

## Filming Disorganised Attachment: “Calm, contented play suddenly succeeded by distressed, angry behaviour”

Robbie Duschinsky, Northumbria University  
Email: [robert.duschinsky@northumbria.ac.uk](mailto:robert.duschinsky@northumbria.ac.uk)

**Abstract:** This paper critically explores the politics of screen media and knowledge in contemporary attachment theory, with a focus on the status of ‘disorganised/disoriented’ child behaviours recorded in the Ainsworth Strange Situation Procedure. In the course of this exploration, John Bowlby and Gilles Deleuze/Felix Guattari will be discovered as strange allies in conceptualising primate infants as machines of movement and desire. An integration of their insights will be used to analyse the intersection of expressions of attachment, play, fear and anger in the Strange Situation, and to specify the epistemological and political commitments of attachment research. The paper will explore tensions between the readability and unreadability of a child’s gesture on film as a result of its place within a broader system of signs, assessing the ways in which this tension has been dealt with by attachment theory.

### Introduction

The primate infant, John Bowlby proposed, continually monitors the availability of at least one determinate caregiver, anticipated to be able to offer protection and support. When the caregiver appears to be available, the infant can engage in activities such as play or sleep; after a while without interaction, but especially when alarmed or anxious, the infant will cease other engagements and seek proximity and protection from her attachment figure through behaviours such as crying, smiling or crawling. Bowlby conceptualised this process as the ‘attachment system’, and proposed that it evolved to facilitate the child’s survival in the face of dangers such as predation, attack or exposure to the elements. He theorised, developing ideas from object-relations psychoanalysis, that the availability of a caregiver establishes a young child’s sense of self and capacity for emotion-regulation and trust in others, which form the basis for their later mental health. In a text co-written with Jimmy Robertson, Bowlby highlighted ‘the powerful sense of loss and anger’ a young child feels when ‘overwhelmed when his imperative need of the absent mother is not met’, claiming evocatively that ‘in the experience of the two-year-old the death of the mother and her absence are the same’.<sup>1</sup>

From its very emergence, attachment theory was intimately bound up with screen media. Attention to this relationship is made particularly salient in the context of recent calls to develop explorations of the encounter of object-relations theory and film,<sup>2</sup> and of a longer tradition of work highlighting the importance of the figure of the child for the politics of filmic representation.<sup>3</sup> Bowlby’s work with the Robertsons, filming young children separated from their parents by hospitalisation, led to widespread public recognition of the suffering these separations could cause, and to changes in policy regarding visiting opportunities for the parents of hospitalised children. The psychological significance of the separation appeared visible on the screen to viewers of these films: on reunion with their parents, the children showed signs of disorientation, freezing, alternations of anger and fear of their parent, and

---

<sup>1</sup> Robertson, J. & Bowlby, J. (1950) ‘Responses of Young Children to Separation from their Mothers, II’ *Psychiatrie Sociale de L’Enfant*, 131-140, at p.138

<sup>2</sup> Kuhn, A. ed. (2013) *Little Madnesses: Winnicott, Transitional Phenomena and Cultural Experience*, NY: I.B.Tauris

<sup>3</sup> E.g. Lebeau, V. (1992) ‘Daddy’s cinema: femininity and mass spectatorship’ *Screen* 33(3): 244-258; Eleftheriotis, D. (2005) ‘Early cinema as child: historical metaphor and European cinephilia in *Lumiere & Company*’ *Screen* 46(3): 315-328 ; Lury, K. (2010) *The Child in Film: Tears, Fears and Fairy Tales*, NY: I.B.Tauris; Kathryn Bond Stockton (2010) *The Queer Child, or Growing up Sideways in the Twentieth Century*, Durham: Duke University Press.

inconsolable grief. Commenting at the time, Anna Freud described the film technology used by Bowlby and the Robertsons as remarkable for its capacity to make 'the outward manifestations of the inner processes' available for demonstration and analysis.<sup>4</sup> Building on this capacity, Bowlby's collaborators went on to utilise film to document behaviour in the Strange Situation, an observational measure designed by Mary Ainsworth. In this experimental procedure, as the episodes incrementally increase the stress of the infant by increments, the observer can attend to individual differences in the infant's movement between behavioural systems: the interplay of exploration and attachment behaviour, in the presence and in the absence of the parent. In a letter to Bowlby, Ainsworth enthused about her laboratory's access to an 'excellent... portable videotape apparatus'. The capacity to repeatedly review infant and parent gestures on tape, and to watch them in slow-motion, Ainsworth wrote, was simply 'beautiful'.<sup>5</sup> In her published work, she praised film technology in particular for its capacity to support 'finer-grained' analysis of the different and conflicting motivations that might be read off from the morphology of a child's posture or gestures, allowing the observer to use visible behaviour to infer the interplay between behavioural systems such as exploration and attachment.<sup>6</sup>

Scaffolded by the forms of demonstration and analysis afforded by film technologies, 'attachment has proven to be perhaps the most important developmental construct ever investigated'.<sup>7</sup> Given this, Vikki Lebeau's difficult, incisive question can be levelled at the thousands upon thousands of films which have been made of infants in the Ainsworth Strange Situation: 'What wishes are at work in the visual archive of the child in pain?'<sup>8</sup> From Oakley in 1971 to Krane in the present, it has been proposed that attachment theory has been animated by a conservative wish to responsabilise women and then to police their childrearing, figured as a matter of the future of the nation.<sup>9</sup> It is indeed the case that attachment theory has seen intensive use by the psy-disciplines: attachment theory is today described as 'the most popular theory for explaining parent-child behaviour by professionals and clinicians'.<sup>10</sup> Of particular significance has been use by the psy-disciplines of the 'disorganised/disoriented' (D) attachment classification. Howe has described the D attachment classification as 'very influential' in informing assessments and interventions, since children displaying behaviours considered indices of disorganised/disoriented attachment 'constitute the hard core of most clinical and welfare caseloads'.<sup>11</sup> Illustrating the 'the interconnection of political rationalities and screen media'<sup>12</sup> in the case of attachment theory, Wilkins has recently advocated for the filmed assessment of disorganised attachment by social services as a screening tool for serious

---

<sup>4</sup> Freud, A. (1953) 'A Two-Year-Old Goes to Hospital—Scientific Film by James Robertson' *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis*, 34: 284-287, p.285.

<sup>5</sup> Unpublished letter from Mary Ainsworth to John Bowlby marked the 30th May 1972, Wellcome Trust Archive, London.

<sup>6</sup> Tracy, R., Lamb, M. & Ainsworth, M.D. (1976) Infant Approach Behavior as Related to Attachment *Child Development*, 47(3): 571-578, p.577

<sup>7</sup> Sroufe, A., Egeland, B., Carlson, E., Collins, A. (2005) 'Placing Early Experiences in Developmental Context' *Attachment from Infancy to Adulthood*, (eds.) Klaus Grossman, Karin Grossman & Everett Waters, NY: Guilford Press, p.51

<sup>8</sup> Lebeau, V. (2008) *Childhood and Cinema*, London: Reaktion Books, p.19

<sup>9</sup> Oakley, A. (1981) *Subject Women*, Oxford: Martin Robertson; Krane, J., Davies, L., Carlton, R., & Mulcahy, M. (2010) 'The clock starts now: Feminism, mothering and attachment theory in child protection practice' In B. Featherstone, C. Hooper, J. Scourfield, & J. Taylor (Eds.) *Gender and Child Welfare in Society* (pp. 149-172). Oxford: Blackwell; Vicedo, M. (2011) 'The social nature of the mother's tie to her child' *British Journal for the History of Science* 44(3): 401-426

<sup>10</sup> Barth, R., Crea, T., John, K., Thoburn, J. & Quinton, D. (2005) 'Beyond attachment theory and therapy' *Child and Family Social Work* 10: 257-268.

<sup>11</sup> Howe, D., Brandon, M. Hinigs, D. & Schofield, G. (1999) *Attachment Theory, Child Maltreatment and Family Support*, London: Palgrave, p.122; Howe, D. (2010) *Attachment Across the Lifecourse*, London: Palgrave, p.154

<sup>12</sup> Grieveson, L. (2009) 'On governmentality and screens' *Screen* 50(1): 180-187, at p.187

harm, given that 'disorganised attachment indicates child maltreatment'.<sup>13</sup> A child's attachment behaviours on film can then be used by professionals to speak for them about their interests.<sup>14</sup>

Such take-up of attachment theory supports accounts which situate it as part of the discursive 'software' which operates the 'hardware' of the state's surveillance and disciplining of childrearing. Yet, for Lebeau, 'at issue is not, or not only, the question of the child's pain as such but how that pain is handled, how it arrives at – addresses itself to – its audience via the always potentially coercive "look" of the camera'.<sup>15</sup> As such, it is possible to advance and finesse the political critique of attachment research, articulating precisely the location and form of this conservative wish in attachment theory and its implication with screen media. After examining the relationship between screen media and the development of attachment theory, this article will build upon the work of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari in interrogating and theorising this relationship. This is in line with calls to use and develop Deleuze's ideas through such work: for example Hickey-Moody has urged recognition both that 'Deleuze's writings on children offer possibilities for rethinking the process of growing up', and 'Deleuze's theory of childhood affectivity is inherently conservative to the extent that it romanticizes the childhood state.'<sup>16</sup> In their writings, Deleuze and Guattari are generally hostile to developmental psychology and its role in normalising subjectivities through the policing of families. Yet they specifically affirms the validity and significance of demonstrations of attachment phenomena: 'It is not a question of denying the vital importance of parents or the love attachment of children to their mothers and fathers. It is a question of knowing what the place and the function of parents are within desiring-production'.<sup>17</sup> In exploring the link between screen media and attachment theory through a Deleuzian lens, this article will apply and demonstrate the value and purchase of film theory to a new area, filling a gap left open by superb analyses which have made film the object of psychological analysis<sup>18</sup> – but not *vice versa*. With the exception of Emma Wilson's beautiful analysis of Alain Resnais' use of footage from evolutionary psychology in *Mon oncle d'Amérique*,<sup>19</sup> to date psychological footage itself has not been considered using tools from film theory. This is the case despite the pervasiveness of psychiatrists and psychologists in cinema and television, from Alfred Kinsey to Hannibal Lecter, and also the significant number and reach of documentary films made about psychological studies, including both basic and applied attachment research.<sup>20</sup>

The article will begin by considering the role of film in shaping conceptualisations of attachment, focusing on how the influential classification 'disorganised/disoriented attachment' both emerged as a consequence of film technologies and has subsequently been reified and limited by the way these were used and interpreted. In doing so, the article will reassess the epistemological status of attachment classifications, criticising essentialist approaches to what Foucault would call attachment theory's 'grid of specification... the systems according to which

---

<sup>13</sup> Wilkins, D. (2012) Disorganised attachment indicates child maltreatment. *Journal of Social Work Practice*, 26(1): 15-30

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Ruddick S (2007) At the horizons of the subject: Neo-liberalism, neo-conservatism and the rights of the child. *Gender, Place and Culture* 14(5): 513–526.

<sup>15</sup> Lebeau, V., *Childhood and Cinema*, p.154

<sup>16</sup> Hickey-Moody, Anna. (2013) 'Deleuze's children' *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 45(3): 272-286, at p.284, 281.

<sup>17</sup> Gilles Deleuze & Felix Guattari ([1971] 1984) *Anti-Oedipus*, trans. Robert Hurley, NY: Continuum, 51.

<sup>18</sup> E.g. LeBeau, V. (1994) *Lost Angels: Psychoanalysis and Cinema*, London: Routledge; Shimamura, A.P. (2013) *Psychocinematics: Exploring Cognition at the Movies*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

<sup>19</sup> Wilson, E. (2006) *Alain Resnais*, Manchester: Manchester University Press; cf. de Mijolla, A. (1999) 'Freud and the Psychoanalytic Situation on the Screen', In *Endless Night: Cinema and Psychoanalysis, Parallel Histories* ed. Janet Bergstrom, (p.188-199), California: California University Press

<sup>20</sup> Such documentaries range from *Glub Glub and the Monkeys* (dir. Robert Allen, Thames Production, 1975) about the research of Robert and Joan Hinde on infant development in primates to – more recently – *The Human Behavior Experiments* (dir. Alex Gibney; Sundance, 2006) about the Milgram and Zimbardo obedience experiments, and *The Dark Matter of Love* (dir. Sarah McCarthy, Double Bounce Films, 2013) about the role of attachment in the adoption of children who have previously received care in institutions.

the different “kinds of madness” are divided, contrasted, related, regrouped, classified, derived from one another as objects’.<sup>21</sup> This analysis will permit a reconsideration of the politics of attachment research, deploying Deleuze’s distinction of films between those that reveal a movement-image and those that reveal a time-image: the former use film to subordinate sound and movement on the screen to existing societal narratives, whereas in the latter the screen exceeds these narratives and makes visible the forces which ever disrupt the present and make other futures possible. In considering films of attachment assessments in terms of the movement-image and time-image, the article provides a limit-case for, and ultimately an affirmation of, emancipatory claims made on behalf about film by scholars, within which ‘any film might exceed the limitations of its sensory-motor movement-image schema through time-images that interrogate diverse, coexistent ages and affects of an impersonal open whole or “univocal” world’.<sup>22</sup> Drawing together its different threads, the article will close with reflections of our attachments to forms of screen media which persecute us.

### **‘Disorganised attachment’ as an artefact of film technology**

Three categories were originally proposed by Ainsworth and Wittig in 1969 for coding patterns infant responses to their Baltimore Strange Situation study. In films classified as ‘avoidant’ (Group A), the infant avoids the caregiver with their gaze or posture when reunited and attends to the toys as a way of masking their distress and face from their caregiver. Ainsworth proposed that the apparently unruffled behaviour of the avoidant infants is in fact a mask for distress, a hypothesis later evidenced through studies of the heart-rate of avoidant infants. This behaviour was theorised to have two functions: to keep control of oneself and to avoid receiving rebuff from caregiver who shows impatience with the infant’s distress. In films classified as ‘secure’ (Group B), the infants display excited and elaborate play, use the caregiver as a safe base from which to explore the toys and a safe haven to which they return both periodically and when alarmed or anxious. These infants protest at their caregiver’s departure – but on reunion look to the caregiver’s face, seek the caregiver upon his or her return, and can be comforted. It was theorised that these infants feel confident that their communications about need can get through to their caregiver and that the attachment figure will be available to protect them when called upon. Children classified as ‘ambivalent’ (Group C) show distress even before separation and are clingy and difficult to comfort on the caregiver’s return. They distrust their caregiver’s offer of toys to play with, treating such offers as attempts at misdirection from receiving the caregiver’s attention. These infants were theorised to be pre-empting their unpredictable caregiver, deploying their distress and anger to get and keep an unpredictable caregiver’s attention and therefore their availability. The A, B and C patterns of attachment were conceptualised by Ainsworth as ‘organised’, in that the attachment system could recruit and orchestrate a variety of behaviours (e.g. crying, smiling, crawling) to achieve these determinate ways of achieving a kind of proximity with their caregiver.<sup>23</sup>

The classification the infant received with one parent was found to have no association with their classification with another parent, implying that the Strange Situation coding protocols do not assess personality differences but rather that infant’s expectations about the care they will receive from a particular attachment figure. The infant classifications were found to be highly predictive of all manner of later assessments of mental health and of social and academic competence. Researchers concluded that, in eliciting the activation of the attachment system through separation from the caregiver in a strange environment, Ainsworth’s assessment and classifications were tapping a foundational aspect the way that an infant’s early caregiving environment influences their development: the direct association of infant

---

<sup>21</sup> Foucault, M. ([1969] 1972) *Archaeology of Knowledge*, London: Routledge, p.46

<sup>22</sup> Boljkovac, N. (2013) *Untimely Affects: Gilles Deleuze and an Ethics of Cinema*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, p.6.

<sup>23</sup> Ainsworth, M.D. (1972). Attachment and Dependency: A Comparison. In Jacob L. Gewirtz (Ed), *Attachment and Dependency* (pp.97-138), Washington, D.C.: Wiley

attachment classification for any later outcome was not found to be high, but the cumulative indirect effect was very substantial.<sup>24</sup> That the same patterns of infant behaviour could be found by researchers time and again across contexts and cultures provided evidence both for the operation of the attachment system hypothesised by Bowlby, and for two main ways of moderating its demands: by downplaying distress in an avoidant pattern in order to keep self-control and avoid rebuff, or pre-empting an unpredictable caregiver in using distress and anger as a way of keeping the caregiver's attention. The three Ainsworth attachment patterns were thus understood to be such robust constructs because they were the product of *universal* capacities of human emotion-regulation.

However, from the 1970s, an archive began to grow of tapes in which children, particularly on reunion with their caregiver, displayed gestures and postures discrepant with Ainsworth's coding system. These included signs of disorientation, freezing, alternations of anger and fear of their parent, and inconsolable grief – just the behaviours Bowlby and the Robertsons had observed in children on reunion after hospitalisation. Further discrepant reunion gestures and postures were also documented by Ainsworth, her students and collaborators. For example, there were films in which the infant 'appears to be "in a trance"', 'slaps his own face; pulls his ear; digs into his arm with his nails', or displays 'odd vocalisations (he "barks")'; infants were also observed tensely cocking their heads, or throwing their hands in front of their faces on reunion with their parent.<sup>25</sup> The validity of attachment theory was threatened by the growing archive of films in which these gestures and postures were observable in infant-caregiver interactions otherwise classified as 'secure' – since the infants approached their caregiver on reunion without avoidance or resistance on reunion. Though the films in which these discrepant behaviours were visible were more common in samples taken from clinical, social services or otherwise at-risk populations, many researchers nonetheless concluded that these gestures and postures were mere 'noise', produced by an inability of the Ainsworth Strange Situation procedure to cleanly draw out the attachment system and its vicissitudes for filmed observation. Yet the potential meaningfulness of this archive of discrepant tapes was corroborated by observations by child psychoanalysts, such as Selma Fraiberg, who saw in their clinics such behaviours interrupting the play of infants who had experienced trauma or neglect.<sup>26</sup>

In 1981, Mary Main, a former doctoral student of Ainsworth's, introduced a new 'unclassifiable' designation for such films, with the hope that the new (non-)classification would both improve the validity of the 'secure' classification and also that the identification of these discrepant cases and their comparison together might itself turn out to be fruitful. The indelible debt that this development had to film technology was emphasised by Main and colleagues: 'the distinction between secure and unclassifiable, false-secure infants has been made possible only by the opportunity for close, repeated review of videotape records'.<sup>27</sup> As Mulvey has discussed, the possibilities of channelling representations of movement through repetition, slow motion and freeze-frame offer new possibilities for seeing.<sup>28</sup> Film technology facilitated repeated viewing of the same behaviour by a researcher, with attention to what came before and after, and its particular physical morphology and apparent social significance in the dance of interaction between child and parent. In one film, for example, an infant interrupts her approach to her father on reunion. 'She suddenly stopped and turned her head to the side and – while gazing blankly at the wall – slapped a toy and then her empty hand on the floor', before continuing her approach and reaching to be picked up. The researchers found out afterwards

---

<sup>24</sup> See Carlson, E. A., Sroufe, L. A., & Egeland, B. (2004). The construction of experience: A longitudinal study of representation and behavior. *Child Development*, 75, 66–83.

<sup>25</sup> Main, M. (1977) Analysis of a peculiar form of reunion behaviour seen in some day-care children. In R. Webb (ed.) *Social Development in Childhood* (pp.33-78), Baltimore: John Hopkins, p.69

<sup>26</sup> Fraiberg, S. (1981) 'Pathological Defences in Infancy' *Psychoanalytic Quarterly*, 51: 612-635

<sup>27</sup> Main, M. & Weston, D. (1981) The Quality of the Toddler's Relationship to Mother and to Father: Related to Conflict Behavior and the Readiness to Establish New Relationships. *Child Development*, 52(3): 932-940, p.939

<sup>28</sup> Mulvey, L. (2006) *Death 24x a Second*, London: Reaktion Books

that the child's father had recently attempted suicide and had frequent homicidal fantasies.<sup>29</sup> In evaluating the significance of film for the new ideas they were presenting, Main and colleagues also commented that 'slow-motion review of the tape yielded a strikingly different interpretation' of gestures and postures that were 'too subtle to note in real time'.<sup>30</sup> Describing this film in print, Main and Solomon note that 'in these microseconds, her eyes widen as she looks at mother [and] the asymmetry makes her appear puzzled, disgusted or fearful. Her face then breaks into an extremely wide smile'.<sup>31</sup>

However, perhaps the greatest significance of film for the recognition of these discrepant behaviours lay in the fact that it allowed researchers to confer. Main's laboratory at Berkeley began to collect unclassifiable tapes from other researchers working with high-risk samples such as Mary J. O'Connor, Elizabeth Carlson and Susan Spieker. A member of the laboratory, Judith Solomon, conducted an intensive review of two hundred tapes of unclassifiable behaviour in infant-parent interactions, some from Main's own low-risk sample and others given by other researchers. Main and Solomon reported two patterns in these 'unclassifiable' tapes: 'the most striking theme running through the list of recorded behaviours was that of *disorganization*, or, very briefly, an observed contradiction in movement pattern, corresponding to an inferred contradiction in intention or plan. The term *disorganisation* was also needed, because, for example, immobilised behaviour accompanied by a dazed expression is not so much disorganized as seemingly signalling a lack of orientation to the immediate environment'.<sup>32</sup> In line with Ainsworth's technical use of the term 'organised', mentioned above, the use of the term 'disorganisation' in Main and Solomon diverged from its use in everyday language; instead, it was used in a technical sense to mean the absence or disruption of a coherent sequence of behaviours oriented to achieve proximity with the caregiver, presumed to suggest contradiction or disturbance of the attachment system itself.

Main and colleagues presumed that an attached infant would always be compelled by the attachment system to seek their attachment figure when alarmed or anxious. This would usually, they suggested, produce the secure (B) attachment response of directly seeking the caregiver on reunion after a separation. Avoidant (A) attachment behaviour, by contrast, works as a 'conditional strategy' to deactivate or direct attention away from the attachment system in order to avoid troubling a caregiver who would otherwise rebuff them: the 'insecure-avoidant infant is theoretically captured within a positive feedback loop in which rejection arouses attachment behaviour which, rejected again by the attachment figure, leads to still further arousal of the attachment system. We described this situation as inherently disorganising, but suggested that the rejected infant escapes behavioural disorganisation through a shift away from the attachment figure'.<sup>33</sup> Ambivalent (C) attachment behaviour combines this approach with an outpouring of anger and distress, in an oscillation which keeps the caregiver's attention. To the degree that this outpour and oscillation is behaviourally coherent and maintains environmental responsiveness, it is considered a 'conditional strategy' for obtaining proximity; to the degree that this outpour is not well-sequenced or responsive to the environment, it is 'in fact disorganized'.<sup>34</sup> Considered closely, 'disorganisation' was primarily theorised by Main and colleagues as a spectre both haunting and animating both avoidant and ambivalent behaviour. Only secondarily, the concept was used in the name for a new classification: 'disorganisation' was defined by Main and Solomon as an observed contradiction in movement pattern, understood to reflect a parallel disruption of the infant's representations of the caregiver that

---

<sup>29</sup> Main, M. & Solomon, J. (1990) Procedures for identifying infants as disorganised/disoriented during the Ainsworth Strange Situation. In M.T. Greenberg, D. Cicchetti & E.M. Cummings eds. *Attachment in the Preschool Years* (pp.121-160), Chicago: University of Chicago Press, p.144.

<sup>30</sup> Main, M. & Stadtman, J. (1981) Infant Response to Rejection of Physical Contact by the Mother. *Journal of the American Academy of Child Psychiatry*, 20(2): 292-307, p.297

<sup>31</sup> Main & Solomon, Procedures for identifying, p.143

<sup>32</sup> Main & Solomon, Procedures for identifying, p.133

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid*, p.180.

<sup>34</sup> Main & Hesse 1990, p.179

integrate the attachment system. Using Solomon's detailed notes, Main clustered such behaviours into seven indices which could be used by researchers to code a proposed new classification of infant behaviour in the Strange Situation: 'attachment disorganization/disorientation' (D). Film technology made it possible for the field to come to consensus about the need for the new classification. At a four-day workshop at the University of Washington, Mary Ainsworth sat on the floor to be as close as possible to the screen as Mary Main showed her tapes coded with the new 'D' classification; at the end of the event, Ainsworth wrote to Bowlby that she and 'everyone there was most impressed with the need for adding a new 'D' or disorganised category to the classification system'.<sup>35</sup> Main and Solomon's work on the "disorganised attachment" status' has subsequently been described as 'revolutionary', and as one of the 'truly fundamental discoveries' in the field of psychology.<sup>36</sup> Ballen et al. have described how 'in the last decade, the field of developmental psychopathology has devoted increasing interest to what appears to be one of the most meaningful risk factors for later maladjustment: infant disorganised attachment'.<sup>37</sup> For example, disorganised attachment in infancy has been found to predict either constriction or flooding of distress or anger in a child's doll-play at age 6.<sup>38</sup> Furthermore, and notably, researchers have also found that a classification of 'disorganised attachment' in infancy *increases* as a predictor of several mental health problems over the life-span.<sup>39</sup>

Together with Erik Hesse, Main proposed that disorganised attachment behaviour can be explained by a contradiction between the attachment system and another behavioural tendency. Reflecting on what tendencies could be sufficiently powerful to disturb the attachment system, which demands that the infant seek protection from the attachment figure when alarmed, her conclusion was that it must be alarm evoked by the attachment figure themselves. That is to say, 'an infant who is frightened by the attachment figure is presented with a paradoxical problem – namely, an attachment figure who is at once the source of and the solution to its alarm'.<sup>40</sup> A parent who frightens the child with abusive behaviour, or who themselves is frightened when the child seeks comfort because of past trauma, could both be supposed to cause such a paradox for an infant. This conclusion was supported by Main's research. She found that if parents were shown the Robertsons' film footage of the reunion of hospitalised children and then interviewed about their relationship history, particular disturbances and moments of dissociation could be observed in the fluency of the discourse of parents whose children were classified as disorganised in infancy.<sup>41</sup> However, Main and Hesse also pointed to research which showed that an infant's disorganised/disoriented attachment behaviour towards a parent can be caused by confusion in the absence of fear, and they wanted

---

<sup>35</sup> Mary Ainsworth, unpublished letter to Bowlby dated February 14th 1985, Wellcome Trust Archive, London.

<sup>36</sup> Gothenburg (2007). Honorary Doctorate for Mary Main. Available at: [http://www.psychology.sunysb.edu/attachment/pdf/Mary\\_Main\\_honorary\\_degree.pdf](http://www.psychology.sunysb.edu/attachment/pdf/Mary_Main_honorary_degree.pdf)

<sup>37</sup> Ballen, N., Berniera, A., Moss, E., Tarabulsky, G.M. & St-Laurent, D. (2010). Insecure attachment states of mind and atypical caregiving behavior among foster mothers. *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology* 31(2): 118–125, p.118

<sup>38</sup> Main, M. & Cassidy, J. (1988) Categories of response to reunion with the parent at age 6. *Developmental Psychology* 24(3): 415-426.

<sup>39</sup> Sroufe, L. A., Carlson, E. A., Levy, A. K., & Egeland, B. (1999). Implications of attachment theory for developmental psychopathology. *Development and Psychopathology*, 11, 1–13; Belsky, J., & Fearon, P. (2002). Early attachment security, subsequent maternal sensitivity, and later child development: Does continuity in development depend upon continuity of caregiving? *Attachment and Human Development*, 4, 361–387.

<sup>40</sup> Main, M. & Hesse, E. (1990) Parents' unresolved traumatic experiences are related to infant disorganized attachment status. In M.T. Greenberg, D. Cicchetti & E.M. Cummings eds. *Attachment in the Preschool Years* (pp.161-181), Chicago: University of Chicago Press, p.163

<sup>41</sup> Main, M., Kaplan, N. & Cassidy, J. (1985) Security in Infancy, Childhood, and Adulthood: A Move to the Level of Representation. In I. Bretherton & E. Waters (Eds.), *Monographs of the Society for Research in Child Development*, 50 (1-2, Serial No. 209, pp. 66-106), p.86

to 'underscore that *in all probably other factors are operating*' in many cases of disorganised/disoriented behaviour.<sup>42</sup>

The ideas of Main and her colleagues were mischaracterised in two interleaved respects which they have described as 'widespread and dangerous',<sup>43</sup> contributing to the misuse of attachment theory for the policing of families. The first mischaracterisation takes Main and Hesse as arguing that children in films coded as 'D' necessarily fear their caregiver. To take but one example, in their textbook on *Social Development*, Parke and Clarke-Stewart explain that children classed as having 'insecure-disorganised attachment (Type D)... seem to be apprehensive and fearful of their attachment figure'.<sup>44</sup> Main and Hesse have stated that they wish that they had made it clearer that they intended their emphasis on frightened or frightening caregiver behaviour as 'one highly specific and sufficient, but not necessary, pathway to D attachment status'.<sup>45</sup> They draw attention to their own findings that show that unresolved loss in a parent who is otherwise caring adequately for their child predicts a classification of disorganised attachment in the Strange Situation, and to other studies which highlight that a parent's ongoing experience of an anxiety-disorder or multiple forms of social and economic disadvantage have also been found to predict disorganised attachment in the infant, even in the absence of any known maltreatment or neglect. A second mischaracterisation takes Main and Solomon as presenting attachment theory as a four-category and exhaustive system. Again to take one example, O'Shaughnessy and Dallos have accused Main and colleagues as bent on 'reducing complex human experience to typologies'.<sup>46</sup> In fact, Main's position was animated precisely by a commitment against the idea of disorganised attachment as either an exhaustive addition to a taxonomy, or that it would be caused by a single mechanism: 'our discovery of the D category of infant Strange Situation behaviour rested on an unwillingness to adopt the "essentialist" or "realist" position regarding the classification of human relationships. It was based on the presumption that both individuals and relationships are unique and that they have a higher "reality" than any classification can fully encompass'.<sup>47</sup>

If 'disorganised/disoriented attachment' was a concept erected upon film technology, it was also in part embalmed by the way they were used, contributing to both mischaracterisations. Whether drawing upon hermeneutic phenomenology or psychoanalysis, since the late 1970s film theorists have drawn attention to the role of the spectator in 'completing' the images and sounds they experience to form the meanings of a film.<sup>48</sup> Main and Solomon depended upon this processes, since they required viewers to *infer* some form of contradiction or disruption of the (invisible) attachment system from the observation of (visible) infant behaviour which did not appear to the viewer to constitute a coherent direct or conditional strategy for proximity-seeking. The term 'disorganization/disorientation' was introduced as a best-fit but contingent description of the kinds of gestures and postures from which this contradiction or disruption could most directly be inferred. They expected the coder viewing the film to consider and negotiate with their assumptions about what a coherent strategy for proximity-seeking might look like, and look for clues – such as freezing, or a parabolic approach trajectory to the caregiver on reunion – that the coherence of the behavioural system which organised such behaviour was being disrupted or contradicted. However, the immediacy of the vivid and deep representation of reality offered by film supported the impression that the meaning of the behaviours was immediately accessible,

---

<sup>42</sup> Main, M. & Hesse, E. Parents' unresolved traumatic experiences, p. 174, 177.

<sup>43</sup> Main, M., Hesse, E., & Hesse, S. (2011). Attachment Theory and Research: Overview with Suggested Applications to Child Custody. *Family Court Review* 49(3): 426-463, p.441

<sup>44</sup> Parke, R.D. & Clarke-Stewart, A. (2011) *Social Development*, NY: John Wiley, p.119

<sup>45</sup> Hesse, E. & Main, M. (2006) Frightened, threatening, and dissociative parental behaviour, pp.310-1.

<sup>46</sup> O'Shaughnessy, R. & Dallos, R. (2009) 'Attachment Research and Eating Disorders: A Review of the Literature' *Clinical Child Psychology & Psychiatry* 14(4): 559-574, p.559

<sup>47</sup> Main et al. 'Security in Infancy', p.99

<sup>48</sup> E.g. Mayne, J. (1993) *Cinema and Spectatorship*, London: Routledge; Lapsley, R. (2009) 'Cinema, the impossible, and a psychoanalysis to come' *Screen* 50(1): 14-24.



expressed within them in the same way. Such an essentialist 'desire for the real' of the filmic representation further stimulated the more general tendency in psychology to treat behaviours in a group as occurring through a unitary and undifferentiated process.<sup>49</sup> As a result, many researchers and psy-discipline practitioners took from the work of Main and Solomon the (partially circular) conclusion that the gestures and postures indexed with the 'D' attachment classification themselves manifest 'disorganisation/disorientation', as the reason for behaviour discrepant with the Ainsworth A, B and C classifications. As Main and Solomon warned in the last pages of the very chapter announcing the protocols for coding disorganisation/disorientation, treating the items in a group as expressions of an essence tends to offer undue support to beliefs that all phenomena in a particular group have a single historical cause;<sup>50</sup> and indeed, perversely following this warning as if it had been a prediction, perceptions of 'disorganisation/disorientation' as a unitary process facilitated the widespread misapprehension that all behaviour in the D indices is necessarily caused by a single thing: an attachment/fear conflict. This assumption that the indices of 'disorganisation/disorientation' express a single process has contributed to a neglect of *how*, through what processes, the indexed behaviours occur (a neglect compounded but not solely caused by the existence of practical difficulties for statistical analyses, such as that the behaviours which index disorganization/disorientation often co-occur in high-risk samples). Among the behaviours classified as D, only behaviour which appears dissociative has received theoretical scrutiny.<sup>51</sup> As Lyons-Ruth et al. have recently observed, with some concern, 'to date, few hypotheses have been advanced regarding the mechanisms underlying this striking difference among infants who display disorganized behavior'.<sup>52</sup> The researchers note that this inattention to the mechanisms may be masking important differences and potentially limiting the precision of clinical and welfare interventions. For example, Lyons-Ruth et al. report their finding that a particular form of disorganised/disoriented behaviour – where it occurs without any avoidance or resistance – has a very strong and distinct association with suicidal feelings by age 19.

Among the behaviours listed as indices of disorganisation, four cases can be used to illustrate that if 'fear plays a causal role in at least some types of disorganized/disoriented infant behaviour',<sup>53</sup> this alone is not adequate as an explanatory mechanism for how all the behaviours work, and that new theorising is warranted. First we might consider the infant who, on reunion with the parent, runs to hide behind a piece of furniture, looking scared. In 'direct apprehension of the caregiver' (index 6 of the coding system), behaviour is coherently sequenced: there is no 'observed contradiction in movement pattern'. As such the question hidden by the reification of 'disorganisation/disorientation', and left unaddressed by subsequent theorists, is how this coherence is possible. Attachment theory presumes that the attachment system, sending the infant to an attachment figure for protection when they are scared, is hard-wired into human beings by evolution; Bowlby states that even a child who is afraid of a physically abusive caregiver would still be expected to approach them when alarmed.<sup>54</sup> So a coherent sequence of behaviours demonstrating fear of the caregiver on reunion implies the mysterious disappearance of the attachment system, which should overwhelm or at least conflict with and disrupt an attempt to flee the caregiver. An indication of this trouble,

---

<sup>49</sup> See Cowie, E. (2011) *Recording Reality, Desiring the Real*. Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press; Gunning, T. (2007) 'Moving Away from the Index: Cinema and the Impression of Reality' *differences* 18(1): 29-52; Burman, E. (2007) *Deconstructing Developmental Psychology*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., London: Routledge

<sup>50</sup> Main & Solomon, 'Procedures for Identifying', p.156

<sup>51</sup> Liotti, G. (1992) 'Disorganized/disoriented attachment in the etiology of the dissociative disorders' *Dissociation* 5(4): 196-204.

<sup>52</sup> Lyons-Ruth, K., Bureau, J.-F., Easterbrooks, M., Obsuth, I., Hennighausen, K. & Vulliez-Coady, L. (2013) Parsing the construct of maternal insensitivity: distinct longitudinal pathways associated with early maternal withdrawal, *Attachment & Human Development*, 15:5-6, 562-582

<sup>53</sup> Main, M. & Hesse, E. (1990) 'Parents' unresolved traumatic experiences', p.174

<sup>54</sup> Bowlby, J. (1973) *Separation*, London: Vintage, p.117

visible to the initial theorists though not subsequently, is that in the very paragraph in which Main and Solomon first offer 'disorganisation/disorientation' as the label for their new classification, they specify that 'our category title is still not fully satisfactory (see esp. the discussion of apprehensive movements)'.<sup>55</sup> A second case of behaviours in which an attachment/fear conflict does not proximally appear to be sole mechanism are 'rhythmic, repeated movements without visible function', termed 'stereotypies' in index 4. The reification of disorganisation/disorientation has meant that these gestures and postures have been generally cut off from comparison and mutual analysis with the same behaviours as they occur in caged animals that are (otherwise) being well looked-after. For instance, stereotypies are familiar to those with knowledge of equine care, under the label 'stable vices'. In a manuscript from 1999, unfortunately left unpublished, Main urges that attachment researchers should engage with debates occurring in ethology about the causes of these behaviours.<sup>56</sup>

A third class of behaviours which have been neglected by the reification of disorganization/disorientation are those in which an observed contradiction in movement pattern is visible, and this corresponds to an inferred contradiction in intention or plan, but the conflict is between attachment and *anger*, not fear. Index 1 gives the example of an 'infant calm and undistressed during both separations from the parent, but [who] becomes extremely focused on the parent, showing highly angry behaviour on reunion,' and index 2 directs attention to occasions when 'the infant displays anger simultaneously with proximity seeking or contact maintaining'.<sup>57</sup> There has been no theory or investigation of whether anger/attachment conflicts can be treated in the same way as fear/attachment conflicts in infancy, though there has been discussion of the bifurcation of disorganised infants by the time they become pre-schoolers into those who are cruel and those who are caregiving to their parent.<sup>58</sup> Fourth and finally, 'calm, contented play suddenly succeeded by distressed or angry behaviour without rationale' appears twice, in index 1 and in index 3. Attachment theorists have long presumed that calm, contented play necessarily cannot occur if the attachment system has been activated by alarm or anxiety,<sup>59</sup> so again an attachment/fear conflict does not present itself as a proximal explanation for this behaviour. Observations of an infant flooding out into distress or rage in the context of otherwise calm play has never seen any discussion in the academic literature on attachment, in contrast to the three other behaviours mentioned above where there has been some discussion; as a result, we will return to it later after reconsidering attachment and films of attachment behaviour through the work of Deleuze and Guattari.

## Lines of flight

For decades attachment researchers have published discussions of the 'notoriously complex origins of attachment disorganization',<sup>60</sup> without consideration that some of this complexity may be a product of the reification of disorganisation/disorientation. As Turner has shown, in unduly subsuming causally-important heterogeneity, reification generally 'causes particular problems for the development of theory regarding the causes and consequences of phenomena grouped together under the label'.<sup>61</sup> This agrees with Deleuze, who proposes that conceptualisations which appear to exhaustively capture the meaning of phenomena both depend upon and hide a premature closure of the dynamic forces in play: 'Beneath the actual

---

<sup>55</sup> Main & Solomon, 'Procedures for Identifying', p.133

<sup>56</sup> Main, M. (1999) 'Disorganized attachment in infancy, childhood, and adulthood', unpublished manuscript.

<sup>57</sup> Main & Solomon, 'Procedures for Identifying', p.136

<sup>58</sup> E.g. Main, M. & Cassidy, J., *op cit*.

<sup>59</sup> Ainsworth, M.S. (1967) *Infancy In Uganda*, Baltimore, Maryland: John Hopkins University Press.

<sup>60</sup> Meins, E., Fernyhough, C., Arnott, B., Vittorini, L., Turner, M., Leekam, S.R., Parkinson, K. (2011) 'Individual differences in infants' joint attention behaviors with mother and a new social partner' *Infancy* 16(6): 587-610, at p.606.

<sup>61</sup> Turner, B.S. (1992) *Regulating Bodies: Essays in Medical Sociology*, London: Routledge, p.70

qualities and extensities, species and parts, there are spatio-temporal dynamisms. There are the actualising, differentiating agencies. They must be surveyed in every domain, even though they are ordinarily hidden by the constituted qualities and extensities.<sup>62</sup> The tendency of psychological research to squeeze the play of forces into categories, he and Guattari argue, is partly impelled by the demands and funding coming from the psy-disciplines, which cannot police subjectivities without access to constant labels which signify 'harmful' and 'abuse'.<sup>63</sup>

Whereas many attachment theorists and professionals in the psy-disciplines have presumed that the only quality that can be ascribed to infant behaviours in the Strange Situation which diverge from the Ainsworth protocols is that they 'lack' organisation, Deleuze and Guattari urge that we view all behaviours as the product of machines of movement and desire, and classificatory systems as epiphenomenal overlay. This vision is, in perhaps a surprising alliance, fully in agreement with the perspective of Bowlby (and following him, Main and Solomon), for whom the primate infant should be regarded as a 'machine incorporating feedback' about flows of movements and the stop or start implications of a plurality of desires.<sup>64</sup> For this cluster of social theorists and psychological theorists alike, 'everywhere it is machines – real ones, not figurative ones: machines driving other machines, machines being driven by other machines, with all the necessary couplings and connections. An organ-machine is plugged into an energy-source-machine: the one produces a flow that the other interrupts. The breast is a machine that produces milk, the mouth a machine coupled to it.'<sup>65</sup> Deleuze and Guattari argue that 'from his very earliest infancy, the child has a wide-ranging life of desire – a whole set of nonfamilial relations with the objects and the machines of desire – that is not related to the parents from the point of view of immediate production.'<sup>66</sup> Bowlby fully agrees, specifying the operation of an exploratory system as a machine of dispersive centrifugal movement away from the caregiver across friendly expanses, but which gets cut off after a time or when the infant is frightened by the attachment system which impels a centripetal movement back to the caregiver.

When awake and healthy, the infant is suspended between the flows and interruptions of adventure and attachment, deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation. As such, 'it is wrong to think that children are limited before all else to their parents, and only had access to milieus afterwards, by extension or derivation. The father and mother are not the coordinates of everything that is invested by the unconscious. There is never a moment when children are not already plunged into an actual milieu in which they are moving about, and in which the parents as persons simply play the role of openers or closers of doors, guardians of thresholds, connectors or disconnectors of zones. The parents always occupy a position in a world that is not derived from them. Even with an infant, the parents are defined in relation to a continent-bed, as agents along the child's route.'<sup>67</sup> Despite highlighting the radical potential of affirmation and becoming embodied in such expansive, centripetal play, Deleuze and Guattari predict for each child, in the passage into adulthood, both the capacities for exploration and attachment will be mutilated, reconfigured and plugged into the demands of capitalist economics, 'even if it retains some of their debris in well-defined enclosures'.<sup>68</sup>

Bowlby and Main observe that each child must preserve a 'line of flight' back to the caregiver from their explorations into the world; whereas other mammals might have burrows or other associated spatial milieu to which they return, primates have determinate figures,

---

<sup>62</sup> Deleuze, G. ([1968] 2001) *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton, NY: Continuum, p.266

<sup>63</sup> Deleuze, G. & Guattari, F. ([1980] 1987) *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi, NY: Continuum, 112, 264.

<sup>64</sup> Bowlby, J. (1969) *Attachment*, London: Penguin, p.41

<sup>65</sup> Deleuze, G. & Guattari, F. ([1971] 1984) *Anti-Oedipus*, trans. Robert Hurley, NY: Continuum, p.1

<sup>66</sup> Ibid. P.51

<sup>67</sup> Deleuze, G. ([1993] 1998) *Essays Critical and Clinical*, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, p.62

<sup>68</sup> Deleuze & Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p.200; Deleuze, G. ([1962] 1983) *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson, NY: Continuum, p.23-4;

living milieu, to whom they always wish to know their line of flight.<sup>69</sup> Deleuze agrees but immediately considers the possibility that the line of flight does not result in comfort and protection: 'A line of flight must be preserved to enable the animal to regain its associated milieu when danger appears. A second kind of line of flight arises when the associated milieu is rocked by blows from the exterior, forcing the animal to abandon it and strike up an association with new portions of exteriority, this time leaning on its interior milieus like fragile crutches.'<sup>70</sup> All children faced with separation and reunion in the Strange Situation are confronted with the possibility of what Deleuze and Guattari call the possibility of becoming-orphan: 'absolute deterritorialisation becomes relative only after stratification occurs on that plane or body: It is the strata that are always residue, not the opposite'.<sup>71</sup> The Ainsworth attachment patterns could then be thought of as strata, determinate but epiphenomenal, produced by the possibilities for a line of flight which ends in reterritorialisation with the caregiver rather than abandonment.

In enacting this line of flight, Deleuze and Guattari propose, 'the child is constructed within a double series': a set of perceptual relations with the caregiver in the present, and a virtual set of experiences, expectations and fantasies from the past.<sup>72</sup> If these series converge such that the infant's line of flight can overcome or integrate possible obstructions, then the action the infant takes is fully centripetal, directly sending the child to her caregiver (Group B) when absolute deterritorialisation threatens. Where a contradiction occurs between perception (suggesting the caregiver's physical availability in the room on reunion) and memory (suggesting rebuff or unpredictability from the caregiver when the infant is distressed), implying that a direct and stable reterritorialisation is not possible, negation and dialectic are two logics which can be recruited – as Hegel's thought illustrates – to serve as conditional strategies of reterritorialisation.<sup>73</sup> On the presumption that such a direct line of flight will result in rebuff and as such be counterproductive, an avoidant attachment strategy (Group A) will shunt the desire for centripetal movement into the interior milieu – as the force of an imperative to negate their desire to regain their living milieu. The infant turns her attention to toys, in a fidgety way as a source of self-distraction, rather than as a site for adventure. By contrast, producing the ambivalent attachment strategy (Group C), the infant who experiences their living milieu as unpredictable can dialectically utilise the very chaos and unpredictability of their distress and frustration to pre-empt, take change and give a measure of predictability to the interaction – by throwing a tantrum. Like the attachment theorists, Deleuze describes such patterns as occurring upon 'the plane of organisation', which 'is constantly working away at the plane of consistency, always trying to plug the lines of flight, stop or interrupt the movements of deterritorialisation, weigh them down, re-stratify them, reconstitute forms and subjects'.<sup>74</sup>

All three Ainsworth patterns respond to the threat of deterritorialisation with direct or conditional strategies to achieve the set-goal of the attachment system as a centripetal imperative. Deleuze and Guattari propose that 'drives and part-objects are neither stages on a genetic axes nor positions in a deep structure; they are political options for problems, they are entry-ways and exists, impasses the child lives out politically'.<sup>75</sup> Viewed as such, the attachment system can itself be regarded as tending towards political conservatism, working particularly under conditions of anxiety (but all the time to some degree) to close down the perceived threat posed by deterritorialisation. Indeed, despite his advocacy of its demands, Bowlby fully acknowledged that 'attachment is fiercely possessive, selfish, utterly intolerant of frustration' and that, since women conventionally have responsibility for children, capitulation to it would

---

<sup>69</sup> E.g. Bowlby (1969) *Attachment*, p.61; Main, M. (1979) The "ultimate" causation of some infant attachment phenomena. *Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, 2: 640-643

<sup>70</sup> Deleuze & Guattari, *Thousand Plateaus*, p.61

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.* p.63

<sup>72</sup> Deleuze, G. *Difference & Repetition*, p.124

<sup>73</sup> Deleuze, G. *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, Chapter 5

<sup>74</sup> Deleuze & Guattari, *Thousand Plateaus*, p.297

<sup>75</sup> Deleuze & Guattari, *Thousand Plateaus*, p.14

'enslave mothers'.<sup>76</sup> Such a conclusion would suggest that – from Bowlby to contemporary uses of attachment theory within the psy-disciplines – there has been a major and potentially strategic confusion between the conservative demands of the attachment system and the needs of the child. The attachment system impels immediate reterritorialisation with the infant's determinate attachment figure or figures in the face of any perceived threat, without concern for the manner or degree of wider supports which will facilitate nurturance through offering the carer health, social or political resources.<sup>77</sup>

### **Fluctuatio animi**

Where the attachment system can achieve its goal of reterritorialisation directly (B), or via negation or dialectic (A and C), the film of a Strange Situation can present what Deleuze calls a 'movement-image': a circuit of images in which the potential for absolute deterritorialisation is solved by action, and movement is brought back through a sequence of actions into the arms of an apparently stable and pre-existing order of figures and concepts. A movement-image implies in its resolution that centrifugal movements of exploration are matched by centripetal movements of return, and separation of the child from her caregiver is merely the interim between states of being together as sufficiency. Agamben has observed that 'in the cinema, a society that has lost its gestures tries at once to reclaim what it has lost and to record its loss';<sup>78</sup> in the case of films of the Ainsworth Strange Situation procedure, movement-images of the demands for reterritorialisation enjoined by the attachment system frame an image of familial sufficiency disrupted and then regained which correspond and, indeed, contribute to social forces which isolate women from health, social or political resources required for sufficiency.

Drawing upon Kurt Lewin's work from the 1930s on the spatial paths of infant movement in an experimental situation, Deleuze defines the movement-image in film as one in which 'the sensory-motor schema is concretely located in a 'hodological space' (Kurt Lewin), which is defined by a field of forces, oppositions and tensions between these forces, resolutions of these tensions according to the distribution of goals, obstacles, means, detours. The corresponding abstract form is Euclidean space, because this is the setting in which tensions are resolved according to a principle of economy'. Deleuze emphasises that 'anomalies of movement', within this principle of economy, are only recognised as a single undifferentiated cluster: disordered, and as such either ephemeral and meaningless, or in need of rectification by direct psychologically-informed action.<sup>79</sup> Yet for Deleuze, this characterisation of anomalies of movement as undifferentiated disorder is a product of an unwillingness to explore their logic if it takes us off our familiar maps. Glossing Bergson, he states that 'the idea of disorder appears when, instead of seeing that there are two or more irreducible orders (for example, that of life and that of mechanism, each present when the other is absent), we retain only a general idea of order that we confine ourselves to opposing to disorder'.<sup>80</sup> He defends use of the term 'disorganised' – not as a synonym for undifferentiated disorder, but in a precise sense to mean a disjuncture between a human's perception and their motor-schema, which stops the smooth flow of expected behaviour and instead results in confusion, symptoms, or surprising and potentially ineffective mixes of tendencies towards action.<sup>81</sup> Deleuze does not necessarily positively valorise 'disorganisation'. He and Guattari state that 'staying stratified – organised, signified, subjected – is not the worst that can happen; the worst that can happen is if you throw the strata into demented or suicidal collapse', offering the examples of the 'drug addict,

---

<sup>76</sup> Robertson & Bowlby, 'Responses of Young Children', p.138; Bowlby, J. (1958) 'The nature of the child's tie to his mother', *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 39: 350–373, p.367.

<sup>77</sup> Hrdy, S. (2014) 'Development + Social Selection in the Emergence of "Emotionally Modern" Humans' *Research and Perspectives in Neurosciences* 21: 57-91

<sup>78</sup> Agamben, G. ([1990] 2000) *Means without End*, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, p.53

<sup>79</sup> Deleuze, G. ([1985] 1989) *Cinema II*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson & Robert Galeta, London: Bloomsbury, p.124

<sup>80</sup> Deleuze, G. ([1966] 1988) *Bergsonism*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson & Barbara Haberjam, NY: Zone, p.19

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.* p.69

paranoiac, or hypochondriac'.<sup>82</sup> However, disorganisation can help us see the contingency of the links between flows with which we are accustomed, disrupting present assumptions and showing the potential for other possibilities and futures.

Building on his reading of Bergson, Deleuze contrasts the movement-image to the 'time-image', a film in which actions cannot be unified with resolutions. For instance, in the time-image, 'movement can tend to zero, the character, or the shot itself, remain immobile', threatening to turn the transitions and transactions which comprise a film into a still photograph through the frozen state of a body; 'movement may also be exaggerated, be incessant, become a world movement, a Brownian movement, a trampling, a to-and-fro, a multiplicity of movements on different scales. What is important is that the anomalies of movement become the essential point instead of being accidental or contingent.'<sup>83</sup> In examining the logic of such anomalous movement, Deleuze conceptualises the space of the time-image with the idea of *fluctuatio animi*, taken from Spinoza. Spinoza teaches that *fluctuatio animi* is the counterpart process, in the domain of affect, of confusion and doubt in the domain of the imagination. *Fluctuationes animi* 'for the most part arise from an object which is the efficient cause of each affect. For the human body is composed of a great many individuals of different natures, and so it can be affected in a great many different ways by one and the same body. And on the other hand, because one and the same thing can be affected in many ways, it will also be able to affect one and the same part of the body in many different ways. From this we can easily conceive that one and the same object can be the cause of many and contrary affects'.<sup>84</sup> *Fluctuatio animi* thus occurs to the degree that the complexity of dynamic forces within which the subject is situated and of which she is composed inhibit the coherent expression of affect in a behavioural sequence.<sup>85</sup> 'The *fluctuatio animi*' of the time-image, Deleuze concludes, 'is not hesitation between several objects or between several directions, but a mobile covering-up of sets which are incompatible';<sup>86</sup> it is an 'undecidability of the body' in which 'the obstacle does not, as in the action-image, allow itself to be determined in relation to goals and means which would unify the set'.<sup>87</sup> As such the issue becomes not contradiction in the abstract, but the specific possibility of imperatives for gestures of the body which are difficult to express at once. This potential difficulty allows the film of infant behaviour in the Ainsworth Strange Situation to be regarded as a time-image: it reveals a world in which not everything is ultimately reconcilable and which therefore retains instability and dynamism.

Unlike Main, whose theory gives space for but does not venture beyond the conflict between attachment and fear, Spinoza considers the potential for two further forms of undecidability faced by someone who loves and needs an object.<sup>88</sup> First, he considers the *fluctuatio animi* which can result from disjunctures between other irreconcilable embodied affects. Second, he explores the undecidability of the body which can attend an irreconcilability between affects and our attempts to manage them (e.g. through negation or dialectics, as we have seen). As Deleuze emphasises, Spinoza helps us see that the disorganisation or frozen inhibition of an integral affect need not be regarded as a collapse into undifferentiatedness or the result solely of contradiction; the disorganisation of an affect can be the product of any force – including those of which the affect itself is composed – which can disrupt the coherent efficacy of its power for action.<sup>89</sup> In particular, Spinoza is interested in the way that love can be disrupted or dysregulated by hate, considered as a response to an object which chronically

---

<sup>82</sup> Deleuze & Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p.179, 181

<sup>83</sup> Deleuze, *Cinema II*, p.134

<sup>84</sup> Spinoza, B. ([1677] 1994) *Ethics*, trans. Edwin Curley, London: Penguin, II, 154, S.

<sup>85</sup> Deleuze, G. ([1968] 1989) *Expressionism in Philosophy*, trans. Martin Joghin, NY: Zone, p.386-7, n.23; Cf. Macherey, P. (1996) 'The Encounter with Spinoza', in Paul Patton, ed., *Deleuze: A Critical Reader*, Oxford: Blackwell, pp.139-61

<sup>86</sup> Deleuze, *Cinema II*, p.135

<sup>87</sup> Deleuze, *Cinema II*, p.209

<sup>88</sup> See e.g. *Ethics*, II, 155, S2; II, 194, XV.

<sup>89</sup> Deleuze, *Difference & Repetition*, p.322

raises and frustrates our hopes and desires. This account can help us analyse behaviour identified in the indices of disorganised/disoriented attachment, which do not immediately suggest a conflict between attachment and fear, but rather attachment and anger. The indices for coding disorganised/disoriented attachment include the following behaviours: 'the infant displays anger simultaneously with proximity seeking or contact maintaining' (index 2) or 'infant calm and undistressed during both separations from the parent, but becomes extremely focused on the parent, showing highly angry behaviour on reunion' (index 1).<sup>90</sup> It could be suggested that these behaviours exhibit some compromise between avoidance, minimally centrifugal as the negation of desire, and the centripetal imperatives of attachment and anger.

Considering the *fluctuatio animi* also lays groundwork for a potential explanation of a previously unexamined behaviour, mentioned above, in the indices of disorganisation/disorientation: an infant is filmed playing contentedly for a long while (which, in conventional attachment theory, should preclude the operation of the attachment system) and then suddenly showing strong distress or anger. In contrast to many attachment theorists, Deleuze and Guattari do not sever exploration and attachment as fully differentiated systems. Rather, they suggest that 'pieces from the bodies of the mother and the father are taken up in the connections, parental appellations crop up in the disjunctions of the chain, the parents are there as ordinary stimuli of an indifferent nature that trigger the becoming of adventures'.<sup>91</sup> Attachment relations are inscribed within the flows, breaks and linkages of play. As such, even without the activation of the attachment system by anxiety on the departure of the caregiver, play itself therefore has the capacity to trigger a virtual image of the caregiver which can dysregulate exploration to the extent that the child floods out into rage or distress. This account, in fact, can be somewhat aligned with a mechanism already identified by Bowlby in his description of the infant as a 'machine incorporating feedback'. From a study of infants in a playground, Bowlby noticed that at intervals something seemed to send the infant back from exploration to halt near their caregiver, before sallying forth again. It appeared that 'return towards mother seemed to be accomplished in longer hops and at a faster rate than the outward journey'.<sup>92</sup> Bowlby suggested that exploration itself activates the attachment system a little, evoking the infant's awareness (memory/perception) of their caregiver and orienting them back to him or her. 'Calm, contented play suddenly succeeded by distressed or angry behaviour without rationale' in the indices of disorganised/disoriented attachment could then be explained, not as a conflict between attachment and fear, but rather as a flooding of play by rage or distress, evoked by the experiences, expectations and fantasies of the caregiver which remain beating at moments even within the centripetal movement off into adventure.

## Attachments to film

To close, I shall apply some of the ideas developed above in reflection on our attachments to film. In his chapter in *Little Madnesses*, Tisseron proposes using Winnicott that 'in playing, every child chooses to let himself be invaded by intense feelings arising from situations that he knows full well are fictional. In this way he familiarises himself with these feelings, tames them and masters them. In other words, he gradually puts in place a capacity to isolate, check and, just as important, displace the feelings he has in real situations, where he cannot master them, onto playing situations, where he can. The adult cinema-goer does exactly the same'.<sup>93</sup> My sense is that, rather than solely serving as a space for displacement and mastery, Tisseron underestimates the capacity of both play and of cinema to distress, persecute and infuriate us. This point echoes a criticism made by André Green of Winnicott. Whereas in *Playing and Reality*, Winnicott wrote that 'play is the universal and belongs to health', Green qualifies that play can

---

<sup>90</sup> Main & Solomon, *Procedures*, p.137

<sup>91</sup> Deleuze & Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, p.124

<sup>92</sup> Bowlby, *Attachment*, p.253

<sup>93</sup> Tisseron, S. (2013) 'The Reality of the Experience of Fiction', in *Little Madnesses*, ed. Annette Kuhn, NY: I.B.Tauris p.130

also be overwhelming and master the player, and can diverge from and even work against health in Winnicott's sense – the ability to be recognisable to oneself and others within society 'without too great a sacrifice of personal spontaneity'.<sup>94</sup> For example, Julie Sexeny has presented the case of Aronofsky's *Black Swan* as a film which enthrals through its capacity to offer moments of emancipation and health precisely in and through a confirmation of persecutory gender norms, a confirmation which overwhelms with polarised affects and which works to master the protagonist and the viewer.<sup>95</sup> Sexeny's account suggests that we can find ourselves returning to such a film time and again not only because of the opportunities it holds for displacement and mastery, but also as a site for reinforcing and/or disturbing the hold of relations of power which work to specify us as by degrees normal or pathological.

Viewed as a movement-image, films of attachment assessments appear to show the division of humans into four categories. Whereas three of the categories identify infants who can find some way, even if this involves avoidance or resistance, to coherently sequence their behaviours to achieve the availability of their caregiver when they are alarmed or anxious, a fourth 'disorganised/disoriented' category has been widely reified as an undifferentiated and disordered state, caused by fear of the caregiver. By contrast, viewed as time-images, these films open out all infant behaviour as by degrees constituted by and within potentially incompatible movements of deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation, possibility and closure. Attending to films of attachment assessments as potential time-images, reveals that all of us by degrees shape our attachments in a manner haunted by the potential for absolute deterritorialisation and abandonment, which impels us to organise as best we can even around unresponsive, unpredictable, cruel, infuriating or hopeless encounters.<sup>96</sup> This offers a potential qualification of theories of aesthetic masochism since Studlar,<sup>97</sup> as it is not presumed that there need be any pleasure in our enthrallment with a persecutory film. Rather, we can find ourselves watching because a film has closed in around us, due to the opportunities it offers for reinforcing and/or disturbing the relations of power that orchestrate our *recognisability* to ourselves and others - whether as film critics or queer subjects, research psychologists or social workers. The conditions of such recognisability to ourselves and others can leave us deeply attached to people and cultural artefacts – including film, and psychology – that can hurt, scare or enrage us and which need not offer us pleasure or comfort. However, as I have attempted to demonstrate through considering the attachment assessment film as a potential time-image, even encounters and artefacts with a history of conservative effects raise the possibility of surprising openness and critique. This perspective converges, in this regard, with the suggestion made by Judith Butler that 'the moment of resistance, or opposition, emerges precisely when we find ourselves attached to our constraint, and so constrained in our very attachment. To the extent that we question the promise of those norms that constrain our recognizability, we open the way for attachment itself to live in some less constrained way.'<sup>98</sup>

---

<sup>94</sup> Winnicott, D. (1970) *Playing and Reality*, London: Routledge, p.56; Winnicott, D. (1965) *The Maturation Processes and the Facilitating Environment*, London: Karnac, p.83; Green, A. (2005) *Play and Reflection in Donald Winnicott's Writings*, London: Karnac.

<sup>95</sup> Sexeny, J. (2014) 'Mutual recognition in Darren Aronofsky's *Black Swan*', presented at *Moving Objects: Film, Relation, Change*, Birkbeck College, London, 17<sup>th</sup> January 2014.

<sup>96</sup> Cf. Berlant, L. (2011) *Cruel Optimism*, Durham: Duke University Press, p.227

<sup>97</sup> Studlar, G. (1985) 'Visual Pleasure and the Masochistic Aesthetic' *Journal of Film and Video*, 37(2): 5-26.

<sup>98</sup> Butler, J. (2004) 'Bodies and Power Revisited' in Karen Vintges & Dianna Taylor (eds.) *Feminism and the Final Foucault*, (pp.183-196), Urbana: University of Illinois Press, p.191-2.