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**"Then *look!*" Un-born Attachments and the Half-
Moving Image**

Andrew Asibong, Ph.D.

Birkbeck, University of London

Address for correspondence

Department of Film, Media and Cultural Studies,
Birkbeck, University of London,
43, Gordon Square,
London WC1H 0PD

a.asibong@bbk.ac.uk

"Then look!" Un-born Attachments and the Half-Moving Image

Abstract

This article explores the emotional impact on the viewer of disturbing and disorienting images of infant-caregiver relationality in four "melo-horror" films: *Imitation of Life* (1934), *Imitation of Life* (1959), *The Brood* (1979) and *Beloved* (1998). Comparing some of these filmic images to the infant performances of "disorganized" attachment styles captured on videotape by attachment researchers such as Mary Main, the author argues that the filmed audio-visual enactment of relational trauma, whether in the context of scientific research or cinematic art, offers the spectator an opportunity to work consciously and unconsciously with representations of unbearable psychic and psycho-social experience - both her own and that of others - which may hitherto have been thought unrepresentable, or simply not thought at all.

Keywords

Film studies, melodrama, horror, attachment theory,
infant-caregiver relations, spectatorship, trauma

I raised the camera, pretended to study a focus which did not include
them, and waited and watched closely, sure that I would finally catch
the revealing expression, one that would sum it all up, life that is
rhythmed by movement but which a stiff image destroys, taking time in
cross-section, if we do not choose the essential, imperceptible
fraction of it.

- Julio Cortázar, "Blow-Up"/"The Devil's Drool"

Why couldn't they see it? It still puzzles me.

- Frances Farmer, "God dies"

I.

They say that on the day of Melanie Klein's funeral in
1960, Klein's long-estranged daughter, Melitta
Schmideberg, based in New York since 1945 but back in
England hard upon her mother's death, did not attend the
cremation in north London, but instead opted to give a

lecture elsewhere in the capital. That day, it is reported, Schmideberg wore a pair of "flamboyant red boots" (Grosskurth, 1986, p. 461). The image of the unreconciled (and already obscure) psychoanalyst-daughter lecturing in her "special pair of red boots" (Young, 2000) as her famous former analyst-mother's body burned a few miles away has always split me in at least two parts: yanked in one direction by the almost comedic aspects of its sheer incongruity, I am pulled in quite another by the painful familial disintegration of which it so crazily speaks. In the context of this essay on cinema, Schmideberg's red boots link in my projecting mind to analogous images from a particular kind of fantastically family-focused cinema and, like those filmic images, play an important part in my evolving internal representation of relational catastrophe.¹ This article is concerned

¹ I think of Judy Garland's ruby slippers and their spectacular intervention in her dangerous family romance in *The Wizard of Oz* (1939); Moira Shearer, psychotically dancing her way out of relationality in the demented *Red Shoes* (1948); and Piper Laurie in de Palma's *Carrie* (1976), gasping in horror at the sight of her rebellious daughter's (pale pink) prom dress: "Red! I might have known it would be red!" Then there is James Dean's bright red jacket in Nicholas Ray's 1955 melodrama *Rebel without a Cause*, its anti-parental redness echoed in the nearly-sacrificed son's jacket in

with the capacity of a certain kind of moving image to reflect aspects of the unprocessed affect of irreparably traumatized attachments. I shall be examining the function of images that have imprinted themselves on my psyche in the course of my 20-year relationship with some outlandish variants of North American family film melodrama. Schmideberg's vividly recalled footwear on that day in 1960 seems to me to march straight out of a world of "melo-horror", an icon of relational breakdown at the heart of the very parent-child dyad that generated, via Klein's simultaneous blindness and insight, some of psychoanalysis's most inspiring and deranged formulations.² I want to argue that one of the

Ray's *Bigger than Life* (1956) and in the dead daughter's - and the murderous dwarf's - cloak in Roeg's aptly-titled *Don't Look Now* (1973).

² Witnesses of Schmideberg's public ravaging of her mother during the first phase of the so-called "controversial discussions" with Anna Freud in London in the early 1940s are divided into those (encouraged by Schmideberg's analyst Edward Glover) who criticized Klein as an unscrupulous mother and analyst, those (mainly from Klein's group) who viewed Schmideberg as either "a devil" or "ill", and those who preferred to avert their eyes from the embarrassingly "un-English" spectacle (see Roazen, 2000, pp. 52-60; Kristeva, 2001, pp. 204-207; Grosskurth, 1986, pp. 281-333). The disturbing sight of whatever it was that had gone so terribly wrong between mother and daughter was

key - and hitherto little-discussed - functions of cinematic "melo-horror" is to capture on camera precisely such forms of ungraspably traumatized kinship.

Inspired by a recent article by Robbie Duschinsky (2015) on the implications for film and media studies of attachment theory post-Bowlby, I have been moved to play with Duschinsky's innovative marriage of object-related enquiry and analysis of the the moving image.

Duschinsky's piece forms part of a recent movement in film studies away from Lacan/"Screen Theory", considering the film viewer's experience in the context of play, emotion, obsession, relationality, internal metamorphosis and transitional phenomena (cf. Cartwright, 2008, Lebeau, 2009 and Kuhn, 2013). In his article, Duschinsky explores not only the conservative but also the potentially radical use we can make of audio-visual information gleaned from the video recordings of infants and their caregivers that were created in the attempt to extend and

mercifully taken off-stage come 1945, but the image of those returning red boots carries the visual trace of an anti-relationality that begged to remain hidden. For a direct flavour of Schimberg's extraordinary critique of Klein during the controversial discussions themselves, see King and Steiner, 1991, e.g. pp. 92-99.

develop Bowlby's early concepts of human attachment.³

When Mary Ainsworth carried out her series of experiments that have come to be known as the "strange situation", she inaugurated a sustained meditation on the implications of really *looking* at the filmed images of children's sometimes bewildering responses to their returning caregiver.

Ainsworth's analysis of these infants' filmed demonstrations of indifference, relief or tearful resentment upon reunion with the parent or equivalent led to her establishment of the first three categories of "attachment style": (a) insecure-avoidant, (b) secure and (c) insecure-ambivalent.⁴ In observing the recorded gestures of infants vis-à-vis their primary objects, Ainsworth was able to translate fragments of a parent-child relationship that hitherto had remained mysterious and un-systematized into clear and communicable concepts. The videotaped "strange situation" staged a two-tiered relay of psycho-visual communication: allowing un-

³ It strikes me now that Bowlby, as Klein's dissenting supervisee and Joan Rivière's ex-patient, could be considered, along with Melitta Schmideberg, as another rebellious analyst "baby".

⁴ For a good account of the "strange situation" and Ainsworth's findings, see Wallin, 2007, pp. 15-24.

symbolized relationality to be transformed into observable *gesture* (by the demonstrating child), that observable gesture could later be transformed into *meaning* (by the theorizing researcher). When Ainsworth's former doctoral student Mary Main added her own fourth category of "disorganized-disoriented" to Ainsworth's already established three attachment styles, she pushed the researcher-spectator's imperative to really *look* further still.⁵ Associated with severe trauma, with the caregiver's failure to mourn their own lost objects, with neglect and/or abuse in the home, and evocative of a caregiver who is experienced by the infant as either "frightened" or "frightening", the filmed infants eventually placed by Main into this final, controversial category rendered alarmingly audible and visible "a contradiction between the attachment system and another

⁵ For a thorough overview of Main's remarkable contribution, see Wallin, 2007, pp. 25-43. Main and Solomon (1990) remind us of the fundamental necessity of adequate *vision* when scrutinizing images for evidence of attachment styles: "If the film is of poor quality [...] it is unlikely that D [disorganized-disoriented] scoring will be accurate [...] The observation and recording of D behavior can only be made in conjunction with repeated, slow-motion study of the film" (p. 147). This reminder is central to Duschinsky's (2015) analysis.

behavioural tendency" (Duschinsky, 2015), performing oddly anomalous gestures and sounds:

Directly upon sighting (or even hearing) the approach of the parent, some infants exhibited confusion. We observed one infant hunch her upper body and shoulders at hearing her mother's call, then break into extravagant laugh-like screeches with an excited forward movement. Her braying laughter became a cry and distress-face without a new intake of breath as she hunched further forward. Then, suddenly, her face lost all expression (Main and Solomon, 1990, p. 146).

Disorganized-disoriented attachment styles are characterized by the infant's often unreadable audio-visual displays of something that is, relationally-speaking, out of joint; an energy - I am tempted to call it anti-energy - that seems to be flowing, or jerking, in almost otherworldly directions.⁶ The signs of disorganized-disoriented attachment are, above all, the visual communication (freezing, barking, falling) of a fantastically chaotic relationality. Main elaborates (Duschinsky, 2015) on the sheer disorder - captured by the powerful eye of the camera - of the physiognomic

⁶ Main and Hesse (1990) write of "movements of approach which have a slow, limp, 'underwater' quality" (p. 173) and of unusual vocal patterns with "an ominous, or 'haunted' tone or effect" (p. 175).

manifestations of infants she and her colleagues found themselves scrutinizing and struggling to interpret:

[F]or about three seconds one side of the child's mouth turns upwards to form a smile while the other side turns down in a grimace or frown. Try doing it. It's neurologically anomalous. I can't do it. It suggests simultaneous activation of conflicting behavioral systems and without slow motion we would not have caught it.

I am fascinated by the "strange situation" videotapes for the way in which they might also be viewed, from a non-scientific perspective, as the distant cousins of more widely-seen forms of filmed relationality: cinematic melodrama and cinematic horror. Blank, freezing or inconceivably splitting children appear on screen; something uncontainable gets performed by them before the camera's gaze; and something emotionally real is glimpsed, felt and, perhaps, converted into meaning by the one who really *looks*. The three or four moving pictures I propose to discuss in what remains of this article are, for me, important examples of an uncanny, uncategorizable, disorganized, disoriented and disorienting hybrid cinematic genre I call "melo-horror". In their fantastically visual

externalizations of traumatically internalized relationships, these films have demanded of me over the years that I look at them again and again, while at the same time confronting me with images of such remarkable disjunction that they feel often unbearable to witness. *The Brood* (1979), *Beloved* (1998) and the 1934 and 1959 versions of *Imitation of Life* have propelled me towards new forms of knowledge about film, its depictions of disturbed kinship, and my own uncanny relation to its representations of what I would call *disorganized revelation*. At the heart of all of these films are the horrific performances of children who behave like living-dead creatures when placed in proximity to their onscreen caregivers. These children "act out", on the one hand, the gestures of desperation for a life-giving parental gaze while, on the other, appearing to suffer from having been placed in a context of constant, cinematic over-scrutiny. Jerking, like Main's videotaped infants in particular, and like my fantasy of Schmeideberg's red-booted, counter-Kleinian, vengeful daughter-analyst, in two or more directions at one and the same time, they threaten to pull apart the (often over-determinedly) psychoanalytic narratives in which they exist; the films shudder under the impact of their raging child-

protagonists' disoriented motions. This article is an attempt to analyse my own - disorganized - spectatorial attachment to these spectacles of infantile writhing.

II.

There is a moment in John Stahl's 1934 film adaptation of Fannie Hurst's 1933 novel *Imitation of Life* when Delilah, the Black mother of 18-year old Peola, who is "light-skinned" enough to pass as White and informs her mother that she wishes now officially to do so, exclaims in a statement of bewildered anguish: "You can't ask me to unborn my own child!" The line is a disturbing one which brings for the first time into (innovative) language an emotional truth about the radically unstable relationality which she and Peola have visibly inhabited since their appearance in the film's first five minutes. Exhibiting a strange kinship with Jung's description (uttered a year later in 1935, during his third lecture at the Tavistock Clinic in London) of the patient who had "never been properly born" - a phrase that would haunt Samuel Beckett, in attendance that day with his therapist Wilfred Bion (Connor, 1998) - Delilah's exclamation evokes a psychically real but physically impossible

image, of a person who is somehow managing to reverse, undo or subvert the very process of their own birth to a particular mother, railing against the attachment with a force that is as palpable as it is fantastical. We are beyond the realm of mere family romance.

While the two films differ from one another in important ways which have been discussed at length elsewhere,⁷ they share a crucial quality which underpins, I think, my own long-term attachment to them both, and that is their deranged and deranging mimesis of Peola's (re-named Sarah Jane in Sirk's 1959 remake) internal split. Both film versions seem to jerk and writhe under the weight of the un-metabolized - and, crucially, disavowed - trauma and tension their double-narrative asks them to bear. The digestible "White story", of comfortably neurotic mother-daughter duo Bea (re-named Lora) and Jessie (re-named Susie) and the indigestible "Black story" of Delilah (re-named Annie) and Peola/Sarah Jane, although housed in the same domestic space of the White woman's apartment (later mansion), cannot be reconciled with one another, strain against one another,

⁷ See, for example, Berlant (1993), Butler (1990) and Mulvey (1996), not to mention the extremely solid collection of essays on Sirk's remake put together by Fischer (1991).

yanking the spectator in two fundamentally opposing emotional directions, for all the superficial similarity of the "mothers and daughters in conflict" trope. It is as if two different kinds of souls were contained within the same film-body. Peola/Sarah Jane and her outlandish demand to be "unborn" instils at the heart of both *Imitations of Life* a "realness" that feels both gory and, at times, un-survivable. This child's words, expressions and gestures demand a new classification, transforming *melodrama* into *melo-horror*.

The uncanniness of both versions of *Imitation of Life* lies in the way they imbricate this difficulty of really *seeing* what takes place within the Black mother-daughter relationship, in all its disorienting horror, into the partially-blank gazes of the normative and self-deceiving White mothers within the films' narratives. In their White-mother roles, both Claudette Colbert and Lana Turner perform to perfection an anxious *turning away* from the disturbing, half-moving image of trauma provided by Peola/Sarah Jane. They constantly misread that bewildering figure's writhing as something that is merely unfortunate, temporary, apolitical - and essentially reparable. In the 1934 version, having witnessed a particularly appalling interaction between Delilah and

Peola as they move ever closer to permanent familial rupture, a hand-wringing Bea will describe the situation to Jessie as "a tragedy", an example of what she and Jessie must do their best to avoid. Bea is, as Mulvey (1996) puts it, "an encapsulation of disavowal" (p. 35), while, in the 1958 version, Lora is equally "unable to discern, to make out the emotional events that are taking place around her" (p. 38). But the films themselves operate in such a way that the spectator is hard pressed to take refuge in the same forms of defensive denial as those indulged in by their blank-White mothers. For in these films, Peola/Sarah Jane, together with her disturbing signs and gestures, are preserved as properly spectral, impossible for the spectator to normalize or shelve. Like the very trauma they communicate, the half-moving images of Peola/Sarah Jane *stick*. Monique Rooney (2010) reminds us that

in the interview with Jon Halliday in which he discusses *Imitation's* twin plots, Sirk disparages the "white" storyline, the one that features the film's star. [...] Elsewhere, Sirk insists it is *only* this "split" character type [of Sarah Jane] that interests him. Sirk enigmatically states that it is the "restless, moving energy" of this figure that captures his attention and is central to his cinema dramas.

And in Mulvey's (1996) terms, the figure of Sarah Jane contained "the element of craziness that Sirk valued" (p. 31).

This mad daughter figure is filmed in such a way that aspects of an unshakable relational malaise have become not only visible but also emotionally useful, in a highly complex manner, for a range of different spectators. Perez (2008) movingly and amusingly describes his long-term attachment to both versions of *Imitation of Life* and, in particular, to the "mulata" icon of Peola/Sarah Jane: "*Imitation of Life* is the cultural artifact that has chosen me – named me – inspiring trauma and reverie" (p. 119). Perez is especially compelling in his articulation of a troubling split at the heart of his relationship with the films' images:

I lay in bed, head aching, stunned that I had been reduced to convulsive sobs by a movie with such racist (and formulaic) machinations – a movie I found entirely transparent, or so I thought. I would return to this film, and its more famous remake, repeatedly as a teacher, race scholar, and queer fan. These repeated returns added to my pain and anger, but they also reinforced the more ineluctable pleasures for me of *Imitation of Life*. My difficulty in deciphering that pleasure, my inability to compartmentalize it, compels an incessant

return to the source (p. 120).

Like Peola/Sarah Jane herself, then, Perez-as-spectator becomes divided against himself, torn in two directions, forced to look at implications of a disorganized-disorientated attachment that is played out onscreen but is also *repeated within him* via his simultaneous repugnance for and attraction towards his hated-desired filmic object. Eventually admitting that, “[a]lienated by Peola’s articulated desire for whiteness, I nonetheless join her in seeking the protection, reputation, and privileges of whiteness”, Perez goes on to note:

[t]he substance of Peola’s desire is not so alien after all – and this realization is a difficult one, especially as our need to murder the mother, whom we hold responsible for our shame, becomes clearer (p. 133).

Rather than blanking it out like Bea or Lora, Perez uses the disturbing vision of Peola’s disoriented relationship with her mother to gain articulable insight into his own emotionally and ethico-politically disturbing experience of internal paradox. While Perez’s analysis focuses on the specificities of queer-of-colour identification with the image of Peola/Sarah Jane, what his exploration most

fascinatingly teases out is the cinematic figure's power to symbolize unpalatable aspects of the spectator's unconscious phantasies of a parent-child attachment gone nightmarishly wrong.

The two versions of *Imitation of Life* are, from their very opening scenes, obsessed with the staging and filming of parent-child "strange situations" that either flirt with, or wander wholesale into, catastrophe. We are drawn into powerfully primitive images of early, repressed aspects of real or phantasized traumatic relationality. Via the uncompromising, exhibitionistic, frighteningly beautiful, at times (especially in Stahl's version) *deathly* figure of Peola/Sarah Jane, then, the spectator is forced to gaze upon spectacular forms of disorientation that end up terrorizing and hijacking both films.⁸ I am reminded of the psychoanalytic biographer Paul Roazen (2000), recalling with barely concealed

⁸ Fredi Washington's performance as Peola in the 1934 version is nothing less than horrific, capturing with astonishing acuity the specifically ghoulish aspects of the girl's internal deadness. As Sarah Jane in Sirk's 1959 remake, Susan Kohner is far more erotically charged, while still communicating panic and emptiness throughout. Kohner would, of course, go on to play Sigmund's wife in John Huston's wonderful *Freud* (1962).

horror an unshakable image of Melitta Schmideberg during an interview he conducted with her during the 1960s:

I cannot get out of my mind the picture of a small woman sitting in a large chair in a room darkened by thick curtains, and the memory also stays that throughout the interview she was sucking on something in her mouth that (I think) caused a little white drool to come down one side of her chin (p. 55).⁹

I find myself peeping with dread through my fingers at the spectacle of Peola/Sarah Jane - who actually makes it - unlike Schmideberg - to her mother's funeral at the end of the film for one final display of flailing psychic agony. Confronted with an image of relational disaster that I may reasonably think I would give anything *not* to have to see, I find, in the final analysis, that the image turns out to be strangely worth the disturbance of going back to look at. But what exactly is it that I am going back to look at? And why do I think I can find it in a film's half-moving image?

⁹ Roazen (2000) paints a picture of Schmideberg as a sociopathic and vaguely repulsive adult baby, eventually confessing that the kindest thing he can say about her is that she was "mad as a hatter" (p. 56), elsewhere quoting an acquaintance for whom she was "straight out of a horror movie" (p. 55)

III.

They look and they do not see themselves. There are consequences.

So stated Winnicott (2005, p. 151) in his characteristically bald evocation of the mother - in ideal or "good enough" circumstances - functioning as a kind of mirror for the infant who desperately seeks out her gaze. Following Winnicott and his preoccupation with the concept of maternally-generated psychic "aliveness" in the infant, André Green (1983) would elaborate on the emotional dangers of the "dead mother" and her unconscious installation of unmarked, un-mourned patches of spectrality inside the once-alive child she never properly saw. Before Winnicott, of course, there was Ferenczi, who arrived at - often attacked or ignored - conceptualizations of an infant's dissociative development of internally distorted parental images when attacked or ignored by his or her actual caregivers to a point beyond the tolerable.¹⁰ All these clinicians, in

¹⁰ As is well-documented (e.g. Judith Dupont's introduction to Ferenczi, 1995), Freud strongly disapproved of the once-loyal

their different ways, describe a world in which vulnerable humans, affected by the way they are looked at or not looked at, generate or fail to generate *images of relationality* with which they can give meaning to the world. But in what sense might the kinds of filmic images I have been discussing contribute to the creation of new meaning for the spectator?

For Jean Knox (2004), influenced both by the early object-relations theorists and by the attachment concepts of Bowlby, Ainsworth and Main, makes a crucial move in her further incorporation of the Jungian idea of the archetype into her exploration of an infant's early experience of his or her primary caregiver and the relationship they have together. Problematizing the notion of the archetype as a somehow naturally occurring *imago* within the human mind, Knox instead argues for a rethinking of the child's development of unconscious archetypes as the culmination of internalized emotional interactions with the first human being s/he knows. These

Ferenczi's return to a radically revitalized, literally mind-expanding theory of child sexual assault, and sought to stop his own rebel analyst "baby" delivering his landmark 1933 "Confusion of Tongues" paper (Ferenczi, 1949).

interactions come, eventually, to be symbolized through what Knox calls "image schemas":

Whilst image schemas are without symbolic content in themselves, they provide a reliable scaffolding on which meaningful imagery and thought is organized and constructed, thus meeting the need for a model that provides for the archetype-as-such and the archetypal image. If we adopt this model for archetypes, we have to discard the view that they are genetically inherited and consider them to be reliably repeated early developmental achievements (p. 9).

For Knox, one of the principal aims of psychotherapy is to work directly with a patient's internalized image schemas, seeking to

allo[w] knowledge to become increasingly accessible to different parts of the cognitive system, so that consciousness itself can be seen to be an emergent property of the constantly reiterated process of representational re-description" (p. 10).

By helping to "representationally re-describe" those aspects of their patients' internal worlds which have hitherto not had adequate representation via the early development of symbol-promoting image schemas, the psychotherapist collaborates in the re-establishment in

the patient of "reflective function", that capacity, first elaborated by Fonagy and Target (1997) to conceive of both oneself and other people as having a mind, as experiencing emotion, as actually being real.

I am not arguing that the "half-moving" images - fantasized, filmed, or both - which I have been discussing so far perform the same reparative function as psychotherapy. Movies are not actual people; they do not provide the spectator with a real, reciprocal, human relationship (although neither, it might be argued, does psychotherapy, at least not as it is classically conceived; Ferenczi [1995] made that point in his soul-searching clinical diary of 1932-3). But I do believe that what these "half-moving" images offer, from Main's videotapes to cinema's "melo-horror", are freshly representational frames in which to feel, symbolize and, perhaps for the first time, see the repressed shards of our own disorganized relationality. Within these new - Jung might say "transcendent" - mirrors of unprocessed attachment-trauma, it is not the human beings in front of the camera but rather those who are truly looking at them who may have the chance to reconfigure themselves internally, if they can bring themselves to be moved by this series of symbolizing gestures. When, in the 1934

version of *Imitation of Life*, Peola sees her pale image in a mirror and exclaims to her bemused Black mother, "I'm *White!*", she appeals to a register of perception that is anything but emotionally reflective. In Sirk's 1959 remake, Sarah Jane repeats even more spectacularly Peola's vain attempt to gain confirmation of her discombobulated sense of self, in the form of genuflection before a set of pornographizing gazes that are constitutionally incapable of offering anything close to what Knox would describe as truly reflective function. But what about us, the spectators who watch these characters in a range of "strange situations"? What does our gaze do with their flailing performances of un-mirrored distress?

I think that Sirk offers us something of a blueprint for a different kind of gazing experience, one capable of transforming the un-metabolized affect of infantile disorientation into something potentially nurturing and generative of emotional thought, in the remarkable final funeral sequence of his version of *Imitation*. Here we have the child Sarah Jane and the mother Annie reunited for one last "strange situation", Sarah Jane behaving in characteristically disorganized fashion as she bursts onto the horrified scene outside the church to wrestle

with her dead mother's coffin. But there is something different about the way in which this final scene of relational disorganization gets *looked at*, both for the intra-diegetic spectators and, I would argue, for the spectators of the film itself.

For once, we have the impression that the witnesses of the uncanny parent-child reunion are seeing something that they have hitherto not allowed themselves to see. Lora and Susie, the blondly, blandly "untraumatized" mother-daughter pair, have shifted both psychically and physically far enough at this stage to enter into an almost entirely Black space, one which, to cap it all, is filled with the shockingly alive voice and face of Mahalia Jackson singing "Trouble in the World". There is something utterly unexpected about these sounds and images of collective Black life and mourning in the final moments of a melodrama in which the bleeding wounds of disrupted Black kinship have been blanked out time and again: they erupt into the hitherto "sanitized" White space of the film as visual archetypes of something fantastically fresh and containing.¹¹ The singer, the

¹¹ I still find these images of Lana Turner and Sandra Dee, in humbly integrated attendance at this beautiful, Black, pre-Civil Rights funeral, weirdly shocking.

mourners, Lora, Susie and the spectator are united in gazing at what remains of a truly dead mother's bewildering interactions with her exploding child. The spectacle of derangement is sequentially linked to something that I would venture to call filmically-generated rapture. What I am trying to describe with this term is the kind of seismic internal shift I feel when I allow myself to gaze on a filmed image of relationality that is simultaneously disturbing and transcendent and, instead of turning away, am able, somehow, to experience a kind of insight into how that image of disturbance may be representationally re-described and *met*; what kind of unspoken horror it may audio-visually symbolize; and how my own developmental features and deficits, both conscious and unconscious, may be connected to that symbolization.

In the concluding sections of this article, I shall explore what two other "half-moving" images of cinematic melo-horror may be able to achieve when they are able to "representationally re-describe" a set of traumatized image schemas and archetypes that have - like that patient Jung famously evoked at his London lecture of 1935 attended by Bion and Beckett - *never been properly born*.

IV.

Thirty seconds after you're born you have a past. And sixty seconds after *that*, you begin to *lie* to yourself about it.

This sobering statement is uttered by the inebriated character of Juliana Kelly in David Cronenberg's film *The Brood* (1979), in a somewhat insightful, yet at the same time woefully decontextualized, analysis of her relationship with her disturbed adult daughter Nola. It is a saw worthy of Klein at her best and worst.¹² Five minutes later, Juliana will be bludgeoned to death by what looks like a tiny, ugly infant. The creature is actually not a human child, we discover towards the end of the film, but rather one of a huge "brood" of psychically generated entities that Nola has grown, one by one, in a sort of exo-womb that hangs outside her abdomen. Nola's capacity for this kind of asexual

¹² One can only speculate as to whether Cronenberg consciously meant to evoke Klein. Later in the film we do see posters of Laing and Reich in Nola's former apartment, and of course Cronenberg went on to make the Freud-Jung-Spielrein-themed movie *A Dangerous Method* (2011), so clearly the actual figures of psychoanalysis are of no small interest to him.

reproduction has been stimulated by her psychotherapy sessions with the maverick clinician Hal Raglan, pioneer of "psychoplasms" at his residential treatment centre, "Somafree", where Raglan encourages all his patients to symbolize the unprocessed affect of their childhood trauma (Nola claims to have been severely abused by her mother and betrayed by her father) in the form of bodily growths. Nola is Raglan's most spectacularly performing case (the "queen bee", as Mike, an envious fellow-patient puts it): her fantastical brood ends up killing both her parents, as well as her estranged husband Frank's potential new girlfriend, Ruth. When the creatures abduct Frank's and Nola's 5-year-old daughter Candice, Frank is forced to confront Nola at Somafree, where she triumphantly shows him her exo-womb, and delivers her latest brood-baby; Frank looks on aghast. Horrified, he strangles Nola, but not before the brood beat Raglan to death in the shed outside, leaving little Candice (who has witnessed this murder, and is herself now showing signs of involuntary somatization in the form of weeping tumours) in a state of dead-eyed catatonia.

Not enough has been written about this remarkable film, perhaps Cronenberg's finest work, but I shall restrict my analysis of it here to underlining its

utterly uncompromising exploration of what it might mean, in psycho-cultural terms, truly to *look* at the disorganized and "unthinkable" materialization-performance of the internalized relational traumata of infancy. In the space between declaring her theory of the mendacious baby and experiencing her own fantastical murder by her daughter's "new flesh", Juliana beholds the creature that has recently emerged from her daughter's "psychoplasmic" therapy. She is given no choice. Nola's supernatural trauma-baby (Juliana's pseudo-grandchild) defiantly presents itself for viewing, refusing to submit itself to its grandmother's analysis, Kleinian or otherwise. All it is, the moment before it kills Juliana, is her non-negotiable vision - at last - of her adult daughter's tangled-up insides. *You will look at this, even if it's the last thing you do* - this is the desperate communication Cronenberg's film seems visually to enact for its squirming and discomfited spectator, not in the usual horror-spirit of gratuitous sadism, but rather with an emotional earnestness that is, in its way, as melodramatically heartrending as vintage Sirk. The fantastical "infants" at the heart of the film make for some of cinema's most preposterous images. Watching *The Brood* is a truly bizarre cultural experience - the

creatures are simultaneously hilarious (in their cute little snow-suits) and bloodily terrifying; the disoriented spectator starts to feel like that toddler in Main's video, the one whose mouth managed to turn up and down at the same time. But in their uncompromising monstrosity, Cronenberg's brood (and the "psychoplasms" project generally, such as it is given form onscreen) represent a radical filmic response to an ethical challenge, the very challenge with which Ferenczi (1949) presented an unforgiving Freud via his "Confusion of Tongues" heresy: how does a responsible adult - psychotherapist, filmmaker, caregiver or anyone else - facilitate the symbolization of a traumatized subject's internalized relationships, strange psychic fruit, perhaps, but the fruit, nevertheless, of real interactions that have been scrupulously hidden from view or simply, mysteriously, never really seen?

Nola's therapy scenes with Raglan, in which he "therapeutically" plays her daughter, her mother, her father and her rival, and she plays herself in various states of development, are excruciating. When I watch them, I feel swirling combinations of embarrassment, fear, amusement, rage. I do not feel emotionally "organized". The second of these three scenes, occurring

roughly a third of the way through the film, is a dialogue between Nola and Raglan-as-Daddy which encapsulates the central problematic of the film and its indigestible images. The "child" Nola reproaches her "good" parent for not seeing what screamed to be seen: "You shouldn't have looked away when she hit me. [...] You pretended it wasn't happening. You looked away. Didn't you love me?" This is the obsession that drives the "madness" (embodied in Nola) at the heart of *The Brood*, just as, in a very different context, it is the obsession that drives the madness (embodied in Peola/Sarah Jane) at the heart of *Imitation of Life*: how do we generate images equal to the representation of an affliction which has not been recognized and which has accordingly mutated into something beyond recognition? And, even if we manage such a feat, how do we expect our spectator to respond to the image we have created?¹³

¹³ Cronenberg repeats this question in truly astonishing form in his recent *Maps to the Stars* (2014), in which Julianne Moore's film star character is repeatedly mocked and confronted by the ghost of the dead film star mother she believes sexually assaulted her in childhood. The scenes of their "dialogues" are amongst the most disturbing I have ever witnessed in the cinema, while Moore's character's decision to play her mother's role in a remake of an old classic reflects a Sarah Jane-like shallowness of vision in its

In the film's denouement, just before the spectacular lifting of skirts and revelation of the ex-womb, Nola mockingly questions Frank - and implicitly the spectator - as to his seriousness about *really* wanting to accompany her on her radically subjective journey into self-knowledge and expression. His protestations of sincerity (he is merely playing for time) are a parody of hollow platitudes: "Show me! Educate me! Involve me! I wasn't ready before but I'm ready now [...] I want to go with you wherever you go." When Nola responds, her eyes large and knowing - "Do you? *Do you?* - we realize, just as Frank realizes, that she is about to show us - "Then *look!*" - something that will challenge to its very core our ability to truly look. Like Nola's father, we may turn away from Nola at precisely the moment she most needs us to see her. Nola nevertheless persists in her request for witnessing, even at the cost of her own destruction (and Frank will promptly strangle her). Cronenberg's camera refuses to turn away from the abdomen, its fantastical growth, its infant product. And since that camera's gaze not only remains steady but also

spectacularized collusion with - as opposed to transcendent use of - the screen/mirror of trauma.

records what it sees, Nola's extraordinary cinematic and emotional revelation is kept intact for us until we are ready to see it. We may never be ready, of course - at least, not until we grow a new pair of eyes.¹⁴

V.

I want to conclude this exploratory survey of cinema's "un-born attachments" by focusing on a set of uncannily moving images of a mother and her disoriented, un-dead child which, despite being directed by a high-profile filmmaker (Jonathan Demme), despite featuring one of the most successful entertainers in the Western world (Oprah Winfrey), and despite being adapted from the work of one of the most highly-lauded writers of recent times (Toni Morrison), remain obscure and largely unseen. The film *Beloved* (1998) is a strangely neglected cultural object: shallowly bathed in arms-length tepidity upon its release, it has subsequently sunk into a shadowy, near-

¹⁴ A colleague who recently taught the film told me that some students reported having been made emotionally and even physically ill by this scene.

invisible critical oblivion. My intention here is to take a long, hard look at some of these images which have been deemed so apparently unworthy of serious contemplation. My unprovable suspicion is that contemporary culture has averted its embarrassed gaze from this extraordinary film (whilst - rightly - holding up the original novel as a "classic") in much the same way as the mortified White mother Bea/Lora of *Imitation of Life* could not bear to take in the visual spectacle of Peola/Sarah Jane's frenzied demands for psycho-social metamorphosis, and just as Frank felt compelled to cover his eyes upon beholding Nola's monstrous exo-womb. Utterly beyond the categorizations of either family melodrama or horror, yet inextricably bound up in both genres, *Beloved* is a bizarre cinematic descendant of both *Imitation* and *The Brood*, featuring an adult-child protagonist ("Beloved") who emerges from a womb of total (racialized) trauma, passes into a crypt-like space that is neither life nor death, and demands, in a series of almost unbelievably disturbing audio-visual displays, to be seen in all her "un-born" distress.

Morrison's original story was, as is well known, inspired by the real figure of a reluctantly infanticidal nineteenth-century mother. Sethe, formerly enslaved at a

plantation known as "Sweet Home", lives with her daughter Denver at 124 Bluestone Rd, a house that is haunted by some kind of thoroughly disturbed spirit. Sethe's young sons Howard and Bugler have already taken flight in terror of the ghost, and her mother-in-law, Baby Suggs, has died. When Paul D., Sethe's former friend from Sweet Home (where he was also enslaved), turns up at "124" after years of wandering, the two begin a tentative sexual relationship, and Paul D. is able to dismiss the ghost. Shortly afterwards, upon returning from the fair, Sethe, Denver and Paul D. encounter an outlandish, infantile young woman, barely capable of speech or movement, known only by the name "Beloved". They take her in and help her to develop. Denver realizes that Beloved is a form of her long-dead older sister, who apparently died in babyhood; meanwhile Paul D. discovers that Sethe killed that baby (and would have killed the others and herself too) in an attempt to prevent them all from being taken back into slavery at Sweet Home, following a recent escape. Paul D. leaves "124", having gravely offended Sethe with his reminder that she has "two legs, not four", trying hard also to forget the one terrible, sexual night he spent in the outhouse with Beloved, who demanded of him that he "touch [her] on the inside part".

The three women, Sethe, Denver and Beloved, drift into a state of wretchedness, as Sethe, having finally realized Beloved's identity, wears herself out in trying to make amends before her now despotic ghoul of a dead daughter. Driven by the fresh madness of Beloved and Sethe into the world outside "124" for the first time in her life, Denver brings help in the form of a local group of Black women, who succeed, via collective spiritual effort, in drawing a heavily pregnant, naked Beloved out of the house and causing her at last to vanish.

The filmed version of *Beloved* is without doubt one of the most truly *revelational* films my eyes have ever been offered, managing the rare cinematic feat of translating into transformational visions "crypt-like" relational dynamics that had been evoked ten years earlier in a prose which many had assumed to be un-filmable. My goal here - beyond registering the fact that the filmed images of the movie (more so even than the language of the book) helped me to make conscious, via extraordinary symbolization, aspects of my own internalized relations that I had hitherto repressed into deadened oblivion - is to highlight some of the key ways in which Demme's film uses specifically visual and eye-oriented techniques to effect a kind of emotional

movement in the spectator that seems to me not unrelated to "reflective function" such as it is described by Knox (2004).

Most obviously, by turning Morrison's often fantastical words into images, Demme dares to conjure up on camera aspects of psychic experience and traumatic relationality that emerge from a place of radical, pre-symbolic interiority. When Morrison tells us, improbably, that the shadows of Denver, Sethe and Paul D. were holding hands even though they themselves were not, Demme does not hesitate to create that impossible image: the effect is breathtakingly emotional, as we see the existence of a realm of nascent psychic attachments that the intra-diegetic spectators of the trio cannot. Sethe's and Paul D.'s traumatic dreams of Sweet Home are projected as horrendous visual images onto the walls of Sethe's bedroom as the new couple sleep, while, most stunning of all, the once-invisible "ghost" of Beloved is given flesh in the filmed person of the performer Thandie Newton. The impact of Newton's disturbing, outrageously materialized performance on the viewer's already over-stimulated senses is hard to overstate. It belongs to a small category of deranged filmic performance in which the actor manages to convey a kind of internal chaos that

is beyond mere madness, but which evokes a realm of almost ontological disorientation.¹⁵ As the stammering, drooling, sexualized infant-revenant Beloved, Newton is both somehow *embarrassing* (not unlike Samantha Eggar as Nola at certain moments of *The Brood*) - one wants to turn away from the *affect* she visually and sonically produces - and sublime. There is something about the way she acts that feels unbearable. As Ellen C. Scott (2004) puts it,

Beloved is in a sense the definition of a spectacle - and not only because she hold our optical attention. For spectators within and outside of the narrative alike, Beloved defies both paradigm and categorization: our eyes don't know what to do with her.

But what I find most truly fascinating about Newton-as-Beloved is the way in which she is created by Demme's camera as a being that is both incapable of being *looked at* and which - like Winnicott's "un-mirrored" baby, like *Imitation's* Peola and Sarah Jane, and like Melanie Klein's adult daughter Melitta Schmideberg (if we believe

¹⁵ Some other performances I would put in this category are Sissy Spacek's in Altman's *3 Women* (1977); Isabelle Adjani's in Zulawski's *Possession* (1981); Lisa Gay Hamilton's (who, coincidentally, plays the young Sethe in *Beloved*) in Rodrigo Garcia's *Nine Lives* (2005).

Roazen's (2000) account of her quasi-pathological anti-relationality) - is itself incapable of *looking*.¹⁶

"I came back to see her face," Beloved tells Denver in a scene roughly a third of the way into the film which, not unlike the therapy dialogue between Nola and Raglan a third of the way into *The Brood*, explores the problem of not looking, but with an even more heightened intensity. The two sisters, one alive, one un-dead, are questioning each other about their origins. As Denver, played by Kimberley Elise, begins to realize who Beloved actually is, we see her unusually expressive eyes fill with tears as she gazes at her rediscovered sibling with incredulous, incredible love. As I watch Denver watching Beloved - no matter how many times I see the film - and as I observe the quality of her gaze shifting into something so radically object-seeking and relational, I find myself starting to weep. What Demme's camera captures, and what Elise's face performs, is a recognition that feels ineffable.¹⁷ It is all the more

¹⁶ As Winnicott (2005) puts it: "When I look I am seen, so I exist. I can now afford to look and see" (p. 154). It becomes increasingly, disturbingly apparent in the course of this film that Beloved cannot "afford" to look or see anyone or anything other than her own fantasy of the lost/murderous mother Sethe.

¹⁷ Elise states (quoted in Fischerova, 2006): "I had to communicate

startling, contrasted, as it is, in a series of close-up shot-reverse shots, with Newton's blank, hard gaze. Beloved seeks only information about the origins of attachment; when it comes to experiencing attachment to her rediscovered objects in this, perhaps the strangest "strange situation" imaginable, she veers, like the most disturbing of Main's videotaped infants, from freezing to slapping to a positively unending grimace of...*something*. Beloved's eyes - Newton's eyes - remain uncannily bright and distant throughout the dialogue with Denver, seemingly hungry, but not for anything that her sister can offer. The creature claims that what she seeks is the regained vision of their mother's face; but the spectator knows in the moment of horrible immersion in that gaze of radical hardness that it is far too late for that. Like Nola's brood, like Peola and Sarah Jane, Beloved is a strange embodiment of traumatized attachment-obsession that is at the same time uncannily indifferent to anything that is recognizable as actually functioning attachment.

the character non-verbally. I felt that the less I said with words and the more I said with face and eyes and body, the more true it would be to Denver's character" (p. 37).

It seems to me that the film challenges and encourages the spectator to look at *Beloved* in a way that she herself cannot manage to look: in the place of eyes of shame, we are invited to grow eyes of love.¹⁸ When, in the film's almost intolerable denouement, the naked, swollen-bellied *Beloved* emerges from the front door of "124" to meet the horrified gaze of the singing Black women, Nola's challenge to Frank - "Then look!" - at the conclusion of *The Brood* is repeated at a collective level. The spectator, allied with the singing women (of whom Thelma Houston, the legendary performer of the aptly-titled "Don't Leave Me This Way", is one - reminding us of Sirk's startling, intermedial use of Mahalia Jackson at the end of *Imitation*), must force him or herself to look at the embarrassing spectral image lolling with its unhinged mother on the porch, just as Main was duty-bound to keep on looking at those uncategorizable videotapes of infants and their rediscovered caregivers behaving in such strange and perturbing ways. For it is in our continued gaze, despite enormous discomfort, Demme's camera implies, that

¹⁸ For a wonderful - and comprehensive - account of the therapeutically transformational role of loving eyes on "un-mirrored" patients, see Ayers (2003).

something resembling real change can take place. A rich, local White man, Mr Bodwin, is also present at the public revelation of Beloved. He appears to see what the spectator and the singing women see, but his gaze, like Frank's at the end of *The Brood*, is horrified and rejecting. What will he remember of the sight of Beloved? What will he actually take in? What will Lora and Susie retain of the sight of Sarah Jane and Mahalia Jackson at Annie's funeral at the end of *Imitation*?

And what about us? What can we conceivably take in, retain and use, consciously or unconsciously, from these half-moving images of disorienting melo-horror? As if trying to help us to use what we have witnessed within a context of ultimately nurturing containment rather than total trauma, Beloved will close with a visual reminder of the uber-parental gaze of the long-dead Baby Suggs, played by legendary African-American actress Beah Richards, preaching to a group of formerly enslaved children and adults in a clearing in the woods near her home. "Love your hearts!" she declaims. In an earlier flashback to similar scenes of pastoral bliss presided over by Baby Suggs, Beloved's gaze at the scene evoked remains blank and uncomprehending. It seems to me, however, that this film does not fix us in the position

of its spectral, unseeing, un-born child, any more than *Imitation of Life* or *The Brood* does. All three films encourage us to go further, much further, than the reluctant, frequently disavowing witnesses, Mr Bodwin, "Miss" Lora and Frank. They take us to a place where, perhaps, we can at last look again at Melitta Schmideberg's red boots - and even at her "devilish" drool - and not only "blow up" these disorientingly moving images, but reflect them, love them too.

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Author bio

Andrew Asibong is Reader in Film and Cultural Studies and Co-Director of Birkbeck Research in Aesthetics of Kinship and Community (BRAKC) at Birkbeck, University of London. His research is concerned with the emotional and political metamorphoses of the relational self, via engagement with film and the moving image, although he has also published widely on (mainly French) literature. He is the author of *François Ozon* (Manchester University Press, 2008) and *Marie NDiaye: Blankness and Recognition* (Liverpool University Press, 2013).