)



Baghdad Burning II: More Girl Blog from Iraq, Riverbend (Feminist Press): In 2005, a 20-something middle-class Iraqi woman, known by her screen name Riverbend, published her blog posts on life in her wartorn country as *Baghdad Burning*. This sequel picks up in October 2004, just before Bush's re-election, and begins with an open letter to Americans warning them about Dubya's potential to worsen life for Iraqis as well as his own citizens. It continues to outline the struggles of Iraqi civilians, particularly young women grappling with an increasingly fundamentalist government. (feministpress.org)