

# The Uterus as a Narrative Space in Contemporary Cinema from the Americas

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the uterus as a narrative space in contemporary cinema from the Americas. The thesis offers a timely change in focus for film studies in relation to pregnancy and the female reproductive body as it investigates the overlooked space of the uterus, and speaks to the increasing importance of the critical medical humanities. Through close textual analysis, framed phenomenologically, I argue that the uterus is a distinct narrative space by bringing into dialogue film theory and scholarship on the foetal ultrasound to create an analytical framework, which includes biotourism, collaborative coding, and the notion of ultrasound bonding. The thesis is divided into three main chapters. In Chapter One I establish the uterus as a narrative space in *Juno* (Jason Reitman, 2007, USA); *Maria Full of Grace/María, llena eres de gracia* (Joshua Marston, 2004, Colombia/USA/Ecuador); *Gestation/Gestación* (Esteban Ramírez, 2009, Costa Rica), and *Stephanie Daley* (Hilary Brougher, 2009, USA) by bringing together Vivian Sobchack's notion of the screen as premises for perception (1992) and Julie Roberts' notion of collaborative coding (2012a; 2012b). Chapter Two argues for the existence of a biotourist narrative in *The Milk of Sorrow/La teta asustada* (Claudia Llosa, 2009, Peru/Spain); *Quinceañera/Echo Park* (Wash Westmoreland, Richard Glatzer, 2006, USA); *Ain't Them Bodies Saints* (David Lowery, 2013, USA), and *Apio verde* (Francesc Morales, 2013, Chile). Chapter Three highlights the transformation of the foetus in *Up* (Pete Docter, Bob Peterson, 2009, USA); *The Bad Intentions/Las malas intenciones* (Rosario García-Montero, 2011, Peru/Argentina/Germany); *Pan's Labyrinth/El laberinto del fauno* (Guillermo del Toro, 2006, Spain/Mexico/USA); and *Birth* (Jonathan Glazer, 2009, USA/UK/Germany/France) by bringing Janelle Taylor's (2008) notion of bonding into dialogue with the Marksian recollection-object. The thesis focuses attention on narrative spaces in the body in relation to film form, rather than representations of the pregnant body or the figure of the mother and, thus, differs significantly from other scholarship to offer a bold analytical shift on the subject of pregnancy.



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NB. This thesis includes English, American English and Spanish. In order to have some continuity, I use the English spelling of *foetus* as opposed to the American spelling of *fetus* in the main body of the thesis. I will leave original American English spellings in quotations. The titles of films will be given in English and the original Spanish where appropriate. All film titles will be shortened throughout the text. The titles for films in Spanish always use a capital letter for the first word followed by lower case for the rest e.g. *El laberinto del fauno*; I will follow this convention in all titles given in Spanish.

The thesis uses a small number of screenshots from the DVD of each film as an integral part of academic critique. All the images in the thesis are crucial, fully referenced, and there to support my academic analysis.



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## INTRODUCTION

Throughout history, the female body has been subjected to scrutiny. It has been used metaphorically largely as a result of its capacity for pregnancy and reproduction. However, the site of pregnancy – the uterus – has been overlooked and under-theorised. Given the fact that pregnancy is central to kinship, it is crucial, I argue, to examine this bodily function in terms of its *affectiveness* rather than its gender specificity. It is not my aim to argue that pregnancy should be seen as non-gender-specific or gender-free; rather, I explore other avenues of discussion that are not wholly focussed on gender. The female reproductive body has become synonymous with its biological function, which, paradoxically, creates a separation of the body of the pregnant (fertile) person and the foetus. The site of the uterus changes as the perception of it moves between the internal body (which includes the foetus), and the external body. The uterus, as a result, becomes a fragmented location and a contested site. This, I argue, is where the uterus becomes a narrative space in cinema. I consider the fragmentation of the female reproductive body crucial to my investigation. My critical aim is to renegotiate a language for the close textual analysis of pregnancy by capitalising on what is already understood about narratives that surround the foetal ultrasound and to discuss this within the frame of phenomenology.

Phenomenology, as a philosophical concept, speaks to how the body and mind contribute to a sense of being in the world, but when applied to film scholarship, it is inextricably linked to theories of spectatorship. As my critical aim is to position the pregnant body outside of the spheres of gender representation and to explore the affectivity of the uterus as a frame, my film phenomenological approach, I argue, presents a methodological way of rethinking the pregnant body and reproduction that operates within the theoretical framework of spectatorship. In this

way, I develop a new conceptual framework for the analysis of pregnancy. In film studies, film phenomenology, Jenny Charmarette argues, is a ‘different scratching of the philosophical-phenomenological itch’ that pushes at the boundaries of many theoretical enquiries, and it is important to say from the outset that there is a lively debate in film studies about whether phenomenology is a methodology or a theory (2015: 290).<sup>1</sup> The *Quarterly Review of Film and Video* devoted a whole issue to the subject of phenomenology in film in 1990 and Julian Hanich and Christian Ferencz-Flatz revisit the subject in 2016 in the journal *Studia Phaenomenologica*. In each, the question about whether phenomenology is method or theory remains under intense discussion. It is crucial, therefore, to understand that film phenomenology is still evolving. To consider phenomenology as a methodological approach alone suggests it is merely an observational tool that describes the film-going experience, but this restricts and ignores its crucial role as an interpretative, critical tool when discussing theories of spectatorship in relation to the body. In film studies, the lived body experience can be understood as the physical act of viewing a film, or how the senses are invoked in the spectator to create meaning and affective response. This includes not only the aesthetics of the film world(s), but also the interaction between protagonists. Phenomenology, I argue, enables an interrogation of the dynamic between the spectator and the screen, and the dynamic between the protagonists on screen, whereby it articulates spectatorship *and* narrativity. In this way, phenomenology can be understood as a catalyst for a methodological approach and theoretical enquiry and should be considered a lens through which to think through and develop theories of spectatorship.

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<sup>1</sup> Charmarette uses this phrase as a direct response to the language Steve Connor (1999) uses in relation to cultural phenomenology. Connor explains that phenomenology should be seen as a way to write ‘plausibly about cultural objects and experiences’ and is substantially different from the criticism of philosophical phenomenology as an ethereal approach akin to a ‘forest path into mystified quietude’ (19; 20).

Certainly, phenomenology is a method for qualitative research on the lived experience, and my thesis makes direct reference throughout to empirical research on the foetal ultrasound, but it should always be remembered that this kind of data also demands an interpretative analysis. If phenomenology, then, is not only a philosophical discussion on consciousness and the body, but also a way to *think through* questions of the lived experience, embodiment and corporeality, one of my questions is whether it might form not only a methodology, but also a theoretical basis whereby pregnancy and the scan can be understood in relation to film spectatorship. I understand there to be an inherent flexibility in phenomenology which, I argue, supports its use in this thesis and gives meaning to my interdisciplinary approach. Phenomenological ways of thinking allow me to construct a methodological and theoretical paradigm that bridges film studies and empirical research so that my conceptual framework intersects with other interpretative epistemological positions. Moreover, as I want to look closely at what the film does in relation to pregnancy as opposed to what pregnancy means in more general terms, my phenomenological approach encourages a closer textual analysis of pregnancy in film that is distinct from an extended explanation of what pregnancy is, how it is experienced, and what it represents.

It is clear to me that the importance of phenomenology in relation to pregnancy remains undeveloped in film studies. Although Iris Marion Young (2005) offers a phenomenology of pregnancy from the point of view of the pregnant subject, her philosophical analysis does not elaborate on spectatorship beyond objectification of the body and subjectivity of the pregnant person. Young does, however, suggest that spectatorship of the foetal ultrasound offers a route into the shareability of the pregnant experience through vision (2005: 61). Julie Roberts (2012a, 2012b) pushes this question further in her work on the foetal ultrasound by addressing the question of spectatorship in relation to pregnant embodiment and the foetus. Roberts highlights the lack of scholarship on the scan that acknowledges its role as a ‘multi-sensory process’ that

is not only visual (2012a: 81). Roberts speaks about a collaboration of spectatorship and narrative using the term ‘collaborative coding’ as a way to describe the shared narrative concern around the screen in the scan (2012a: 99; 2012b: 305-309). This collaboration, which I discuss in Chapter One, makes sense of spectatorship whereby the visual image – in the guise of the foetus and the narrative device of the scan – provokes a suturing as the spectator attributes identification (by recognising the image of the foetus as something familiar to them) as part of establishing kinship.

Yet identification according to Martine Beugnet, in relation to film, has two forms: firstly, that which is led by the gaze and the camera; secondly, that which is guided by the film’s corporeality (2007: 7). This suggests that there is identification that is led by the mode of address and identification that is led by the aesthetics of the image. Kate Ince explains that, as she understands it, identification is the spectatorial dynamic led by a recognition of the characters in a film, as well as the spectatorial dynamic in relation to the materiality of the film and the experience of viewing the film (2011).<sup>2</sup> This suggests that there is a nuanced understanding of how identification is positioned in relation to spectatorship. Roberts, looking at the discursive exchanges between sonographers and clients in the scan room, uses collaborative coding to explain how ‘the sonogram [is] a signifier of [the] baby’ where ‘imaginative interpretations [...] made by one observer is picked up and repeated [and] moderated’, so that multiple narratives form a ‘mutually acceptable interpretation of the images on screen’ (2012b: 9). Collaborative coding, therefore, stresses identification *and* intersubjectivity whereby spectators interpret the image (of the foetus) in relation to how they see themselves and how they position themselves as part of a kinship group. Furthermore, when

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<sup>2</sup> Ince reconceptualises the use of identification in film theory. She argues that it has become understood as part of Lacanian psychoanalytic approaches and she rethinks it as ‘a non-Lacanian psychoanalytic and phenomenological concept of bodily, sensate identification’ as a way to acknowledge multi-layered cultural identifications (2011: 10).

viewing the scan is thought of as biotourism, as I discuss in Chapter Two, the interior of the uterus can be read as a bioscape that it is spatialised so that, according to Charlotte Kroløkke, the (expectant parent) spectator's response to the visual image on the scan (whether or not it can be understood as 'real'), is coupled with an 'acceptable' narrative around the scan as part of a shared subjectivity (2011).<sup>3</sup> A shared subjectivity suggests a communal viewpoint that in the scan is often read as bonding as I discuss in Chapter Three, but the act of looking is not always looking from the same point of view, nor is it divorced from the embodied moment of the encounter as a self-reflective experience. Whether it is the scan or the film, self-reflexivity depends on the spectator's ability to empathise or sympathise with the subject of the narrative (pregnancy) and/or the protagonists (pregnant person, foetus) where the encounter is part of the lived body experience. In this way, the scan mirrors the experience of the film where each can be understood as a multi-sensory process.

When Vivian Sobchack develops her theoretical approach to spectatorship of film phenomenologically, she insists that 'the film experience is a system of communication based on bodily perception as a vehicle for conscious expression' and that 'the viewer, therefore, shares cinematic space with the film but must also negotiate it' (1992: 9-10). She investigates the structures of vision as both empirical *and* philosophical arguing that the vision of the spectator and the projected vision of the film meet at the cinema screen and that the film experience should be considered as a form of communication and a doubling of spectatorship, which intersects with spectatorship of the scan. Sobchack's analysis of the film experience through phenomenology, importantly, reflects her frustration with established theories of

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<sup>3</sup> Kroløkke's empirical ethnographic research, noting verbal and non-verbal exchanges in the scan room, was carried out in ultrasound clinics offering a foetal ultrasound as part of regular antenatal check-ups in Copenhagen, Denmark and Albuquerque, USA. The clientele in Copenhagen was largely white middle-class women and in Albuquerque the clientele was mainly Native American and Hispanic.

spectatorship in film studies and she rails against the view that phenomenology is ‘mushy’ or subjective, or that its use in film studies is merely ‘sloppy liberal humanism’ that then questions the academic rigour of its use not only as a methodology, but also as a theoretical enquiry (1992: xiv). Her point, which she argues strongly, is that well-established psychoanalysis and Marxist analyses have ‘not exhausted her own experience but [have] exhausted her patience’ and ‘grounded and circumscribed’ film theory so that any discussion of spectatorship is limited to representation and apparatus (1992: xv). Rethinking spectatorship as an embodied experience also challenges, as Laura U. Marks acknowledges, ‘the critique of ocularcentrism [that] has a considerable legacy among feminist theorists, who link vision to the distancing from the body and to the objectification and control of sense and others’ (2000: 133). Distancing and objectification is one way of thinking through the body in terms of spectatorship, but as Marks argues, it takes away the importance of interconnectivity and the haptic. Sobchack adds that film theory is, or should be, a way to understand the ‘meaningful relation between cinema and our sensate bodies’ (2004: 54). A linguistic expert herself, Sobchack emphasises that although structures of meaning can be explained, they are nevertheless limited by language, and that semiotics and the ideological study of the gaze do not deal with the specificity of the lived body experience.

Although phenomenological approaches are becoming increasingly well established in film, the departure from ideological analysis of spectatorship, signalled by Sobchack, has continued to both challenge and enrich theories of spectatorship in film studies, and informs my own analysis beyond theories of the gaze. It is the gendering of the gaze in film theory that appears to be most problematic in relation to the body. The social construction of the female body as the subject and object of the gaze, means that it can be fetishised or made gender-specific in relation

to the ‘male gaze’.<sup>4</sup> In the 40 years since Laura Mulvey’s essay was first published, analysis of the gaze, and the *to-be-looked-at-ness* of the subject of that gaze remains fundamentally important to spectatorship (1975). The gender specificity in Mulvey’s work is a response to the subjectivity and objectivity of the female protagonist, but it is no longer sufficient to talk only about the male and the female gaze. The hallmark of Mulvey’s essay, the pleasure of viewing – scopophilia – places the female body within patriarchal systems of production and reception, but the importance of her work is often overlooked in the critiques of her reading of the patriarchal gaze and for her dependence on Freudian psychoanalysis.<sup>5</sup> It must be remembered that Mulvey’s work is a critique that is *one* way of looking (at representation of women) at *one* cinema (Hollywood). This presupposed, Jackie Stacey argues, a ‘*monolithic* system in which the cinematic apparatus was saturated with patriarchal needs and desires’, and points out that there was no agreement between feminists at that point about what might construct a female spectator as opposed to a male spectator (1994: 20; emphasis in original).<sup>6</sup> Moreover, psychoanalytic readings are based on gender-defined sexuality as a reference for spectatorship. The gendered spectator is not significant to the way I read the films in this thesis but Mulvey’s work, nevertheless, establishes connectivity through the gaze and helps to establish not only what I am looking at in my reading of films, but also establishes how I am looking: firstly, the

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<sup>4</sup> Words such as ‘voyeurism, fetishism, exhibitionism and the male gaze’, Thomas Elsaesser and Malte Hagener suggest, detract from Mulvey’s central argument about the power of the gaze (2010: 109).

<sup>5</sup> See Steven Shaviro’s *The Cinematic Body* (1993) for his dismissal of Freudian psychoanalysis in film theory in general, and Mulvey’s work in particular. Shaviro (1993) Richard Dyer (1990) and bell hooks (1993) have all critiqued Mulvey’s notion of the gaze, and the ideological spectatorship assumed in apparatus theory. In recent years, Shaviro has revisited Mulvey’s work, admitting that he underestimated the polemical importance of Mulvey’s essay, and he now believes that only someone as passionate about cinema (as he is) could have written her text (2008). Mulvey also critiqued her earlier work for its gendered focus, but in the introduction to the second edition of *Visual and Other Pleasures*, she stresses that her writing reflected and emphasised the optimism of the political left in the UK, in which film theorists were taking ideas from both Francophile film critique and analysis of the Hollywood production system (2009: ix).

<sup>6</sup> Stacey gives a measured critique of Mulvey’s work and places it, like Mulvey herself, within a critique of feminist film criticism as it stood in the late 1980s and early 1990s (1994).

director and camera (including the editor, *mise-en-scène* and extent of realism); secondly, the gaze between actors and/or characters (in the narrative diegesis of the film); and thirdly the spectator or audience.<sup>7</sup> This positioning is of crucial importance to the way I develop my conceptual framework as my thesis moves away from the ideological positioning of the spectator and questions of representation that are present in contemporary Neo-Freudian psychoanalytic and Neo-Marxian methodological and theoretical approaches to film so that I can lead a discussion on pregnancy and the uterus that focusses on the importance of narrative space and the film frame.

Nevertheless, I understand there is a tension in film scholarship that exists in competing philosophical analyses of the frame. I believe there are important crossovers in these arguments that are crucial to how I read pregnancy and the space of the uterus. For example, Sobchackian ideas of the frame as a '*premises for perception*' (1992: 134; emphasis in original) intersect with Deleuzian notions of off-screen space as an 'Elsewhere' (1986: 17). In my discussion of off-screen space in Chapter One, I bring the two philosophical ideas together as I do not consider them mutually exclusive. Although Gilles Deleuze does not write about the embodied spectator, and is not identified as a phenomenologist, he does acknowledge the power of off-screen space which, I argue, links closely with the gentleness of the frame described by Sobchack. In fact, Deleuze's notion of an 'Elsewhere' brings strength to my argument of the uterus as an off-screen space and as a conceptual narrative space. It could be argued that multiple narratives around the uterus are in fact extra-diegetic rather than off-screen, but this

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<sup>7</sup> Mulvey's more recent work is about the possessive and pensive spectator in relation to duration and the screen/still (2006). By freezing the action, narrative continuity is stopped but it allows a reassessment of the image and the spectator's relationship to the image. The possessive spectator wants repetition, to see the same part of the film repeatedly. Mulvey relates this repetitive viewing to Freud's notion of *fort/da*. In this case, repetitive behaviour in the child, Freud thinks is a process of repeating an unpleasant experience in order to make sense of the pleasurable one – making something important go away so that it will come back, like his mother.

does not address the profundity of these narratives. Extra diegesis suggests something that is obviously part of the world of the film but positioned outside of the main diegesis so that, in other words, the spectator is aware of its presence. Importantly for my discussion on pregnancy, Deleuze points to another narrative space that demands discussion. Although Deleuze speaks specifically about the formal qualities of the frame and not bodily space, I take the essence of his discussion to rethink the uterus as a space that is not only visual, but also haptic.

Haptic visuality, coined by Marks in relation to intercultural film, describes the sensual quality of film as experienced by the spectator. Marks makes a distinction between the optical and the haptic when she says, ‘optical visuality depends on a separation between the viewing subject and the object’ and ‘haptic looking tends to move over the surface of its object’ and embraces the ‘familiarity with the world that the viewer knows through more senses than vision alone’ (162; 187). She describes the way the camera can present the spectator with partial images such as textures and colours that invoke sense memories and that the cinematic experience is something tactile that spectators ‘brush up against’ and this influences the way the materiality of the film is understood and analysed (2000: xii). Jennifer M. Barker suggests that the cinematic experience is one of ‘inspiration’ whereby the process of experiencing a film begins on the surface of the skin, moving through the muscles into the viscera of the body, and ‘animates [the spectator] with sensations and attitudes’ that are then brought back to the surface as part of the embodied experience (2009: 146; 147). Both Marks and Barker encourage a way of looking at film that acknowledges the embodied spectator, the invocation of the senses and emotions, which suggests a rethinking of the formal qualities of film.

The aesthetic qualities of film – cinematography, editing, lighting, *mise-en-scène* – mean little without the emotional engagement of the spectator. Tarja Laine argues that, in order to introduce a critical methodological approach to emotion in the cinema, a critical response is ‘to

shift from questions of representation (what the film is) or signification (what the film means) to matters of agential practices, actions, and intensities (what the film *does*)' (2013: 4; emphasis in original). In this way, the intimate relationship between the spectator and the screen can be thought of in relation to film as an aesthetic form *and* as an experience. Within this discussion, there are fundamental questions to be answered about whether this turn towards the affective qualities of film should be part of reception (audience) studies and representation and not a return to film form and close analysis. Daniel Frampton suggests that 'both para-narrational "showing" and *mise-en-scène* aesthetics' or 'filmosophy' allows an understanding that new realities are constantly created on screen and he argues against formal close textual analysis – which he describes as 'technist' (2006: 39; 171; 172; emphasis in original).

However, I suggest that close analysis of the text should not be considered as mechanical or lacking in meaning. Laine maintains that the turn to affect in film studies has moved the reading of film as a text from something that can be done objectively to an understanding of cinema and the film itself as an 'emotional event' that is experiential (10-11). She explores what she calls the '*emotional core*' of the film which, she explains, includes the intrinsic emotions that any particular film has in relation to its structure that is intentional, as well as the emotions engendered in any single spectator (2013: 3; emphasis in original). Shaviro also suggests that the spectator is 'captivated', 'distracted', and 'touched' by cinema and that identifying with the film is actually 'sympathetic participation' or 'complicitous communication' as part of an affective encounter (1993: 53). Affect, as I understand it, is creating the circumstances in which there is the potential for effect, whether this effect is felt as a bodily (physical) or psychological (emotional) reaction, that relies on empathy and sympathy which Sobchack calls '*interobjectivity*' (2004: 311; emphasis in original). Sobchack suggests that interobjectivity is

a necessary counterpart to intersubjectivity, whereby both are complimentary, complementary and contrary.

Furthermore, Sobchack thinks of interobjectivity as a way to express what embodiment is, as the lived body is ‘at once, both an objective *subject* and a subjective *object*: a sentient, sensual, and sensible ensemble of materialised capacities and agency that literally and figurally makes sense of, and to, both ourselves and others’ (2; emphasis in original). This circulation of affect is central to the ultrasound scan and is part of embodied spectatorship that allows my discussion to move between the spectator of the film, the protagonists and the corporeality of the film. Brian Massumi explains that the ‘affective is marked by the gap between *content* and *effect*’ (2002: 24). This is a helpful way to think about the two sides of the affective encounter that Gregory J. Seigworth and Melissa Gregg suggest is an *in-between-ness* signalling the presence of a potential resonance that results from an affective encounter (2010: 3). Emotion, as Massumi argues, is only one potential resulting affect in this encounter and the two, emotion and affect, should not be conflated. Importantly, Massumi establishes the two-sidedness of the affective encounter to suggest that the emergence of affect is in its intensity or resonance. The turn to affect in film studies is part of the discussion that embraces the embodied spectator and the corporeality of the film form. As Eugenie Brinkema suggests, a return to the analysis of film form is a way to understand the ‘forgotten dimension’ of affect where the return to close textual analysis is in itself, as she suggests, a response to the turn to affect and the affective nature of film (2014: xvi). My method of reading the films brings into focus a reassessment of the way in which pregnancy and the uterus can be understood by engaging with this turn to affect.

Within this reassessment, I am, however, mindful of what Imogen Tyler, Rebecca Coleman and Debra Ferreday refer to as ‘methodological fatigue’ in feminist media studies (2008). The methodological fatigue is understood by Tyler *et al.* as when theoretical debate is richly

articulated, but the focus of that debate is less well defined. This lack of definition speaks to how I understand there to be something fundamentally missing from the subject of pregnancy in film studies. This something, I argue, is an understanding of embodiment, not only as a record of the experience of pregnancy, but also as the embodied experience of pregnancy that is separated from the pregnant person and the foetus, and concerns other narratives. There is a rich history of feminist critical analysis on the body. This thesis builds on this scholarship, as I discuss throughout, but there is less work on the affective quality of the reproductive body as part of the everyday embodied experience.

Sobchack argues for an analytical framework that acknowledges the embodied experience of the spectator and maintains that distinction of the lived body must include more than just gender or race. She argues that the lived body can also be ‘diseased, impaired, or deprived’ (1992: 160), and that this quality, of normativity, is not taken into sufficient consideration. Christine Battersby suggests that, by normalising the female reproductive body as one ‘that births’, it can be repositioned as a norm for analysis (1998). The body ‘that births’ is not always seen within a normative context, and its definition is more accurately a definition of *corporeal potentiality* rather than an actuality. Margrit Shildrick suggests the body should ‘be addressed in its concrete specificity, not as some immaterial abstraction’ (1997: 30), and rails against the fragmentation of the female body. Similarly, Elizabeth Grosz encourages a turn to corporeal feminism, where she does not consider the non-biological act of reproduction as neutral, but rather male-centric and argues against binary approaches to subjectivity and sexuality by ‘shifting frameworks and models of understanding’ (1994: xiv). Yet, despite its centrality as a frame in pregnancy, the uterus has been sidelined or marginalised as being only a marker for the female reproductive body. The separation of the pregnant body and the foetus, I argue, offers a way to refocus textual analysis. Phenomenology as a frame allows me to investigate the *emotional core* of the film

where it acknowledges the embodied spectator and the normative possibilities of exploring the pregnant body and the uterus.

My own approach is interpretative and my work is inter-disciplinary – a hallmark of feminist research and my approach through phenomenology allows me to draw together scholarship from cultural, historical, geographical and from anthropological studies to engage with memory, landscape and space, trauma, and embodied narratives. This scholarship allows me to address what Patricia Clough calls, in relation to the turn to affect, ‘the foraging of a new body [...] the biomediated body’ (2010: 207). Clough suggests that the notion of the bio-mediated body is part of a much wider discussion on affect and bodies, and signals the recognition that bodies are not only considered as organisms. Understanding of bodies must take into account the conflation of bio-media and new media, which changes the notion of not only what the body is, but also what the body can be made to do.<sup>8</sup> Carolyn Pedwell and Anne Whitehead, like Tyler *et al.*, express concern about how feminist theory can engage with the affective turn without losing some of the principles that inform feminism (2012). Tyler explains that any reflection on (feminist) politics and (media) analysis should return to ideological positioning in order to understand what kind of questions feminist critique should address (2008). Moreover, Pedwell and Whitehead argue that affect is not a new concept and that ‘feminist scholars have been at the heart of [...] engagements with affect’, clarifying that ‘feminist analyses are of most critical value when they attend reflexively *both* to what might be gained *and lost* through claiming a “new” conceptual paradigm’ (2012: 115; 118; emphasis in original). Pedwell and Whitehead do acknowledge that feminist study of affect examines how ‘affect travels within and across cultures, situating feminist debates [...] within international, transnational, cross-cultural, and

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<sup>8</sup> See also Rosi Braidotti’s notion of the ‘posthuman’. Although the posthuman means many things, Braidotti suggests that posthuman theory is ‘about coming to terms with unprecedented changes and transformations of the basic unit of reference for what counts as human’ (2013: 104).

cross racial contexts' (124). Pedwell and Whitehead's concern is that the 'turn to affect' can remove ideological questions.

Whilst I understand the concern from feminist scholars, I do not believe that the turn to affect is anti-ideological. On the contrary, it can offer ways to reposition feminist critique in relation to pregnancy and the uterus. Gaylyn Studlar argues that 'like feminism, phenomenology cannot be considered to be a unified theoretical stance', but its usefulness is in providing 'new conceptual models for understanding film within the framework of feminist response' (1990: 70; 71). Helen Marshall argues that there is not enough attention paid to empirical research when discussing the body and that theories of the body are most useful when they are brought into dialogue with empirical research into real experiences (1996). My thesis brings a new perspective to feminist critique to present an analysis that progresses, not limits, feminist film theory. The turn to affect in film, I argue, is not a turn away from something, nor is it a turn towards something else. It is a (re)turn to film form and close reading of the film text which explores the in-between-ness that exists in the spectatorial encounter.

Both phenomenology and close textual analysis could be interpreted as wholly subjective, but I argue that they are essential to the methodological and theoretical underpinning of my thesis. An understanding of the mechanism of the gaze establishes how the spectator is connected with the body on screen. Sobchack suggests 'the film transcends the filmmaker to constitute and locate its own address, its own perceptual and expressive experience of being' and is where film theory prioritises the screen and 'only indirectly [the] dynamic activity of viewing [...] engaged in by both the film and the spectator' (1992: 9; 15). Sobchack argues that the metaphors of cinema used in classical film theory – the screen as a picture frame, a window or a mirror – assumes an analysis of *active* viewing that sidelines the *dynamic* quality of the embodied experience in the viewing process. As David Sorfa suggests,

people don't think about apparatus theory or the male gaze, they ask: "Do I like this character?", "How do I feel when I watch this film?", "What is real or true about this film?", "Is what this character is doing right or wrong?", "Am I enjoying this?", "Does this film make sense?", "What have I learned from this film?", "Should I change my life in some way because of this film?" (2016: 4)

Although Sorfa supposes a non-academic viewer, I bring the essence of his questions into my analysis of the uterus and focus on how to understand active viewing and the dynamic of spectatorship in relation to embodiment and the embodied spectator.

By repositioning the uterus as a frame and a narrative space in close textual analysis, I demonstrate that any discussion about pregnancy must tackle crucial questions about spectatorship and narrativity *before* examining gender or specificity, or context. In my phenomenological analysis, I do not prioritise social, political or cultural representations of women and this is a unique way to analyse pregnancy and the pregnant body in the cinema. Moreover, my approach challenges the way pregnancy has been understood more generally as almost always inextricably linked to notions of femininity, maternity or the maternal-foetal connection. The focus on gender has, I argue, fragmented the more pressing political, cultural, and social concerns about reproductive rights, abortion, pregnancy and pregnancy loss. As pregnancy is a physiological state that occurs over a period of months to *some* bodies as part of the biological reproductive process, there must be a fundamental shift in ways of thinking about pregnancy that acknowledges its centrality as part of the human condition. This is not to propose an ahistorical, asocial, acultural approach that ignores gender, but to stress the importance of this thesis not only to the critical medical humanities in relation to film, but also to the broader social, political and cultural discourses around pregnancy. For that reason, I continue my Introduction by identifying and engaging with the critical discourses on the ultrasound and medical history of the body that concern the female reproductive body to position my argument so that I disentangle the foetal image and representation from the narrative space of the uterus.

## Separating the Uterus from the Foetus beyond the Ultrasound

Of critical importance to this thesis is not the use of the ultrasound scan, but its quality as a way of looking into the body. The materiality of the uterus has been lost while looking inside it for the foetus and the foetal ultrasound creates an environment in which, according Malcolm Nicolson and John E. E. Fleming, ‘the uterus [is] no longer quite the mysterious object it [has] previously been’ and ‘the ultrasound beam [has] allowed the medical gaze to breach the “iron curtain of the maternal abdominal wall”’ (2013: 178).<sup>9</sup> It is crucial to understand, however, that the ultrasound was developed to “see through” objects with sound waves, and that the modern day foetal ultrasound scan was not first developed in order to view the foetus. As Nicolson and Fleming explain, the technology was first developed as an echolocation device for military and industrial use. The scan, as an obstetric tool for viewing the foetus, came about after a long process of discovery that began with medical investigation of disease, head trauma, tumours, intestinal blockages and breast tissue as well as uterine and ovarian cysts (2013: 59).<sup>10</sup> It was during this medical investigation that the foetus was accidentally discovered. Donald explained that the smallest of foetuses could be discovered before the uterus was palpable. The scan, therefore, could identify the heartbeat as a sign of a living foetus, and this became an important sign of life before movement – quickening – in the uterus was felt by the pregnant person. Donald argued that, ‘[i]t is possible to pick up the foetal heart very clearly long before

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<sup>9</sup> Nicolson and Fleming note that the ‘iron curtain of the maternal abdominal wall’ is a phrase used by Donald (1955: 5) and ‘iron curtain’ originally refers to the curtain lowered onto the stage as a fire precaution. They explain that ‘by the 1930s [it had] acquired the metaphorical meaning of a barrier to communication’, rather than the physical and political barrier signifies in the present day (2013: 285). They reference Patrick Wright’s work, which charts the history of the iron curtain (2007).

<sup>10</sup> Nicolson and Fleming’s research is primarily about Ian Donald, the obstetrician from Glasgow who championed the ultrasound, rather than the feminist discourse around the technology although, importantly, they fully acknowledge the importance of this discourse. Nicolson and Fleming note that Ann Oakley sent a copy of her manuscript *The Captured Womb* ([1980]1984) to Donald for comment. Donald suggested that the title should be changed to *The Capturing Womb* as he thought Oakley’s title made the uterus sound passive (2013: 258-259). It is important to note that Nicolson and Fleming take a posthuman approach to their research whereby they agree that bodies become the interface between the social, the biological and the technical (10).

quickening would occur [and] the patients always appreciate hearing the reassuring noise of their foetal circulation and learning that all is well' (194).<sup>11</sup> It was Donald who made the link between the ultrasound scan and its bonding qualities, providing foetal scan photographs from 1958 onwards both as illustrations in his publications and to pregnant women as a record and reassurance of their pregnancies.

It is clear from Nicolson and Fleming's research that Donald's work on the foetal ultrasound was developed as a positive contribution to the health and wellbeing of the maternal body (maternal mortality was considered a scandal in the early twentieth century [58]).<sup>12</sup> However, as they admit, the technology became inextricably linked to the process of childbirth as the 'ultrasound scanner was both a major agent for and a potent symbol of the medicalisation of childbirth' (3). The technology of the scan, then, has had repercussions for how the pregnant body continues to be understood. In addition, despite the ambitious ethical desires to diagnose and improve care for women and the foetus, the foetal ultrasound did not come without a political agenda. Donald was passionately against abortion and opposed the UK 1967 Abortion Act.<sup>13</sup> He was also one of the founding members of the Society for the Protection of the Unborn Child (SPUC). This suggests that the development of foetal visualising through the scan has been subject to conflicting notions of the value of the foetus and it is perhaps not surprising that the understanding of the pregnant body and foetal body have become blurred.

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<sup>11</sup> This quotation comes from a letter from Donald to R. Algranati 3 May 1979. This is found in papers 5/2 from Donald's personal correspondence, referenced in a footnote by Nicolson and Fleming.

<sup>12</sup> Nicolson and Fleming say that, in 1937, the UK Ministry of Health's investigation into maternal mortality found that half of the deaths of women in childbirth was avoidable, notably through medical mismanagement in the use of obstetric instruments (2013: 58).

<sup>13</sup> The 1967 Abortion Act applies to Great Britain (excluding Northern Ireland) and is not a law for abortion on demand. It has strict criteria (amended in 1990 to reduce the gestational limit from 28 weeks to 24 weeks), but the importance of the Act is that it enables registered practitioners to perform abortions in National Health facilities.

A foetus does not keep a body alive – unlike an organ – and relies on another body for growth, but the blurring of definitions of what a body can be complicates the existence, and the definition, of the ‘foetal body’. The foetus has become an image or entity, Rosalind Petchesky argues, where visualising technologies such as the foetal ultrasound created, on the one hand, a fetish foetal image, and, on the other hand, rendered the pregnant person invisible (1987: 277). Referring to the North American anti-abortion film *The Silent Scream* (1984, Jack Duane Dabner, USA), Petchesky explains how static ultrasound images are used to produce a moving image inside the uterus, which creates ‘overlapping boundaries between media spectacle and clinical experience when pregnancy becomes a moving picture’ (264-65).<sup>14</sup> It is perhaps more accurate to describe the transducer as that which connects the scan technology to the body. Sonia Meyers describes the way the ultrasound transducer (which is used across the body) and the vaginal probe (which is inserted into the vagina) operate when they come in contact with the body (2010: 197-209). The transducer or probe is lined with reactive piezoelectric crystals, which, when stimulated by the electrical charge of the ultrasound machine, produce sound waves that penetrate the body and bounce back when they come into contact with solid structures such as bone mass. Meyers highlights the way in which the sound waves are altered by the internal bodily tissue and are in constant flux. The resulting spectatorship, Karen Barad suggests is a result of the transducer as ‘machine interface to the body’, which results in an ‘intra-action’ between the technology and the foetus, whereby the foetus becomes a phenomenon (1998: 101). The image produced on the ultrasound screen, the foetus, is therefore

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<sup>14</sup> The documentary film shows an ultrasound scan image of a fetus during a suction abortion. Narrated by pro-life physician, Dr. Bernard Nathanson, it claims that the foetus can be seen screaming. Petchesky describes the emotive film as belonging to ‘the realm of cultural representation rather than of medical evidence’ (267).

a product of visually deciphered mathematical information that has, nevertheless come to be understood as a cultural object.

It is not only the foetal ultrasound scan, which is considered an important technology for viewing. Kelly A. Joyce explains that the MRI (magnetic resonance imaging) scan is perceived as a ‘cultural icon’ and even a ‘sacred technology’, with physicians referring to its qualities as miraculous or magical (2008: 1-23; 149-166).<sup>15</sup> Such reverence, she argues, is the result of its position as a gold standard of technology as part of the visual turn in medicine. Like the high-definition ultrasound, the MRI produces a pictorial representation of the inside of the body based on the translation of numerical data. In the case of MRI, the pictures that it produces are part of a series, similar to the still frames of film that, when placed in sequence, give an illusion of movement as well as visual sense of depth to the body. This slicing of images can reveal or hide things in the body depending on the thickness of each slice. As Joyce explains, the MRI scan does ‘not provide a transparent “window” into the inner body but instead *produce[s]* the body’ (63; emphasis in original). This constructed visibility begins to create a body or bodies that must be mediated and that need a language of interpretation.

This returns my discussion to the affectivity of the scan. Of relevance to this thesis is how virtual imagery can be seen to affect emotional responses to the foetus. Martin Johnson and John Puddifoot, who conducted clinical investigations into grief when they interviewed the male partners of women who had miscarried, found that the response depended on the ability

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<sup>15</sup> MRI was originally called NMR, nuclear magnetic resonance imaging, which was initially used in medicine for detecting cancer. Joyce provides an in-depth explanation about how MRI works (11-14) and the development of the technology (24-46). She notes that the decisions about the appearance of MRI and the use of psychedelic colouring reflects the era in which the technology was developed and these were based on the 1960s and 70s pop artists such as Roy Lichtenstein and Andy Warhol. These colours were then dropped as physicians were more used to using the grey scale so the MRI was also changed to grey scale.

to generate vivid visual imagery (1998). The existence of the virtual image relies on an ability to generate imagined images, which in turn effects the ability of a person to react to the ultrasound image, or indeed make a decision to view one in the first place.<sup>16</sup> They found that it is ‘general imagery ability that provides some of the motivation for men to participate in the observation of an ultrasound scan’ (144). Although their study was designed to look at grief responses, the existence of ‘vivid imagers’ along with the idea that ‘the expression of trauma, which itself relies on imagery, appears to be an aid to recovery’ has relevance to how I read narrative in my corpus of films (144). Their study emphasises the relationship between imagination and screen images and finds that the grief responses from men who have seen or who intend to see an ultrasound scan have more or less the same level. By contrast, there is a lower grief response from men who have not seen a scan or who have no intention of seeing a scan (144). The study confirms that the ultrasound can help to create a spectatorial ‘bond’ with men who find it more difficult to generate vivid imagery.<sup>17</sup> This suggests that the uterus is an important location not only as a container for the foetus, but also as a location for what are understood to be narratives of bonding.

A significant part of kinship in relation to the foetal ultrasound is that which is not in the scan room, but comes from a sense of a relationship or kinship that is only recognised when the

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<sup>16</sup> Johnson and Puddifoot’s research was compiled retrospectively via questionnaires given to male partners of women who had miscarried before 25 weeks of gestation. Jo Garcia *et al.* (2002) list research projects that investigate patients’ views of the foetal ultrasound in eighteen different locations in the US, Canada, the UK, the Netherlands, parts of Africa, Australia and New Zealand between 1980 and 1999 including Johnson and Puddifoot, Sandelowski (1994), Mitchell and Georges (1997), and Hyde (1986). Garcia *et al.* explain that Johnson and Puddifoot’s research does not reflect interactions within the scan room.

<sup>17</sup> Johnson and Puddifoot explain that ‘until very recently the view that men too could be affected by miscarriage carried little currency and inspired little research’, and that while their previous research told them that ‘many men did indeed experience a deeply-felt loss following their partner’s miscarriage, they felt inhibited in the expression of their feelings, whether publicly or to family and friends’ (1998: 138)

foetus is understood as something that has meaning. Roberts *et al.*'s more recent work on the commercial ultrasound stresses the importance of imagination in the process of 'doing family' during the foetal ultrasound where 'resemblances are both real and imagined' (2015: 11). Resemblance, Roberts *et al.* suggest, is only one part of a more complex process of recognition and identification, which helps to understand where the foetus 'fit[s] into the new family' (11). The imagination therefore, transforms biological information about the foetus into a kinship connection based on resemblance, so that identification is selective. Roberts *et al.* note that resemblance is not the only way to establish kinship around the scan: the choice of scan partner and who gets copies of scan pictures are all part of rehearsing familial or kinship roles. The ultrasound scan provides the 'baby's first picture' (Lisa M. Mitchell, 2001) where the technological image – the freeze-framed foetus – becomes part of a kinship group. In addition, Roberts suggest that high-resolution scans, that appear to present increasingly lifelike visual images, 'rel[y] just as heavily on social interaction and discourse [as the 2D scan] to be meaningful' (2012b: 299). One area Roberts feels has been opened up by new reproductive visualising technologies is the visibility of other parts of the body: '[i]t is not only the foetus that is rendered in new detail, the umbilical cord, the uterus wall and the placenta too are newly visible. These structures are the markers of the foetus' location in the body and might [...] be used to stress the *interconnection* of the foetus and the pregnant subject' (2012a: 135; emphasis in original).<sup>18</sup> Looking into these structures, according to Roberts, is where the 'the human eye is mobilised and its visual capacities extended' (2012a: 92; 99).<sup>19</sup> This 'eye' can move wherever

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<sup>18</sup> Roberts (as Julie Palmer) writes about the connectivity of the placenta in her empirical research on ultrasound scans. She refers to JaneMaree Maher's notion of the 'placental body' (2002) as a way to give agency to the pregnant woman and as a 'reminder of the location of the foetus in the gestating body' (2009: 78). More recently, Maria Fannin has written about 'placental relations as a model for the negotiation of difference' as a way to counter negative interpretations of the fetal-maternal relationship (2014: 289-306).

<sup>19</sup> This is how early filmmaker Dziga Vertov saw the film camera. He describes the camera as Kino-Glaz, or Cine-Eye where the camera, as the eye, could be placed right next to the action, but also placed in locations where the human eye could not reach.

the technology takes it. In the ultrasound scan, the sound waves pass through the body into the uterus and bounce back from hard matter such as bone, so that a 'picture' can be created from data. This data can be reproduced on screen. The 'eye' then passes through various stages in order to be able to "see". Its visual capacities are extended when the 'eye' is mobilised to search in places that the human eye cannot see so that the visual capabilities that Roberts talks about are, in reality, a construction, which depends on the uterus being opened up to "see" the foetus.

Prioritising spectatorship of the foetus, over the pregnant body and the uterus, encourages the spectatorship of a disembodied being, separated from its place of growth, and it is this disembodied foetus that exists as a focal point. The separation of the pregnant body and the foetus has been documented extensively in feminist discourse where being able to see the foetus inside the uterus, Barbara Duden suggests, involves an 'un-skinning' of the woman (1993: 77-78). This un-skinning reveals the unseen and the hidden and gives the impression that the inside of the body is a landscape with 'glorious vistas that can be visited' (Sawchuck, 2000: 10). The frame of the uterus then becomes an auditorium, a location, which Rebecca Kukla calls a theatre (2005) and Julie Roberts calls a metaphorical space (2012a). Here, the spectatorial process of looking into the uterus is a way to meet and greet the foetus as it is transformed into a baby. Referring to this shift from the pregnant body to the foetus, Duden asks 'how did the unborn turn into a billboard image and how did that isolated goblin get into the limelight?' (1993: 7). She argues that pregnancy turns the woman into 'an ecosystem for the fetus' and laments the time when it 'could be featured only in the kinds of books that also showed labia majora and pubic hair' rather than the present day of being 'overwhelmed by fetuses' (7). Perhaps this overwhelming image of the foetus is not quite as ubiquitous as the early 1990s when Duden was writing, but her point is that 'body history [...] is to a large extent a history of the unseen [where] until recently, the unborn, by definition, was one of these' (8). I suggest she is arguing

for the symbiotic nature of the foetus and the pregnant body living together.<sup>20</sup> The unseen – which includes foetal movements and quickening, as discussed below – is part of the embodied experience, but has been forgotten.

Duden puts it very eloquently when she says, ‘step by step, the physician’s fingers, then his stethoscope, later X-rays, tests, and sonar have invaded women’s gendered interior and opened it up to a nongendered public gaze’ (81; note her emphasis on the *male* physician). The public gaze both sidelines and dismisses the importance of the embodied experience not only of the pregnant person, but also their embodied unseen experience of pregnancy so that ‘the “ebbing” and “flowing” and “curdling” and “hardening” of the body is changed so that ‘forced to see, to represent, to imagine, we have a restricted sensorium for the invisible shapes inside us’ (8). I include what Duden says in detail, because her argument about losing connection with the unseen is crucial to my discussion. Her careful analysis of foetal images and the lost emphasis on embodied sensation is where film theory on the senses can reclaim the essence of the (pregnant) body in analysis. Duden argues that Lennart Nilsson’s well-known 1965 images of the foetus ‘[...] generate a persuasive illusion [that] result[s] in a misplaced concreteness [where] graphics convincingly create the illusion that abstract notions have a tangible reality [and] give the foetus an aura of bodily presence. (1993: 25)<sup>21</sup> Although I am not convinced that the foetal objects in Nilsson’s photographs are ‘abstract notions’ in themselves, the photographs are certainly dishonest in their representation of life as they represent an interiority and an

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<sup>20</sup> The definition that I use of ‘symbiosis’ is taken from the *Oxford English Dictionary* of ‘two different organisms [...] which live attached to each other whether mutually beneficial or not’ (1989: 451).

<sup>21</sup> Duden calls this the ‘Nilsson effect’ and explains that his foetuses were taken from corpses and (fallopian) tubal pregnancies. Importantly, she explains that fetoscopy (inserting a camera into the body to see the foetus *in situ*) was not sufficiently developed for Nilsson to capture these images from live foetuses (1993: 11-24).

unseenness that *only* exists as an illusion.<sup>22</sup> The foetuses in the photographs are all dead, but constructed aesthetically to represent the illusion of life. The foetal ultrasound also presents an illusion of materiality whereby the picture on the screen (of the foetus who does not exist outside of the body) is represented as the baby's first picture. I suggest that this notion of the interior and the unseen must be seen in the context of the socially constructed interior.

The disconnection of corporealities, of the pregnant body and of the foetus, underlines the significance of the socially constructed interior. Nathan Stormer suggests 'that biomedical discourse transforms the womb into a *social space*' (2000: 109; emphasis in original). He argues that the uterus – which he only refers to as 'womb' – is not analysed as a material object in itself. He says that 'to assume that [the womb as incubator] is simply wherever a women's body exists is to undercut analysis of the womb as a discursive object' (109). Although he does not tackle this discursive space in great detail, he establishes that the uterus is not only 'a site of discourse about life, rights, and the essence of "woman"', but also a space that warrants separate discussion (109).<sup>23</sup> Judith Butler suggests that the constructed interior masquerades as an understanding of sexual or gender difference (1990: 185-193). She argues that the socially constructed interior depends to a large extent on cultural and social normative or heteronormative behaviour and is used as a benchmark for gender-identification saying that, 'gender does not necessarily follow from sex, and desire, or sexuality generally, does not seem to follow from gender' and the gendered body 'has no ontological status apart from the various acts which constitute its reality' and that 'reality is fabricated as an interior essence' (185). Interior essence, she argues, is a 'decidedly public and social discourse which creates "*fabrications*" of identity'

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<sup>22</sup> For more on the historical context of Nilsson's photographs of the foetus and his book *A Child is Born* (1965), see Solveig Jülich (2015), and for a discussion of Nilsson's images and fetal remains see Suzanne Anker and Sarah Franklin (2011: 103-25).

<sup>23</sup> Stormer's work relates to medical practices in the nineteenth century and the idealised foetal image of the twentieth century linked with abortion.

(185; emphasis in original). Although Butler talks about gender definition, I argue that this sense of interior essence is often taken as the basis for analysing the female reproductive body.

The female reproductive body is defined by the presence of the uterus, but this does not recognise the permutations of the genetically female body, nor does it recognise self-definition.<sup>24</sup> The binary that is culturally established between the male and the female body creates a dialectic between the identification of the male and the identification of the female, but this does not fully address the classification of either. Butler suggests that this binary presupposes that sex and gender are distinct: one is biologically defined, and the other socially and culturally constructed, but gender, she says, is ‘a corporeal style, an “act,” as it were, which is both intentional and performative’ (190). Without this binary, I argue, there are no ground rules to identify male and female and therefore no ground rules to identify the reproductive body as female. Butler goes on to say, ‘perhaps this construct called “sex” is as culturally constructed as gender; indeed, perhaps it was always already gender, with the consequence that the distinction between sex and gender turns out to be no distinction at all’ (8). Importantly, the ‘interior essence’ (or soul), Butler suggests, is lost in this binary. The soul in this case is not defined by religion or religious beliefs; rather, it is part of ‘the effect of a structuring inner space [by] the signification of a body as a vital and sacred enclosure’ (184).<sup>25</sup> This suggests that in identifying the body as an enclosure, there is an essential quality to the interior that marks it out as different to the exterior – which suggests the need to reconceptualise the uterus itself.

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<sup>24</sup> In 2008, Tomas Beattie was interviewed by journalists Oprah Winfrey and Barbara Walters and was followed by a documentary team for *The Pregnant Man* (2008), during his second pregnancy. This highlights the incongruity of conflating pregnancy with female identification as the pregnant subject who births, in this case, identifies as a transgender man.

<sup>25</sup> Sarah Cooper considers the role of the ‘soul’ as it relates to film theory, explaining that it is not one ephemeral object; she likens it to the interior essence of the film’s body enclosed within the surface of the film (2013).

## **Rethinking the Uterus; *see* Womb**

In the course of the research for this thesis, I have been redirected in my search for the uterus to look instead for the womb. The uterus is primarily a medical description; womb, on the other hand, is used to describe both the medical and the metaphorical. This semantic differentiation influences the way the uterus is viewed. It is the womb rather than the uterus that has a long history in narrative cinema as a location for emerging aliens and false offspring, and comedic bodily growth. It is the womb that functions as a pseudo-homestead through the figure of the mother who, in turn, functions as a metaphor – both positive and negative – for nature and community on the one hand and protector and carer on the other. Although womb is interchangeable with uterus, in a medical sense, the notion of the ‘womb’ has taken the place of the uterus. This can be traced back to scientific misunderstandings of the physiology of the human uterus where it was confused with the uteri of animals and was given qualities that can be attributed to misunderstandings compounded by misunderstandings about procreation and reproduction. As Cheryl L. Meyers explains, physicians had many theories about how this reproductive organ functioned (1997). In the fourth century B.C., Hippocrates suggested that the uterus wandered around the body attaching itself to other organs and thus causing hysteria in women. This hysteria could then be solved by either intercourse or impregnation. In the second century A.D., the physician Aretaeus added that the wandering uterus could be attracted and repulsed by a variety of smells so that the movement of the uterus could be controlled by the right use of aroma to align the uterus in the body and prevent ‘hysterical suffocation’ (2). The ability of the uterus to move freely around the body was reflected in how the human uterus was imagined. As T. Chard and J. G. Grudzinskas point out, the uterus was thought to consist ‘of a number of cavities exhibiting angulation and horns, its lining studded with “tentacles” or “suckers”, like an animal within an animal’ (1994: 2; note the use of the term “animal” rather than human). Conversely, in the second century B.C., the Greek physician Galen said that the

uterus was actually stationary, but that hysterical suffocation did exist and was caused by the uterus retaining male and female bodily fluids. In any case, the cure was again intercourse.

It is debated how much western medical practices and beliefs have affected practices across the Americas. George M. Foster explains that humoral medicine and beliefs were thought to have been brought to Latin America by Spanish and Portuguese colonial medics (1987: 355-393). Foster says, however, that there is compelling evidence to show that humoral medicine was developed independently across the continents of Europe, Asia, Australasia and the Americas. He argues that similar – though not identical – beliefs based on the Elements (earth, water, fire and air, but more specifically the properties of wet and dry, hot and cold) can be traced to Ancient Greece, India, China, and Australia. As Patricia J. Hammer suggests, the lack of written pre-Hispanic records and the differences in cultural beliefs, social structure and language means that physiological concepts are difficult to compare (2001: 243). This historical background demonstrates that the unseen human uterus has been subjected to many theories. Patricia J. Hammer notes the existence of the *madri*, in the community of Cororo in the Bolivian Andean Highlands, which is considered to be a marker of femaleness and reproductive potential (2001: 248-251). The *madri* is understood to be an organ that is not attached and can move around the female body, but is located in the abdomen. Hammer explains that it is, in fact, the abdominal aortic artery which, when depressed, produces a strong beat and is described by the *madri* expert in the community as a ‘heart-lung’ only found in a woman. Hammer says it is likely that the *madri* is a concept that is more widespread than this community as, in personal communication with another ethnographer, Hammer find a similar notion in pregnant immigrants from Mexico who call the female pulse the *tipte* (2001: 250). A full examination of this transfer of beliefs across continents is beyond the scope of this thesis, but I argue that some caution should be

applied to any discussion on the pregnant body that presumes a national or regional specificity in this context.

In the context of redefining the uterus, however, the matrixial gaze, introduced by Bracha L. Ettinger, in relation to painting, re-emphasises the importance of the uterus as a communal bodily space (1995). The commonality in this case is that all humans share the experience of being in the uterus. Ettinger says ‘in choosing to infuse the term matrix’ to the notion of the gaze, she aims to ‘restore to it its ancient feminine/maternal source – as the word means uterus, womb (Latin)’ (22). She explains that this is to acknowledge the specificity of the uterus as having two sides: an inside and outside. This acknowledges its materiality, but she also challenges the notion of the uterus as passive by considering it ‘a dynamic borderspace of active/passive co-emergence *with-in* and *with-out*’ (22-23; emphasis in original). I introduce this idea of interconnectivity as it refocuses the discussion of the body to a discussion of interconnectedness between the individual and the larger community as a ‘*sharable dimension of subjectivity*’ (23; emphasis in original). The matrixial gaze is not linked to scholarship of the scan, but, according to Griselda Pollock (2006), it is fundamentally important as a way of understanding human relationships by concentrating on the interconnectedness of the self to others through the commonality of the uterus. The matrixial gaze suggests a way of looking at, or through, the uterus in visual culture, but for the purposes of this thesis, the historicity of anatomy is also crucial to understand.

One of the reasons for the lack of anatomical understanding in relation to the female reproductive body was the lack of bodies to examine. It was not until the first century A.D. in Alexandria, that human subjects – executed criminals – were allowed to be dissected and examined by anatomists and physicians (Ramsey, 1994a: 1-3). Although this went some way to increasing the understanding of the internal workings of the body, it was not until the fifteenth

and sixteenth centuries that doctors who were skilled artists, such as Leonardo da Vinci and Andreas Vesalius, began to investigate the minutiae of the body and thereby challenge some of the long-held beliefs about the uterus, such as the uterus being multi chambered (7). It was not until the mid-eighteenth century that cadavers became more readily available, but females were in short supply and ‘prized as rare commodities; pregnant female cadavers were doubly rare’ (Roberta McGrath, 2002: 63). Cadavers accessible for dissection were still supplied from the bodies of convicts and prisoners, not many of which were women. It was the work of anatomist William Hunter in the *Human Gravid Uterus* (1774) that finally established the physiological workings of the uterus, and explained the anatomical connection between the female body and the foetus so that it could be understood in greater detail than previously.<sup>26</sup> By developing more effective preparatory techniques for dissection, Hunter and his brother John were able to investigate the vessels of the uterus. What is vital is that they established the separateness of the maternal and the foetal blood vessels in the placenta, to demonstrate the separateness and the interconnectedness of the mother and foetus (Ramsey, 1994a: 14). Hunter dissected the uterus not to confirm the earlier medical thoughts on whether the uterus could wander around the body or was animalistic, but to establish the anatomical ‘truth’ about the body. In fact, the text that accompanies the illustrations only mentions once the emotional connection of the pregnant woman and the foetus when he describes how the anatomical connection between mother and child carries ‘on that wonderful influence upon which the life and health of the child depends’ (Hunter, 1794: 31). I posit that Hunter’s work also foreshadows the advancement of scientific visual technologies, such as the foetal ultrasound, which creates a physical space

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<sup>26</sup> Hunter’s anatomical atlas was published posthumously in an edited version in 1794, which explains the discrepancy in dates. The etchings were by Jan van Rumsdyk, who illustrated other earlier anatomical atlases. Life-size drawings in red chalk were taken from cadavers prepared by William’s brother. Hunter originally trained in theology at Glasgow University before moving into medicine and training at St. Georges hospital in London. Peter M. Dunn notes Hunter’s importance not only in the anatomy of the human uterus, but in his attitude as a ‘physician-man midwife’ in that he believed in letting a woman labour naturally rather than with intervention (1999, 77-78).

between the woman, the foetus and the uterus. However, his fascination with reproduction and its close relationship to female identification ignores one important physiological fact about the uterus: that it changes throughout time. Ramsey makes the point that all other organs in the body are functioning or near functioning *in utero* except for the reproductive organs. The uterus, as Ramsey says, is even more complicated as ‘with the maturing of the female endocrine system, puberty ushers in not a single definitive change but a repetitive series of cyclical changes which recur throughout reproductive life’ (1994b: 18-19). This element of time and cyclical change means that the capacity for reproduction is time limited in an individual, and therefore is a transient method of scrutiny either medically or theoretically about the female, the female body or pregnancy.

Early physicians also visualised the foetus in the uterus as a fully formed person floating free with space around it, separated from the female (preformation). This small adult – the homunculus – was thought to be transported through sperm into the woman’s body and grew inside the (woman’s) body, developing into a larger version of this small person (Rowland, 1992: 118-119). As Geraldine Lux Flanagan explains, embryology was still considered a new science as late as the 1960s (1982).<sup>27</sup> She notes that it was only comparatively recently that the egg cell of the mammal was discovered through the microscopic image in a dog’s ovary (9).<sup>28</sup> Flanagan charts the development of embryology and takes care to point out the misrepresentation of reproduction by artists such as da Vinci who thought the foetus was immobile and functioned entirely inside the uterus like a seed, as well as Galen’s belief that the female stored a collection of embryos – *emboîtement*. The collection of embryos, Galen

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<sup>27</sup> Flanagan’s book on the nine months of human gestation was published in 1962 before Nilsson’s similar work in 1965. Flanagan’s work, however, is less well known even though it has been translated and published across the world. This is likely, I suggest, to Nilsson’s work being published in *Life* magazine.

<sup>28</sup> Karl Ernst von Baer discovered this egg cell in 1827.

thought, was waiting to be brought to life through contact with the male. Each embryo was stacked on top of one another and contained all the information necessary for growth (and contact with the male *initiated* the process as a catalyst rather than having any direct role).<sup>29</sup> Flanagan points out that this theory is, in fact, closer to the knowledge that we now have about the role of genetics where information is already stored in the reproductive cells (11). In this trajectory of scientific thought, the embodied sensations that originate in the uterus became less significant or lost.

Before the introduction of visualising techniques, medical understanding prioritised the pregnant person rather than the foetus and the presence of *quickenings* – when the pregnant person experiences foetal movements for the first time – was the marker of something alive in the body rather than the presence of the foetus. Duden argues that the loss of status of quickening, which can only be only verified by the pregnant person, diminishes the status of the pregnant person (1992). She argues that the reliance on visualising technologies means that ‘pregnancy has become operationally verifiable’, so that the pregnant person is not needed for a diagnosis (343). Susan Bordo also suggests that there is an ambivalence about the female reproductive body whereby the integrity of the human body, in the US, is protected for consensual medical intervention but conversely a ‘casual and morally imperious approach medicine and law [has been] taken to non-consensual medical interference in the reproductive

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<sup>29</sup> The misunderstanding about reproduction and the materiality of the foetus reflects the lack of scientific discovery, but it also reflects the strength of belief that relates to competing scientific thought. Flanagan explains that through the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries competing scientific sides were established: the ovists and the homunculist. She explains that both believed in *emboîtement*, but one believed that the embryos were formed and waiting for male contact in the female, while the other thought that the homunculus was in the head of the sperm and the uterus was the resting place for it to grow. This was discounted in 1759 when anatomist Kaspar Freidrich Wolff published *Theoria Generationis*, which argued that the body is not preformed and that the male and the female contribute essential information (1982: 12).

lives of women' (1999: 75).<sup>30</sup> This morally imperious approach is understood to be when the bodily integrity of one person, the pregnant person, is superseded by the bodily integrity of another, the foetus. This highlights the social and political complexities of offering civic rights to a being – the foetus – which is, for its existence, part of another person's body, in the uterus. The erasure of the pregnant body in relation to the foetus, therefore, clearly has political and social implications, but, viewed differently, this separation highlights the importance of a corporeal disconnect in relation to the uterus.

The threshold between life and death of the foetus has changed markedly over the years. Lorna Weir notes that this came about with the introduction of a threshold for the living subject – the foetus – and reflected concern over infant mortality in the early twentieth century in Europe, North America and Canada, which led to the 'medical invention of the novel *perinatal* threshold' (2006: 2; emphasis in original). Weir argues that the threshold explains the disconnection between the pregnant person and the foetus which creates a 'continuous temporal interval across the birth threshold, distinguishing the bodies of women from the fetus during the last trimester of pregnancy and the labour process' (2006: 182). This emphasis on the separation of the woman, as an embodied environment for the foetus, from the personhood of the foetus is a division that Carol Stabile positions as 'historically unprecedented', and I would add, culturally complex (1994: 179). Stabile points out that technological imagery is part of the next phase of erasure of the body from the foetus. Whilst I am not convinced that erasure is the

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<sup>30</sup> Bordo emphasises that although the rights of bodily integrity are reinforced by the US Supreme Court, there is, nevertheless, a duality within these rights 'for those who come to be treated as mere bodies despite an official rhetoric that vehemently forswears such treatment of human beings' (1999:72). This treatment extends not only to the pregnant woman but also to the genetically defective and is, Bordo suggests, a result of a history of both racism and the oppression of the poor. She notes that this develops into a gender-bias, particularly in relation to enforced sterilization.

most accurate way to describe this separation, it does suggest that in focussing on either the foetus *or* the pregnant person, the uterus is overlooked.

The uterus is not only an embodied space, but it is also a contested space, which suggests a corporeal integrity that must be acknowledged. The corporeal interior of the pregnant woman has, according to Rebecca Kukla, reached ‘institutionalised public status’ (2005: 108). Kukla argues that the important status of the foetus, already established by the end of the Enlightenment, has been significantly changed by contemporary visualising technologies to create a ‘*single*, canonical foetus who has become the inhabitant of each individual pregnant body’ (109; emphasis in original). This suggests that not only is the space of the uterus and the pregnant body displaced by the scan, but also the foetus as it becomes an iconic image that can be understood to fit all uteri. Kukla argues that the creation of a canonical foetus confirms the uterus as ‘theatrical public space’ (111). Understanding the uterus and foetus as public space and spectacle reflects the (dis)embodied experience of pregnancy as both happening *in* the body and *to* the body where the ‘body of the one is simultaneously the body of two’ (Maher, 2001: 201). Iris Marion Young, discussing pregnant embodiment, emphasises this corporeal disconnect by saying that, ‘pregnancy does not belong to the woman [...] it is a state for the developing foetus for which the woman is a container’ (46). She goes on to say that,

[t]he pregnant subject [...] is decentred, split, or doubled in several ways. She experiences her body as herself and not herself. Its inner movements belong to another being, yet they are not other, because her body boundaries shift and because her bodily self-location is in her trunk in addition to her head. (2005: 46)<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Young wrote this article in the early 1980s before the foetal ultrasound was so prominent in pregnancy care. In a 2003 postscript to the original article, Young emphasises the relevance of her original discussion on the subjectivity of the pregnant person. The only thing she adds to the contemporary article is that the pregnant person’s experience of the ultrasonic image is the same as

This suggests a fluidity of understanding that moves across pregnancy as an embodied state and the uterus as corporeal location. The ultrasound makes sense of this fluidity where the ultrasound, according to Duden, is seen to ‘explore [...] new forms of perception, images, concepts and attitudes’ where the pregnant woman is not only un-skinned, as I mentioned above, but also becomes a ‘participant in her own skinning, in the dissolution of the historical frontier between inside and outside’ (1993: 77-78). This suggest that in creating the personhood of the foetus – by separating it from the pregnant person – the uterus remains elusive. The uterus remains a misunderstood location owing to the way medical thought has evolved and the growing prominence of the foetus as a cultural and political entity. It is important to stress that although medical thought establishes the separateness *and* connectedness of the pregnant person and the foetus, the uterus has become both a contested site and a public space. I argue that the constant conflation of the terminology ‘womb’ and ‘uterus’ has resulted in a continuous disconnection of the uterus from the body, which has had an effect on how it is understood in spectatorship of the body, and enabled the notion of abjection in relation to the female reproductive body to become a crucial element in film critique of pregnancy.

### **Learning to Love Abjection**

Notions of the monstrous in relation to the female body and the uterus originate in the abject described by Julia Kristeva (1982), but the conflation of Kristevan abjection and the pregnant body is a recent phenomenon. The reason I focus on the abject at this point is that it lends itself to a negative analysis of the interior body, which, I argue, needs to be challenged. Tyler argues that the abject is useful in feminist theory, but cautions against its overuse in Anglophone

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everyone else who sees it. In other words, she notes the priority of the visual where ‘sonogram technology has revolutionised the experience of pregnancy and expectant parenting by putting a visual representation of the foetus at the centre, in the context of a modern epistemological system that has always given priority to the visual over the tactile or even the oral’ (2005: 61).

discussions on the maternal (2009). Her argument is twofold: first, she explains that Kristeva does not place herself within a feminist framework so her discussion is not feminist; second, the maternal in Kristevan terms does not prioritise the woman and is therefore problematic when discussing maternal subjects and subjectivity. Whilst I do not hold the view that only feminists should talk about the female body, and I do not agree that Kristeva ignores the importance of women in society, I do agree with Tyler that abjection should not be automatically associated with the female or the maternal. Tyler argues strongly against the notion of abjection in relation to the maternal, as she believes as it does not ‘address [...] the social consequences of living as a body that is identified as maternal and abject’ (78). Her premise, with which I agree, is to encourage feminist theorists (following Iris Marion Young [2005] and Toril Moi [2001]) to re-centre the lived body experience, as not only a response to the social and cultural value of the maternal body, but also as a way to address the critical differences between the female and the maternal body.

In light of Tyler’s discussion, it becomes increasingly problematic to conflate horror and the maternal. The notion of the abject, however, is critical to Barbara Creed’s theoretical positioning of the horror genre in film studies and her work is regarded as the seminal text on horror and the female body (1993). Michael Grant argues that film theorists like Creed have drawn on Kristeva’s notion of abjection without discussing the nuances of the theory itself (2004). Grant posits that this is a fundamental flaw, with which I agree, and suggests that, for example, when Creed discusses Ridley Scott’s film *Alien* (1979, USA/UK), where an alien creature impregnates a member of a space station crew, she concerns herself with *mise-en-scène* to the exclusion of narrative development. As Grant argues, the fact that the sets of *Alien* are blatantly uterine – and designed as such – weakens the richness of any further psychoanalytic discussion on meaning. His point is that the sets have been created to reflect the idea of the

monstrous-feminine and that to attribute any additional meaning based on Kristeva's theory of abjection is misguided. Grant says the '*mise-en-scène* picture allows one to envisage the monstrous-feminine, the Other, as vaguely object-like. As a result, its relation to the film's action remains obscure' (181). Grant applauds the originality of Creed's analysis, but strongly argues that she does not bring any additional meaning to the film by applying any notion of the abject, as this is already reflected in the intention of the filmmaker.

In Creed's defence, her argument centres on the representation of the female as a monster that is defined by her gender and sexuality, and her argument is intended to move away from the idea of the female in horror as victim. She refers to Kristevan abjection in her analysis of the horror film to describe how the genre works by taking the idea of perverse pleasure and using the abject to create conflict in the narrative. Creed's work revolves around female embodiment and representation. Carol J. Clover, by contrast, questions the dynamic of narrative and gender identification by addressing both plot and narrative space and argues that the male audience, particularly the younger male, can identify with central victim-hero female figure in the horror/slasher movie (1992).<sup>32</sup> A key factor in the representation of the victim is spectator identification and she explains that 'a figure does not cry and cower because she is a woman; she is a woman because she cries and cowers. And a figure is not a psychokiller because he is a man; he is a man because he is a psychokiller' (13). This returns to the inherent problems in analysing gender representation and Clover argues that 'film theory's conventional assumption that the cinematic apparatus is organised around the experience of a mastering voyeuristic gaze' is flawed (7-9). As Clover suggests, the idea of the male and female point of view as opposites

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<sup>32</sup> Clover also explains the phenomena of 'dual focus narratives' in the occult film, whereby the female narrative is there to 'open up' the male narrative (1992: 70).

is ‘a relatively modern construction that sits, in fact, rather lightly on large sectors of the culture’ (13) and this should not be forgotten when discussing the reproductive body.

Another factor in the abject, and of importance to this thesis, is the way interior bodily fluids are seen as being affective and this is an integral part of understanding the abject. Kjetil Rødje makes a crucial point about the problems inherent in discussing the abject in relation to blood, particularly menstrual blood, when he says that ‘Kristeva [falls] short of providing satisfactory explanations for the wildly differentiating effects and functions of various visual and cinematic images where blood plays a part’ (2015: 93-94). He insists that imagery in the cinema is not only about the symbolic, but it is also about affect, and that Kristeva is not referencing the affective nature of cinema in her analysis.<sup>33</sup> Rødje notes that incidences of blood increased in North American cinema in the 1960s (which Sobchack [2000] also notes), and is mainly associated with violence.<sup>34</sup> The affective quality of blood, he writes, is in its viscosity and ability to create an affective encounter with the spectator and this applies to the ultra-violent action and the ultra-gory horror film. Rødje talks about the affective quality of the presence of blood that is ‘out of place’, explaining that this happens ‘when the surface of the body is broken

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<sup>33</sup> Rødje refers to W. J. Thomas Mitchell who suggests that images have a vitality which he calls ‘vital signs’ whereby they are not alive, but they are attributed life in the form of symbolism or representation (for example, the Twin Towers). He calls this a ‘double consciousness’ that ‘vascillat(es) between magical beliefs and sceptical doubts, naïve animism and hard headed materialism, mystic and critical attitudes’. He also explains that this aliveness in images is often explained as something that ‘someone else’ wants or thinks: for example, ‘primitives, children, the masses, the illiterate, the uncritical, the illogical, and the “Other”’ (2005: 7).

<sup>34</sup> Rødje refers to films from the 1950s such as *The Return of Dracula* (also known as *The Fantastic Disappearing Man*, 1958, Paul Landres, USA) and *The Tingler* (1959, William Castle, USA). Rødje and Sobchack both mention two films directed by Sam Peckinpah, *Bonnie and Clyde* (1967, USA), and *The Wild Bunch* (1969, USA). Sobchack says that in the 1960s there was ‘blood everywhere’ in US films, which she suggests reflected the fear of mortality as high profile murders (Martin Luther King, Malcolm X and Robert Kennedy) were reported on US television. She says that although *Bonnie and Clyde* was ‘not the first film to overly bathe itself in blood, it was the first one to create an aesthetic, moral and psychological furor’ that ‘stylised death (2000: 114). She suggests that in more recent films, such as Quentin Tarantino’s *Reservoir Dogs* (1992, USA) and *Pulp Fiction* (1993, USA), ‘bodies are more carelessly squandered than carefully stylized’ (121; emphasis in original).

or when blood flows from body orifices (such as during menstruation)’ (2015: 90). This reference to menstruation as ‘out of place’ appears to be unthinking rather than a critical comment on the (ab)normal or abject qualities of the female bodily function, but he raises this in order to interrogate Kristeva’s position in singling out menstrual blood. He argues that when she talks about menstrual blood it is to demonstrate the centrality of its meaning and signification in relation to the ‘universal female’, where this universal female is conceptual.<sup>35</sup> Nevertheless, the markers or signals for menstruation – such as bleeding – are useful devices on screen and are used as shorthand for bodily functions. Menstruation is represented in popular culture as both a comedic and horrific narrative device in contemporary western film and television. As Lauren Rosewarne explains in reference to menstruation (2012), and Christine Battersby reinforces in relation to the body (1998), the female reproductive body has only the *potential* to reproduce.

Menstruation is a marker of this reproductive potential, yet is seen as a universal function of the female body. The unused packet of sanitary towels, if shown on the screen, signals the missing period, but the pregnancy test must confirm that the missing period is a pregnancy and not something else (such as menopause). Rosewarne suggests this is a *synecdoche* where the bodily function of menstruation is replaced by symptoms and/or commercial products that provide a more acceptable – or less uncomfortable – reference to menstruation (2012: 93-120; emphasis in original).<sup>36</sup> Kristeva suggests in her essay ‘Women’s Time’, that the biological and

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<sup>35</sup> Rødje refers to historian Melissa L. Meyer (2005) who insists that blood is not particular to any one culture; rather, it is of universal significance, which is partly because of its symbolic role of reproduction.

<sup>36</sup> According to Sharra L. Vostal (2005), menstrual products such as mass-produced sanitary towels introduced a ‘new aesthetics of waste and a new attention to the female body’ when they arrived on the mass market in the US after the First World War. They were introduced in response to modern ideas about personal hygiene and an emerging class of women working outside of the home. They also hid the practical inconvenience of menstruation.

the conceptual are integrally linked and the foundation of female biology is found in repetition, cycles and eternity that forms ‘the fundamental, if not the sole, conceptions of time in numerous civilizations and experiences, particularly mystical ones’ (1981: 17). Although ‘Woman’s Time’ was written with reference to the socio-cultural and political history of the feminist movement in Europe, her discussion of time suggests that female subjectivity is bound by both cyclical (biological) temporality and monumental (infinite and imaginary) temporality which can connect distinct generations and civilizations in a way that is inherently different to notions of linear time. I draw attention to Kristeva’s discussion on time, as this understanding of the cycles inherent in the female reproductive body is not one that is generally applied to the male reproductive body.

The male body – like the female – has the *potential* for reproduction, even if the male body itself is not the location of the foetus. There is little consideration, however, of the way sperm is given a life of its own or for the way this male reproductive fluid is personified. As Lisa Jane Moore notes, the language used to describe the sperm and its journey reflects the ‘endless fascination with the real or imagined capabilities of this [...] proliferating and endless resource’ (2009: 45). Not only is its supply seemingly never ending, ‘sperm “is spent,” “reabsorbed,” “swims,” “spurts,” “careens,” and “crashes” through ducts, penises, vaginas, test tubes, labs, families, culture and politics’ (49). She argues that this language is masculinised through speech to reflect the stereotypical male models of the ‘fierce competitor, the benevolent father, the impotent wimp, the good catch, and the masculine threat’ (47). This bodily reproductive function or product, as she sees it, does not share the same negative focus as the female secretions.<sup>37</sup> The notion of the abject, then, poses significant problems regarding the

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<sup>37</sup> See Bettina Bildhauer for a discussion on medieval text *De Secreta Mulierum/The Secrets of Women* (1483) where she notes that the belief in ‘humours’ suggested that all bodily fluids including

understanding of the female body and the maternal. I am not arguing against its use, but I suggest that it should not be used as a shorthand that replaces a more complex analysis. Understanding of reproductive bodies, both male and female, needs re-evaluation and I argue that there is still much analytical ground to cover before the notion of abjection can be reclaimed within the pregnancy genre.

### **The Pregnancy Genre**

There is surprisingly little written about pregnancy in the cinema and what there is concentrates on mainstream – mainly Hollywood – cinema. The question is not whether there is a great deal of scholarship in film studies on pregnancy, but what sort of scholarship is available, and from what perspective that commentary is taken. Parley Ann Boswell insists that mainstream Hollywood films always follow on from current trends so that ‘if Hollywood is doing it, then everybody else has already done it’ (2014: 2). This is a bold claim, but I can find no clear evidence that cinema outside of Hollywood has tackled pregnancy in a significantly different way. Although pregnancy is certainly a recurrent theme or narrative device in horror and thriller films, Boswell’s use of the term ‘Hollywood’ indicates that there is another cinema or cinemas that do not fall into this category. Whether she considers this other cinema as independent, experimental or art house is not clear and thus it is not clear who this ‘everybody else’ is. What Boswell does say, and I agree with, is that looking at canonical films (and literature) ‘through a frame of pregnancy will change them for us, revealing aspects either that we have never thought about, or have never taken seriously’ (2).<sup>38</sup> She argues that, by reframing pregnancy, it

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menstrual blood, semen and breast milk were believed to be by-products of blood, which in turn was digested food (2005: 67-68).

<sup>38</sup> Boswell investigates nineteenth- and twentieth-century (north) American literature such as Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *The Scarlet Letter: A Romance* (1848) and Harriet Ann Jacobs’ *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861) as well as Hollywood cinema such as D. W. Griffiths’ *Way Down East* (1920, USA) *Rosemary’s Baby* (1968, Roman Polanski, USA), *The Handmaid’s Tale* (1990, Volker

‘behaves like a Trojan horse, opening a narrative to reveal all sorts of human emotions and behaviours that have little to do with pregnancy itself’ (5). Although she is not adventurous in the film genres that she writes about, this reframing and re-evaluating of pregnancy can be applied to films both inside and outside of what is understood as the mainstream.

Mainstream cinema does not necessarily mean that films made for the mass market are readily available or popular, and the conflation of ‘Hollywood’ and mainstream introduces a confusion between Hollywood and the notion of the popular. Kelly Oliver, for example, writes about images of pregnancy in Hollywood, but she does not explain how she defines her Hollywood corpus (2012). While it is clear that she is talking about popular films that are intended for commercial cinemas, there is some difference between the box office figures of a film such as Judd Apatow’s *Knocked Up* (opening weekend: \$30, 690, 990), and Hilary Brougher’s *Stephanie Daley* (opening weekend: \$3, 401).<sup>39</sup> It is not my intention to argue that mainstream only means box office success, but it is important to note that Hollywood is often used as an explanatory term to describe an enormously diverse set of films. Oliver draws in other films that are outside of ‘Hollywood’ such as *4 Months, 3 Weeks, 2 Days/ 4 luni, 3 saptamani si 2 zile* (2007, Cristian Mungui), from Romania, *Bella*, (2006, Alejandro Gomez Monteverde), from the US and Mexico, and *Moon* (2009, Duncan Jones) from the UK in order to widen her discussion. This goes beyond Oliver’s intention to limit her corpus to ‘Hollywood’. This indicates the need for discussion to move beyond a North American corpus, which I do in this thesis, as Boswell also widens her discussion (about mainstream Hollywood) to other types of

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Schlöndorff, USA/Germany), *Look Who’s Talking* (1989, Amy Heckerling, USA), *Juno* and *Precious* (2009, Lee Daniels, USA).

<sup>39</sup> These figures are taken from IMDb’s (Internet Movie Database) listings. Whilst these weekend gross figures do not indicate how a film’s popularity changes in the aftermath of its distribution, it is a marker of the level of interest that a commercial audience (fee-paying) has for that film on first release.

film, notably French New Wave filmmaker Jean-Luc Godard's *Breathless/À bout de souffle* (1960). She does this to explain Godard's influence on a generation of North American filmmakers, but crucially, she argues that the film contains a pregnancy narrative that is not developed. The 'silent pregnancy runs the show, in unconventional ways: without melodramatic fanfare, and through a rear-view mirror' Boswell writes, insisting that the pregnancy is shared with the spectator through dramatic irony and 'informs everything in the film' (172; 173). The dramatic use of pregnancy as an embodied state that has no further plot development is an important point to make, but it is not necessary, however, to go all the way back to 1960s France to see evidence of this.

Even if pregnancy does not form any part of a plot development, its very existence in contemporary cinema serves a narrative purpose. The (non)appearance or (non)discussion of pregnancy "appears" frequently on the screen in order to form the basis of subtext for the spectator. This subtext can be shorthand for the character of the pregnant protagonist, to signal the relationship of that character to other protagonists, or it can direct the response of the spectator to that character.<sup>40</sup> As Currie K. Thompson explains, pregnancy, and a woman's response to it, is often used as a narrative shorthand for a woman's character development, whilst pregnancy itself, he explains, can signal mood in a film (2014). Thompson, who writes on Argentinean cinema, makes an important point about the conflation of pregnancy and maternity when he explains that it is the very concept of maternity that creates narrative. He describes the narrative construction of maternity in three parts: 'witnessing a woman give birth, the discovery that a woman is pregnant, or the expectation that she will become pregnant' (73-74). In other words, the narrative of pregnancy exists even if there is no pregnancy on screen.

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<sup>40</sup> Throughout the thesis, I use the term 'character' to describe an individual within the film. The term protagonist implies that there is a significant role within the film's narrative for that character.

This concept of maternity as narrative is seen in films that are more recent than the films that Thompson discusses. In *Touristas* (2009, Alicia Scherson, Chile), an aborted pregnancy underlines the fragmented relationship between husband and wife Carla (Alicia Küppenheim) and Joel (Marcelo Alonso), and functions as a turning point even though the pregnancy does not exist. It is the memory of pregnancy and how each of them think about the pregnancy as well as the way it was ended that causes conflict. In *Kept and Dreamless/Las mantenidas sin sueños* (2005, Martín de Salvo and Vera Fogwill, Argentina/France/Netherlands/Spain) a young mother, Florencia (Vera Fogwill) with a backstory of being irresponsible, lies to her own mother about being pregnant in order to secure money from her. In *Leonera/Lion's Den* (2008, Pablo Trapero, Argentina/South Korea/Brazil/Spain), a pregnant woman, Julia (Martina Gusman), is charged with killing her partner and gives birth in jail, which adds to the obstacles she has to overcome in the narrative. In *Junebug* (2005, Phil Morrison, USA), pregnancy creates a mood of suspense in the film, in which the pregnancy of Ashley (Amy Adams) is a narrative device through which to understand the conflict in an extended, and fragmented, family. As the family wait for the birth, Ashley unites them as they are forced to spend time with each other, but when the baby is stillborn, the family fragments once again. In *Revolutionary Road* (2006, Sam Mendes, USA/UK), the discovery of pregnancy creates conflict whereby each of the main protagonists, April (Kate Winslet) and Frank (Leonardo de Caprio), reveal their opposing views about their future lives: April wants to go abroad, but Frank has been promoted and wants to stay in the US. The pregnancy, which will result in a third child, emphasises this conflict. In each film, the pregnancy loss underpins the emotional subtext of the narrative. In *Undertow/Contracorriente* (2009, Javier Fuentes-Léon, Peru/Colombia/France/Germany), pregnancy is used to emphasise the battle that the main character (who is having a sexual relationship with both his wife and his male lover) has with his sexuality. In this film, the

pregnancy helps to develop the male character's narrative conflict. The pregnancy, whilst important, has a subsidiary role as a narrative device.

By contrast, the use of pregnancy as a key narrative device in contemporary popular cinema allows multiple plot lines around parenthood and new reproductive technologies, and has introduced, Oliver explains, a new generation of films since 2000, particularly from the US, that engages with different ideas about "family" or kinship groups. Assisted reproductive technologies (ARTs), such as in-vitro fertilisation (IVF), have introduced a new way of seeing the "family" whereby kinship groups are drawn not only from biological connection, but also by scientific means, and sometimes by subterfuge. It is not only scientific means, however, that provides drama, the very idea of the pregnant belly without pregnancy is a common trope. For example, *Labor Pains* (2009, Lara Shapiro, USA) and *Preggoland* (2014, Jacob Tierney, Canada) demonstrate the advantages in term of perceived status and personal qualities of the pregnant person, even if they are not actually pregnant. In *Baby Mama* (2008, Michael McCullers, USA) the faked pregnancy in the uterus of the surrogate Angie (Amy Poehler) is achieved by a prosthetic belly. This fakery masks a real pregnancy where the foetus in the surrogate's uterus belongs, biologically, to the surrogate's husband. The 'hostile' uterus of the main protagonist Kate (Tina Fey), that supposedly cannot support a pregnancy, is finally capable of pregnancy by natural conception with the right male partner. In the final scene of *Baby Mama*, the four protagonists celebrate together the first birthday of their respective children to show they have formed a new kinship group. Surrogacy, then, is a popular theme in contemporary cinema. Sometimes not only a child, but also, on occasion, a grandchild is desired, as in *The Brothers Solomon* (Bob Odenkirk, 2007, USA). In this case (as with *Baby Mama*), kinship is formed by brothers John (Will Arnett) and Dean (Will Forte) not only with the surrogate Janine (Kristen Wiig), but also with Janine's extended family and her partner.

Surrogacy can also be positioned as a religious calling, as in *Misconceptions* (2008, Ron Satlof, USA) in which the surrogate pregnancy results in a close relationship between an evangelic Christian woman Miranda (A. J. Cook) and a gay man Terry (Orlando Jones). In *Saved!* (2004, Brian Dannelly, USA/Canada), a religious calling to reproduce means that teenager, Mary (Jena Malone), has sex with her boyfriend to prove to *him* that he is not gay. She sees this as giving her virginity as a gift not to her boyfriend but to God. When Mary becomes ostracised because of her pregnancy, she finds kinship with her gay boyfriend and other ostracised teenagers. Pregnancy, then, through assisted reproductive technologies and through surrogacy is not only the main focus of the narrative, it is also a vehicle for bringing groups of characters together.

Pregnancy is often used as a vehicle or device that allows characters who have disparate personalities and lifestyles to form an alternative kinship group. In *Who Says It's Easy?/¿Quién dice que es fácil?* (2007, Juan Taratuto, Argentina), the main protagonists, Aldo (Diego Peretti) and his pregnant tenant Andrea (Carolina Pelleritti), fall into a relationship which results in Aldo being with Andrea through the birth of her child. In *Music on Hold/Música en espera* (2009, Hernán A Golfrid, Argentina), musician Izequiel (Peretti again) pretends to be the father of Paula's (Natalia Oreiro) unborn baby in return for her helping him to find music for his latest composition. The supportive male friend in these films deflects the pregnancy narrative onto the male character to explore questions of paternity and fatherhood. The narrative of fatherhood is also seen in other films that deal with sperm donation which, like the fake pregnancy, offers an opportunity to examine fatherhood as part of a kinship with or without biological connections, such as in *The Back-Up Plan* (2010, Alan Poul, USA) and *The Switch* (2010, Josh Gordon and Will Speck, USA). The rite of passage into fatherhood includes the journey into manhood as seen in the teenage pregnancy film *Too Young To Be A Dad* (Éva Gardos, 2002, USA/Canada) where Matt (Paul Dano), the teenage biological father, accepts his changed role

and career plans to support his girlfriend, Francesca (Katie Stewart), and to fight against his child being adopted. Pregnancy can provide the narrative complication rather than the main storyline as in *Life Happens* (2011, Kat Coiro, USA): young mother Kim (Krysten Ritter) pretends that she is not a mother after becoming pregnant after a one night stand. The events that led up to her pregnancy are important, but the pregnancy itself is not the main focus of the narrative. This can be the case even when ostensibly the main focus is pregnancy as in the multi-protagonist films *What to Expect When You're Expecting* (2012, Kirk Jones, USA), which follows the individual pregnancies of couples with interconnected lives. Each pregnancy is different, but the narrative, rather, focusses on individual characters. Similarly, in *Casa de los babys* (2003, John Sayles, USA/Mexico), a disparate group of North American women are all adopting babies from Mexico. Not being able to become pregnant is the reason for the characters to be in Mexico, but the focus on the film is the complexity of disparate lives. In whatever role the subject of pregnancy plays in the narrative, rarely does a film use the uterus itself as a subject or a plot point as it does in Isabel Croixet's film *My Life Without Me* (2003, Spain/Canada). This film centres on the subject of uterine cancer. The uterus, in this case, reflects the centrality of motherhood for the female character Ann (Sara Polley) and becomes an image both perceptually and as part of the diagnostic scan. The narrative that surrounds the uterus, however, reflects the pivotal role of the mother in relation to her body, rather than the uterus itself functioning as a palimpsest of her own life.

Whilst the uterus is not a subject in itself, the experience of the foetus in the uterus is an emerging trope in fiction film. Although the trilogy of comedy films of the late 1980s and 1990s – *Look Who's Talking*, *Look Who's Talking Too* (1990, Amy Heckerling, USA), and *Look Who's Talking Now* (1993, Tom Ropelowski, USA) – gave voice to the sperm and foetus *in utero*, its intention was comedy, not an expression of foetal worth. The Christian evangelical

film *October Baby* (2011, Jon Erwin, Andrew Erwin, USA), gives the foetus a voice in order to allow testimony from the foetus who remains alive following the abortion process when a young woman Hannah (Rachel Hendrix) begins to display physical signs, such as fainting and a feeling of not being able to breathe, and finds out that these physical symptoms result from her being the survivor of abortion. When Hannah collapses, and when she is recovering from her collapse, she describes the feeling of drowning saying, 'I feel dead inside'. This film dramatises and anthropomorphises the unborn foetus in order to highlight the long-term effects of abortion. In *El Colombian Dream/El colombiano dream* (2005, Felipe Aljure, Colombia) the aborted foetus narrates the story of his family fourteen years after his death before life. The film is not pro-life, yet the film creates a narrator who has yet to forgive his premature death. The gentler pro-life drama of *Bella* does not use the aborted foetus as a narrator, but the foetus becomes part of the redemption process for the male protagonist José (Eduardo Verástegui) who is responsible for killing a child. By talking his colleague Nina (Tammy Blanchard) out of an abortion and offering to adopt and raise her unwanted baby, the foetus becomes the focus of *his* narrative. The role of the pregnancy in this case is to develop the narrative of the adoptive father rather than develop the narrative of the mother.

The shift to using pregnancy as a main plot device does not eliminate representation of the woman or the mother, but it does shift the emphasis of discussion away from the role of the woman as mother. Pregnancy as the main narrative (or plot) device, as Oliver insists, is a recent development in popular contemporary cinema, and contrasts with the previous focus on motherhood. By focussing on pregnancy as a narrative device, the narrative of prospective parenthood – male or female – can be explored through pregnancy. Introducing pregnancy as a narrative device places embodiment centre stage and, Oliver suggests, is of particular interest given the wealth of scholarship on female subjectivity and pregnant embodiment. The visibility

of the pregnant body in contemporary popular visual culture emphasises the ‘elasticity of pregnant subjectivity’ according to Tyler (2001: 71). The way that pregnant embodiment is seen reflects the changing nature of parenting, kinship and reproduction, which can be comedic as it separates sex, reproduction and romance. As a result, sex, romance and reproduction can function in different narrative threads in the same film with the pregnant body having a narrative function in itself. When reproduction is separated like this or managed technologically, romance can appear elsewhere. Oliver explains that this has changed the characteristics of the romantic comedy, which has been transformed by an uncoupling of romance and sex. She suggests that this began with the uncoupling of sex and reproduction achieved by the introduction of birth control in 1970s USA. This changed emphasis, in which romance, sex and reproduction are not always entwined, offers more narrative possibilities for male and female character development.

The pregnant person, and the pregnant body in the sub-genre of the romantic comedy, function as narrative devices for both male and female character progression and is a shift from pregnancy signalling *only* motherhood or maternity. According to Oliver, it is only recently that pregnancy has been the centre of film narratives and this is reflected in the proliferation of mom-coms (mother comedies) as rom-coms (romantic comedies) which place pregnancy rather than the woman in the centre of the frame.<sup>41</sup> The cinematic roots of romantic comedy can be charted back to the Hollywood romantic melodramas in the 1950s with hetero-normative comedy teams where the function of the narratives in these cases were often to tame the career/independent woman, and to emotionally domesticate the male hero. Lucy Fischer suggests this has led to maternity being discussed within the genre classification of melodrama,

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<sup>41</sup> In Oliver’s argument, it is the pregnant body rather than romance that provides comedy not motherhood. This type of film, therefore, is not strictly a mom-com; it is more accurately – using her criteria – a preg-com.

the ‘maternal melodrama’, where lines of genre classification are drawn across the gender divide and that this complicates themes like maternity (1996: 10-12). Fischer encourages a shift from this discussion to investigate ‘questions of maternity outside their assumed generic “home”’ to explore other genres, but also to bring a different perspective to maternity as a gender-divided genre (8). As pregnancy is part of everyday life, confining the subject of pregnancy to gender-identified genres means that other ways of looking at pregnancy are less likely to be analysed. It also means that other ways of looking, at the everyday, for example, are overlooked.

The fearful embodied experience of pregnancy is often read as horror, but this ‘horror’ is part of the everyday. Fischer reads the film *Rosemary’s Baby*, which concerns a young pregnant woman convinced she has been impregnated by a satanic group, against the grain of a horror discussion to consider it as an ‘utterance of a women’s private experience of pregnancy’ (1996: 76).<sup>42</sup> Importantly, she notes that the embodied reality of pregnancy, a central motif in the film, reflects the real emotions of the pregnant person, not only the supernatural and horrific suggestion that her foetus has been placed in her uterus by a satanic group. By normalising pregnancy as an experience, she moves the discussion of pregnant embodiment beyond pathological abnormality. It is crucial, then, to consider how the understanding of pregnancy has become so genre dependent. Horror, comedy and melodrama genres depend on their affective quality, so pregnancy in either of these genres is there for horrific, comedic or melodramatic effect. Brinkema suggests that the horror genre is so identified by its relationship to negative affect and that this separates it from comedy (2015). Given the genre differences, she points out that this genre classification and the ‘circular impulse towards generification’

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<sup>42</sup> Fischer first published this essay in 1992 in *Cinema Journal*. She also notes the importance of Ingmar Bergman’s film *Persona* (1966, Sweden) as a film about maternity even though this is not expressly a thematic strand in the film.

causes problems not least because the classification of horror includes films that do not horrify, and that films identified as belonging to other genres which also ‘produce moments of disturbing affective intensity’ are not classified as horror (264). Caetlin Benson-Allott adds that the classification of horror is defined not by truly horrific historical events, but by the feelings of disgust and fear that are generated because of the interiority of bodily function (2015). This offers some explanation about why pregnancy lends itself to this recurring discussion around the woman’s body.

Creed argues, in relation to the horror genre, that it is the ‘fertilisable’ nature of the female body which singles it out and links it to the existence of horrific ‘alterations in the womb’ which itself ‘swells to monstrous proportions’ or becomes a ‘disgusting growth’ or even transposes to another part of the body as a ‘displaced tumour’ (1993: 50; emphasis in original). The supposed inside of the ‘womb’, she says, is an inspiration for set design where labyrinthine paths lead to ‘a central room, cellar or other symbolic place of birth’ where ‘the womb is depicted as grotesque’ and where the monster will give birth (53). It is often not only the womb as part of the set design, but also the womb as an imaginary location that creates horror. Even when the films deal with real human fears where the body is a transformative site, their *raison d’être* is horror, and they speak to the fear not only of the unseen alien growing in the body, but also to the disturbing nature of reproduction itself.<sup>43</sup> Despite Creed’s seminal work, she does not tackle

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<sup>43</sup> Films that belong to this category include *Rosemary’s Baby*; *Carrie* (1976, Brian De Palma, USA) where a teenage girl develops ever increasing telekinetic powers as she enters puberty; *Demon Seed* (1977, Donald Cammell, USA) where a woman is impregnated by a computer with artificial intelligence; *The Brood* (1979, David Cronenberg, Canada) where offspring are created by asexual reproduction triggered by a woman’s psychological trauma; *Alien*; *Aliens* (1986, James Cameron, USA/UK) a sequel to Scott’s film that returns to the abandoned space ship where alien eggs are found waiting to hatch; David Cronenberg’s *The Fly* (1986, USA/UK/Canada) – a remake of Kurt Neumann’s 1958 film (USA) – where a man transforms into a fly, and *Dead Ringers* (1988, Canada/USA) where identical twin male gynaecologists become obsessed with a woman whose has a trifurcated cervix and uterus.

the important question of language and definition when describing the internal body. In the index to her book, there are thirteen separate entries for ‘womb’, two references for ‘uterine iconography’, and no reference for the ‘uterus’. In Oliver’s work, there are sixteen separate entries for ‘womb’ and none for ‘uterus’ (2012: 232). This implies that the ‘womb’ as a metaphorical or symbolic location is more significant – or more interesting – than the uterus as an actual place.

The interior of the pregnant body and the expanding uterus is a source of horror, but the fascination with the site of growth – the uterus – also extends to the product that emerges from that site: the offspring. Sarah Arnold charts the way the horror genre from *Rosemary’s Baby* to *Eraserhead* (1977, David Lynch, USA) and *Grace* (2009, Jeff Chan, USA/Canada) ‘all relate to the fear of monstrous, deformed or mutant offspring’ (2013: 156). The horror of the offspring also relates to the unseen mother as the arrival of a child of unclear parentage arrives into an established family by adoption or cloning as in *Godsend* (2004, Nick Hamm, USA/Canada) or *Orphan* (2009, Jaume Collet-Serra, USA/Spain/France/Italy). Arnold suggests that the monstrous, female, reproductive body can be negated in the horror narrative by being coded as ‘mother’, and the monstrous offspring or foetus can be negated by being coded as ‘baby’. She argues that psychoanalytic theory is a useful in looking at motherhood and suggests that horror film is already predisposed to the myths and symbolism associated with a psychoanalytic reading of the maternal body (2). She explains this by saying that melodrama and the horror film have much in common, and that, although ‘there has been a wealth of research on the mother in melodrama [there is] relatively little on the mother in the horror film’ and that ‘there are enough similarities in terms of the construction of motherhood to warrant the use of psychoanalytic theory usually reserved for the melodrama’ (4). One of the major similarities between horror and melodrama, she argues, is the ‘disruption of the ordinary [and] its shift from

the normal and its provocation of anxiety' (2). This may well be the case in terms of genre conventions in both horror and melodrama. This approach, however, highlights the inherent difficulties in analysing the mother, motherhood and the reproductive body through psychoanalysis and by linking this to a 'normative' shift. In order to recognise the shift from the normal, there needs to be a definition of what is normal. In fact, Arnold explains that she does not attempt to comment on the notion of the 'really lived' mother, but she gives little reason for ignoring the 'really lived mother' as normative and as a starting point for research (1). Bringing together the two genres certainly widens the scope of research on the maternal. Taking a psychoanalytic approach, however, and not defining the normative, inevitably narrows the scope of analysis and does not tackle the complex nature of pregnancy as a subject across genres.

Pregnancy as a genre, then, does not have a clear definition and I argue that part of this lack of definition is that the lived body experience of pregnancy is not being represented. The correlation between the use of pregnancy in comedy and the use of pregnancy in horror comes from the inherent comedic or horrific notion of interiority, which may include the uterus as a location, but not the uterus itself as a subject. There are clearly different uses of pregnancy as a narrative device: it creates a mood, develops the character of the pregnant person, or allows the narrative of other characters to develop and both the horror and comedy genres use images of pregnancy and the pregnant belly affectively. The fake belly is used as an image that represents the complex nature of reproduction in either the difficulty of becoming pregnant or the desire to be seen as pregnant. The interior of the uterus is also used to give voice to the foetus whereby it can communicate its experience inside the uterus (while inside or outside of it) as a commentary or a reflection. There is a lack, however, of contemporary feature films that speak in any real way to the experience of pregnancy as part of the everyday and that engage with

contemporary issues. In order to address this, and for a more complex analysis, I argue for new groupings of films that offer different ways of thinking about pregnancy.

### **Corpus of Films**

One of the strengths of this thesis is in establishing a new corpus of films, but I do recognise that their disparate nature demands discussion. The Americas of my title refers to North America, Canada, South America and the Caribbean. This area has many cultural and historical crossovers, but has traditionally been divided, for academic study, into north and south with corresponding linguistic allegiances, which to the north are Anglophone and to the south Spanish and Lusophone. This tradition emphasises the differences across the region rather than the commonalities. It also splits the central region of the Caribbean into linguistic groups based on colonisation. The Americas, however, have specific commonalities in relation to pregnancy: namely, reproductive and abortion services which, I argue, marks the region out as distinct. The Southern cone countries, including Central America and the Caribbean, have broadly conservative attitudes to pregnancy and reproductive rights and, according to the Guttmacher Institute, which monitors reproductive rights worldwide, ‘more than 97% of women of childbearing age in Latin America and the Caribbean live in countries where abortion is restricted or banned altogether’.<sup>44</sup> Accessibility of reproductive services including abortion, therefore, are increasingly areas of concern. Although the US might be considered more liberal than nations across the southern Americas, this does not reflect the reality. Restrictions are placed on reproductive rights in individual states across the US, and delaying tactics are commonly employed in relation to abortion services. There is targeted regulation of abortion

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<sup>44</sup> Although there are some signs of a willingness to amend legislation, abortion is prohibited completely, with no exceptions, in Chile, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Haiti, Honduras, and Nicaragua. Countries where abortion is allowed with few or no restrictions are Cuba (with parental consent for minors), Guyana, Puerto Rico, Uruguay (with parental consent for minors), [www.guttmacher.org/fact-sheet/facts-abortion-latin-america-and-caribbean](http://www.guttmacher.org/fact-sheet/facts-abortion-latin-america-and-caribbean).

providers (TRAP), and insurance limitations for abortion which is becoming increasingly widespread.<sup>45</sup> State laws, as opposed to central government directives, can insist that people referred for terminations undergo compulsory ultrasound and/or counselling. These delaying tactics have two important effects: seeing the foetus on the ultrasound screen (presuming positive bonding) may make a person change their mind about having a termination, and delaying the legal process may take the pregnant person beyond the gestational viability for a legal termination. In Canada, reproductive rights are not part of the legal system and abortion is freely available. It should be remembered, however, that the location of services such as abortion clinics in sparsely populated areas means that they are not necessarily freely available or accessible. Termination of pregnancy in Canada must be carried out, as it is in the US, by regulated clinics and not all cities have these clinics. Given that progressive political and economic attitudes towards pregnancy are inextricably linked to the accessibility of services, it is clear that reproductive rights are, in effect, becoming increasingly diminished. It also suggests to me that there are fundamental questions to be asked about attitudes to pregnancy and the pregnant person. For that reason, I argue that there is an urgency to finding new ways of thinking about pregnancy across the Americas.

Grouping the films as I do, from regions with common attitudes to pregnancy and reproductive rights rather than national and/or language groups, offers a departure for film studies in relation to pregnancy and the study of the Americas. Bringing together a range of films from different national cinemas, however, is not unprecedented. As Dina Iordanova, David Martin-Jones and Belén Vidal suggest, cinema is not only centralised in countries or nations (as in Eurocentric or Hollywood-centric), but it also exists on the periphery (2010). As small nation cinemas become increasingly visible and accessible, they argue, there needs to be increasingly complex

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<sup>45</sup> [www.guttmacher.org/state-policy/explore/overview-abortion-laws](http://www.guttmacher.org/state-policy/explore/overview-abortion-laws).

discussions about nation and nationhood that question and reassess established national cinematic canons. Importantly, for the purposes of this thesis, I am suggesting that the region of the Americas is distinct because of its attitudes to pregnancy, *not* because of its cultural, economic or ideological sameness. The debate around abortion in the US is, argues Linda J. Beckman, ‘contentious, convoluted, and unpredictable’ as a result of competing ideologies about the role of motherhood and the personhood of the foetus (2016: 102). As Beckman points out, although abortion has been declining across the US for the past thirty years, and birth rates have been dropping, pregnancy and reproductive rights remain linked to ideologies about gender roles, even if these ideologies do not necessarily reflect public opinion. Although the discourse around abortion and foetal personhood in relation to reproductive rights is well documented in the northern Americas, the debate on personhood takes on an increased complexity when thinking about regional and cultural specificity. Lynn Morgan suggests that the notion of foetal personhood in the Ecuadorean Andes, for example, is complicated when the *feto* (foetus) is more likely to be thought of as *criatura* (creature) or *venidero* (the one to come) rather than ‘a culturally specific conceptual entity’ (1997: 324). Morgan also notes that the term *auca* – to describe a liminal being – is not only used for the unbaptised newborn, but is also used to describe other peoples or tribes who are considered less than human. Ethnographic research by Andrew Canessa (2012) and Tristan Platt (2001) in the Bolivia highlands, meanwhile, emphasises the complexity of personhood where it is understood as something that does not begin in pregnancy, with the foetus or even with the infant. This reflects an ambiguity or uncertainty not only about foetal personhood, but also with the notion of existence itself. These findings suggest to me that there needs to be more discussion that engages with the complexities of foetal personhood and pregnancy as a lived body experience, and as part of the communal human existence. The cultural specificity of Morgan, Canessa and

Platt's discussion is beyond the scope of this thesis, but I posit that my discussion is of critical importance here.

Although this thesis is about fictional drama, I cannot ignore the fact that the subject of pregnancy across the Americas through the 1990s and 2000s has been more prevalent in documentaries that are not only, but often, made by women. Documentary filmmaking addresses narratives that are not fully explored in contemporary commercial drama, but are helpful in understanding the broader preoccupations in the lives of contemporary women in the Americas such as sexuality, access to contraception and economic battles: all of which are often linked to the female reproductive body. The documentary *Beautiful Sin* (2014), from Costa Rica/US, investigates the implications for prospective parents of a ban, in Costa Rica, on *in vitro* fertilisation (IVF). The question of enforced sterilisation in Brazil informs the work of filmmaker Ana Luiza Azevedo as women speak about their thoughts and feeling (negative and positive) in *Ventre Livre: Freeing the Womb* (1994). *Las Libres: The Story Continues* (2014, Gustavo Montaña, USA/Mexico/Argentina), documents the criminalisation of women for having abortions, even when there is no technical pregnancy at all. Florence Jaugey's film *De niña a madre/From Girl to Mother* (2005) from Nicaragua asks pregnant girls about their childhood, their partners and reproductive responsibilities. In *Rosita* (2005) filmmakers Barbara Attie and Janet Goldwater document the legal procedures in Nicaragua and Costa Rica as authorities and parents deal with the pregnancy and human rights of a nine-year-old girl. These documentaries reflect the constant paradox of pregnant person's rights versus human rights versus foetal rights.

Abortion as a subject matter is highlighted in the documentary *Jane: An Abortion Service* (1995, Kate Kurtz and Nell Lundy, USA), which charts the rise of lay abortionists in the US in the late 1960s and early 1970s who provided terminations for women who could not finance the

procedure even when it became legal to do so. The 125 women workers performed 12,000 abortions between 1968 and 1973. Without the aid of ultrasonography, the workers performed the terminations by touch, relying on their understanding of the physiological nature of the body from the vagina to the cervix and to the uterus. Pregnancy itself is explored in *The Motherhood Archives* (2013) by Irene Lusztig, which includes narratives of twentieth century US public information films about pregnancy, birth and motherhood where the (middle-class, white) expectant mother is described as a ‘traveller in an unimaginable foreign country’ and follows the embodied experience of pregnancy from antenatal exercise classes to the journey from their homes into hospital. The subject of pregnancy is integrally linked not only to questions of contraception, but also to the vexed question about the existence of virginity. Therese Shechter’s *How to Lose Your Virginity* (2013) from the US, examines female virginity as a rite of sexual passage that, in the heteronormative/patriarchal definition, is understood as the penis crossing the vaginal threshold. Furthermore, in *Virgin Tales* (2012) director Mirjam von Arn, explores the lives of Christian evangelicals in the US, and investigates how the male, through sexual intercourse, ‘opens your womb’, and how the existence of the womb identifies the female as ‘life giver’. This suggest to me that virginity and the conflation of woman and virgin (seen in some of the films in my corpus) demands some discussion.

It must be remembered that the notion of the virgin birth in Christianity has provoked not only theological, but also anthropological discussion. As scientist and social anthropologist Edmund Leach suggested in 1966, the myth of the virgin birth is part of the ‘metaphysical topography of the relationship between gods and men’ and that this is separate from what people believe as actually happening to the body (39). Isabel Arredondo, writing on motherhood and Mexican cinema, draws attention to the Virgin as a construct and argues (agreeing with Marina Warner [1976]) that ‘the Virgin tells us about people who created the myth [...] [It] is not imposed by

an outside force, but is made by the society who believes in it; its origin is within society' (2014: 36). It is the concepts of *marianism* or Mariology – the worship, devotion and reverence of the Virgin Mary, mother of Jesus Christ – that promotes the ephemeral qualities that women are expected to have in Latin American society. In order to differentiate between Christian worship and gender roles, Evelyn P. Stevens coined the word *marianismo* as a counterpart to *machismo* (1973: 90-101). Whilst femaleness and maleness in this context are not entirely comparable, Stevens initiates an important discussion that revolves around the perceived superior moral and spiritual qualities of the (idealised) woman capable of reproduction. Stevens' work concentrates on Mexico, and as such is culturally and regionally specific, but it highlights the complexity of gender roles and the genealogy of such roles insisting that social class factors bear heavily in the development of many of these concepts. There is disagreement about whether these notions of masculinity and femininity result from colonial cultural imperialism, and Stevens explains that the concept of the fertile female as a superior being (or goddess) is shared globally.

Nevertheless, the question of virginity underpins the documentary *A Girl Like Her* (2011, Ann Fessler) from the USA, interviews women in the present day, who gave up their babies for adoption throughout the 1960s and 1970s, still suffering from the ongoing trauma of being separated from their babies. This ongoing trauma of separation extends to infants taken from the post-partum person and disappeared or stolen. Whilst the search for lost children is a political and social concern, there is another more ephemeral issue at hand, that of the last location of the foetus: the uterus. In Noemi Weis' documentary *Abuelas: Grandmothers on a Mission* (2012) from Argentina, Estela de Carlotta one of the grandmothers of the *Plaza de Mayo* – a group searching for their children and grandchildren who disappeared under the military repression in the 70s and 80s – explains the search for the remains of her daughter Laura, who was imprisoned when pregnant and killed soon after the birth of her son. De

Carlotta's search led her to Laura's bodily remains which showed the presence of pregnancy in her pelvic bones. Although a concrete sign that a pregnancy existed, there was no evidence of the whereabouts of the baby.<sup>46</sup> The uterus, then, becomes a physical location of biological contact creating an embodied and conceptual link not only between the pregnant person and the child, but also between the remaining relatives and the child as part of kinship. Based on actual testimonies, Gaston Biraben's fictional drama *Cautiva/Captive* (2003) from Argentina dramatises a schoolgirl's traumatic experience of having her (illegal) adoptive parents taken into custody and being re-introduced to her biological family. The trauma of identity is also depicted in a dramatic reconstruction in *Los Rubios/The Blonds* (2003) from Argentina and the US that depicts the abduction of director Albertina Carri's parents. Although my research suggests that there is not a critical mass of film texts on this subject, I suggest that any corpus of films relating to the children of the disappeared must refer to, and will benefit from, my film readings.

It is not only the themes of pregnancy and reproductive rights across the Americas that bear commonalities, the co-production histories across the Americas (and Europe) of transnationally produced and/or funded films demands, as Luisela Alvaray (2011) suggests, a re-evaluation of regional and national identities in the light of globalisation. A measure of the importance and increased visibility of other kinds of films and filmmakers is reflected in the recently announced new invitees to the *Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences* (AMPAS). Because of fierce criticism at the lack of diversity in the Academy Awards nominees, AMPAS announced in June 2016 that they had invited 683 people join the Academy, which included many contemporary writers and directors from Latin America. This suggest a welcome change and points to a

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<sup>46</sup> It was not until 2014, thirty-six years after his birth, that de Carlotta found her grandson, Ignacio Hurban (now Montoya Carlotta), who had volunteered to have his DNA tested.

significant change in the kinds of films presented for achievement awards in coming years. Although the Academy Awards have not considered as inclusive or even relevant to large sectors of the global filmmaking community, this change will have an impact on the kinds of films across the Americas that will be funded, marketed and discussed in the future. My work contributes to this shifting focus by bringing together films that reflect this cousinhood of film production by grouping together films that are not defined by their national or cultural sameness. This also means, I argue, that there needs to be a rethinking about representations of pregnancy that are culturally and ideologically specific, such as the concepts of *marianism*/Mariology and *marianismo*. These concepts, which inform representations of pregnancy, are often used as a shorthand (for the generic woman) in film narratives and in analysis, but are not always contextualised. By keeping my analytical focus on the uterus, my thesis in turn challenges the narrative content of films about pregnancy. Without some of the cultural, social or political signposts of reproduction, it becomes increasingly obvious that pregnancy is often a small part of the narrative rather than a central driving force, and my thesis exposes the potential absence of variety in film scripts that deal with pregnancy.

Importantly, challenging grouping of films means that I introduce a corpus of films that would not be considered in other circumstances. What is also of crucial interest to my work is what Michael Chanan calls a ‘cousinhood’ that connects films from the North and the South of America (2006: 47). Chanan suggests that there is huge interest – not only in the Americas – in creating new definitions and in looking more widely at how films are grouped for analysis. The cousinhood that Chanan describes is problematic as the term suggests a kinship or family grouping, but he introduces the term as a way to acknowledge the shared style, or aesthetic,

common to populist postmodern cinema across the Americas.<sup>47</sup> Both Chanan and Laura Podalsky (2011) explain that Latin American cinema has come to increased prominence globally as a result of directors working not only in Latin America, but also in Europe and North America.<sup>48</sup> Podalsky argues that cinema in Latin America has engaged with affect in a significant way that has brought individual directors to transnational prominence, but this turn to (visceral) affect has not been welcomed by film critics who were influenced by previous political and social movements in Latin American Cinema in the 1960s and 70s such as *Cinema Novo* and *Third Cinema*, movements that railed against the influence of the dominant (First World) film production.<sup>49</sup> She argues that films which engage with affect are ‘complex and call upon us to reconsider how aesthetics and politics intersect in today’s cinema’ (3). In addition, as films now circulate in different ways, most obviously through the internet, there must be a process by which theorists can approach world cinemas that does not always refer back to national political movements and reflect the problematics of historical national specificity.

Of relevance to this thesis, Chanan argues that it is important to remember that the essence of political cinema that came out of the Latin American region in the 1960s and 1970s embraced diversity or *différance*.<sup>50</sup> Although Eurocentric film movements such as the French New Wave

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<sup>47</sup> For a discussion on marginal cinemas and mainstream critical theory, see Julianne Burton-Carvajal (2006: 17-35).

<sup>48</sup> Chanan and Podalsky suggest that it was Alejandro González Iñárritu’s multi-protagonist film *Amores Perros* (2000) from Mexico that signalled a shift in how Latin America cinema and its filmmakers are seen in the rest of the world. The film gained its international popularity from its viscerality which, according to Stephen M. Hart, signalled that ‘[t]he “New” New Latin American film was typically located in a generic (often urban) non-traditional site [...] thereby making a clean break with films of the 1990s, which were located within a recognizably national space’ (2015: 108). Podalsky gives an extensive account of the reaction to Iñárritu’s film not only internationally, but also by the critics from South America who saw the film as Tarantino-lite.

<sup>49</sup> For discussions on New Latin American Cinema, *Cinema Novo* and *Third Cinema* see Zuzana Pick (1993), John King (2000) and Anthony R. Guneratne and Wimal Dissanayake (2003).

<sup>50</sup> Chanan uses Jacques Derrida’s notion of *différance* to signify diversity, but he uses the term in a different context to Derrida’s original meaning. Derrida’s term accentuates the linguistic similarity of difference and deferral and could be most closely related to the system of signs and signifiers that marks linguistic theory (which itself forms the roots of European cinematic theory, particularly of the

were also politically influenced, the new Latin American Cinema of the 1960s and 70s, according to Chanan, was not an aesthetic wave in the same way, but it ‘invoked an avant-garde spirit of iconoclasm [...] and was therefore, in aesthetic terms, radically pluralist’ (40). This is something that has been forgotten in those discussions of post-2000 cinema in Latin America, which largely concentrates on the influence rather than the connectedness of Hollywood. The cinemas of north and south are linked, perhaps not politically, but, as Chanan suggests, they are the ‘same, but also different’ and, as such, there is already a dialogue across the Americas (2006: 50). It is important also to recognise, however, that not every nation in Central and South America or the Caribbean has a viable film industry. Countries such as Costa Rica, El Salvador, and Nicaragua did not produce feature films until the late twentieth century, and the Caribbean island Grenada not until 2006. This contrasts sharply with other nations such as Cuba, Chile and Argentina where a cinematic infrastructure produces a rich cinematic heritage. The region of the Americas, I argue, cannot be thought of as homogenous, and I do not consider it as such.

The more pressing question, I suggest, is how to engage with contemporary cinema transnationally. Increasingly, cinemas from around the world are being discussed in terms of their transnational importance, but there is some misunderstanding about the term and the way it is used. I understand the term transnational to offer a language that describes how the historical perception of the national, the international and the global has changed. Transnationalism is generally understood to mean that which operates without or beyond national borders and relates to wider issues concerning the movement of peoples and/or cultures from one geographical situation to another as a result of economic, political or environmental change. Martine Beugnet acknowledges that, in relation to a phenomenological reading of film,

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*Cahiers du Cinema* group). Derrida uses the term to describe the pause or the gap that exists in the process of understanding – a deferral. Margrit Shildrick explains that *différance* suggests that meaning is ‘deferred or detoured, always in some sense somewhere else’ (1997: 103).

context is important and warns against ‘constructing yet another ahistorical or universalising method of appraisal’, but explains that the transnational is a response to the ‘problematization of nation as a label’ (2007: 12). There is also, I suggest, not only a dissatisfaction, but also a confusion about historical or cultural specificity in relation to film production. In effect, the global circulation of films now offers filmmakers a platform for their films that is unprecedented in recent times and this emphasises what Nataša Đurovičová (2010) and Steve Vertovec (2009) suggest is an ontological and epistemological repositioning of the global, the national and the international. The transnational and the essence of its meaning as a post-national sensibility (as Vertovec suggests) is most useful to the way I have grouped my films.<sup>51</sup>

The films I examine are contemporary and, as such, there is no specific archive in which to find them. My starting point, therefore, was to search for films that had pregnancy as a clear theme. I realised early on in my research that some of the films that might be relevant fell outside of any defined category of ‘pregnancy’ and that I would have to extend my search in order to gather a broader range of films to discuss. In fact, finding pregnancy in films is not easy, whether one is searching on-line databases, libraries or indexes. Search words such as “pregnancy” are only likely to find films that have pregnancy as a main narrative thread. The word “womb” is generally related to the horror genre, and “uterus” is almost non-existent as a

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<sup>51</sup> The notion of the post-national is fluid and interpreted in many ways, which is why I talk about a post-national *sensibility*. The term post-national, I suggest, recognises the complexity of discussions that began in critical movements, theoretical approaches and understanding of film aesthetics associated with a national consciousness such as Third Cinema in Latin America that articulated the importance of political filmmaking that was separate from Hollywood (First) and European Auteur traditions (Second). See Fernando Solanos and Octavio Getino’s manifesto *Toward a Third Cinema* (1970-71), which is discussed by Michael T. Martin (1997: 33-58). Post-national also acknowledges the diversity of exilic, diasporic and postcolonial ‘accented’ film production and filmmakers where the nation is seen from the differing viewpoints (Naficy, 2001).

search term in film.<sup>52</sup> Related terms such as “abortion” bring up a range of films, some fiction, but often documentaries like *Silent Scream* and Pedro Chaskel’s black and white documentary drama *Aborto* (1965) from Chile, and sometimes action movies with a mission to ‘abort’.<sup>53</sup> The aim of this thesis is not to catalogue all contemporary films across the Americas in which pregnancy is a part of the narrative, and these searches suggest to me that this is an impossible task, but importantly, my search has presented me with a diverse range of films that do not fall into an established corpus. This finding has influenced the way I have identified films to include in this thesis, and this has evolved over the course of writing.

The films I have included in my corpus range from films that are well known globally to films that have yet to achieve a high profile. The films, however, exemplify those that include pregnancy. As I have already said, films about pregnancy are surprisingly hard to find and my corpus reflects the eclectic nature of my search. What I would say about all of the films in the corpus is that they all break new ground in terms of their subject matter or in terms of their production. For example, Lowery’s *Birth* breaks taboos of representing relationships between adults and children, del Toro brings an outsider’s sensibility to the Spanish civil war in *Pan’s Labyrinth*, Docter and Pixar Productions present miscarriage as a very adult theme in a children’s animated film in *Up*, and Morales tackles the laws on abortion directly through drama in *Apio verde*. Most of the directors and writers of the films in this thesis, however, do not have a large back catalogue of film projects. Only two of the directors in my corpus have a significant number (more than five) of feature credits. Pete Docter has many writing as well as directing credits including original story credits for children’s animation in *Monsters, Inc.* (2001, USA),

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<sup>52</sup> A search for “uterus” in IMDB produced only three short films: *The Uterus Chat* (2014, Ted Satterfield, USA), *How to Sponsor a Uterus* (2012, Bobby Richards, USA). *His Uterus; Her Lover* (2011, Caire Leona Apps, UK), and a character, Uterus Johnson, in a TV comedy.

<sup>53</sup> Chaskel’s documentary has some similarities with *Apio verde* in that it dramatises the reality of abortion for women when it is illegal.

*WALL-E* (2008, USA), *Inside Out* (2015, USA) and the *Toy Story* franchise (1995-2018, USA). Guillermo del Toro has many directing, writing and production credits including writing, directing and production credits for *The Devil's Backbone/ El espinazo del diablo* (2001, Spain/Mexico/France/Argentina), which (like *Pan's Labyrinth*) deals with the aftermath of the Spanish Civil War, and he has a production credit for children's animation *The Book of Life*, (2014, Jorge R. Gutiérrez, USA). Some of the directors – Joshua Marston, Claudia Llosa, David Lowery, Jason Reitman and del Toro – have worked in television as directors.<sup>54</sup> Jonathan Glazer has a background in music videos, and Lowery (who has few feature credits as writer/director) has an extensive background in editing features and short films as well as feature credits for cinematography. The filmmakers, therefore, have a range of other technical skills that they bring to each film. Directors Esteban Ramírez, Rosario García Montero, Hilary Brougher, Claudia Llosa and Francesc Morales do not have a large portfolio of feature credits, but all are writer/directors of their own films.<sup>55</sup> Reitman is the only director who does not have any writing credit for his film *Juno* (the screenplay is by Diablo Cody), but he has writing and production credits for his other feature films (the most recent of which is intergenerational comedy drama *Men, Women and Children*, 2014, USA). All other directors have a writing credit for their films, as either original story or screenplay. Bob Peterson, co-director of *Up*, does not have a writing credit for this film, but he has writing credits for high-profile children's animated films (*Finding*

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<sup>54</sup> Reitman is known for only one film about pregnancy – his father Ivan, however, is known for being the producer and director of pre-millennial comedy films about genetic reproductive experimentation such as *Junior* (1988) and *Twins* (1994) as well as director and producer of the paternity-focused *Father's Day* (1997). Reitman, Sr. was also involved in the body horror genre as the producer and executive producer of David Cronenberg's early films from the 1970s. Although Reitman, Jr.'s films are more concerned with intergenerational narratives and do not focus on the body genre, this cross-generational relationship is important to note, including his appearance as an actor in some of his father's films, including *Twins*.

<sup>55</sup> Robert Isenberg has called Esteban Ramírez the Iñárritu of Costa Rican Cinema in *Tico Times*, an English-language magazine (2014). This illustrates the importance of his work in a national context, but also signals the aspiration of national film production and filmmakers to transnational or global product.

*Nemo*, 2003, Andrew Stanton and Lee Unkrich, USA and *Finding Dory*, 2016, USA); both films dealing with the subject of lost and found kinship groups.

Although this is a wide range of films, I have found some commonalities in terms of the awards that they have attracted and in the way they reflect the work of both established and emerging filmmakers and writers. The Sundance Institute and Film Festival have supported and given awards for many of the films in my corpus.<sup>56</sup> Some of the films have been awarded Academy Awards (Oscars). *Up* was nominated for five Academy Awards and won Best Animated Feature and Best Achievement in Music. *The Milk of Sorrow* was the first Peruvian film to be nominated for an Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film. Actors Catalina Sandino Moreno and Ellen Page were nominated for an Academy Award in 2005 and 2008. *Pan's Labyrinth* was nominated for Academy Awards for original screenplay and best foreign language film and won for best cinematography. Page and Sandino Moreno also both won best female lead at the Independent Spirit Awards (for independent cinema) for *Juno* and *Maria Full of Grace*, respectively. At the same festival, each film also won best screenplay for writers Diablo Cody and Joshua Marston. Amber Tamblyn was nominated for an Independent Spirit Award for best supporting female in *Stephanie Daley*. Nicole Kidman was nominated as Best Actress for a Golden Globe for her role in *Birth*. *Up* won two Golden Globes for Best Original Score and Best Animated Feature. *Gestation* won Best Film at the Trieste International film festival. Rosario Garcia Montero developed her script for *The Bad Intentions* at the *Escuela Internacional de Cine y Televisión* (EICTV) in Cuba. Her film won the Lima International Film

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<sup>56</sup> The Sundance Film Institute and film festival are important as they support world-emerging cinema talent in order to help filmmakers network and screen their films. *Maria Full of Grace*, *Stephanie Daley* and *Ain't Them Bodies Saints* were all premiered at the Sundance Film Festival. *Quinceañera* won the Audience prize and the Grand Jury prize at Sundance. In addition, the scripts for *Stephanie Daley* and *Ain't Them Bodies Saints* were developed at the Sundance Screenwriters Lab. Claudia Llosa's previous film *Madeinusa* (2006) also premiered at the Sundance.

Festival Best Peruvian film award. Of the other films, *Apio verde* is the only film that has yet to win an award. Morales's film has importance and visibility as an independent production because of its controversial content on abortion. The film has yet to find a distributor in Chile, which has resulted in Morales making the film accessible on VIMEO (with permission), but also releasing it to full public access on YouTube. My corpus, then, has been drawn from a wide geographical area, and has a wide breadth of subject matter, and this has enabled me to consider pregnancy from a range of perspectives. Although the corpus was not drawn from award ceremonies, their visibility suggests that they can be understood, in this way, in relation to one another.

My searches were across library collections, film festival programmes, and scholarship on contemporary cinema. Increasingly, however, filmmakers are releasing their films on the internet, streaming them through sites such as VIMEO and YouTube. In addition, there are also more specialised or geographically specific streaming services such as *Remezcla* (a web magazine for South American and Caribbean culture), *Ciné-Pata* (for Latin American cinema), and *Cinéchile* (an archive for Chilean film). There are also other larger global streaming services such as Netflix, Hulu, and Amazon Prime, which influence not only what films are available from the archive, but also which films are available for viewing. The way in which film research responds to this change is, I argue, in a state of flux. In terms of the archive, Ana López and Dolores Tierney acknowledge that academic study of Latin American cinema, particularly English speaking academic study, has increased markedly, but only since 2011 (2014).<sup>57</sup> Although contemporary Latin American directors (such as Alejandro González Iñárritu, Guillermo del Toro and Alfonso Cuarón) are at the forefront of commercial cinema

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<sup>57</sup> López and Tierney base this on the increase in numbers of articles relating to Latin American Cinema published between 2011 and 2013 in *Cinema Journal*, the journal for the Society for Cinema and Media Studies (SCMS).

production in the US and Europe, the scholarship associated with Latin American film, they argue, is still developing. López and Tierney emphasise the importance of archival research for Latin American cinema. I agree that archival research is needed, but I also suggest that more thought is also needed in how to approach films that are outside of what has been, or is currently, archived: for instance, films that are being streamed through the internet. This presents challenges to the provenance of individual films, but I suggest that further research is needed to place these films within a contemporary context.

I define the films in my corpus as personal dramas. Although not an obvious or self-explanatory category, crucially for this thesis, I consider this corpus of films as ones that have a dramatic arc based everyday life and form part of a domestic narrative. Although the concept of genre is being constantly reassessed, its usefulness is in its flexibility. At present, there is no recognisable genre category that connects these films. I suggest that they are part of what Linda Williams calls ‘body genres’, and I interpret this category through Williams’ argument that women’s bodies ‘have tended to function as both the *moved* and the *moving*’ (1991: 4; emphasis in original).<sup>58</sup> The films in the corpus, although less extreme in their physicality than the genres Williams discusses, do, nonetheless, demonstrate how the body becomes a catalyst for narrative and character development. Although my discussion has referenced pregnancy in terms of horror, this has been to situate pregnancy in film studies, rather than to develop my thoughts on the horror genre. Within my corpus, I have intentionally excluded films that I consider to be firmly within the horror genre. This is because the horror genre has been written about

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<sup>58</sup> Williams says ‘body genres’ apply to range of genres – porn, horror and melodrama – that are similar in their physical effect on the spectator in terms of bodily sensations. Annette Kuhn suggests the word ‘gynocentric’ to describe the genres of TV soap opera and melodrama in film as they are considered to have a gender-specific audience, but this term, I suggest, is too closely linked to the medical examination of the woman. Ivone Margulies’ notion of ‘corporeal cinema’ is aligned to discussions of realism rather than the body (2003: 1)

extensively in relation to the female body and pregnancy, as I have indicated above. I suggest, nevertheless, that study of the horror genre benefits from my reading of the films in my corpus, and I recognise that there are genre parallels in the films I am reading. As Rick Altman suggests, genre definition is often assumed and not enough thought is invested in how useful or accurate genre categories actually are (1984). The interior of the pregnant body lends itself to an exaggerated form of realism and a sense of otherworldliness. This leads to some of the films in my corpus containing elements of the horror either imaginary or real.

The use of the horror aesthetic, I argue, is to exaggerate personal dramas that have horrific implications, but are grounded in the everyday. Certainly, *Apio verde* moves from the conventions of domestic drama to the conventions of the horror film to magnify the personal and domestic circumstances of the main protagonist as she struggles to come to terms with her unviable foetus. Similarly, *Pan's Labyrinth* explores the trauma of external conflict as it effects the mental health of a young child using horrific imagery to show how this might appear in the child's imagination. In fact, these films, I suggest, share the quality of magical realism – which enhances the ordinary and the mundane – with other films in the corpus.<sup>59</sup> Films such as *Stephanie Daley*, *The Milk of Sorrow*, *Up*, *The Bad Intentions*, and *Birth* most clearly have elements of the imaginary and the magical. I would argue also that *Juno*, *Maria Full of Grace*, *Gestation*, *Quinceañera*, and *Ain't Them Bodies Saints*, also fall within this category, where the imaginary, the magical and the real influence the multiple narrative that surround the pregnancy. A key element of the way realism is elaborated is shown in the films which have a teenage, or very young, main protagonist (*Juno*, *Maria Full of Grace*, *Gestation*, *Stephanie*

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<sup>59</sup> Angel Flores, who identified magical realism as an aesthetic in Spanish American literature, argues that grouping (literature) thematically or biographically ignores the way the text is composed. The aesthetic quality of composition, she argues, should not be sidelined when categorising works of fiction (1955).

*Daley*, and *Quinceañera*), where pregnancy is conflated with notions of being a good mother, which is, in turn, conflated with the negative connotations of being sexual active. This perception of the young body as a moral signpost allows realism to attach a toxicity to the very notion of that body containing a foetus.

Although many films in the thesis – to varying degrees – deal with the child and childhood, this does not mean that the films are aimed primarily at a young audience. The family film *Up* relies on the adult spectator bringing their own life experiences to the film, in order to understand the complexity and depth of emotion involved in the ageing and bereavement process. Like many films made for children and families, the film (which has a certificate that is universal or with parental guidance) is intended for a young audience but, it is also designed to appeal to intergenerational spectators. The main protagonist is seen throughout the film as a child, a young adult and an elderly man. It is important to his narrative that the spectator has evidence of his life chapters before he becomes lonely, withdrawn and anti-social. His embodied history as a child, therefore, is a crucial element in creating affect in relation to his character. Although *Pan's Labyrinth* and *The Bad Intentions* both have central characters aged eight or nine, neither film is aimed at this age group. This is reflected in the certification. *Pan's Labyrinth* is certified as fifteen in the UK, and has a range of certifications, from fourteen to eighteen, globally. This certification is shared by *The Bad Intentions*, which is rated thirteen in Peru, which meant the actress Fatima Buntix, its main star, could not attend the film's premiere.<sup>60</sup> This suggests that the adult point of view is the dominating point of view in each film. The film *Birth* has a range of certifications, from twelve in Brazil to thirteen in Argentina and fourteen in Peru, while in the UK no-one under the age of fifteen can see the film and in the US anyone under the age of

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<sup>60</sup> The range of certification of *Pan's Labyrinth* suggests that there is a discrepancy between what is seen as suitable for a teenage audience.

seventeen must be accompanied by an adult.<sup>61</sup> This implies that there are adult themes that are not suitable for the child spectator and suggests that some part of the child's embodied experience is not suitable for the child spectator and that the child becomes 'anthropomorphised' for the benefit of the adult viewer (Karen Lury, 2010: 148). In *Birth* the child is used as a vehicle to remember the adult character and to signal that movement of memories through time for the protagonists. The position of the child character, therefore, challenges the image of the child as innocent or unknowing affecting the way he is perceived by the protagonists.

Allowing for the different spectator points of view, my corpus represents films that, I argue, should be seen in relation to one another because of their narratives around the uterus. By including the Americas as a whole in my research, my corpus reflects the critical need to address films not only nationally, but also post-nationally. By retaining a focussed critical and theoretical framework based on spectatorship, phenomenology and the scholarship of the body, my analysis recognises the importance of new groupings of films and challenges the way in which pregnancy has been seen previously. By refocussing attention on the uterus and its separatedness and connectedness to the body, I offer a critically different way to position the female reproductive body. In understanding the uterus as a narrative space, I challenge critical readings of the pregnant body, but more crucially challenge the implication of gendering pregnancy beyond the cinema. In exploring the commonalities in contemporary film across the

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<sup>61</sup> The film classification for *Birth* is age seven in Sweden, but eighteen in Taiwan. Although the range of film classification for a single film reflects the individual concerns of film censors around the world, and this classification can change when the film is released on DVD, it does give some indication of possible audience.

Americas, I make a vital connection between attitudes to pregnancy, reproduction and abortion in this region by offering a bold new way to reconceptualise pregnancy.

## **Chapter Outline**

In my Introduction, I have outlined what I consider to be critical areas of discussion that position my readings of the films in my corpus. In each of the following chapters, I provide a synopsis of each film and I continue my critical discussion before moving on to a close textual analysis. In Chapter One, I explore Sobchack's notion of the premises for perception and Roberts' notion of collaborative coding in order to establish the uterus as a narrative space. I discuss the notion of collaborative coding as perceptual glue in the narrative of *Juno* to argue that the image of the foetus in the scan photograph becomes 'that by means of which' a narrative of kinship can be transferred between the biological teenage mother and the adoptive parent and explain the narrative around the uterus for the biological father. In *Maria Full of Grace*, I consider how the pregnant body moves through geographical landscapes and how the uterus, as an orientation point in the scan, enables the foetus to become a "baby". In *Gestation*, I discuss how the uterus is seen as both a site of contamination and kinship, where the frame of the uterus provokes a reaction that is visceral. In *Stephanie Daley*, I argue that the uterus is a frame which enables the foetus to be perceived as both dead and alive and the scan offers a premises for perception where repeated viewings allow the perception of the foetus to move between life and death.

In Chapter Two, I investigate the internal landscapes of the uterus by thinking through the conceptual framework of biotourism. I discuss the transposition of scale, which enables the foetus to become narrator in *The Milk of Sorrow*, and then move on to discuss the uterus in *Quinceañera*, where it is perceived as having presence in the room. In *Ain't Them Bodies Saints*, the fragmented lives of the protagonists are emphasised in the corporeality of the film whereby the anatomy of the uterus is transformed into a space that enables a conversation with the foetus

that spans the whole film. In *Apio verde*, the uterus is a space in which the “baby” exists in the perception of other people and this perception is in counterpoint to the experience of the pregnant woman.

In Chapter Three, I look at the Marksian notion of the recollection-object as a way to understand how narratives around the uterus enable a bond to be made that depends on the life and death threshold whereby the bond is not only with the foetus *in utero*, but is also present in objects that are associated with pregnancy. In *Up*, I investigate how life narratives and memory are affected by pregnancy loss, so that the baby exists as a virtual image outside of the body and the memory of the foetus is transferred in objects that circulate between people. In *The Bad Intentions*, I look at how the foetus becomes an adversary and recollection-object for the main protagonist while it is inside the uterus, so that bonds that are made with the foetus are changed profoundly when the foetus is born. In *Pan's Labyrinth*, I investigate the journey through the uterus where the child is surrounded by a uterine landscape and becomes a recollection-object who operates as a conduit and bond between the world of the living and the world of the dead. In *Birth*, the adult body at death transforms the foetus *in utero* through reincarnation. The reincarnated adult, in the body of a young boy, becomes a recollection-object who repels and attracts other protagonists as they are confronted by their emotional and physical kinship bonds, and are, therefore, forced to confront the threshold between death and life that occurred in the space of the uterus.



## CHAPTER ONE

### **Narrative Negotiations: The Act of Viewing the Ultrasound Scan**

Narrative space is not restricted to the limits of the screen frame – where it establishes the dynamic between the spectator and the frame – but is also found in the dynamic between the spectator and the frame of the body. In this chapter, I investigate the narrative construction around the frame of the uterus, arguing that in order to explore this dynamic fully the uterus should be considered a narrative space where multiple narratives intersect. I bring into dialogue Roberts' notion of 'collaborative coding', that describes the way spectators construct narratives from imagery and embodied histories around the ultrasound scan (2012a; 2012b: 305-309), and Sobchack's notion of the screen (and the body) as '*premises* for perception' and 'organ of perception' (1992: 134; emphasis in original), with which she argues that narrative information does not end with the shot or the sequence, but is interpreted constantly by the spectator. This dialogue allows me to address the dynamism of the technological image in relation to the reproductive body and, importantly, allows me to address the dynamic that exists between individual narratives around the uterus. The uterus is predominantly an unseen space within the diegesis of each film in this chapter – *Juno* (2007), *Maria Full of Grace* (2004), *Gestation* (2009), and *Stephanie Daley* (2006) – and one of the ways the interior of the uterus is visualised in these films is through the medium of the foetal ultrasound. This interior is centred on the technological image of the foetus, which – although hugely significant – only forms part of the interior space. The technological image and the way it is constructed establishes a dynamic between the spectator, protagonists and the internal body but, as I argue, this involves more than just visual information. Each film discussed in this chapter concerns a young, pregnant woman and reflects the social concerns – such as underage sex, single parenthood and social

status – that can surround the young pregnant person. The viewpoint of the pregnant person and the presence of the foetus, however, does not necessarily drive each narrative around the uterus.

These narratives are informed by visual information on the cinema screen, but equally crucial for the spectator is the existence of narrative in off-screen space. Off-screen space is an interpretative space based on perception where the gaps in visual information are filled with a sense of what might be happening off-screen. The cinematic frame, for Sobchack, provides the ‘orientation point’ of a film for the spectator, where ‘it functions as “that by means of which” the film has access to its world and the world exists for it (and for us)’, where narrative space is created around a frame which is ‘both invisible to the film’s seeing of its world and yet visible to us [and] provides the *synoptic center* of the film’s experience of the world it sees’ (1992: 134; emphasis in original).<sup>62</sup> One of the most compelling arguments that Sobchack makes about the cinematic frame is that its properties include ‘gentleness’ where the spectator is not always aware of the geometric limits of the frame. Gentleness, in this context, describes how action that takes place on-screen moves into off-screen space, but the perception of visual information remains so that it is interpreted and perceived as part of an off-screen narrative space. Although it is impossible to visualise or effectively describe what this off-screen narrative space actually *is*, it is possible to analyse how it functions in relation to the spectator. I discuss in more detail the specifics of cinematic off-screen space below, but first, I establish the similarities with the

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<sup>62</sup> Sobchack takes this term from Richard M Zaner (1964) who reflects on consciousness and the animate object in the work of M.M. Gabriel Marcel, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Maurice Merleau-Ponty. Zaner explains that the body is the ‘by means of which’ the world can be perceived. He calls the body the ‘orientational center, O’ and the ‘organ of perception’. He also describes the body as the site where ‘the fields of sensation are spread out’, a concept which Sobchack uses to describe the cinematic frame. Zaner acknowledges the importance of Henri Bergson’s analyses of the body and notes that many do not fully refer to Bergson in their own work (1964: 249).

foetal ultrasound where the screen and the image of the foetus are not the only elements necessary in the process of interpretation.

### **Collaborative Coding as ‘Perceptual Glue’**

Narrative space around the uterus in relation to the ultrasound scan is much wider than the scan, the scan room or the foetus, and collaborative coding provides the perceptual glue that links and makes sense of the narratives around the uterus. The notion of ‘perceptual glue’ comes from visual perception studies and refers to how the spectator makes sense of images that, in themselves, are hard to understand.<sup>63</sup> These narratives may be initiated by visual imagery as I have indicated above but – importantly – the narratives may not be directly concerned with the foetus or the pregnant person. Collaborative coding, according to Roberts, allows the image of the foetus to be interpreted and understood by the spectator as both visual (through the ultrasound scan), and conceptual (through multiple narratives in the scan room).<sup>64</sup> Roberts’ research concerns ultrasonic images of the foetus and non-diagnostic bonding, but I suggest her findings relate directly to the importance of off-screen space as she acknowledges that broader narratives around the uterus are there to interpret and contextualise the visual experience for the spectator.<sup>65</sup> Narratives, in this context, are constructed according to the spectator’s perceptual ideas about what the foetus (and pregnancy) represents, irrespective of the ultrasound scan. Collaborative coding, therefore, places the image in a narrative context for the

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<sup>63</sup> James Pomeranz and Edward A. Pristach’s work on human perception uses the term to describe selective and divided attention in how line segments are understood. Perceptual glue is also used as a way to express how speech is understood (see Robert E. Remez and Philip E. Rubin [1992]).

<sup>64</sup> Jose Van Dijck suggests that interpreting the sonogram is a straightforward process, which can be accomplished by an ultrasound technician. Decoding, she suggests, is a more complicated and highly skilled process, usually performed by specialist sonographers where the full medical implications of what can be seen on screen are understood (2005: 105).

<sup>65</sup> Roberts’ research is concerned with interchanges that take place in the 3D and 4D bonding or boutique scan (as opposed to the more usual grey-scale 2D diagnostic ultrasound scan). Despite this kind of scan often described as non-diagnostic, ultrasound technicians are trained to look for abnormalities. It is simply not possible to describe them as solely non-diagnostic.

spectator. This perceptual glue takes many forms and produces narratives that may not be directly concerned with the foetus, but are certainly focused around the uterus.

The foetal ultrasound creates an image of the foetus, which can be interpreted as a baby, but this is not its main purpose.<sup>66</sup> The purpose of the ultrasound scan is to investigate any abnormalities in the foetus, to check its position in the uterus and to check the location of the placenta.<sup>67</sup> Any additional outcome, such as bonding or emotional connection, is based on a ‘kind of common sense appeal – based on a longer history of thinking about attachment and bonding and on faith in the visual’ that does not bear up to closer critical scrutiny (Roberts, 2012a: 85). I discuss more fully the notion of bonding in Chapter Three, but it is worth remembering that any question of attachment or bonding through the ultrasound scan is highly subjective and depends on creating the image of a ‘baby’, rather than of a foetus. In fact, any claims to realism, Roberts suggests, ‘rely on a comparison of the technofetus with imagined generic models or specimens, or the imagined infant-to-be’ (85).<sup>68</sup> Collaborative coding, therefore, does not describe how the image of the foetus becomes a ‘baby’; it explains how this process of perception might work in the ultrasound scan where the notion of a ‘baby’ is an integral part of that perception. Collaborative coding, Roberts suggests, is, on the one hand, a visual process where images of the foetus are deciphered according to physical likeness to the

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<sup>66</sup> Janice McLaughlin has noted that the ultrasound’s medical purpose (to find soft markers of abnormality and measuring probabilities) is at odds with the expected outcomes of the patient (to provide reassurance and a first picture of the baby). She asserts that, despite the medical profession having some reservations about its routine use in antenatal care, it is thought impossible to carry out in-depth random control trials (RCT) of ultrasound use as women are unlikely to consent to *not* being scanned (2003: 274).

<sup>67</sup> Despite its critical connection to the foetus and the pregnant person, the placenta is considered – along with the umbilical cord – a barrier to seeing the foetus during the ultrasound scan, especially when a keepsake picture is being taken by the sonographer (Maher, 2002; Palmer, 2009; Roberts, 2012b).

<sup>68</sup> Luc Boltanski explains ‘techno-foetuses’ as ‘new beings’ brought about by new procreative technologies (2013: 136). He suggests this complicates the wider discussion about the status of the foetuses that are thought of as worthless, and the foetuses that are thought of as priceless, where status is not only of personhood, but also of legality.

familial spectator (shape of nose, length of limbs), and similar familial mannerisms (sleepy, active); on the other hand, she suggests that collaborative coding is also a conceptual process in which narratives of kinship and family histories are established and strengthened by being told and retold. This formulation of conceptual narratives suggests that part of the interpretative process, although initiated by images of the foetus, is not dependent on the foetus itself. The conceptual narrative is constructed around the ultrasound image where the uterus is a frame or premises for narratives that exist outside of the frame, outside of the scan room, and independent of the foetus. This construction of a conceptual narrative is an integral part of non-diagnostic bonding and highlights some of the difficulties and contradictions that surround the different uses of foetal ultrasound technology.<sup>69</sup> Far from being a straightforward technology, the scan creates ethical dilemmas not only in its use as a diagnostic tool but also in the way it is used to interpret images of the foetus which are, in effect, highly technological snapshots of foetal development.

The foetal ultrasound has been called a ‘Janus-faced technology’ by Jose van Dijck who asks whether the ultrasound can be restored to function as a purely medical tool separated from its socio-cultural connotations (2005: 102-106). The ambiguity that the ultrasound attracts is not, van Dijck says, as a result of its use but is ‘inscribed in the technology itself’ (106). Ultrasound technology shows information that is ambiguous because its interpretation is dependent on the quality of resolution of the image and the operating skills of the practitioner. This creates a conflict based on the kind of information that is relevant to diagnosis, and the kind of information that is relevant to – or dependent on – the notion of a ‘baby’. The increased

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<sup>69</sup> Steve Robson suggests that it is not yet shown that the 3D/4D scan has additional benefits for diagnostic and prognostic assessment although he suggests that the high definition scan will be used increasingly in the future in specialist departments dealing with abnormalities of the face, nervous system and the brain (2010: 696-698).

resolution of the foetal ultrasound does not mean that the image can be easily deciphered. The ultrasound relies on visualising, but its ‘benefits and limitations [need] to be interpreted in the light of other sensory information’ as one of the problems with the ultrasound scan is that it is ‘held up as a natural and unmediated view of the womb’ (Roberts, 2012a: 9-10). Yet the ultrasound is not natural and unmediated. Interpreting the scan is a complex process, one that involves translation and interpretation of mathematical data into images, as well as the presence, Roberts suggests, of a guide (the sonographer). This guide contextualises the scan images. The meanings of images produced by the high definition scan ‘[lend themselves] to elaborate narratives of fetal personality’ (2012b: 310). These elaborate narratives of foetal personality overlap with elaborate narratives of kinship and bonding that operate more broadly at a conceptual level around the foetus *while* it is contained in the uterus.

The foetal image in the scan is not constant, but it is interpreted as a continuing narrative of the foetus from being *in utero* to birth. New visual information in the modern scan, owing to increased resolution and a more realistic dimensional perception of the human shape, makes the foetus appear more lifelike and, for that reason, is interpreted as interacting with its audience. The ultrasound, in relation to bonding, however, remains a ‘one-way process and not an interaction’ (Roberts, 2012a: 82), and this is often forgotten. The foetus may react to the pressure of the transducer and react physically to the technology, thus making it appear to be interacting. The ultrasound image is increasingly understandable to the non-medically trained only when the heartbeat can be found. Before the bone mass can be seen and before eight weeks of pregnancy, the ultrasound detects a heartbeat which, Van Dijck explains, can be seen and heard and which itself is a marker of life (2005: 103). It is not, however, until bone mass can be seen as limbs, spine and skull, which occurs in the second trimester, that the foetus begins to make visual sense to the spectator. The foetus may make perceptual sense in that the

‘cloudlike pattern’ in shades of grey (Duden, 1993: 31) is someone’s child, but the scan remains an ‘act of translation’ achieved by the sonographer, and the spectator of the scan, creating narratives that focus on ‘family resemblance, fetal personality, voicing the fetus, and mapping seeing and feeling’ (Roberts, 2012b: 304).<sup>70</sup> A mapping of seeing and feeling describes the way the image on the scan invokes emotion and resonance by engaging memory, shared history and knowledge. Importantly, this process is intermittent or incomplete during the scan but is the source of continuity outside of it. This suggests that family resemblance, foetal personality and voicing the foetus are intrinsically linked to the clarity or resolution of the foetal image on the sonogram, whereas mapping seeing and feeling describes the conceptual interaction with the technological image, and is where narratives intersect. The short-lived, episodic nature of the ultrasound implies that the narrative in the scan room is transient, in contrast to the complex narratives around the uterus that exist both inside and outside of the scan room. Mapping seeing and feeling, therefore, exists in the space around the frame: in off-screen space.

### **Recognising Absence on Screen**

A dynamic connection is encouraged between the spectator and the screen, and the spectator and the image: in the ultrasound scan, this dynamic can be described as collaborative coding, and in cinema, the dynamic can be described as a process of identification – or suture. Suture recognises the existence of absence on the screen; in other words, integral to the understanding of suture is the understanding that off-screen space exists. In off-screen space, there is narrative space that is on the one hand understood spatially, and on the other hand understood as perceptual. Deleuze theorises off-screen space as ‘out-of-field’ (or ‘*hors-champ*’) which he argues ‘refers to what is neither seen nor understood, but is nevertheless perfectly present’

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<sup>70</sup> Roberts takes the idea of the foetal scan as part of ‘an act of translation’ from Mitchell’s work on the foetal ultrasound (2001: 108).

(1986: 16). Off-screen space is part of narrative progression where it suggests spatial continuity and is threaded throughout the film. In this way, the spectator understands that what is happening off-screen is part of a continuation of the action. There is another off-screen space that is conceptual and relates to the relationship of the spectator to the frame.

Off-screen space has a temporal quality – which relates to its existence rather than a movement through time – that relies on perception and is directly related to Sobchack’s ideas of the gentleness of the frame. The viewing dynamic is affected by the way the ‘visual freedom [of the frame] in the activity of seeing gently comes to an end’ (1992: 131). Sobchack takes the notion of gentleness from Maurice Merleau-Ponty who says that the spectator is ‘not shut up in one sector of the visible world’, and that vision exists beyond the frame to create other narrative possibilities (1968: 100).<sup>71</sup> These possibilities are not only of the spectator’s making, but they are also an integral part of how cinematic narrative functions. The ‘contours of [vision] are not lines, and [vision] is not cut out against an expanse of blackness’; despite the physical boundary of any frame, vision constantly looks towards the horizon (Merleau-Ponty, 1968: 100). Sobchack also argues that the limits of the frame do not limit vision, rather that vision and the frame are entwined with each other and ‘the frame is a limit but like that of our own vision it is inexhaustibly mobile and free to displace itself’ (1992: 131). In other words, the film presents a world that, although it might be fictitious, exists beyond the frame, and that neither the function of the frame nor the vision of the spectator could strictly be described as ‘a geometric act’ (134). Rather this is an ‘act of viewing’ that articulates the way the spectator perceives the world of the film as on-screen and off-screen where the spectator, according to Merleau-Ponty,

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<sup>71</sup> Merleau-Ponty draws on theories of existential phenomenology, and notions of being and not being. He likens the gradation of looking to an animal in a cage ‘whose freedom gently comes to an end’ (1968: 100). Freedom, Merleau-Ponty suggests, is beyond the frame of the cage, and is not part of the animal’s everyday existence, but it exists nonetheless as part of its perception.

‘is of it and is in it’ (1968: 100). Deleuze suggests that all framing, however closed, or self-contained, creates an out-of-field that is ‘a more radical Elsewhere, outside homogenous space and time’ (1986: 17).<sup>72</sup> The ‘Elsewhere’ that Deleuze mentions depends on the affective nature of each film and in order to discuss this, there needs to be a redefinition of the frame.

Recognising the affective qualities of the frame as part of a sensorial, corporeal space – or an embodied narrative space – means refocusing traditional narrative analysis. A traditional approach to film analysis prioritises the image on the screen. For example, as David Bordwell *et al.* assert, ‘centering, balancing, frontality, and depth-all these narrational strategies-encourage us to read filmic space as story space’ (2002: 54). In addition, Christian Metz says that ‘narrative has *a beginning and an ending*’ and ‘is, among other things, a system of temporal transformations’ made up of images, filmic descriptions of images, and a series or sequence of shots which create narrative (1974:17; 19; emphasis in original). This understanding of narrative space relies on prioritising positionality within the frame: the *mise-en-scène*. This includes what is seen physically in the frame: the location and position of the protagonists; lighting and camera set-ups; soundscapes as well as the use of continuity editing designed to help the story of the film make sense to the spectator (Heath, 1976; Bordwell, 1997). Noel Burch recognises that both on-screen and off-screen space constitute narrative space and lists six segments of off-screen space, four of which relate to the edges of the frame and exist as entrance and exit points (1973: 17). These entrance and exit points, Burch insists, have ‘only an intermittent or, rather, *fluctuating* existence during any film’ (21; emphasis in original). This understanding of narrative space is what Deleuze calls the ‘movement image’, whereby

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<sup>72</sup> Sobchack considers Deleuze’s work as parallel to her own, even though he rejects the position that his work is a phenomenological study of cinema. Sobchack argues for the similarities, suggesting that Deleuze uses semantics to distance his study from ‘existential phenomenology’. One of the reasons Sobchack provides for this distancing is that Deleuze does not recognise the embodied experience of the spectator (1992: 30-31).

sensory-motor schemata are enabled to replicate reality, mimicking the actions of real life and creating narrative continuity (1986). This understanding of narrative continuity is an essential counterpoint to off-screen space – and I return to this understanding of narrative throughout the thesis – but it is important to recognise that there is a tension in film analysis around the affective quality of off-screen space. It is crucial, therefore, to re-evaluate traditional narrative analysis so that it acknowledges embodiment or the lived body experience, as it applies to the act of seeing through the frame, and the frame of the body.

### **Uterine Frame and the Imagination**

By prioritising the image of the foetus, the ultrasound screen displaces the uterus as the frame, but the presence of the uterus does, nevertheless, influence the imaginative and conceptual act of seeing. The uterus becomes, as Kukla suggests, a place of performance – a theatre – (2005), which Roberts describes as ‘a metaphorical space’ (2012a: 94). In other words, the uterus is spatialised. I discuss the spatiality of the interior in Chapter Two, but it is worth noting that the uterus is already a frame that has been replaced by the frame of the ultrasound screen. The ultrasound also displaces the embodied experience of the pregnant person by fragmenting the reception of the (foetal) image. This results in a blurring between embodied subjectivity – in relation to the pregnant person – and objectivity in relation to the technological image of the foetus. This blurring emphasises the shift in perception crucial to visualising technologies of the body, but, as Rosi Braidotti emphasises, these technologies ‘are not endowed with intrinsic humanistic agency’ (2013: 45).<sup>73</sup> It is more accurate to say that the viewing process has become more managed through imagined interaction and, as Sobchack says of the cinema screen, the

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<sup>73</sup> Braidotti accepts, however, that the increased autonomy of smart technologies increases the agency of these technologies. She suggests that the development of military technologies, used in warfare and peacekeeping, raises profound legal and ethical considerations when these machines are programmed to make decisions (2013: 44).

viewing process in the scan ‘ascrib[es] value to its objects’ (1992: 130). It is the act of viewing which engages the imagination and that constructs meaning, which explains how meaning can be ascribed to the foetus as an object in the ultrasound without ascribing either meaning or importance to its location in the body.

The meaning that is ascribed to the foetus *in utero* is a result of what Catherine Mills (2011) calls ‘sympathetic imagination’, which allows the spectator of the ultrasound to identify with the foetus. This identification relies on the ‘affective dimensions’ of a relationship built on sympathy and to a certain extent on the belief that that the foetus can feel pain (103-106).<sup>74</sup> The sympathetic imagination is a forceful factor in the interpretation of the foetal image as a vulnerable being, and sidelines the biological working of the uterus and the pregnant body in order to prioritise the foetus.<sup>75</sup> The strength of the imaginative viewing depends on the foetus remaining inside the uterus, which provides a frame for imagined interactions. In *Maria Full of Grace* and *Gestation*, the heartbeat, amplified by the scan, not only confirms the existence of the foetus but also confirms the baby as belonging to the pregnant person: it is ‘my’ baby or ‘your baby’.<sup>76</sup> This possession can be altered according to the realities of a particular situation.

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<sup>74</sup> Sympathetic imagination is a philosophical term and Mills is not the first, nor the only, person to talk about it. She notes the definition given by Peter Goldie where he calls it ‘in-his-shoes’ imagination (2000). The issue of pain, Mills notes, is exploited in *The Silent Scream* when the narrator, obstetrician Nathanson, uses emotive language to describe foetal pain during abortion. The film plays on the idea that the foetus is vulnerable to pain and combines the medical authority of the narrator with the technological image of the foetus to create and ascribe meaning. The foetal ultrasound images are manipulated to highlight rapid movements when medical instruments encounter the foetus, which suggests the foetus reacts to pain. In addition, when the foetus is seen with its mouth open Nathanson suggests it is screaming silently.

<sup>75</sup> Mills also notes that the abortion lobby have long used the ultrasound image as a way to express their views. She argues that, as 3D and 4D imagery increases, it is important to consider the process of its reception as a tool in these moral and ethical arguments (2011: 101-120).

<sup>76</sup> Roberts notes that the use of possessive pronouns is not common when referring to the foetus. She mentions this in reference to Julia Black’s documentary *My Foetus* (2004, UK) which investigates whether knowing the ‘realities’ of abortion can change the decision to be pro-choice. Roberts recognises the importance of Black’s film – showing an actual termination – as a counterpoint to the rhetoric of the anti-abortion lobby in the US. Black subverts the rhetoric and imagery of the anti-abortion lobby by showing an early termination as quick and containing no identifiable body parts (2012a: 62).

In *Juno*, the foetus is narrated as ‘your baby’ by the sonographer and later by Juno (Ellen Page), as being ‘always hers’ referring to adoptive mother Vanessa (Jennifer Garner). In this way, kinship groups can be created around the image on the scan, the portable scan image in the form of the photograph, and as a narrative that is conceptual. The conceptual narrative that Juno creates highlights the separation between the pregnant body and the personhood of the foetus where the personhood of the foetus is transferable through interconnecting narratives.<sup>77</sup> This suggests that the imaginative image of the foetus is as forceful as the actual scan image. Mills argues that ‘foetal images operate most effectively at the level of emotion or affect’ (2011: 105), and the forcefulness of the imagery relies on understanding the subtleties between sympathy and empathy. The foetus becomes corporeally visible through the scan where the affective dimension of sympathetic imagination removes the frame of the uterus and – to a certain extent – the pregnant body.

When the spectator becomes involved in a narrative on the cinema screen or the ultrasound scan, the frame becomes less important than this imaginative interaction. The technological image is described through collaborative coding to make it understandable. The technological image, however, is not always an accurate representation of what the ultrasound transducer, or probe, can “see”, as I discuss in the Introduction. The transducer records all information even if that information is not clear, understandable, or describable. There is a distinction, therefore, between the understanding of the technological image, and an understanding of the information produced by the technology itself. Collaborative coding, as a way to understand the image of the foetus on the scan, creates a dialogue, but this dialogue is one-sided. While it is clear that the technology of the scan is part of an interaction as the technician moves the screen and the

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<sup>77</sup> Mills explains that, within the anti-abortion lobby, ‘hyperbolic claims to personhood can and often do operate in the absence of images of the early embryo’ which makes the argument about the forcefulness of foetal images more complex (2011: 104).

transducer, and the pregnant person prepares and moves their body for the scan to be successful, the technology itself, the machine or the screen, does not interact with the spectator.<sup>78</sup> It is the perception of the spectator, and their emotional connection at one moment in time that creates meaning. The scan photograph, as a frame, relies on the perception of the spectator, and their emotional connection to the foetus or to the pregnant person in order to be understood as part of a continuing narrative rather than only as a technological snapshot.

### **Capturing a Moment in Time**

The ultrasound photograph is static and captures a moment that has already passed, but its affective power is in the way it represents future narrative possibilities. This marks the scan photograph out as different from other types of photography where the image, at the moment of the shot, is already in the past. When André Bazin suggests the ‘objective nature of photography confers on it [...] credibility’ where the object in the photograph is ‘*re-presented*, set before us, that is to say, in time and space’, he suggests the purpose of the photograph is not to ‘create eternity [but] to embalm [...] time’ (1960: 7-8; emphasis in original). The scan photograph embalms the image of the foetus, but its strength is as an orientation point, a frame in which to conceptualise narrative possibilities. In this way, the scan photograph not only stills the moment, but it records a moment in time, which acts as a conceptual punctuation in each narrative. The photograph is an object that not only captures the moment; it can create another lived-body moment that imposes meaning through perception. When Juno takes her scan photograph to the adoptive parents, the still photograph becomes something else once viewed by others. The photograph, in this case, becomes portable and is passed from the sonographer

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<sup>78</sup> I thank Roberts (personal correspondence) for pointing out that interacting with the technology is an integral part of the scan process. As she says, the technician can position the screen and the transducer in order to get a better picture, and the pregnant person has prepared their body for the scan and helps by moving their body into position so that the scan is successful in recording clear images.

to Juno, and then from Juno to the prospective father, Mark (Jason Bateman), and to prospective mother, Vanessa. Each protagonist engages with the photograph differently, particularly in the way they handle it, and the way they engage emotionally with the technological image. It is not only the scan photograph that provides a snapshot, but also the scan in each film is only seen for a short amount of time. The brevity of the scan depends on a continuing narrative.

The scan in each film fulfils different purposes in the narrative, but each scene that involves a scan is brief. In *Maria Full of Grace*, the ultrasound scan confirms Maria's (Catalina Sandino Moreno) pregnancy, and the photograph of the scan establishes her in a new geographical location, which has implications for the legal status of her and her child. In *Gestation*, Jessie's (Adriana Alvarez) scan – which is not seen by the spectator – establishes the intergenerational kinship group between Jessie and her mother. In *Stephanie Daley*, the scan has a significance for the narrative of each of the main protagonists. Lydie (Tilda Swinton) returns to the scan repeatedly as a way to reassure herself that her foetus is alive, while the scan is used in this film as a narrative device to return to Stephanie's back-story. In *Juno*, the scan is a moment in time when Juno, her best friend Leah (Olivia Thirlby), and her stepmother Bren (Alison Janney) view the foetus. The only other time that the 'foetus' is viewed is when it becomes a newborn baby. Each moment – the scan of the foetus and the baby at birth – is important not only in its visualisation, but also in the emotion attached to the captured moment.

The emotional responses in each film are, in part, owing to the formation of kinship and familial groups, but emotions are not only corporeal sensations, they are part of a more complex system of mediated responses and as such are subjective and can be misinterpreted. The intense nature of emotions means that they can be part of a miscommunication where the emotional responses do not hold the same meaning for every person and it is, as Sara Ahmed suggests, the 'objects of emotion that circulate, rather than the emotion as such' (2004: 10-11). This

miscommunication can be caused by when someone experiences the same emotion but it is the ‘outward manifestation’ of that emotion, Martha Nussbaum argues, that creates individual differences not the emotion itself (2001: 157). Visceral and emotional responses around the uterus and to the foetus occur in all of the films in this chapter and these responses vary in their intensity depending on whether they are part of the ultrasound scan experience or not. In *Juno*, for example, Juno’s stepmother Bren cries when she sees the foetus on the ultrasound scan; in *Maria Full of Grace*, Maria smiles for the first time – in relation to her pregnancy – when she hears the heartbeat of the foetus in the scan; in *Gestation*, Jessie’s best friend, Alba (Natalia Arias), strokes the pregnant belly and talks to the foetus through Jessie’s body; in *Stephanie Daley*, Lydie has vivid dreams about stillbirth, which appear to physically exhaust her and Lydie uses the ultrasound scan as a form of reassurance, to check that ‘everything is alright’ (Roberts, 2015: 601).<sup>79</sup> Her repetitive viewing of the foetus through the scan offers Lydie reassurance after a previous stillbirth, but the repetition of the scan also reinforces the central narrative of foetal death and neonaticide. Jessie’s pregnancy in *Gestation*, for example, becomes a moral issue for the head-teacher, Sister Maria (María Bonilla), who expresses her emotions outwardly as negative and, more significantly, viscerally. Her emotional responses are in stark contrast to everyone around her and centre on the teenage body – and uterus – as a site for sin. In this way, the narrative off-screen space of the uterus creates another embodied response, one that is not dependent on the scan or the scan photograph.

The embodied moment in time that was captured at the scan is fundamentally changed and the embodied experience of the scan is not repeated. The only thing that remains from the scan is

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<sup>79</sup> Roberts *et al.* (2015) investigate the reasons for women having ultrasound scans from private providers: reasons include reassurance, entertainment, knowing the sex, checking the sex identification is right, changing minds about wanting to know about the sex, having a keepsake, bonding, and ‘seeing the baby’. Roberts explains that the reasons are not mutually exclusive and that, for many, there is a range of reasons for having such scans.

the still photograph. The still photograph, according to Sobchack, has ‘a presence without past, present, future’ (1992: 59). She argues that the still photograph can only offer ‘the *possibility* of meaning’ (60; emphasis in original). The photograph, however, is not an image of the actual foetus, which is constantly changing and growing. This is reflected in the use of the ‘classic profile shot’ of the foetus, which is easily identified as ‘baby’ (Roberts, 2012a: 126). The foetus – as baby – now takes on a conceptual quality where the narrative space around and within the uterus is open to interpretation and negotiated by many people as part of an imagined interaction. Collaborative coding puts the image on the foetal scan into context for the spectator, but its usefulness, in the way I read each film, is in its application beyond the scan room. The process of conceptualising the image that is seen on the scan involves the ability to “see” the foetus as a “baby”. In order to do this, narratives of kinship must be told and retold. These narratives do not only originate in the familial recognition of the foetus; they can be ascribed to the foetus or to the uterus as part of a conceptual narrative. This narrative becomes part of off-screen space and relies on the process of perceptual glue whereby the foetus and the uterus are separated in the imagination. This means that the uterus and the body become premises for perception whereby the conceptual narrative moves beyond visual information. In this way, the frame of the uterus and the body can be said to have a gentleness so that there is a continual movement between on-screen and off-screen space which allows protagonists to “read” the body according to their own conceptual narrative.

### **An Act of Translation: Portable Imagery in *Juno***

Set in present day Minnesota in the US, the main protagonist of *Juno* is a teenage girl, Juno, who is still at high school and who discovers she is pregnant after having sex for the first time with her friend Bleeker (Michael Cera). After a visit to an abortion clinic, where she is told that the foetus already has fingernails, she decides that she will give birth to the baby and have it

adopted. She chooses a middle-class couple Vanessa and Mark from a small advert section in the local paper and signs a contract with them for a closed adoption, which means she will not have any contact with them in the future. Over the course of the pregnancy, she finds that she has lots in common with Mark, rather than Vanessa, but when Mark leaves Vanessa, Juno decides to carry on with their arrangement for adoption. Juno and Bleeker agree to become a couple during the pregnancy and they spend increasing amounts of time together. Bleeker does not see the baby when it is born, but joins Juno immediately afterwards. The film ends with Bleeker and Juno returning to their teenage lives together.

Juno's pregnancy drives the main narrative of the film, but there are multiple narratives around the uterus that, although integral to the narrative arc of the film, are less concerned with Juno herself. These narratives reflect what I argue are the main themes in the film – adoption, intergenerational relationships and parenting – and highlight the blurring of imagery and narrative between the pregnant person, the foetus and the uterus. The theme of adoption establishes a parallel narrative around the uterus. The uterus carries the foetus that will be the future child of the adoptive parents, but will not be part of the everyday kinship or familial group for Juno, her father Mac (J. K. Simmons), her stepmother Bren or boyfriend and biological father Bleeker. Crucially, Juno transfers the focus of the pregnancy – the foetus – from her own narrative to the narrative of Vanessa and Mark. Juno does this by narrating, or translating, the scan photograph for each of them in turn, and in doing so, displaces the frame of her own body and her uterus to encourage Vanessa and Mark to imagine the foetus as their own child. This act of translation shifts the scan image to the scan photograph so that Juno makes sense of and contextualises the foetal image through a process of collaborative coding.

Juno narrates the image of the foetus, but in order to do that successfully, and for this narration to provide a perceptual glue, the notion of a “baby” must be understood by Vanessa and Mark.

In narrating the foetus and shifting her body as frame to position Vanessa and Mark as parents, the embodied connection of Juno and her boyfriend Bleeker to each other – and to the foetus – changes from the moment that the baby is born. While the foetus is in the uterus, their lived body experience foregrounds its presence; when the baby is born their lived body experience become an embodiment of loss. This loss is physical with the removal of the baby, but it is also conceptual where the memory of the foetus and baby remains. The uterus, as an orientation point, becomes a marker of physical absence, not only of the foetus *in utero*, but also of the concept of “baby”. The embodied experience for the two young protagonists is part of character development in the narrative, but it also anchors the film with a strong emotional subtext.



Figure 1. The dissolve links kinship groups with a move from Vanessa to Bren in *Juno*.



Figure 2. Close-up showing Juno and Bleeker’s feet in *Juno*.

Juno’s body ceases to be the frame for the foetus after the birth but her body, particularly the uterus, remains the site of loss. When Juno and Bleeker embrace in the hospital bed, Juno’s body is *post-partum* – post birth. A blanket covers Juno’s belly, but she faces the camera so that the spectator can see the difference between the growing uterus – which has been a feature of the film throughout – and the post-partum body as the uterus returns to its original size.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> The uterus at this point is still above the pelvic cavity, and even when it returns to the pelvic space, the uterus will not return to its pre-pregnancy size.

The uterus remains changed and marked by the presence of the foetus, and functions as an embodied palimpsest. Its role as an embodied frame, therefore, has strength as part of an off-screen narrative space. Importantly, although Bleeker has not been part of the birthing process – and he does not want to see the baby – the physical, tactile connection between him and Juno is a significant marker of their relationship. The tactility between the Juno and Bleeker, which for a large part of the film has included the presence of the growing uterus, becomes part of their narrative of loss. Two sequences are linked visually to show this loss: Vanessa holding the baby for the first time (Figure 1), and Juno and Bleeker embracing on the hospital bed (Figure 2). The camera moves from a mid-close-up on Vanessa holding the baby for the first time to a slow, brief tracking close-up on Juno and Bleeker’s feet. The shots are linked with a dissolve that moves from Vanessa looking at the baby in her arms, to Juno’s stripy, child-like socks and Bleeker’s trainers still covered in mud from his run at school. Moving from the mid-shot of Vanessa holding the baby – as Bren watches – to Juno and Bleeker’s teenage feet emphasises the reason for the adoption – their age. This dissolve, which forms the slow transition from one scene to the other, establishes the kinship connection between the main protagonists: the adoptive mother, the step-mother/grandmother, the biological parents and the baby. It demonstrates the gentleness of the frame whereby the spectator is encouraged to make a perceptual link between the two scenes on screen. The two scenes in juxtaposition emphasise how experientially different the birth and the presence of the foetus is for each protagonist, and how the birth changes the way the foetus is seen. The dissolve also hints to the way the uterus as a space for the “baby” has been replaced by the baby on screen. The conceptual narrative driven by the foetus *in utero* is part of a continuing narrative so that after the birth Juno says, in voice-over, that ‘he [the baby] didn’t feel like ours, I think he was always hers’. This establishes that the embodied change for Juno had already started before the birth.

Juno narrates the foetus for Vanessa and Mark in order to encourage them to identify as adoptive parents, but she also narrates her embodied experience of carrying the foetus to Bleeker. There is an interconnection between Juno, the foetus and Bleeker that is not only biological, but also it is physical. When Juno decides that she is in love with Bleeker, she tells him ‘you don’t stare at my stomach, you look at my face, and every time I see you the baby starts kicking super hard’. She places his hand on her growing uterus, and says ‘I think it’s because my heart starts pounding every time I see you’. For Juno, her emotional connection with Bleeker has a direct physical effect on the foetus: she can feel the difference in herself and the foetus when Bleeker is there. Significantly, she understands the foetus as “baby”. This physical connection is reinforced when Juno gives birth. Bleeker has a feeling – he knows – that the baby has been born. Although Juno does not tell Bleeker she is going into labour – because he has a big race – his reaction to knowing it has happened is physical. As Bleeker finishes his race, he stops and turns around. Seen in wide-shot, Bleeker turns anti-clockwise while the camera tracks clockwise creating a disorientating effect for the spectator, establishing visually that this is a moment of realisation for him. The moment of realisation is that the baby has been born as Juno’s voice-over suggests: ‘I didn’t tell him, he just knew’. Bleeker’s embodied reaction is significant, as he never sees the baby; he only feels the movements of the foetus through Juno’s body. When the foetus is no longer inside Juno’s uterus, its absence is marked by Bleeker’s embodied reaction, which is perceptual, but is also physical. In this moment, the action on-screen of the birth moves into off-screen space as part of a continuing narrative around the uterus – which depends on the affective relationship of Bleeker and Juno. This demonstrates that the imagined interaction with the foetus, while it is inside the uterus, has a physical effect, and suggests that the loss of the foetus at birth is a loss of the conceptual image of the foetus, which in Bleeker’s case does not involve the ultrasound scan.

The ultrasound, however, provides a key scene in the narrative where Juno's best friend Leah and stepmother Bren, who both provide emotional support to Juno throughout the pregnancy and the birth, see the foetus for the first time. The sonographer begins to create a narrative when she says, 'there's your baby'. This narrative continues with a description of the parts of the body that can be seen – the hand, an arm and the feet. This identification of the body parts of the foetus through collaborative coding establishes the presence of a "baby" and provokes an emotional reaction from Juno, Leah and Bren. These emotions range from tears (Bren) to shock (Juno and Leah). The image of the "baby" for Leah is partly grotesque as she says, 'check out the baby big-head – dude that thing is freaky looking' as they view the skull. This shocked reaction from Leah is a continuation of her horror in an earlier scene where Leah imagines the foetus 'who has fingernails' scratching its way out of Juno's vagina. The foetus is not identified as resembling anyone, nor is it described as having any particular characteristics that marks it as part of their family. The teenage pregnant body, however – and by association, the familial and kinship group – is considered an unsuitable environment by the sonographer who imposes her moral view onto the pregnant body, and views the foetus as something that needs to be protected once it is born. In this way, the sonographer moves beyond the frame of the body and the uterus, in order to construct a narrative that is in the future, out of the scan room and off-screen. This movement of narrative off-screen is also seen as the foetal image is captured as a portable image in the scan photograph.



Figure 3. Mark's point of view focuses on the photograph, not Juno, in *Juno*.



Figure 4. Mark's eye-line confirms he is looking at the scan photograph, not Juno, in *Juno*.

Despite the short-lived nature of the ultrasound event, the ultrasound scan captures an image, which is frozen in time. This allows a transfer of collaborative coding, as a continuation of the scan that transforms the narrative of the foetus. The photograph becomes, as Sobchack puts it, 'that by means of which' Juno and Mark can begin a process of identification and attachment to the idea of "baby". The frame of the photograph takes the place of the ultrasound screen, which in turn has taken the place of the frame of the uterus. The edges of the photograph take the place of the edges of the uterus. Juno holds the photograph up for Mark and, from his point of view, her face is hidden by the edges of the photograph: only her hands and the (out of focus) top of her head can be seen (Figure 3). The photograph, then, almost fills the screen prioritising the profile of the foetus's head, shoulders and arm, and obscuring the pregnant body. Juno presents the foetal photograph as an authentic representation of a "baby", which she has been told (by the sonographer), is hers. The reality for Juno is that the foetus in her uterus it is *not* going to be her baby. Therefore, when Juno introduces the foetal photograph to Mark, she tells him 'behold, good sir, your future child', and she thus transfers the narrative assigned to her and her foetus to initiate a narrative for Mark and his future child, by changing the conceptual focus of collaborative coding. In the reverse, close-up shot, Mark's eye-line shows that he is looking closely at the photograph rather than Juno (Figure 4). Again, this juxtaposition of shots

emphasises the gentleness of the frame, of the uterus, of the photograph and of the cinema screen. In effect, Juno forcibly creates a narrative space around the uterus that displaces the image inside her body in order to communicate with Mark. This means that although the uterus remains the premises for perception, and remains the narrative space, Juno uses collaborative coding to place the technological image of the foetus in a narrative context for Mark, not for herself. This is important for the narrative progression of each protagonist as Juno distances herself from the foetus and Mark is presented with a vision of his future.

When Juno arrives unexpectedly at Vanessa and Mark's home, she transposes the narrative space of the uterus from the scan (the photograph) to a geographical location that belongs to the adoptive parents and narrates the foetus in their home. Although it is Juno who is pregnant, and the foetus is with them in the room, it is the technological image, the snapshot, with which Juno and Mark engage. When Mark takes the photograph from Juno, he stares at it and turns it round in his hands to look at it from different angles asking Juno if it is a boy or a girl. In response, Juno narrates the scan photograph, by describing and ascribing likeness, saying that 'I think it looks like my friend, Paulie' referring to biological father Bleeker. In order for Mark to bond successfully with the foetus – and Juno's narration of his future life with the foetus – he must also come to terms with his biological disconnect with the foetus and understand the foetal photograph as "his baby". It is therefore significant that at this point, Mark's focus of attention moves from the scan photograph of the foetus to Juno. Although Mark tells Juno he is going to make some CDs for her to play 'while my kid's in there', Mark's orientational point becomes Juno, not the foetus or the scan photograph. Mark spends time getting to know Juno, finding out what music and films she likes, and gives her movies and music to take home with her. It is not clear whether Mark has ambivalent feelings towards the object that is the foetus or to the narration that Juno has created, but it does indicate that an emotional interaction has been

established through the exchange of the scan photograph. The perceptual glue results in a negative reaction from Mark. This emotional interaction is significant for Mark as it no longer revolves around the foetus, it revolves around Juno. In contrast, Mark's wife Vanessa engages with the narrative space around the uterus in a very different way by focusing on the foetus and the pregnant body.



Figure 5. Vanessa stares at the scan photograph rather than Juno's pregnant body in *Juno*.



Figure 6. Vanessa talks to the foetus through Juno's body in *Juno*.

For Vanessa, the uterus is a conceptual space where her future child grows, and she transposes a narrative onto the space of Juno's uterus, which could be transposed onto any uterus. The scan photograph plays a part in the way she views the space of the uterus, but collaborative coding is part of a much wider interpretation of the space of the uterus. It does not matter to Vanessa whether it is Juno's uterus or someone else's; what matters to Vanessa is that she has been able to build a relationship, through an imaginative interaction, with any foetus. Vanessa interacts sensorially with the space inside the uterus when she views the scan photograph, and later when she touches Juno's body and talks to the foetus through Juno's skin. When Juno shows Vanessa the photograph of the sonogram, she attempts to narrate it for her telling her 'it's your baby'. Juno tells Vanessa the foetus in the photograph looks like it is waving and saying, 'Hi Vanessa, will you be my mom?' When Vanessa nods in agreement, this indicates that the process of

collaborative coding around the foetus creates a successful emotional bond with Vanessa. Vanessa holds the photograph and stares at it intently and turns it round in her hands as Mark has done, but continues to stare then touches it with her fingers as if to feel the foetus itself. In contrast to the way Mark is placed in the frame with the scan photograph, Vanessa is framed holding the photograph with Juno alongside her (Figure 5). This framing emphasises the disconnect between the actual foetus inside Juno and the foetus that is being created conceptually in both Juno and Vanessa's imagination. The uterus, replaced by the frame of the ultrasound scan, provides the 'by means of which' Vanessa can view a representation of the foetus (the photograph). She looks beyond the frame of Juno's body and uterus and beyond the frame edge of the scan photograph to create meaning around the object. In other words, Vanessa accepts Juno's narrative which has built an image of the foetus that is visual (the photograph) and conceptual (Juno's narrative) moving between what is on-screen and what is off-screen in a Deleuzian 'Elsewhere, outside homogenous space and time' (1986: 18). The scan photograph represents a foetus, but it also represents, for Vanessa, kinship. This kinship is not dependent on this foetus; it is dependent on *any* foetus. Vanessa maps this "seeing" and feeling of the foetus onto Juno's body which allows her to use the orientational point of Juno's uterus as a way to "talk" to the foetus.

Vanessa has not touched Juno's body and has not felt the foetus through her skin but this changes when they meet accidentally in a shopping mall. When they meet, Juno winces and tells Vanessa that nothing is wrong but that it (the foetus) is 'kicking...kicking away'. Vanessa asks if she can touch Juno's belly to feel the foetus and Juno agrees, yanks her hand to her belly, and tells her that everyone at school is always grabbing her and calling her 'the cautionary whale'. After a few moments, Vanessa looks visibly disappointed and tells Juno 'I can't feel anything...it's not moving for me'. Juno tells her to talk to it even though 'it's like ten thousand

leagues under the sea'. This conceptual image of the foetus under deep water, not able to hear her properly, encourages Vanessa to move closer to Juno. Vanessa kneels on the ground, holds Juno's belly with both palms and spreads her fingers across her belly. Vanessa, in a mid-close-up shot, talks directly to the foetus through Juno's skin (Figure 6). Vanessa and Juno's belly are both centrally placed in the frame; the rest of Juno's body is outside of the frame. The central focus is the foetus, and the uterus becomes part of an off-screen narrative space: the premises for perception. The "it" now becomes "baby" as Vanessa says 'Hi baby, it's me.... it's Vanessa...I can't wait to meet you...can you hear me baby?' Juno is outside Vanessa's field of vision and the pregnant body is gently replaced as frame as Vanessa speaks to the foetus. Vanessa feels the foetus move. Juno herself is off-screen, but when Vanessa looks up in response to the baby moving, Juno is staring directly at her, watching her reaction. Between the two women, a continuous narrative is made up that begins with the technological snapshot of the foetus, and moves to a conceptual imagined interaction where the foetus moves from being Juno's "baby" to being Vanessa's.

Vanessa's embodied connection to the foetus is not only through the photograph and through Juno's body; the arrival of the imagined "baby" is also signalled in her home. She buys baby clothes, equipment and decorating materials to prepare practically while projecting an imagined image of her future child onto the bare wall of the nursery. It is significant that Vanessa can transpose the conceptual image of a family photo onto the walls of the nursery as 'our first family photo'. Equally significant is that when she says to Mark 'can you see it?' he does not answer suggesting that either Mark cannot "see" the "baby" or he cannot see himself in that family group. This moment is significant as Mark does eventually leave Vanessa. Vanessa prepares for the imagined future child by painting the nursery and planning a space for the first family photo, and is part of nesting which Vanessa thinks is important especially for an adoptive

parent. Vanessa says that she has ‘always wanted to be a mother’ and that she was ‘born to do this’. Vanessa has created a narrative around the uterus that is based on becoming a caregiver that, for her, revolves around the concept of ‘being a mother’, and ‘being maternal’. There is no reason to doubt Vanessa’s strength of feeling about becoming a mother, but there is nothing in the film that suggests Vanessa will be an effective caregiver or will be a better parent than Juno. The most significant connection that she makes to the foetus while *in utero* is to create a conceptual narrative whereby she establishes the notion of a “baby”, and conceptualises the “baby” while it is in Juno’s uterus. She establishes a familial connection by imagining the first family photograph hanging on the wall of her home. She is able to do this in collaboration with Juno so that a continuous narrative of kinship is established which will allow the transfer of the “baby” from one to the other after the birth.

The notion of “baby” is central to collaborative coding. Juno successfully narrates kinship for Vanessa by transferring the orientation point of her own uterus to the scan photograph. This enables Vanessa to “see” the foetus as “her baby”. The interaction of the protagonists in *Juno* demonstrates the strength of conceptual narratives that are created around visual images, but also by imagined interactions that take place outside of the frame of the uterus in off-screen space. The uterine frame functions as premises for perception in that it becomes an orientation point in the scan and as part of the pregnant body. As an orientation point, the uterus is marked as a site of loss for Juno, Bleeker, Bren and Mac, but it also provides a space in which to narrate the foetus. By narrating the foetus as “baby”, kinship is transferred from the pregnant person to the adoptive parent. The scan, and the scan photograph, become ‘that by means of which’ this kinship can be narrated. In order to do this, the pregnant body is displaced on the screen. The uterus, however, remains a space in which narrative continuity, including the conceptual, can be expressed.

### **The Pregnant Body in Transit in *Maria Full of Grace***

Set in present day Colombia and the US, *Maria Full of Grace* focuses on a seventeen-year-old Colombian woman, Maria, who works in a flower factory de-thorning roses and lives with her mother, sister and nephew. Maria is the main wage earner. She discovers she is pregnant and tells her boyfriend Carlos (Oscar Bejerano) that she does not want to marry him. When she suffers from pregnancy sickness, and is not allowed to take extra breaks at work, she loses her job. She is then befriended by an acquaintance, Franklin (John Álex Toro), who recruits her to be a drugs mule. She smuggles drug-filled pellets in her body, and travels from Bogotá, the Colombian capital, to New York. During the journey, she discovers that her friend Blanca (Yenny Paola Vega) is also one of the drugs mules. When they arrive in New York, they are sent to a hotel to pass the drug pellets out of their bodies. During the night, one of the drugs mules Lucy (Guilied Lopez), who has been ill, is attacked and killed and her body cut open and the drugs taken. Maria and Blanca leave the hotel and befriend Lucy's sister and her husband who let them stay in their apartment while looking for work. During this time, Maria has an ultrasound scan. Lucy's sister discovers that her sister has been killed, and throws Maria and Blanca out of her house. Maria persuades the funeral director to accept her drugs payment to have Lucy's body repatriated. Blanca returns home, but Maria stays in the US.

Maria's pregnancy does not provide the inciting incident that begins the narrative of the film, neither is it the most significant turning point at the beginning of the film, but the uterus as a frame encourages the spectator to make connections within the narrative and sutures the spectator to the character of Maria.<sup>81</sup> The fact that Maria is pregnant means that, although she is suspected of drug smuggling, she cannot be subjected to a confirmation X-ray by the

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<sup>81</sup> 'Inciting incident' is a technical term in screenplay and drama narrative analysis. It refers to the event that sets in motion the narrative journey of the main protagonist(s). The exact nature of the inciting incident is not always clear and is often open to debate.

immigration authorities. This provides the plot point in the narrative whereby she can enter the US. Her state of pregnant embodiment allows her to move from one geographical location to another and it is also her state of pregnancy that means she agrees to drug smuggling in the first place. Already supporting her mother, sister and nephew financially, the implication of pregnancy for Maria is immediately financial: she needs access to money whether she carries on with the pregnancy or pays for an abortion. Maria's pregnancy, then, functions as a narrative device in the film where it is the reason Maria leaves her job and forces her to investigate other ways of supporting herself financially.<sup>82</sup> The pregnancy also functions as an off-screen narrative whereby the spectator understands that narrative action is underpinned by the presence of the foetus. Agreeing to become a drug mule introduces a high level of threat not only to Maria, but also to her foetus and this decision establishes the main dramatic tension in the film. The inciting incident is when she shows up in the pharmacy where the pharmacist – who is a member of the drug cartel in Bogota – helps her to swallow the drug pellets. When Maria swallows the drug pellets, it becomes a narrative turning point where the spectator is forced to engage on a conceptual level with the frame of the uterus to understand the significance of the drugs being next to the foetus.

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<sup>82</sup> In 2004, when this film was made, abortion was illegal in Colombia. In 2006, a Constitutional Court rules that abortion is legal if there is a threat to the life or health of the pregnant person, if the foetus is unviable or if the pregnancy resulted from rape. A report by the Guttmacher Institute in 2011 (Prada *et al.*) found that although Colombia has high rates of contraception use, it has the highest rate of “unintended” pregnancies in Latin America and the Caribbean. The report lists some of the reasons, which include the reliance on traditional methods such as withdrawal and abstinence (which have high failure rates) and limited access to contraception for displaced communities who are also likely to be poor. The report recommends, as well as strengthening contraceptive services, increased access to abortion under the 2006 ruling.



Figure 7. The drug pellets are manipulated in Maria's body in *Maria Full of Grace*.



Figure 8. In a visual match, Maria is prepared for the scan in *Maria Full of Grace*.

The narrative link between the pregnancy and the drug taking creates a spectatorial engagement with Maria's body, through the frame of the uterus that is both visual and conceptual. From the moment she ingests the pellets, Maria's body becomes a container for them and a container for the foetus. The fact that she must swallow sixty-two pellets in total increases the stakes in her narrative (will she be able to do this?), and increases the physical threat to Maria and the foetus (if a pellet bursts will she die?). It is not only the spectator that knows Maria is pregnant when she ingests the drug pellets, Blanca also knows. The uterus, therefore, becomes a frame through which Blanca and the spectator must create an off-screen narrative in order to understand that the foetus is an additional, unseen, protagonist in the film. The pellets in Maria's stomach sit alongside the foetus in the abdomen and their toxic proximity to the foetus inside the uterus provides a counterpoint to the conceptual image of the foetus in the pregnant body that will be seen later at the scan. In the two scenes – the pharmacy and the scan – the pharmacist wears a white shirt, while the pellet makers and the sonographer wear white coats, which provides the air of medical authority, as well as a visual link between them. In both scenes, the uterus becomes the orientation point for the spectator. This means that when Maria's abdomen is manipulated by the pharmacist's hands, to 'settle' the drug pellets (Figure 7), the spectator is

being encouraged make a connection, visually and conceptually, to the scan where Maria's uterus is manipulated with the sonographer's hands (Figure 8). After 'settling' the pellets next to the growing foetus, the pharmacist asks, 'how's your system.... your digestive system?' and slowly presses Maria's abdomen. His concern cannot be for the foetus as he is not aware that there is any foetus. The off-screen narrative space, in this case, exists only for the spectator, and Maria. At this point in the narrative, Maria gives no indication that her uterus, and the proximity of the foetus to drugs, is of any concern to her. It is not until the ultrasound scan that she is confronted with the fact that has ingesting toxic drugs alongside her uterus and her "baby".

The sonographer introduces an imagined interaction between Maria and the foetus. The foetus becomes "your baby" not only for Maria's benefit, but also to encourage the spectator to "see" the foetus as a "baby". The pregnant body as a frame takes on the quality of gentleness in which the sonographer "visualises" the imagined "baby" before the foetus is seen in the ultrasound scan. While Maria is lying on the examination table, before the ultrasound equipment has been touched, the sonographer tells her 'it's important that you take a lot of care during pregnancy. You must not smoke; you cannot drink alcohol. No beer or wine, especially no drugs'. While she says this, the sonographer shakes out the plastic sheet and tucks it into the top of Maria's jeans, isolating her belly for the scan. She does not focus on Maria's belly, however – the location of the foetus – as her attention is on her scan equipment. She continues to arrange Maria's body on the examination table – in a visual match with the movements of the pharmacist – and says 'everything that you consume goes straight to the baby'. Significantly, whilst the pharmacist paid close attention to the interior of Maria's abdomen, feeling and moving the drug pellets into position, the sonographer has little eye contact with the body. When she narrates the foetus, she is connected to Maria's body only when she presses the

transducer into her abdomen, but both she and Maria look to the screen to “see” the foetus (Figure 9) as if it exists outside of the body.



Figure 9. Maria and the sonographer “see” the foetus in *Maria Full of Grace*.

The sonographer narrates an imagined image of the foetus, or “baby”, as symbiotic in the sense that they are growing together, but then also creates an image of the foetus as a person outside of the uterus when she says, ‘if you smoke it’s like giving a cigarette to your child’. This image of a child smoking a cigarette is conceptual, but it demonstrates that the preamble to the scan and its imaginative narration of a “baby” and a “child” is part of an ‘Elsewhere’ where narratives are created and then intersect. After this conceptual introduction, the sonographer “looks into” the uterus (Figure 9) to begin the process of visual identification where the spectator, and Maria, equate what can be seen (the foetus) with what has already been established as existing outside of the uterus (a child). She says, ‘at this stage of pregnancy, we can see the developing foetus...this is the head’, and she points out the shape of the foetus’s skull on the scan screen. The sonographer continues to narrate the foetal body: ‘these are the arms and those are the legs’. As the skull is being shown, Maria is shown on mid-shot and the handheld camera tracks slowly toward her as she asks, ‘this is my baby?’ At this point, Maria’s narrative intersects with the imagined narrative of the foetus as a “baby”. The foetus, although on-screen has become part of off-screen narrative space and exists as part of Maria’s sympathetic imagination of the foetus as “baby”. The heartbeat, or rather the sound of the

heartbeat, signals the presence of the foetus but – more importantly to the sonographer’s narration – a conceptual image not only of *a* baby but also of *her* “baby”. Despite the emotive experience of hearing the foetal heartbeat, however, there is no evidence that Maria bases her future decisions on the ultrasound. The only real indication that this imagined interaction around the uterus has influenced Maria is when she views the foetal ultrasound photograph as she travels to the airport to return to Colombia.



Figure 10. Maria’s eye-line watching Carlos eating arepas in *Maria Full of Grace*.



Figure 11. Maria’s eye-line on the clinic while eating arepas in *Maria Full of Grace*.

The photograph becomes another frame in which to “see” the foetus. It is used to reinforce the corporeal connection that Maria has made with the geographical space around her. Although she has only been in the US for a couple of days, her senses of sight, smell, taste, touch and hearing have helped to anchor her corporeally in New Jersey. Her inability to speak English initially alienates her from the country in which she has arrived, and reflects her liminality as an undocumented person together with her lack of a strong kinship group. Maria walks past signs in Spanish and hears Latin American Spanish speakers. It is important to the narrative of the film that she is drawn to the women’s health clinic because of its advertisement in Spanish

on the front window and the presence of Spanish-speaking staff.<sup>83</sup> She buys the same kind of thin tortillas – *arepas* – that she has eaten with Carlos, her ex-boyfriend, and biological parent of her foetus, on the streets of her hometown in Colombia.<sup>84</sup> The *arepas* are a familiar food to Maria and the way that they are served, with paper and in the hands, means that eating them becomes a familiar corporeal act. Significantly, the spectator is encouraged to make a corporeal link between this and the ultrasound clinic. Her eye-line, as she watches Carlos, is focussed on the *arepas* (Figure 10). In the later long shot of Maria, her eye-line shows that she is looking at the ultrasound clinic while she eats the *arepas* (Figure 11). This makes a direct visual and conceptual link to her everyday life in Colombia. The juxtaposition of the shots again creates an ‘Elsewhere’ that relies on the presence of the foetus in the uterus. This is not the only familiar corporeal act that she encounters. She walks past a young man in a doorway stripping the thorns and leaves from roses, which is the job that she left in Colombia. Within the diegesis of the film, then, her body becomes a premises for perception where Maria’s embodied experience in Colombia (which is now off-screen space) resonates for the spectator with her on-screen image in New Jersey. The spectator engages with Maria’s uterus as an orientation point in order to make sense of her changed corporeal state. The scan photograph then becomes part of the gentleness of the frame of her uterus that depends on this layering of visual, conceptual and perceptual images.

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<sup>83</sup> It is significant that she hears the accents of Latin American, as opposed to Castilian Spanish. This means she has a direct connection to New Jersey as a geographical location.

<sup>84</sup> *Arepas* are thin tortillas made from corn and are common in Colombia and Venezuela. They are often covered with sweet milk, which is made from boiling evaporated milk. *Arepas* are filled with sweet or savoury fillings and are common across Latin America.

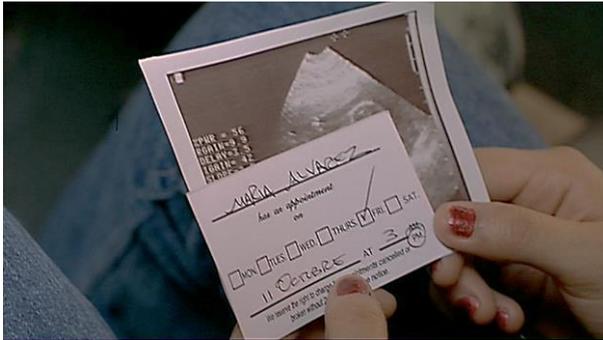


Figure 12. Maria's touches the scan photograph in *Maria Full of Grace*.



Figure 13. The city skyline is juxtaposed with scan photograph in *Maria Full of Grace*.

The photograph of the foetus is another factor in Maria's narrative that draws together her embodied connection to a new city together with her embodied connection to the foetus. The photograph becomes her premises for perception where her corporeal connection to her new environment moves from the interior of the body, through the frame of the uterus, to the geographical landscape. This is reflected in the juxtaposition of mid-shots of her in the taxi, close-ups of the ultrasound photograph and wide shots of the retreating skyline of New York. Maria's gaze moves from the ultrasound photograph (Figure 12) to the skyline (Figure 13) and back again. The implication is that the scan photograph of the foetus serves as an orientation point for Maria. It is the way she can visualise her pregnant embodiment in relation to what she can see around her. It is significant that her decision to stay is finally made as a direct result of the juxtaposition of the foetal image and the skyline. As she takes the taxi to the airport, she touches the scan photograph. The close-up of her fingers moving across the photograph is juxtaposed with long shots of the skyline looking back towards New York. The visual image of the foetus along with the conceptual notion of "her baby" creates an off-screen narrative where the juxtaposition, or montage, of the technological snapshot and the skyline creates a new meaning: the photograph changes how she views herself within the geographical landscape and encourages the spectator to make narrative connections because of this changed corporeality.

This change also contrasts with her journey into the city on her arrival where the skyline was an unfamiliar backdrop.

Although Maria was pregnant on her arrival, her pregnancy was not a significant factor in how she felt about being in the city. At that time, the pregnancy remained a narrative device in the film that allowed her to pass through customs. At the point of entry into the US, the foetus takes on an increased importance owing to its legal status. The narrative space of the uterus changes significantly as the orientation point for the customs officials shifts from Maria's body (as a container for illegal drugs) onto her uterus and the foetus. The customs officials "know" that Maria is carrying drugs in her body. To reinforce this, and to threaten her physically, they force her to put her hands up against the wall and spread her legs and supervise when Maria gives a urine sample. The female customs official stands with Maria while she sits on the toilet to urinate. This scene echoes a previous scene when Maria is in the airplane and defecates two drug pellets. The implication is that this will happen again as she squats over the toilet. However, the urine sample shows that Maria is pregnant and they are unable to x-ray her in order to prove she is carrying drugs in her body. This is the first time in the film that the presence or status of the foetus has affected anything Maria has done. The presence of the foetus establishes that the orientational point of her uterus, for the customs officials includes the concept of a foetus that is separate from her body with its own legal rights. These rights are different and separate from Maria's. This scene is also crucial to the main narrative; if she were captured at this point, she would have to return to Colombia. The narrative plot point around the uterus, therefore, is integral to the overall narrative of the film. Maria's arrival in the US changes her citizenship status and that of her foetus. Although Maria remains an illegal immigrant, her foetus gains personhood and possible future citizenship rights because of the

place of its birth.<sup>85</sup> Crucially, this demonstrates the importance of the uterine frame as part of an off-screen narrative.

Pregnant embodiment, then, is crucial to the narrative of the film whereby the frame of the uterus allows the spectator and protagonists to consider an off-screen space and this is when pregnancy changes from being a narrative device to the uterus being an orientation point and narrative space. With the uterus as a frame and orientation point, imagined interactions can be developed where the foetus becomes *a* “baby” or *your* “baby” or *my* “baby”. This means that the actual (image of the foetus) becomes a counterpoint to the conceptual (image of a baby or child). The uterus as a frame also enables the off-screen narrative to be visualised through the scan photograph when it is placed in juxtaposition with other on-screen images, where it provided an additional meaning. The uterus as a frame also establishes that dramatic irony, where the spectator has more narrative information than most of the other protagonists, exists in off-screen space as part of the narrative space of the uterus. The concept of the foetus in the space of the uterus relies on the ability of the spectator to read this off-screen space and to understand that on-screen and off-screen narrative is affected by pregnant embodiment.

### **The Segregated Uterus in *Gestation***

The film *Gestation* is set in present day Costa Rica in the capital, San José, and surrounding areas. The main protagonist Jessie is a teenage schoolgirl who lives in a poor area, but has a scholarship to attend a private girls-only Catholic school. She meets Teo (Edgar Román), a boy

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<sup>85</sup> Heather Latimer introduces the notion of ‘reproductive futurisms’ where she argues that citizenship of the foetus and the status of the pregnant immigrant are in legal opposition in *Maria Full of Grace* and *Children of Men* (2006, Alfonso Cuarón, USA/UK) (2014; 2013; 2011). She argues that the pregnant refugee is given political agency because pregnancy affords the foetus legal status. According to the statutory United States Code, a child born in the US is automatically given citizenship rights, irrespective of the rights of the parents.

of a similar age from a neighbouring school, and they start a relationship. On her first visit to Teo's home, in a more affluent area of the city, Jessie and Teo have unprotected intercourse. Jessie's mother eventually guesses that Jessie might be pregnant and makes her take a urine sample and have a pregnancy test. Her mother's initial concern, when the pregnancy is confirmed, is how they will afford another person in the house. Teo, meanwhile is horrified and begins to sell some of his possessions so that he can buy abortion pills. Although she had previously agreed to terminate the pregnancy, Jessie refuses to take the pills saying that she is going to have the baby. The head teacher at Jessie's school, Sister Maria, soon finds out about the pregnancy. She allows Jessie to stay at the school, but tells her she must be segregated from the other girls and lectures against the contamination of sin. The other girls protest against Jessie's isolation and eventually a lawyer agrees to represent Jessie in order to get her back into her mainstream class. Meanwhile, Teo, influenced by his mother and friends has asked for proof that he is the father and is therefore absent from Jessie's life, despite her best friend Alba's insistence that he supports her in the pregnancy. Eventually, Jessie is allowed back into her classes and she has an ultrasound with only her mother present. Teo, however, is present for the birth of the baby. The end of the film is set a few years in the future. Teo now babysits for their daughter Sofia as Jessie is now a working single parent.

The growing uterus and the pregnant body of the teenager become narrative focal points in *Gestation* rather than the foetus. Jessie's pregnancy has huge financial and moral consequences as Costa Rica, where the film is set, has one of the most restrictive abortion laws in South America. An unplanned pregnancy, therefore, means that making the decision to have a termination might place the protagonists in danger of losing their civil liberty.<sup>86</sup> While Teo has

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<sup>86</sup> Abortion is illegal in Costa Rica. Even therapeutic abortion, which is allowed under the Costa Rican Civil Code, is seen as socially unacceptable which reduces the number. The legal repercussions

to sell his possessions in order to buy illegal abortion pills, Jessie has to cope not only with the financial implications, but also deal with the way her pregnant body and her uterus becomes a site for the imagined interactions of other protagonists. Jessie hides her pregnancy until her school finds out and she is segregated. This segregation is designed to remove the growing pregnant body from the view of other girls at the school. Her family face a financial crisis and Jessie's visibly pregnant body presents an ethical and moral dilemma for Jessie's Catholic school particularly in the eyes of Sister Maria. Although the foetus is the object in the uterus and the new element in all of their lives, it is the uterus, as part of the teenage pregnant body, which becomes the orientation point for many of the narratives in the film. The fact that the uterus belongs to an unmarried teenager precipitates emotional responses from a practical point of view, but on a conceptual level, the uterus becomes a visceral location in the imagination of her head teacher Sister Maria.



Figure 14. Sister Maria speaks calmly and quietly to Jessie in *Gestation*.



Figure 15. Matching close-up as Sister Maria's facial expression changes in *Gestation*.

Sister Maria creates her own narrative around the uterus that is personal to her, one that is created by a powerful imaginative connection not specifically to the foetus, but to the pregnant

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of abortion are, therefore, very serious for both Teo and Jessie. This qualifies my use of the word "choice".

body and the uterus. Her response is visceral and the uterus becomes, for her, a metaphorical space. Sister Maria feels disgust at the fact that Jessie is pregnant. This disgust is not aimed at the pregnancy itself or the foetus, but rather the way the pregnancy has come about, through teenage sex. This fundamental disgust is shown in Sister Maria's body language when she asks Jessie to come to her office. When Sister Maria asks Jessie if she is pregnant, she talks to her in formal language using *usted* rather than the familiar *tú* to address her, which creates a distance between the two.<sup>87</sup> Sister Maria remains calm and speaks quietly (Figure 14) but her facial expression and gestures change markedly when Jessie confirms – by lowering her head – that she is pregnant. Sister Maria is filmed in close-up and this framing remains the same. It is the viscosity of her response, therefore, that is changed. Her speech becomes more rapid, she begins to use hand movements, her brows furrow, and her lips purse (Figure 15). In this close-up, the frame is divided by the corner of the wall and by the string of wooden rosary beads that hang behind her. This *mise-en-scène* reflects the importance of the Catholic Church to Sister Maria. The rosary beads symbolise prayer and are used as part of the penance for sin.<sup>88</sup> The habit and the veil that she wears marks her celibate role in the church and represents the community to which she belongs. This framing establishes her character and signals some of the themes that drive her own beliefs around religion, celibacy and penance. Her visceral response might originate in her Catholicism, whereby her physical response could be called “sublime” as an overpowering emotional and corporeally experience to be controlled.<sup>89</sup> The

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<sup>87</sup> An adult would normally use the familiar second person *tú* (to *tutear*) when speaking to a child. The use of *tú* is also used in addressing the Christian God in prayer.

<sup>88</sup> In the Catholic Church, the rosary is used to recite specific prayers and is associated with the life of Mary, the mother of Jesus. The beads are arranged on a string in a particular order so that prayers can be recited in pattern. It is traditional for a pattern of prayers to be said in repentance for specific sins: the more serious the sin, the greater the number of prayers.

<sup>89</sup> The notion of the sublime is relevant here, but it forms part of a much wider discussion about creativity and the senses that I am not able to give justice to in this thesis. It is worth mentioning, however, that Sawchuck talks about the sublime when she talks about biotourism, as one of the factors that creates a powerful connection with the internal body. James Kirwan – who writes on the history of

difference, however, between Sister Maria and others is the outward manifestation of emotion. Whilst others may experience the same emotion, they do not display the visceral reaction. Although Sister Maria says ‘we’ll make sure we do everything we can to make sure you have a safe pregnancy’, her embodied response confirms her conceptual narrative. Sister Mary creates a narrative that is personal and conceptual. She is overwhelmed by her feelings and the effort to control these feelings fuels her visceral response to the uterus.

The uterus becomes ‘that by means of which’ Sister Maria connects with the undesired pregnancy. The growing uterus becomes Sister Maria’s orientation point, and the uterus is her premises for perception. Sister Maria begins to narrate Jessie’s body as *una manzana podrida*, a rotten apple – that will contaminate the others, meaning the other girls at school. In this way, the pregnant body and the uterus are given conceptual qualities based on the conceptual idea of sin being infectious. Sister Maria attempts to ostracise Jessie in order to hide the uterus, and her growing belly, from view by keeping her separated from the rest of the schoolgirls. Her anger, which is aimed at Jessie, is also aimed at the presence of the growing uterus. But there is no evidence in the film that Sister Maria’s narrative around the uterus is shared by others. The other nuns facilitate the segregation, but try to persuade Sister Maria to change her mind. The male staff who work at the entrance to the school apologise to Jessie when she has to use a side entrance into school. Sister Maria wants to hide Jessie’s growing uterus from the rest of the pupils. Jessie is not allowed to enter the school by the front entrance, and is not allowed to wear the school uniform. These measures, she insists, are for Jessie’s safety. The uterus as an embodied location is the site for Sister Maria’s off-screen narrative. The girls themselves challenge this narrative around the pregnant body. They support Jessie and form a protective

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the sublime – describes the process as ‘the self-provision of pleasure through an act of the imagination that is the nature of the sublime’ (2005: 163).

circle around Jessie using their own bodies, and linking hands around her in the schoolyard. This action is broken by the presence of Sister Maria, but it establishes that the connection the pregnant body is seen as an extension of Jessie by her schoolmates.

Alba protects Jessie from segregation and also includes the foetus in their conversation by talking to the foetus through Jessie's body. Jessie and Alba talk on a dimly lit stairwell away from other people in a location that is private so that Alba can express not only her close physical relationship with Jessie, but also where she is free to create her own narrative in relation to both Jessie and the foetus. The camera is placed further down the stairs so that the spectator witnesses the scene from a small distance. At this point, the pregnancy has not been disclosed to the school and they talk in general terms about their everyday life and talk about food and crunch green apples (foreshadowing the metaphor used by Sister Maria). As Alba places her hands on Jessie's belly, the camera angle changes to an overhead shot. This shot is the point-of-view of two other schoolgirls who are watching and listening surreptitiously which emphasises the privacy of the moment. Alba, places both her hands over Jessie's belly to feel the movement of the foetus, then tips her head sideways and places her ear over Jessie's belly to listen (Figure 16). She tells Jessie that the baby is giving little kicks for her. She talks to the foetus and voices the foetus saying 'ay, little thing...it's trying to say something to me...Hi, Auntie Alba, how are you? I want to see you'. She then kisses Jessie's belly through her clothes as if she is kissing the foetus. In this way, Alba forms a kinship with the foetus, a conceptual image of a "baby" who recognises her and considers her a close friend of Jessie by calling her auntie. In this way Alba demonstrates the way her sympathetic imagination allows her to identify with the foetus as part of an imagined interaction. Alba becomes the guide explaining how the foetus is moving and 'giving little kicks', suggesting that the physical movements of the foetus are given in response to her voice. Alba creates a conceptual narrative that is

corporeal in that she engages with the foetus physically in her contact with the pregnant body, which confirms that for Alba the foetus exists in the uterus, but remains part of Jessie's body.



Figure 16. Alba puts her ear to Jessie's belly to hear the foetus's response in *Gestation*.



Figure 17. Jessie, alone in her room, stroking her belly in *Gestation*.

The continuing presence of the foetus fundamentally changes the way Jessie sees herself, but it also influences how the spectator reads her narrative information. In a short scene, in the privacy of her own room, Jessie is shown in a mid-shot stroking her growing belly (Figure 17). Although Jessie is not seen talking to the foetus, she is in her bedroom by herself, suggesting that this is the only place where her pregnant body can be exposed without comment. Sister Maria tells her that she does not have a 'normal' life anymore, but the *mise-en-scène* shows the room of a normal young girl. The bedhead is covered in child's writing and stickers, and a toy bear sits beside her pillow, but her growing belly subverts this image of childhood as she touches it lightly with her fingertips and stares out of the frame. This is the first moment that Jessie is seen connecting physically with her pregnant body. Until this point, her pregnancy and her pregnant body has been the focus of many narratives but now it becomes an orientation point for Jessie. There is no evidence that Jessie is visualising the foetus, but she is aware of its embodied presence, which is emphasised by the way she strokes body. This moment of tactility

emphasises the dissonance that exists between the conceptual narrative of the teenage pregnant body as a rotten apple, and the embodied reality of a young woman who is pregnant.

The interior of Jessie's body is conceptualised not only by the presence of the foetus, but also by the absence of menstruation. Jessie's mother Patricia recognises the unused sanitary towel as a sign of pregnancy. In this way, the sanitary towel becomes an outward marker of what is happening inside Jessie's body so that the object itself becomes part of the narrative around the uterus. This embodied narrative around the uterus involves both women and takes place both on-screen (finding the sanitary towels) and off-screen (absence of menstruation). Patricia places a urine sample bottle on the table and tells Jessie that she wants to take a sample from her to the clinic early in the morning. Each object – the urine bottle and the sanitary towel – signals pregnancy through an assumed physiological change in hormones in Jessie's reproductive system. In a two-shot, the women sit side by side, where Jessie cannot avoid her mother's gaze. When Patricia asks Jessie, 'don't you have anything to tell me?' there is a sense that their familiarity and close living also includes an understanding of the cyclical nature of the reproductive body and Patricia knows exactly when to buy sanitary towels for Jessie. The packet of sanitary towels, therefore, highlights the way the uterus operates as premises for perception for Patricia who understands what is happening inside the uterus. When Jessie says, 'you know already?' it confirms that both women understand the temporal quality of the uterus.<sup>90</sup> This familiarity and understanding of the body also extends to Patricia's knowledge of the embodied uterus in menstruation and pregnancy.

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<sup>90</sup> Menstrual synchrony was first investigated by Martha McClintock in 1971. She concluded that women in close contact synchronised their menstruation as a result of pheromones that affected the length of cycles. McClintock's methodology, however, was repeated and questioned by H. Clyde Wilson in 1992, who identified flaws in the collecting data. McClintock's methodology was repeated by Anna Ziomkiewicz (2006), who concluded that menstrual synchrony could not be proven.



Figure 18. Jessie's eye-line shows she is watching her mother in *Gestation*.



Figure 19. Jessie's mother's eye-line shows she is watching her daughter in *Gestation*.

The conceptual narrative that Patricia initiates is based on an everyday understanding of the body and focusses on the uterus. This explains why the kinship between mother and daughter and foetus has already begun before the foetus is visualised through the ultrasound scan. The scan is where the foetus is visualised for Jessie and her mother, but as the scan is not shown in the film: the spectator has to fill the visual gap with a conceptual image of the foetus. The spectator only sees the reaction on the faces of Jessie and her mother as well as hearing the dialogue of the sonographer. Although the transducer can be seen, the figure of the ultrasound technician is only identified by the arm and the white coat. The technology of the scan is only suggested by these parts of the sonographer's body and the transducer. When the scan begins, the sonographer runs the transducer over Jessie's belly. The sound of the ultrasound monitor is loud and distorted as she moves the probe around until she stops when the heartbeat is heard. The sonographer says the heartbeat 'is strong, it's really strong.... this is your baby'. At this point, the camera cuts to a close up of Jessie's face as she smiles and looks up at her mother (Figure 18). The camera then cuts to a close up of Patricia's face smiling (Figure 19). Their eye-lines show that they are smiling at each other as the sonographer tells Patricia 'this is your grandchild, grandma'. The scan screen is spatially off-screen, so that the scan is a frame of the uterus, which is off-screen. The narrative around the uterus has already begun between Jessie

and Patricia so that the scan only confirms that the pregnancy exists. Importantly, the scan at this point also confirms the intergenerational kinship between the two women in relation to the foetus. The sonographer voices this relationship. The cinema screen becomes the ‘by means of which’ narrative information is shown, but this can only be part of a continuing narrative if the spectator can “see” past the edges of the frame to perceive the presence of the foetus. This demonstrates the gentleness quality of the frame where the action on-screen (the scan) moves into off-screen space which is read by the spectator as an off-screen narrative. It is a very short scene in the film and provides a narrative punctuation that reinforces Jessie and Patricia’s kinship group.

For the biological father, establishing kinship is more complex. Jessie’s boyfriend Teo is not concerned with developing a kinship with the foetus or narrating his own family history around the foetus. He rejects this narrative, as does his mother, and rejects mapping seeing and feeling around the uterus. Teo’s embodied reaction to the news of the pregnancy is fuelled by the emotional connection he has to the narrative around the uterus. One of the first things that Teo does when Jessie tells him she is pregnant is to shout at her ‘it can’t be!’ His reaction is based on anger at himself and confusion about how to manage the situation. His first reaction is to undo the error of unprotected sex by sourcing pills to terminate the pregnancy. At this point his premises for perception is the uterus, but his orientation point is the foetus. His own conceptual narrative around the uterus does not include having a child. His focus is on halting the biological process in Jessie’s body which, for him, involves ridding his room (the conception site) of valuable objects to sell. The objects he sells are the objects associated with the conception: his music and videos, his video games and equipment. In effect, Teo’s familiar world, inside and outside the home, is turned upside down by the pregnancy, but more significantly by the conceptual narrative he creates around the uterus. He does not accept the notion of the foetus

as “baby”. It is not only Teo’s familiar world at home that is changed by the pregnancy, the familiar geographical landscape of the city, where Teo and Jessie have developed their relationship, changes nature.



Figure 20. Jessie and Teo run around the fountain in the city centre in *Gestation*.



Figure 21. Jessie and Teo meet at the fountain to discuss the abortion in *Gestation*.

When Teo eventually buys abortion pills, he brings them to Jessie who is waiting for him in a familiar location the municipal gardens in the city. Jessie’s refusal to take the abortion pills marks a turning point in the narrative and this is marked by a change of pace reflected in the landscape of the city, which is a backdrop to Jessie and Teo’s relationship. As they both come from different parts of the city, the centre becomes neutral ground for them to meet. They walk together through the shopping mall, run around the municipal gardens, sometimes hand in hand, sometimes with Jessie on Teo’s back. When they meet to discuss the abortion, it is in the same gardens where they had previously been running. The contrast between the two sequences emphasises the fundamental change that the pregnancy has brought to each of them, and the consequent change is reflected in the aesthetics. The earlier sequence is shot in daylight with the camera observing from a distance. High angle wide shots observe their journey through the city. Teo has leaflets for college courses and both characters are excited about their futures. As they run around the fountain (Figure 20), the wide shot illustrates the enclosed nature of the

location with the curved shape of the seats drawing the two characters together as they circle the fountain (which suggests a uterine shape with fountain in the centre). By contrast, when they meet to discuss the abortion, the scene is filmed at night and they are both seated (Figure 21). The integrity of the location has fundamentally changed. Rather than a landscape to run through, it becomes a visceral location that has drawn them in and is now imbued with embodied memories. Uplights around the fountain illuminate the scene and the pace of action slows as the fountain, although central, becomes a visual and audio backdrop to their conversation. There a musical soundtrack, but it is low and unobtrusive. The scene, therefore, becomes intimate. The camera is placed at their head height, but behind them, as if to eavesdrop on the moment when Jessie says ‘we’re not two anymore’. This moment is significant as it the moment that Teo is forced to make decisions that are proactive rather than reactive. It is at this point that the off-screen narrative space of the uterus changes for Teo and he stops trying to secure an abortion. The location is also the site of a changed perception of the uterus for both characters as the orientation point becomes the foetus as “baby”.

The body of the pregnant teenager provokes reactions throughout the film as the uterus becomes ‘that by means of which’ the body is seen both as a site of contamination or infection as well as a site of familiarity and kinship. The uterus is conceptualised as separate from its bodily function as objects mark the reproductive body as having the qualities of absence (of menstruation) and presence (of foetus). This demonstrates how the frame of the uterus is unseen, but moves into off-screen space through the cyclical nature of reproduction so that the uterus is not only an embodied location, but also a metaphorical space. The strength of the conceptual narrative emphasises the strength of absence as part of off-screen space, but also suggests that the quality of absence and presence is important to understanding the reproductive body.

### **Duration and Repetition in *Stephanie Daley***

Set in the present day, the main protagonist of *Stephanie Daley* is a sixteen-year-old girl, Stephanie (Amber Tamblyn), who gives birth unattended in the toilets whilst on a school ski trip. Stephanie is arrested, but insists that she did not know she was pregnant. She is allocated a forensic psychologist Lydie who has to make an independent assessment of Stephanie for the State prosecution in case she has to go to court and stand trial for killing her baby at birth: neonaticide.<sup>91</sup> Lydie herself is twenty-nine weeks pregnant. She had a stillbirth in her last pregnancy and constantly seeks reassurance in this pregnancy that the foetus is alive. Lydie's husband Paul (Timothy Hutton) does not share Lydie's anxiety and there is a tension on their relationship. Stephanie discloses to Lydie that she had been coerced into having unprotected intercourse at a party and that she was a virgin at the time. Stephanie also admits that she visited the house of her assailant Cory (Kel O'Neill), but had not confronted him and had not told anyone that she was pregnant. Stephanie's story is told in a series of flashbacks. Lydie knows from the forensic investigation that Stephanie's baby died after being suffocated with toilet paper. Stephanie eventually tells Lydie that she thought the pregnancy was a test from God and that the baby, a girl, was breathing when it was born, but that the breathing was 'all wrong'. Stephanie willed the baby to die and when the baby did die, Stephanie believed that she killed the baby with her mind.

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<sup>91</sup> Neonaticide in the US is defined as the killing of an infant within the first twenty-four hours of birth (Porter and Gavin, 2010: 99-112). This is distinct from the killing of an infant under the age of 12 months – infanticide. The specificity in the film of neonaticide is important as this is often linked to the mental health and age of the birthing person, and, in the US, is overwhelmingly committed by women under the age of 25. A review of the literature on neonaticide in the US describes the difficulties of definition: neonaticide can be a result of premeditated violence or a result of passive neglect. The report emphasises that neonaticide is not a modern-day phenomenon and that there is no specific law in the US which treats it any differently from homicide (Drescher-Burke *et al.*, 2004).

The pregnancies of the two main protagonists Stephanie and Lydie are connected visually from the opening scenes and this establishes the importance that their embodied experience of pregnancy and birth has to the narrative of the film. The film investigates the conflicting emotions around pregnancy and loss which are encapsulated in Stephanie's pregnancy and Lydie's current pregnancy. There is a direct comparison between the stage of Lydie's current pregnancy and the age of the Stephanie's stillborn infant which was twenty-six weeks gestation at birth.<sup>92</sup> This gestational age is significant as it places each foetus in the territory of viability at birth. Foetal viability suggests a foetus can survive outside the uterus, but it also suggests it may die outside the uterus. This fragility of survival is an important factor in establishing the cause of – and responsibility for – the death of Stephanie's baby, and it is the root of Lydie's anxiety in her current pregnancy. Stephanie's pregnancy is told mostly in flashback and these lengthy flashbacks are intercut with sequences of Lydie's current pregnancy. This establishes the fragility of the foetus *in utero* again and again and emphasises the ambivalence – strong positive and negative – feelings towards pregnancy and the foetus that is central to both characters. The pregnancies are both connected and contrasted and a comparison is made between the death of the newborn in Stephanie's case and the constant monitoring of Lydie's (alive) unborn foetus.

For each woman, the experience of being pregnant comes with negative perceptions: that 'something is wrong like last time' (Lydie), or that the pregnancy is a punishment from God (Stephanie). The implication is that the fate of each foetus might be influenced by the viewpoint of each woman to her own pregnancy and suggests that the foetus plays a role in each character's sympathetic imagination. This subtext gives strength to the main narrative, and in

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<sup>92</sup> The definition of stillbirth varies according to country, but in the US a stillbirth is defined as foetal loss after twenty weeks' gestation. For more information, see: US government website [www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/stillbirth](http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/stillbirth).

how the main protagonists relate to the foetus, but the subtext equally suggests the importance of confronting death, which applies to other protagonists. When Lydie admits that she threw the ashes of her stillborn baby out of the car window, it is clear that this physical part of the baby (who was a foetus at death) signifies something emotional for her husband, Paul.<sup>93</sup> When he is confronted by Lydie who asks him, ‘what happened to us?’ Paul replies, ‘last spring happened to us...we should have given her a name...had a service, but we pretended like nothing happened’. There is no indication in the film that Paul had seen the foetal scan before the stillbirth, but his involvement in Lydie’s current pregnancy, attending the scan and discussion with the obstetrician, suggests that he felt very involved at all stages previously. If this is the case, and he saw the foetus as part of his kinship group, it existed not only as a “baby”, but as *his* “baby” or *their* “baby” in his own perception. This suggests that even the ashes of the foetus, who died *in utero*, that exist outside of the frame of the body and outside of the frame of the uterus signify a “baby”. Paul’s image of the foetus as “baby” remains part of Paul’s perception, and sympathetic imagination, and exists as part of off-screen narrative space. In order for Paul to accept this current pregnancy, he has to come to terms with the lack of closure on the death of his “baby”. The successful collaborative coding from the previous pregnancy becomes his perceptual glue for this second pregnancy. Paul’s identification with the dead baby is at odds with Lydie’s. For Lydie, the memory of the baby affects her everyday life, as she tells him, ‘I think about her every day’. It is clear that the stillbirth affects her everyday life, which is heightened by her interaction with Stephanie.

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<sup>93</sup> Roger Ebert speaks to this dichotomy in his review: he says that there is a tension between the symbolic act of scattering the ashes of a loved one and the notion of the stillborn as part of the woman’s body and, therefore, hers to dispose of according to her wishes (2007).



Figure 22. The scan shows the foetus in profile in *Stephanie Daley*.



Figure 23. The close-up shows the visceral nature of the foetal scan in *Stephanie Daley*.

The death of Lydie's foetus *in utero* and the death of Stephanie's baby at birth fundamentally changes the way the two female protagonist interact. Although the lived body experience of each woman is crucial to the narrative around pregnancy, it is only Lydie who is currently pregnant. The conceptual narrative that she constructs around her foetus includes the possibility that the foetus will die. The scan of Lydie's uterus, therefore, functions on many levels. The scan demonstrates to Lydie that her pregnancy is healthy and that the foetus is narrated as "baby". This explains why she feels the need to return to the scan as a marker of her foetus being alive. The scan is closely linked to the birth and death of Stephanie's baby and the scene of Lydie's scan appears immediately after the opening sequence to the film which shows the aftermath of Stephanie's birth. Stephanie's post-partum collapse, journey to hospital and return home is followed by the non-diegetic audio of a heartbeat over an intertitle on a black screen. The intertitle moves the narrative forward five months, but the sound of the heartbeat has already formed an audio bridge to the close-up of the scan image of Lydie's healthy foetus (Figure 22). The shape and outline of the foetus is shown and the head and eye sockets can be clearly seen as well as the heart beating. There is a brief close-up of Lydie's face reacting to the image. Her eye-line shows that she is not looking at her own body, but at the image of the foetus on the monitor which demonstrates how her perception is constantly moving from the

orientation point of the uterus, to the screen. Lydie does not register her reaction to the weight of the transducer that is being held against her pregnant belly, although the camera cuts to an extreme close-up of Lydie's belly in profile as the transducer passes over it which exaggerates the visceral nature of the scan (Figure 23). As the transducer passes over her belly, the soft squelch of the jelly and the light from the window reflecting in the congealed droplets that have gathered on the surface of the skin around Lydie's umbilicus, emphasise the physical nature of the scan. This imagery of the pregnant belly is designed to make the prosthetic belly life-like, but an additional effect is that it emphasises the way the pregnant body is sidelined as part of the scan process and as part of the aesthetic of the film.<sup>94</sup> This suggests that Lydie's actual embodied experience, is secondary, or less forceful, than the image of the foetus on the scan.

The foetus is identified visually on the scan by the presence of the foetal skull and limbs, but there is no initial narration for the benefit of the spectator, only the moving image of the foetus on the scan screen. When the camera cuts to a close-up of Lydie, however, it records her reaction to the movement of the foetus. She does not appear to react to the movement of the foetus inside her body. There is a short but noticeable gap where the close-up on her face looking at the ultrasound screen shows that she does not react to the physical pressure on her belly or the foetus's movement inside her. What is clear is that she reacts to the image of the foetus when it moves on the screen. As Lydie watches the monitor, the gynaecologist says 'three pounds, ten ounces, and twenty-nine weeks'. Lydie flinches and smiles in surprise when the

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<sup>94</sup> The prosthetic belly is a feature in contemporary films about pregnancy. In the comedy film *Knocked Up*, about a couple Ben (Seth Rogan) and Alison (Katherine Heigel) who have one date and unprotected sex which results in a pregnancy, it is not only the belly that is prosthetic, but the genitals as well and the film is unusual in its prosthetic representation of a baby's head crowning. In *Baby Mama*, where a high-powered professional Kate (Tina Fey) pays a surrogate Angie (Amy Poehler) to carry her embryo, the prosthetic belly is a prop used by Angie who fakes a pregnancy in order to be paid for surrogacy.

image on screen moves, but she carries on looking at the monitor not her body. When the gynaecologist says ‘oh, there’s a kicker’, Lydie replies ‘he’s always kicking’. The importance of this scene is to establish the health of the foetus which is important to Lydie’s narrative, but it also establishes that the foetus has an identity. Lydie confirms the sex of the foetus as male so that she and the gynaecologist create a continuous narrative around the foetus where the foetus is identified visually through the scan, but also conceptually as a “baby”. By juxtaposing the sequence of Stephanie’s birth with Lydie’s scan, Stephanie’s foetus is conceptualised as a “baby”. This collaborative coding encourages the spectator to make a narrative connection between the aliveness of Lydie’s foetus and the death of Stephanie’s “baby”.



Figure 24. Stephanie looks down into her underwear in *Stephanie Daley*.



Figure 25. The close-up shows Stephanie’s shock at giving birth in *Stephanie Daley*.

When Stephanie gives birth, it is not clear whether she understands what is happening to her, but the graphic representation of the birth confirms that Stephanie experiences a physically and emotionally profound embodied moment as her pregnancy moves from the conceptual (where Stephanie is in control of what she thinks and believes) to the visual where she can see that there is a baby’s head coming out of her body. There is a dissonance between her understanding of her pregnant embodiment (it is not clear at this point in the narrative if she understands that

she is pregnant), where the foetus is contained in the uterus, to her embodied experience of the foetus leaving the uterus and her internal body. Although she can see what is happening, it is not clear if she fully understands the implications of what is happening to her body. When Stephanie locks herself in a toilet cubicle, the moment of realisation that she is giving birth is signaled by a sonic shift as the diegetic sound of washroom, the sound of loud music and people coming in and out of the toilets fades out just before she looks down into her underwear (Figure 24). It is at this point that she registers the shock of seeing what is – presumably – the baby’s head (Figure 25). The scene continues with only the exaggerated sound of the toilet seat moving under her pressure as she bears down which gives the impression that she has blocked everything out – including her own voice – apart from the dissonant, mechanical sound. The sound design in this scene implies that Stephanie enters an altered state of consciousness for the duration of the birth, as the naturalistic diegetic sound returns as soon as she stops pushing. This soundscape, which creates an acoustic interval, suggests that she does not understand what is happening to her, and that the birth is a moment that has occurred on-screen, but that it exists for Stephanie as an off-screen narrative. It is only towards the end of the film when Stephanie tells Lydie that ‘I held her’, that confirms she understood that she had given birth, had seen the infant and identified it as female. Despite her refusal to give many details throughout their discussion, Stephanie has a strong conceptual idea of the infant’s identity. She tells Lydie ‘I knew that she wanted to live, but I didn’t want her to so I told her to die...and she did. I killed her with my mind’. This is a complex process of perception on the part of Stephanie, and her story of what happened is in counterpoint to the forensic evidence: that the baby was found with toilet roll in its mouth and pressed into its face. Importantly, this revelation emphasises the difficulty that Lydie has found when coming to terms with the death of her own foetus *in utero*.

The intercutting of Stephanie's backstory with Lydie's present-day pregnancy suggests that there are similarities in how they understand their own culpability in the death of their "babies", which relates to how they think about their foetuses. In a short sequence Lydie is directly challenged to think about how her own anxieties could be passed on to her foetus. When Lydie arrives at a drinks reception for her husband's work she is stopped by a woman who knows Paul, but whom she does not know. When Lydie explains, in answer to the woman's question, that they will be organising the nursery after the birth, she is told that she must not 'think cautiously' and that she should have 'a ballsy vibe' in relation to the pregnancy; otherwise, she is told, 'you're going to pass on all sorts of anxieties to your child'. This exchange shows that the woman believes that the maternal imagination has a direct effect on the foetus. She bases this on the negative relationship she has had with her mother, but she also suggests that this is because of her memory of being in the uterus. This scene is foreshadowed by a musical bridge where the diegetic sound of background music of light piano is mixed with the extradiegetic soundtrack of cellos and violins, which are themselves accompanied by a rapid beat which reaches a musical peak at the moment she is told about 'anxieties'. The importance of this musical bridge is the effect on the scene and the way it reflects Lydie's preoccupation with the health of her foetus. The presence of the foetus is reinforced when the woman tells Lydie that she is in regression therapy. In this therapy, the woman remembers being in the uterus and the 'waves of panic' she experiences when her mother said that '[she] was destroying her figure and she didn't want [her]'. She also remembers her mother's heart beating above [her] in the dark'. This scene, which only lasts a couple of minutes, highlights the woman's sympathetic imagination towards the foetus and reflects the anxiety that Lydie feels about her own foetus.

The uterus is reappropriated as a metaphorical space and an embodied space as the guest transforms the uterus of her own mother into a premises for perception in which she – as foetus

– has a central role. She remembers not only her experience of being a foetus, but also her emotional response to her mother’s anxiety. The uterus becomes ‘that by means of which’ she can recall being a witness to her mother’s everyday life, but more significantly, recall her emotional, embodied response to her mother’s everyday life. This presumes an understanding of the world outside of the uterus so that the foetus is able to decipher not only her mother’s feelings, but understands the social context of body image while in the uterus. Lydie’s meeting with this guest emphasises why Lydie seeks reassurance in the foetal scan and the medical advice of her obstetrician. The specific fears that Lydie has about her pregnancy are not concerned with biological information about the health of the foetus, but they are concerned with her perception of what will happen to the foetus based on her experience of foetal death. It is not clear if she agrees that maternal imagination can have an effect on the foetus, but it does suggest that this exchange colours how she feels about her pregnancy. The pregnancy – to Lydie – is happening off-screen, and she constantly moves between understanding the visual information about her foetus through the scan, and the conceptual narration of foetal death. Her experience is not, in essence, a denial of pregnancy or of the foetus.

Stephanie’s (dis)connection with the foetus is positioned initially in the film’s narrative as a denial of pregnancy, but after constant flashbacks to the events that led up to the birth, it becomes clear that Stephanie, like Lydie, has very specific fears about her pregnancy. These fears are conceptual and revolve around the values that are promoted at her church. She rationalises her pregnancy as being punished by God for being weak. Even if Stephanie enters a clinical state of disassociation at the time of the birth, there are clues that she realises something is different. She begins to wear loose-fitting clothes, and waits outside the house of the boy who raped her. This is emphasised in Lydie’s investigation. When Stephanie describes her feelings after the rape, Lydie acknowledges the importance of the event saying, ‘something

just happened to you'. A key question for Lydie in her investigation is whether Stephanie knew she was pregnant as this implies that she understood she was carrying a foetus who was capable of life and that she had a duty of care. 'Did you know you were pregnant...did you think it might be?' The court case rests on whether Stephanie is guilty of murder; therefore, this conceptual understanding of the foetus forms part of the prosecution. A conscious decision to kill the foetus suggests an ambivalence where she might have known that the foetus was alive, but equally, did not care if the baby died.

The ambivalence shown by each woman in the film suggests there is no innate way that a pregnant woman relates to her pregnant embodiment and/or the foetus.<sup>95</sup> Lydie's anxieties that are manifest in her dreams about giving birth, and are set in a rural landscape, contain metaphorical allusions to nature. This can be read as the long-standing symbolic connections of woman's body's with nature, but I, however, read against this. The three visual metaphors in the film – water, animals and blood – which might lend themselves to metaphors of birth as part of nature, actually form punctuation points in the narrative, and provide visual links between the two women. Running water provides a visual continuity that links Lydie and Stephanie. When Lydie gets up to drink in the night and chases the cat to the toilet, this is a daily occurrence, because Lydie needs to urinate and the cat likes to drink from the toilet. When the camera focusses on Lydie running the tap for a glass of water and moves to a close-up on the pouring water, a cut on a matching close-up reveals Stephanie as the person running water from the tap into a glass. Similarly, when Stephanie stands and watches Cory, her assailant, outside his house hidden from view in the shadow of the trees, she uses the excuse of an injured deer to explain why she is out at night. Lydie, in a dream sequence, walks into the forest in the

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<sup>95</sup> I use the term ambivalent in the sense of 'entertaining contradictory emotions (as love and hatred) towards the same person or thing' (*Oxford English Dictionary* Vol 1: 388).

middle of the night to give birth. During the day, Lydie passes a dead deer by the side of the road when she is driving. In the film's opening sequence, blood on the snow is a visual marker that something significant has happened; Lydie cutting her hand with a knife at her sister's house shows that she is distracted. There is no textual evidence that any of these elements have a connection to the pregnant body, the uterus or the foetus other than to provide stylistic narrative continuity.

Repeating birth narratives emphasises how pregnancy can provoke strong negative and positive reactions where the uterus, as a premises for perception, is perceived as both on-screen through the scan and through the film's narrative and off-screen through the protagonists' perception of what is happening to them. Stephanie and Lydie experience their pregnancies as happening to them, but also happening outside of their bodies. For Lydie, the ultrasound screen supplements her embodied experience and becomes 'that by means of which' she can be reassured that her foetus is healthy and alive. This suggests that for Lydie, as she perceives it, the foetus outside of the scan is neither alive nor dead. Stephanie's disassociation with her pregnant embodiment is challenged by her perception of what is physically happening inside her uterus (pregnancy and the growth of the foetus) and what is outside of the uterus (birth of the foetus). Repeated questioning reveals not a denial of pregnancy, but a fear, which in itself explains her muted responses. Juxtaposing Lydie and Stephanie's pregnancy and birth narratives reinforces how foetal viability also includes the ambivalence of foetal death and foetal life.

## **Conclusion**

The frame of the uterus exists both on-screen and off-screen as part of the body, and as part of the ultrasound scan so that it depends on being able to "see" beyond the geometric boundaries that define it as a frame. Collaborative coding, which places the image of the foetus into context, emphasises the visual and conceptual nature of the scan and depends on a perceptual glue that

articulates the movement between the screen and the body as frames. By recognising the importance of absence on the screen, as off-screen space, I have re-assessed Sobchack's notion of the gentleness of the frame. Whether it is the frame of the uterus or the frame of the screen, "seeing" around and through the body is dependent on the uterus being a narrative space. This narrative space depends on the shift from visual to the conceptual, and my readings move from representation of the pregnant body to the experiential and embodied experience, which allows other narratives to open up. The adoptive parents and the biological father in *Juno* and *Gestation*, for example, can be analysed based on *their* embodied experience of pregnancy. This involves a reassessment of the relationship of protagonists to the foetus as well as the pregnant person and/or the pregnant body. As familial and kinship group exists inside and outside of the scan room, the uterus provides the continuity of frame that moves from the internal body, to the ultrasound screen, to the photograph as in *Juno* and *Maria Full of Grace*. This suggests that one of the qualities of the uterus as a frame is that it can be transposed and that this transforms the narrative around both the body and the foetus.

The pregnant person as an orientation point has a gentleness that can be compared to the gentleness of the frame where narrative information exists in off-screen space. This gentleness depends on an interpretation of images and is a continuous process. The juxtaposition of conceptual images is fundamental to narrative progression whereby the frame can be seen as a premises for perception and an orientation point for the spectator, whether this frame is the screen, the ultrasound screen, the photograph or the body. In *Stephanie Daley*, the uterus is a metaphorical space where the narrative of characters intersects and the foetus and "baby" are both alive and dead according to the perception of the foetus whilst it is *in utero*. The frame of the uterus presents a narrative space that operates spatially whereby the perception of the foetus is changed as the location of the pregnant body changes as seen in *Maria Full of Grace* and

*Gestation.* The cinematic frame also relies on the perception (for spectator and protagonists) of off-screen narrative space where narratives are interpreted through collaborative coding, which makes sense of perceived images. Collaborative coding provides the perceptual glue that puts images into context and gains its strength in the telling and retelling of kinship ties, but also reinforcing the perceived image of the foetus. This demonstrates an interconnectedness that is present in distinct images of, for example, the technological image of the foetus in the ultrasound scan or as a portable image in the ultrasound photograph. The narrative space of the uterus can encompass distinct narrative threads and can be considered a location that exists both on-screen and off-screen as a part of a conceptual narrative. There is a tension between the non-interacting technology of the ultrasound scan and the interaction in the scan room that is dependent on the collaboration of narratives. The narrative space of the uterus describes the dynamic between the narratives of protagonists and spectator, which rely on emotional engagement and embodied recognition. The uterus is, therefore, an embodied space which enables an interaction between the pregnant person and those around them. The uterus is also an embodied narrative space where protagonists and spectator can bring embodied knowledge and memory to create an emotional resonance. The narratives that are produced are dependent on and influenced by the interiority of the uterus. In the next chapter, I investigate more closely the interior of the uterus by engaging with Sawchuck's and Kroløkke's notion of bio-tourism to explore narratives influenced by the interior of the uterus.



## CHAPTER TWO

### Internal Landscapes and Biotourist Narratives

Although the idea of biotourism originates in film analysis, the significance of interconnected narratives around the uterus – already investigated in relation to the scan – has not been tackled in film analysis. Biotourism articulates the dynamic between the external world and the internal body and suggests that this dynamic is influenced by human interaction and personalised narratives. This chapter draws on a biotouristic framework to investigate the nature of uterine space, looking at how narrative is created around this internal space. I apply the notion of biotourism – which Sawchuck (2000) introduced into film analysis, and Charlotte Kroløkke (2010; 2011)<sup>96</sup> and Roberts (2012a; 2012b) brought to scanning – as an analytic framework to investigate the films in this chapter *The Milk of Sorrow/ La teta asustada* (2009), *Quinceañera /Echo Park* (2006), *Ain't Them Bodies Saints* (2013), and *Apio verde* (2013).<sup>97</sup> I expand the notion of the biotourist narrative to articulate the shift from the internal to the external in the narrative of each film. All four films are domestic dramas, but they are positioned differently within film genres. *The Milk of Sorrow* is a coming-of-age film made as a response to ethnographic studies of communities fragmented by civil war. *Quinceañera* is a teen movie, which describes the intergenerational conflict caused by a young girl's pregnancy. *Ain't Them*

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<sup>96</sup> Kroløkke's empirical ethnographic research was carried out in ultrasound clinics that offered a foetal ultrasound as part of regular antenatal check-ups in Copenhagen, Denmark and Albuquerque, USA. The clientele in Copenhagen was largely white middle-class women and in Albuquerque the clientele was mainly Native American and Hispanic.

<sup>97</sup> Sawchuk describes the journey through the inside of the body in *Fantastic Voyage* (1966, Fleischer, USA) by considering the interior body as a bioscape. She notes that LIFE magazine (1962) had already described the internal landscape in their series on the human body. In the December issue of that year, artist Arthur Lidov illustrated the journey of the sandwich through the body. The colourful and stylised paintings were given the background of landscapes of hills and valleys, coral reefs under the sea, and the sky.

*Bodies Saints* is a love story that follows many conventions of the Hollywood western and *Apio verde* is a drama thriller or horror. Despite their differences, all four films are concerned with intergenerational relationships, and interlocking narratives. In these interlocking narratives, the dynamic between the internal and the external body expresses different points of view in relation to the embodied experience. I investigate the implications for narrative analysis when the space of the uterus is transformed into an undiscovered territory and internal landscape.

Transforming the nature of anatomical imagery through biotourism results in a more nuanced interpretation of internal space and establishes that interior bodily space can be read as a physical landscape. The biotourist narrative illustrates how internal space is negotiated by protagonists and interpreted by the spectator-viewer. When the cinematic frame becomes a premises for perception – as discussed in Chapter One – the shift from the visual to the conceptual marks the transition between on-screen and off-screen space, and in biotourism this shift is from the internal to the external, and from the inside to the outside of the body. According to Sawchuck, there are four essential qualities of biotourism: the transposition of scale from miniature to gigantic; transformation of anatomy into landscape; the metaphorical voyage from the dark to the light; and a rhetoric of the sublime (2000: 11). It is the first two qualities that I consider most relevant to narratives around the uterus: the transposition of scale, and transforming anatomy into landscape. In the first, the foetus and the uterus are transformed in scale and, in the second, the uterus becomes a landscape or bioscape.<sup>98</sup> I consider the notion

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<sup>98</sup> The bioscape has also evolved to include many things including the aesthetic of imaging microscopic life forms such as bacterium and cells in both animals and plants by magnification. This aesthetic depends on taking the internal object and transforming the scale so that it becomes a distinct image – a hyperreal image – removed from its original context. The Olympus BioScapes digital imaging competition which brings together art and microscope imagery has been in existence for a decade and its subject matter includes animal fibroblasts and microscopic plants ([www.olympusbioscapes.com](http://www.olympusbioscapes.com)). In another artistic venture, the inside of the artist's body becomes subject matter for Mona Hatoum as she films her intestines in her art works *Corps étranger* (1994) and *Deep Throat* (1996).

of the bioscope is one of the most important crossovers between film analysis of the internal body and the ethnographic study of the foetal ultrasound, as Roberts (2012a: 99), Kroløkke (2010: 142), and Sawchuk (2000: 14) also note in their work. For Sawchuk, the bioscope ‘enlarge[s] somatic space, rendering [the] most infinitesimal cells, molecules and genetic structures into images on a scale that [...] can more easily [be] comprehend[ed]’ (9). Once the uterus becomes a bioscope, then, it can be mapped and described in terms of this shifting scale. In addition, the uterus is constructed, according to Roberts, ‘as an alternative, metaphorical space in which one might travel to “see” or even “meet” the foetus [through] personalised narratives [and] imagined interactions’ (2012a: 94). The metaphorical meeting space inside the uterus suggests that the experience of meeting the foetus, even if it is separate or separated from the body in the scan, is dependent on conceptualising and transforming the anatomy of the body.

### **Transposing Scale**

Biotourism reinterprets and reconfigures anatomy by transforming the scale of internal space. The fascination of seeing a full-size human become the size of a blood cell or the human heart being larger than the human is a recognisable trope of the science fiction genre and the family film.<sup>99</sup> It is the transposition of scale from miniature to gigantic, according to Sawchuk, that causes the spectator (either the viewer or other characters) to express wonder at the internal landscape rather than the intricacies of narrative (2000:12). The transposition of scale is not only dependent on the visual, however, as it depends on the ability of the spectator to conceptualise what this change in scale means. In the foetal ultrasound, an understanding of narrative enables the foetus to be read as a visual part of a biological process, but it also enables

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<sup>99</sup> Sawchuk mentions films that rely on the transposition of scale for their narrative purpose, including *Honey*, *I Shrunk the Kids* (1989, Joe Johnston, USA/Mexico), *Toy Story* (1995, John Lasseter, USA) and *The Borrowers* (1997, Peter Hewitt, UK/USA). This fascination with anatomical scale is also seen in films from the same era such as *Big* (1988, Penny Marshall, USA), and the trilogy of films about anatomical scale and the uterus in the *Look Who’s Talking* franchise (1989-1993).

the foetus to be read as a conceptual image of a “child” or “baby”. When Sawchuck suggests that the journey through internal space is part of the ‘fantasy that one can voyage into the interior space of the body without intervening in its life process, with silent footsteps, without leaving a trace’, she does not acknowledge the importance of conceptualisation (2000: 21). The fantasy of not leaving a trace suggests that spectatorship has been managed or interpreted and the fantasy, I argue, is not in the journey, but in the perception of a voyage. When applied to the foetal scan the voyage into internal space is not merely looking without leaving a trace, as Roberts points out: it ‘involves interpreting and it is the act of interpreting’ that influences and changes the spectatorial relationship around the foetus (2012a: 99). Therefore, the spectatorial dynamic of a biotourist journey as one of spatial change or transformation relies on interpretation expressed through multiple narratives. Transforming internal space by reconfiguring scale, therefore, is a form of storytelling. As Kroløkke suggests, biotourism articulates a way of demystifying and ‘deconstruct[ing] scientific storytelling’ in relation to the scan, but it also recognises the physicality of the interior body (2010: 139). This physicality, in the way I read each film, revolves around the uterus as an embodied space.

The uterus as an embodied space has a distinct quality as the site for reproduction, and this impacts on how the bioscape of the uterus is understood. In biotourism, particularly in the way Sawchuk uses the term, the internal landscape involves the whole body, which is mapped by visually recognised landmarks – the heart, the lungs, the blood vessels and the brain – whereby each bodily part is represented by its physiological function. These individual functions are then seen as an integral part of the whole person. In the foetal ultrasound scan, biotourism is fundamentally different. Recognition is mapped by visually identifying part of the foetus’s body (leg, head, toes, face) and the mother’s body (placenta, umbilical cord, uterine wall). This fragments the physiological process by changing the nature of the internal landscape, opening

it up to interpretation and foregrounding the foetus. The foetus then becomes the central feature of the ultrasound where 'by visually objectifying the foetus, it becomes "alive"' (Kroløkke, 2010: 21). This objectification echoes Petchesky's notion of the fetishised foetus in the scan where the image of the foetus, separated from the pregnant woman, is 'suspended in space' (1987: 277). Understanding the foetus as a fetishistic image in this way, however, whilst addressing the cultural iconography of the scanned foetus, does not fully address the way the foetus, or rather the technological image of the foetus, sparks a narrative response. By narrative response, I mean the engagement of the spectator and protagonist to the uterus as a narrative space which – given the complexities of the narratives around the uterus – is a self-reflective process. This self-reflection concerns the physiological understanding of pregnancy and the physicality of the foetus, but prioritises neither. Rather, these narratives are concerned with the perception of the uterus as a bioscape.

The way the bioscape of the uterus is perceived highlights the fragmentation or the slippage between the reproductive body and the foetal image and suggests that the process of negotiating the image is different depending on who is looking at it. Fragmentation also suggests a coming apart – a degradation – or even a distortion where, in the scan, 'the foetal-maternal environment is turned inside out, the private made semi-public and the foetus is brought alive' (Kroløkke, 2011: 33). The uterus turned inside out is a visceral image that not only fragments the maternal body; it also fragments and distorts the imagery of the whole body. The landscape of the body is changed conceptually. Making the uterus – and the foetus – public, therefore, allows the space of the uterus to be read as separate and outside of the body. In this process, the foetus is turned out to public gaze whereby the actual foetus disappears as it "comes alive" or rather the foetus becomes something else as a result of this negotiation of imagery. This idea of a negotiated conceptualised spectatorship around the reproductive body speaks to the debate around the

pregnant body, which focuses on the separation of the foetus from the pregnant body, and suggests that corporeality, as a concept, is a crucial part of understanding this separation.

### **Internal Architecture**

Perception around the bioscope of the uterus (which is a conceptual space) transforms narratives through corporeal sensibility. While corporeal sensibility can describe the relationship of the lived body to the environment, it can also explain the way a film is constructed for effect. Giuliani Bruno, comparing film to architecture, says that both are visual media experienced haptically as a ‘spatial form of sensuous cognition’ and that ‘film is a modern cartography [where] its haptic way of site-seeing turns pictures into an architecture, transforming them into a geography of lived and living space’ (2002: 6-9).<sup>100</sup> Bruno’s detailed analysis of the relationship between art, architecture and film helps to contextualise the interconnectedness of narrative through lived space and to see how the cartography of the uterus is influenced by the corporeal sensibility of the protagonists and spectator. Corporeal sensibility, however, is not only an embodied relationship with space: film form lends itself to an on-screen corporeality. A cartography of the uterus, therefore, needs to address the wider context of what Martine Beugnet describes as ‘the specificity of film’s corporeality’ which includes, among others, the effect of rhythm, tone, and framing (2007: 6-10).<sup>101</sup> Corporeality, therefore, depends on the corporeality of the film, the corporeality of the protagonists, and the corporeality of the spectator whereby the perception of the biotourist voyage through the uterus is dependent on all three.

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<sup>100</sup> Bruno’s *Surface: Matters of Aesthetics, Materiality, and the Media* tackles the subject of materiality in the arts as well as film (2014).

<sup>101</sup> Beugnet’s work on French cinema intersects with the work of Jenny Charmarette (2012), who speaks to the importance of phenomenology and film.

Bringing together three corporealities in this way demands a language of analysis that speaks not only to the spectatorial dynamic, but also to the physicality of the senses. The interconnectedness of differing corporealities can be expressed by paying attention not only to the visual qualities of observation, but also to the sensorial quality of the film where watching the film becomes, as Barker suggests, an ‘*intimate* experience [and] *close* connection’ rather than only visual (2009: 2; original emphasis). This echoes what Sobchack says of the way the film presents itself to the spectator through its materiality. Marksian haptic visuality, which describes the sensation of being able to experience screen representations of texture and surfaces, goes some way to describe the physicality that the screen generates, but Barker extends this to include bodily reactions to screen representations, which are felt in distinct ways through the skin surface, musculature and viscera as both physiological and emotional. The visceral nature of spectatorship can be taken to be a description of how a film is received by the spectator rather than a close analysis of the film’s corporeality: bringing these two elements together ensures that the space of the uterus lends itself to a discussion on corporeal sensibility that acknowledges both the physiological and the sensual.

Although the narratives in each film suggest that there is a form of corporeal communication taking place, it must be acknowledged that the uterus itself does not have inherent interactive qualities. In each of the four films in this chapter the protagonists respond to internal space – the bioscape of the uterus – but it is not accurate to say that this response is interactive, nor is it accurate to say that the foetus interacts with other protagonists. Rather than thinking about interaction, the process of communication or perception is, I argue, closer to Karen Barad’s concept of agential realism. Barad introduces the idea of ‘intra-actions’ as a way to ‘signify the

‘inseparability of “objects” and “agencies of observation”’ (1998: 96).<sup>102</sup> This inseparability suggests a fluid intra-action where the screen image is an integral part of the dynamic between protagonist and spectator, described by Sobchack as ‘the *perception of expression* and the *expression of perception*’ (1992: 5; original emphasis). Barad insists that the object (and I include in this the foetus and the uterus) does not come before interpretation and that agency is not something that is assigned, but always an interconnection. This suggests that interconnectivity through intra-action is crucial to understanding the dynamic surrounding the narrative space of the uterus, which, in the ultrasound scan, emphasises the interconnection between the body, the spectator and the technology. There is, therefore, a tension between the notions of separateness and connectedness.

Inasmuch as the ultrasound creates a separation between the pregnant body and the foetus, there is a sense that the separation is, in part, owing to the unacknowledged importance of the embodied experience. Meyers argues that although the ultrasound scan ‘visually deletes pregnant bodies’, there is an interconnectedness of the machine with the body, and with the embodied existence that is essential to understand (2010: 198-201). Her argument seeks to ‘rearticulate the technical aspects of fetal image production’ in order to investigate how the scan can be considered as part of an embodied experience (199). The embodied experience, she suggests, depends on interconnectivity, not only in the scan room but also in the social environment. This brings her work, as she says, into dialogue with Latourian notions of interconnectedness in the social environment where technology is intrinsically bound to a social

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<sup>102</sup> Barad takes physicist Niels Bohr’s work on observation in quantum physics and uses it to develop a feminist framework for discussing the piezoelectric crystal in the ultrasound scan. She discusses materiality, technology and embodiment – including the way the ultrasound transducer acts as both a transmitter and a receiver – to examine the ‘relationship between the material and the discursive’ that is, for Barad, the central element to agential realism. She argues that agential realism is a feminist framework that ‘challenges the disciplinary divide between epistemology and ontology’ and she names the process as ‘epistem-onto-ology’ or an ‘epistem-onto-logical framework’ (1998: 120).

and cultural matrix (1987), and with the Deleuzian notion of interconnectedness as a ‘fold’, where each fold has an effect on the whole, despite its spatial position (1993). Meyers suggests a refocusing on how bodies might be seen to ‘interact’ organically with technologies and speaks to the complexity that connects the pregnant body to visualising technologies. Interconnectivity also offers a way to understand how the uterus as an unseen space within the body can affect other bodies that it “touches”, wherein touch expresses both the physical in relation to pregnant embodiment and conceptually in the sense of evoking emotion. Both notions of touch when considered together can be expressed as intra-action.

Intra-action as biotourism makes sense of the uterus not only as a metaphorical conceptual space, but also as one that is already a distinct bodily space. A biotourist journey could be described as any journey through the lived body yet when talking about the uterus it is important to acknowledge that this bodily space is invested with cultural meaning and emotion distinct from other organs or space in the body such as the heart or abdomen.<sup>103</sup> Not only is the uterus a physiological location where another human being can grow, it is understood as a heavily gendered space integrally linked to the female in a way that other parts of the body are not. Although the space is gendered physiologically, the meaning created by and attached to narratives around the uterus is not inherently gender-specific, but this does not negate the distinct ways in which the female and male reproductive body are understood. The male reproductive organs, for example, do not have the same identity as a cultural and emotional space as the uterus in the female reproductive body, although the male bodily fluids do, however, have some cultural significance. Emily Martin says that gender stereotypes in medical

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<sup>103</sup> Joyce suggests that imaging such as MRI, particularly of the brain, can equate the visualisation or photographic image with the person to indicate not only health but also to ‘reveal one’s identity’ (2008: 2). This suggests that parts of the body can reveal something about the individual without this being connected to, say, gender.

texts describe the anthropomorphic way the egg and sperm are given male and female (performative) gender characteristics and describes the way sperm ‘have a mission’ to ‘penetrate’ the ovum with their ‘whiplashlike motion and strong lurches’ on a ‘perilous quest’ (1991: 489). She compares this to the ‘large and passive’ ovum which has been sitting ‘on the shelf [from birth], slowly degenerating and ageing like overstocked inventory’ (486-89). Monica J. Casper explains that ‘sperm is assessed for what it can tell us about an individual man [but it is] not yet widely used to measure and make predictions about the eventual demise of the species’. The bodily fluids of the female reproductive body – such as breast milk – Casper says are ‘made to speak about more broader collectives such as families, communities, nations, and even the planet’ (2009: 128-29).<sup>104</sup> This explains why breast milk – which physiologically relies on the intra-action of the uterus and the foetus – is positioned as capable of transmitting trauma in the *Milk of Sorrow*, and sperm can be seen to represent masculinity and fecundity in *Quinceañera*. The interconnection of perception and conceptual understanding of what is happening in the uterus, therefore, is dependent on a spatial remapping of the uterus.

In order to contain this anthropomorphising of the sperm and the ovum, the architecture of the uterus must change. The gender difference in the way bodily products described influences how the pregnant body is read as a cultural or social embodied site. A cartography of the uterus

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<sup>104</sup> The breast and breast milk have significance in Greek mythology as Marilyn Yalom explains (1997). The Amazonian warriors cut off their left breast so that they could wield a sword effectively while Zeus allowed his son, Hercules, to latch onto Hera’s breast so that by drinking her milk could become immortal despite his own mother’s mortal status. Yalom notes that, according to myth, Hera’s spurt of breast milk created the Milky Way (20-23). The association of Christ and the breast, she explains, emerges in the thirteenth century when the Virgin Mary’s breast milk is seen as ‘spiritual nourishment’ (46). She makes the observation that the link between blood and milk comes from the work of early physicians such as Hippocrates who believed that blood became breast milk (206). This association of blood and breast milk is also illustrated by da Vinci in his – otherwise accurate – anatomical drawings, which show breast milk coming from the spinal cord made from blood that has been fed with sperm in *The Hemisection of a Man and Woman in the Act of Coition* (c. 1490-92; held at the Royal Collection Trust).

depends on understanding the interconnection or intra-action that the uterus generates where the conceptual space of the uterus “touches” the corporeal space of other bodies and the screen. The changed corporeality of the uterus can be understood through this intra-action. In this way, I suggest that the uterus also underpins the corporeality of the spectator, the protagonists and the materiality of the screen.

### **Somatic Talk: Touch, Breath and the Belly**

Corporeality is not only a description of the materiality of the body or the materiality of the screen, it also describes the tactility of bodies and the way this affects narrative progression. A recurrent motif in the four films I am discussing in this chapter is the way senses such as vision, hearing and touch connect narratives and characters around the uterus. All the films suggest a haptic quality that is integral to the dynamic between the screen, spectator and protagonist. The senses – including touch and breath that exist as tactility and as voice – suggest presence on the screen, and can emphasise the distance between protagonists and the spectator. As indicated earlier, I use the word touch to signify Marksian haptic visuality as well as the sensorial connection between protagonists that is physiological, conceptual and emotional. The senses connect narratives diegetically and non-diegetically so that on-screen and off-screen narrative information is brought together through the corporeality of bodies.

The voice has a corporeal quality whereby it can “speak to” that which is inside the body, to create a conceptual image that exists off-screen. The voice can “touch” and be touched by the internal landscape of the uterus so that there is dialogue that is addressed to the foetus, even if the foetus does not respond. This sound and dialogue exist as connecting forces between bodies. The voice-over is part of the narrative and its position in the narrative can be part of the sound as well as an integral part of the film’s corporeality through the use of voice-over. The voice-over defines character, but it also takes the place of physical presence so that it not only

progresses the narrative, but it also suggests a physical connection from the outside of the body to the inside. The voice-over, then, can be a way to signal narrative shifts, and can be a way to signal physical presence. For example, in *Ain't Them Bodies Saints*, the voice-over suggests that someone can hear a voice when letters are read, and that a character's presence is "felt" when their voice is heard. The narratives of the main characters are then connected by visual images and the sound of their voices, which places them spatially and geographically, whilst connecting them viscerally to each other. This includes dialogue, which is addressed to the foetus. Sallie Han (2009: 307) argues that 'belly talk', speaking directly to the foetus, is an important embodied communication.<sup>105</sup> This intra-action does not necessarily include the object in the dialogue, the foetus, but it does suggest that talking to the foetus 'accomplishes important cultural work [...] as kin and kinship become constructed through talk' (305). This suggests that the importance of belly talk is the way it reflects the preoccupations of the protagonist.

The intra-connection between the protagonists and the uterus is demonstrated in distinct ways within the corporeality of each film. In *Ain't Them Bodies Saints*, the use of the close-up on bodies, which show memories of touch and tactility, are shown in juxtaposition with close-ups that depict past physical encounters. In *Quinceañera*, the antagonistic relationship between daughter and father is emphasised by each being closely framed both separately and together, so that space is given in the frame for pregnant embodiment, which is the source of the antagonism. In *The Milk of Sorrow*, dialogue that concerns the uterus is juxtaposed with visual images of rituals around the dead, and the aftercare of the body. This tactility and visualisation demonstrates what Marks suggests is the power of the senses in that they 'may [...] be senses of knowledge (epistemology), vehicles of beauty (aesthetics), and even media of ethics' (2008:

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<sup>105</sup> Han's research is based on ethnographic research with pregnant women and their male partners between October 2002 and January 2004, in Michigan, USA.

125). Although she is talking here specifically about the sense of smell, it is nonetheless significant that she is arguing that the senses can provoke something more than a physical reaction and that they can be part of knowledge, aesthetics and ethics. This suggests that the senses are part of communication between bodies that invokes not only a narrative between bodies, but can also express a narrative that is not limited by corporeality. This can be seen as part of the sensual quality of sound and of voice.

The voice and the quality of the breath, then, adds an additional complexity to the corporeality of the films. As Davina Quinlivan points out, ‘the notion of breathing stimulates new ways in which to question the nature of seeing, perceiving and sensing things which are not always entirely visible in film [and investigates the] interstices between visibility and invisibility [where] sound serves to stimulate our perception beyond what is visible on screen’ (2012: 1). This confirms that sound moves the understanding of the film’s materiality beyond that which is seen. Quinlivan also makes a critical point when she says that although the study of the senses opens up increasingly rich readings of a film’s text, there is a silence in the lack of sound references in both Sobchack and Mark’s work which needs redressed. Quinlivan suggests that as well as haptic visuality there is also ‘haptic hearing’ (2012: 21). An appreciation of haptic hearing then strengthens the notion of the intra-actions between the protagonists on-screen and the hidden protagonist, in the form of the foetus, that takes place off-screen.

### **Spatial Tourists**

Metaphors that relate to the female reproductive body can help to understand why the uterus lends itself to refiguring as a bodily space. When factory metaphors are used to describe the roles that women and their practitioners play in pregnancy and childbirth, it is to describe the length and complexity of the process whereby it can be compared it to mass production. The machine metaphor, used by Martin, encourages reproduction to be read as production on a grand

scale and for birth to be considered as work, but it also suggests a spatial reconfiguration of the uterus where it can be transformed from a ‘home’ (for the foetus) into a factory (1987: 54-67).<sup>106</sup> The uterus also then becomes a machine, or even *the* machine, rather than the woman, in the birthing process. To understand this reading of pregnancy and birth, it is worth considering the recognised pregnancy model – the technocratic model – which is taken from the work of Robbie E. Davis-Floyd (1994). He describes the way childbirth (in the US), and the physical processes of the female body, is broken down into stages with certain rules and time constraints (*e.g.* first stage and second stage of labour). He explains that if these constraints are broken, there has to be technocratic interventions in the form of drugs, obstetrical instruments or operations. In this way, the reproductive body can be managed if it does not perform within these constraints. Davis-Floyd, in turn, takes his inspiration from the One-Two Punch model (itself a mechanical metaphor) of modern technology by Peter C. Reynolds whereby the natural bodily process is transformed by creating technology to replace it (1991: 1125-40). Another model – the holistic model – by contrast, prioritises the embodied experience of the pregnant women where the woman is trusted to birth with the help of female practitioners such as midwives and doulas rather than male obstetricians. Yet another model is the consumer model of childbirth, to which Kroløkke refers, that uses tourist metaphors. This movement between models of pregnancy and birth explains how pregnancy becomes a ‘mediated experience’ where it is used as a way for the pregnant person and those around them to frame their experiences and in doing so transform their lives (Kroløkke, 2010: 142). How the pregnant body becomes

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<sup>106</sup> Martin explores the way in which metaphors of production – the body as a machine that needs to be fixed – mimic gender inequalities in the childbirth process where male practitioners take ownership of the female body (1987: 54-67). Martin also describes the metaphors that describe the anthropomorphism of the sperm and the egg (1991).

detached from the uterus suggests that the emphasis on mediation means that neither the pregnancy, nor the space of the uterus belongs to the individual: it is communal.

When pregnancy becomes mediated, the foetus is also mediated so that it exists as a separate entity whose personhood is not dependent on the pregnant person. The way protagonists and spectator negotiate the narrative space of the uterus then can be described as a form of cartography whereby protagonists and spectator map and chart their way through the architecture of the uterus (and the screen). As Bruno suggests, 'film and architecture share a dimension of living [as] the space of one's lived experiences. In other words, they are about lived space and the narrative of space' (2002: 64). Pregnancy as an embodied state can be reassembled spatially so that the experience of the pregnant person becomes removed from the foetus. In this 'reconfiguration of space', the pregnant person is encouraged to travel through internal space to 'leave their bodies and enter a new spatial experience [becoming] both 'host [...] and visitor. She is both body and media' (Kroløkke, 2011: 16; 2010: 148). This suggests that not only does pregnancy transform the way the pregnant person sees and experiences their own pregnancy, it also transforms the way pregnancy and the foetus are seen by others. The pregnant body becomes a landscape that can be read as a cartography, but it also becomes a location. Biotourism, then is an 'analytical concept' where exploring new landscapes in the body and attributing values becomes a form of travel through the internal body where 'being a tourist means temporarily leaving one's home for a certain preselected destination [...] for the main sake of gaining new spatial experiences' (Jansson, 2002: 431).<sup>107</sup> Although this notion of tourism is culturally and historically specific, it nonetheless expresses the way spatial

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<sup>107</sup> Jansson notes that contemporary tourism is driven by the 'hyper-realities of the mediascape' where the physicality of geography and landscape has been replaced by representation. This representation can take the form of mediated texts used to market and advertise landscapes which in turn produce both real and 'phantasmagoric visions of the world' (2002: 432).

experiences that are created around an internal landscape depend on the use of metaphors around the internal body, the uterus, the foetus and the interior. The metaphors are created and styled in the rhetoric of journey and discovery where the uterine landscape (in the scan) becomes a ‘home, a playground, or a room’, and the uterine wall a ‘blanket, a pillow or a window’ (Kroløkke, 2010: 149). These metaphors encourage people to ‘experiment with new identities [as] social, collective events’ (2011: 19).<sup>108</sup> In this way, the journey through internal landscape generates a change of vocabulary, which, in relation to the uterus, suggests how narratives around the uterus are linked spatially to the protagonists, and interconnected with the other protagonists and their environment.

Biotourism and the biotourist narrative provide frameworks to describe how bodily space can be read as physical landscape. In order for the anatomy of the uterus to become a landscape, it must be considered a bioscape. Within this bioscape, transformation of scale allows the uterus to become a location that can be visited in order to “meet” the foetus, but also where the foetus can be transformed in scale so that it becomes ‘alive’. The transposition of scale articulates the “aliveness” of the foetus and this transposition suggests that although the inside of the body and the outside of the body are distinct locations, they are interconnected and form an intra-action. This suggests a renegotiation of spectatorship that takes into account the way the uterus and the foetus are understood when they are separated from the body.

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<sup>108</sup> Krøløkke relates these touristic metaphors to Orvar Löfgren’s notion of touristic locations as ‘cultural laboratories’ (2002: 7). Löfgren writes that vacationing in tourist locations does not only mean being on holiday, it can also be an expression of identity in relation to the landscape: a way of imagining and then reclaiming space, but also a way of exploring otherness.

### **The Biotourist Narrative in *The Milk of Sorrow***

The main protagonist in *The Milk of Sorrow* is a young woman, Fausta (Magaly Solier), who lives a sheltered life in present-day Peru. She lives in the outskirts of the capital Lima with her mother Perpetua (Bárbara Lazón) and her uncle's family. The family have been displaced as a result of the civil war in Peru. The family believe that Fausta has been affected by the *teta asustada*, the frightened teat, a condition caused by her mother's traumatic experience of attack and torture in the civil war. This *teta asustada* was caused whilst Fausta was in the uterus and as a baby, as a consequence of drinking her mother's breast milk. The condition means that Fausta is anxious around unfamiliar people and is prone to frequent nosebleeds and fainting. After Fausta's mother dies, Fausta takes a job working in the house of a middle-class pianist Aida (Susi Sánchez) so that she can pay to have her mother's body taken back to where she was born. She slowly gets accustomed to walking through the market to the house, but remains shy and taciturn. One day she faints and her uncle takes her to the doctor's where she is found to have a potato growing in her vagina, which is infecting her uterus. Fausta tells her uncle that she has not placed the potato there for contraception, but as a protection against violation. Fausta gains more confidence, but her employer steals the tune she sings every day saying she can earn her the pearls in her necklace if she does so. Although Aida does not give her the pearls she promised, Fausta manages to take her mother's body on the journey north to her homeland.

In the film, Fausta has a sophisticated knowledge of historical events that happened while she was in her mother's uterus and she recounts this memory through song as a way of recollecting the past, and contextualising the present. In song, Fausta retells her mother's testimony of violence and extends this testimony to create a biotourist narrative for herself and her body where her concern is to protect her body from violation. The film has two main themes: the first is the lived reality of a community displaced by civil war; and the second is the way a young

woman who has led a sheltered life establishes her adulthood in the outside world after the death of her mother. The title of the film is taken from the notion of fright – *susto* – as an embodied reaction to trauma and can be translated literally into English as ‘the frightened teat’. The film speaks to the reality of the lives of indigenous people who have been resettled in the capital Lima and the context of the film is taken from Kimberley Theidon’s ethnographic research, which catalogues the testimonies of women who were systematically sexually assaulted and raped during the 1980s civil war in Peru (2013).<sup>109</sup> Fausta exists on the edges of her own family’s lives. Although she lives as part of an extended family with her uncle and cousins, she avoids unnecessary speech and avoids eye contact with other people. The close relationship she has with her mother is established in the opening scenes where the spectator is told – by Fausta’s mother Perpetua – in graphic detail about the violence inflicted on their family. This violence results in the bodies of Fausta and her mother being imbued with *susto* and this manifests itself in different ways: Perpetua’s breast milk and nipples are contaminated by it, and Fausta’s entire body is infused with it making her prone to fainting and bleeding. The recollection of trauma is crucial to each woman as it justifies Fausta’s physical and emotional demeanour, and it provides continuity of testimony from the primary witness of trauma.

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<sup>109</sup> Theidon also catalogues cases of *susto* that are not specifically related to pregnancy, such as the embodied reaction of adults and children who were witnesses to assassination and torture or who were chased by soldiers (2013: 162). Theidon also notes that *susto* is not something that exists in one geographical area and is not exclusive to Peru but is seen as an embodied reaction to trauma, especially the circumstances of war, in other parts of the world (44). Her work is based on testimonies taken in 1995 after the Shining Path – *Sendero Luminoso* – war had finished; therefore, the testimonies (from the Ayacucho region in the Peruvian highlands that suffered during the war) are based on the long-term effects on the community and on individuals. Other embodied symptoms of trauma might include *iquyasqa*, a ‘profound, bone-penetrating exhaustion’ or *llakis*, ‘painful memories that keep passing through the heart’ (48). Later in the film, Fausta explains that her brother died from being caught by lost souls, as he had not kept to the edges of the path when walking. Although there is no evidence of *susto* in relation of her brother, the fact that they keep an x-ray of his stomach, suggests that they think that *susto* might have also been transferred to him.

The uterus becomes a shared embodied space that connects the two women. It is crucial for the spectator to understand the transposition of scale that allows Fausta, as an adult woman, to narrate her experience of being in the uterus. Their shared history of daughter and mother is described and creates an internal landscape which includes what the unborn (Fausta) can “see” from the inside of the uterus, what is happening outside of the pregnant body and what is happening *to* the pregnant body. The uterus is turned inside out and Fausta becomes the embodied narrator of her foetal self. Fausta narrates her embodied experience of her mother’s rape – and her father’s death – by describing what she saw and felt. She recounts this so that it becomes part of her present. Her narration is part of the grieving process for her mother, but it also enables Fausta to keep what happened fresh in her mind. Her testimony presents a challenge to the spectator. She recalls events that may have been witnessed by others and may be corroborated, but the story she tells is from the point of view of the foetus. The reliability of her testimony, therefore, depends on the spectator being able to imagine the foetus as capable of seeing and feeling. Importantly, Fausta’s memory suggests that the foetus has some objective understanding of what was happening whilst *in utero*. Even if the foetus was not capable of remembering or understanding and even if the recollection is an amalgamation of stories passed on to Fausta through her mother’s storytelling, her biotourist testimony is one of an embodied witness (foetus) who was present when the events took place.



Figure 26. Fausta narrates her experience of being in the uterus in *The Milk of Sorrow*.

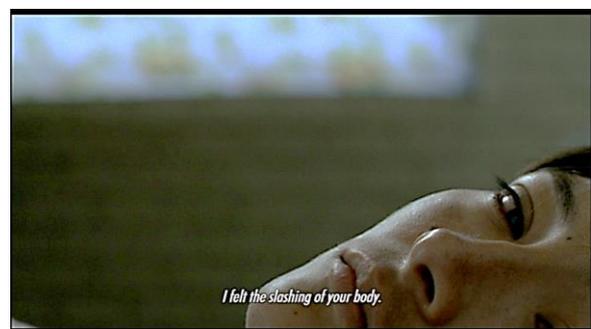


Figure 27. Fausta describes the blows on her mother’s body in *The Milk of Sorrow*.

The importance of the embodied testimony of the foetus is reinforced within the film as the spectator is brought into the action when Fausta directs her gaze to the camera after her mother's death. Fausta's narration is presented as an internal and extra-diegetic monologue. She directs her testimony towards her mother's body lying next to her in the bed. She is talking to her mother. It is important that Fausta's testimony is understood by the spectator. This is emphasised by the way Fausta – in profile – sings her opening line (Figure 26). Fausta's lips are closed and this emphasises that her memory is conceptual as part of her past-lived and present-living experience. Closing her lips isolates her testimony and encourages the spectator to listen to her dialogue as she says, 'I saw it all from your belly'.<sup>110</sup> By removing her diegetic dialogue, the spectator is presented with Fausta's gaze, which is not only the gaze of an adult woman, it is also the gaze of the foetus as it is Fausta as foetus who tells the story. The singing voice gives narrative detail, and takes the place of physical proximity in this duologue between the living and the dead.<sup>111</sup> In this way, Fausta offers a narrative as a way of interpreting her experience *in utero* for the spectator. Her biotourist narrative takes the form of a simple statement, which suggests that her foetal self was capable of seeing and feeling. This is confirmed when she turns her head to look out at the spectator and moves her gaze to look directly into the camera, saying 'I felt the slashing of your body' (Figure 27). By facing the spectator, whilst telling her mother she felt the slashing of her body, Fausta acknowledges her mother's testimony and forces the spectator to identify with the "aliveness" of the foetus who is directing their testimony towards them. This short sequence establishes the narration of the

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<sup>110</sup> This problematises Michel Chion's notion of *acousmètre* whereby the voice of a character originates off-screen so that the mouth and lips are not seen and the power of the voice is in the unseen narrator (1994: 129-37) and Ian Garwood's 'materiality of the voice-over' in the three-dimensional soundscape (2015: 99-138). It is perhaps closer how Mary Ann Doane's describes the internal monologue as the body 'manifest[ing] its inner lining' (1980: 41).

<sup>111</sup> A duologue indicates an interaction, which has equal narrative weight between two characters; the term is more usually used in theatre to describe a two-handed performance or for a significant dialogue between two characters. I have used the term here as it expresses the weight of the communication between the two women that the term dialogue cannot fully express.

foetus and, importantly, depends on the spectator's ability to transpose the foetus as narrator onto the body of the adult woman, Fausta. The foetal testimony is corroborated by Fausta who continues the narration begun by her now dead mother.



Figure 28. Fausta beneath the blanket with her mother in *The Milk of Sorrow*.

The narrative dynamic between Fausta and her mother is initiated in the mother's dialogue at the beginning of the film, which creates a call and response not only in the present, but also in the past and the present between the unborn, the living and the dead. Fausta's mother establishes that the foetus *in utero* could "see" the physical abuse she was subjected to when she says that her attackers had 'no pity for my daughter watching them from inside'. This is an acknowledgement of the way this attack would mark Fausta in the future. Fausta's response to her mother's story takes place when her mother is dead. Fausta strokes her mother's dead body (Figure 28) in the same way she stroked her hair when she was alive. This touching brings them together physically whilst the voice and song brings their story into the present. After she sings, Fausta buries her head in her mother's blanket and strokes her body through the material in order to be as physically close to her mother as possible, even joining her under the blanket in death. The physical closeness of mother and daughter establishes the way voice, sight and touch is important to the transfer of memories. As Perpetua tells her at the beginning of the film, 'I don't see my memories; it's as if I no longer lived'. Exchanging embodied history and memories, therefore, is critical to Perpetua's sense of being alive. As she dies, she transfers

these memories to Fausta so that they stay in the present forming a bridge between past and future. The call and response of the two women develops a biotourist dynamic where there is a constant interplay between the inside and the outside of the body. Each woman provides a narrative for the foetus by transposing the scale of the foetus through an interpretation of what it can see and feel.

The narrative strands that each woman describes around the uterus include the history of violence within the wider community. When Fausta's uncle insists, in the face of medical evidence to the contrary, that she does have *la teta asustada*, it is clear that Fausta's embodied condition is an important part of how he remembers the violence in his community. Fausta's physical responsiveness to intense emotions with frequent fainting and nosebleeds suggests that she is physically different from the other members of the family and extended community. This embodied difference gives her presence in the family a liminal quality where she is both part of and not part of their shared daily life. Fausta displays melancholy characteristics with a sense that she is sad, frightened or anxious.<sup>112</sup> Her embodied reaction to being anxious or frightened is to faint or to bleed from her nose. In physiological terms, the fainting and the bleeding from her nose are not related, according to a doctor. Both, however, are markers of *susto* and are considered part of the same embodied condition despite the lack of biological connection. Although Fausta is physically part of the family and fully involved with activities they organise, her liminality comes from her emotional rather than physical distance from the rest of the

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<sup>112</sup> Sigmund Freud notes the close relationship between mourning and melancholia. He describes the 'reaction to the loss of someone who is loved, contain[ing] the same painful frame of mind, the same loss of interest in the outside world' as not only the loss of a person but of 'some abstraction which has taken the place of [a loved person], such as one's country, liberty, an ideal, and so on'. He suggests, nevertheless, that mourning is a relationship to the world whilst melancholia is the relationship with one's ego (2001: 243).

family. Her psychosomatic condition contracted while she was in her mother's uterus also comes from the contaminated breast milk caused by her mother's experience of rape. This experience of rape, then, is shared by Fausta and her mother, but has repercussions for the rest for the community so that the biotourist narrative of the bioscape of the uterus becomes three things: the location that contains the unborn, an historical site for war crimes, and the window through which the unborn can "see" historical events.

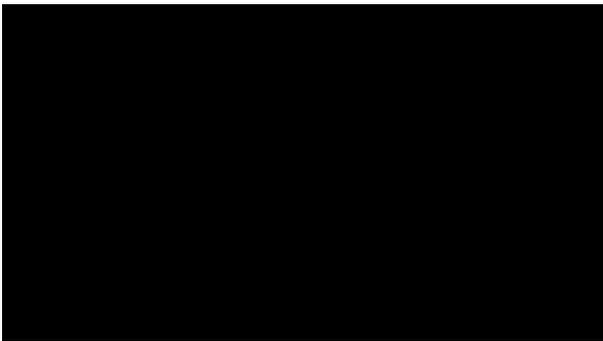


Figure 29. Perpetua begins her song over a blank screen in *The Milk of Sorrow*.



Figure 30. In the fade-up from black, Perpetua is frail and dying in *The Milk of Sorrow*.

The uterus as a location becomes part of the experience of violence and rape so that it becomes part of the shared embodied history and part of their shared oral history. As the film progresses, it is clear that this narrative is an important factor in Fausta's physical life and health. She protects herself from violation – rape – by inserting a potato into her vagina in order to place a physical barrier between her uterus and any possible rapist. Although it is the potato that is making her ill, Fausta has put it in her body as a response to the historic violation of her mother's body. The close proximity of Fausta as a foetus places them both at the site of this abuse, Fausta inside her mother's uterus. Their biotourist narrative is, therefore, partly as a result of this closeness. The close physicality and shared past of the women is demonstrated in the opening sequence. The film begins with the voice of Perpetua singing her memories of war and rape. Although she sings this to Fausta as the only protagonist in the room, her song is also for the

benefit of the spectator. Perpetua's voice-over monologue is sung over a black-out screen (Figure 29). The ambient sound of the room, which includes the wind blowing, forms a quiet but distinct sonic background and establishes the physicality of the room. This prioritises the mother's dialogue whilst placing her in the physical context of the room. This use of voice-over establishes some narrative detail: that the story being told is important, that it is in the past tense, that it uses descriptions of extreme violence and violation, and that it establishes that the victim was pregnant when she was raped. The tone of the voice is high and it is not clear whether the singer is young or old, male or female. When the image of the dying mother fades up from black, the juxtaposition of the image and the sound is profound (Figure 30). The serenity of the ageing, dying woman and the tender physicality of the two women serve as a counterpoint to the violence in her story.



Figure 31. The women communally wash Perpetua's body in *The Milk of Sorrow*.



Figure 32. Fausta washes her mother's nipple in *The Milk of Sorrow*.

The physical and emotional tactility between Fausta and her mother establishes how significant the loss of her mother is to Fausta; it also signposts that the loss of this emotional and physical contact forces Fausta to connect with a wider social world. The fact that historical memories, articulated through a biotourist narrative, are being kept alive by the interchange of dialogue is critical to them and to the wider community. Fausta's mother tells her to sing to her so that she can 'freshen [her] drying memory'. Their dialogue is played out physically as Fausta is seen in

close proximity to her mother, rearranging her hair and repositioning her on the bed as she is dying. When her mother dies, Fausta lies next to her on the bed positioning herself under the covers alongside her. Her mother's body is part of her everyday so that when she dies Fausta continues this close physicality, cleaning her mother's body and washing her clothes. She washes her mother's clothes so that she will not return to their village 'smelling of sadness'.<sup>113</sup> In a later sequence, although Perpetua is not producing breast milk, touching her nipple still represents the transference of the trauma – *susto* – through the frightened teat. The way in which the women from the community prepare Perpetua's body (Figure 31) establishes that she is not ostracised from the community and her body is touched by them all.<sup>114</sup> Fausta is directed to wash her mother's nipple (Figure 32) so that the other women will not become contaminated by touching it. It is only the nipple that represents the specific contamination of the uterus and reproductive system. By contrast, *susto* affects the whole of Fausta's body.

Fausta's embodiment of *susto* drives the narrative of the film. Her corporeality as a foetus directly affects her corporeality as an adult and in this way, there is a constant shift of focus between the inside of the uterus and the outside. Fausta's embodiment is fragmented as her experience as a foetus is made public. Fausta's embodiment is established by those around her before she is born, whereby her personal history is told and retold by her relatives as someone who embodies the traumatic past. This past belongs to the whole community, but manifests itself in Fausta as part of her corporeality so that Fausta's body represents the traumatic effect on her whole family as well as the larger community of people traumatised and displaced by war. Fausta's corporeality, therefore, is an integral part of a community coming to terms with

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<sup>113</sup> The washing of clothes, Theidon says, is meant to ease the journey of the soul to heaven (2013: 59).

<sup>114</sup> Paul Rodríguez describes the 'hands and arms, connected like rhizomes under the surface of the cotton sheet [that] functions as a metaphor of private-social memory and identity' (2016: 287).

its past and becomes a way of preserving memory.<sup>115</sup> It presents the memory as an embodied link to events, people and locations that depends on the presence of the foetus at that time. In this way, there is pressure from the community for Fausta to continue to display *their* trauma through *her* body in the same way that there is also pressure for her mother's body (in life and in death) to retain the essence of the community fright or *susto*.

The uterus is a shared space that not only unites mother and daughter; it also serves as a location that expresses a communal trauma. The physicality shared between mother and daughter is an integral part of their close relationship, but it is also part of an embodied connection that links the past experiences of the pregnant person and the foetus. The spectator is placed within the action and encouraged to make sense of the foetal narration by identifying with Fausta as she recounts her experience of seeing and feeling whilst *in utero* as part of a biotourist narrative. The transformation in scale of the foetus from miniature inside the uterus to the body of the grown woman outside of the uterus is emphasised by the constant reference to the body (both Fausta's and Perpetua's) as a conduit for narratives and memories of trauma. The transposition of scale also suggests that this trauma fundamentally changes the landscape of the uterus so that it becomes separate or separated from the body. This fragmentation allows the pregnant body and the uterus to be thought of as distinct.

### **Uterine Landscape in *Quinceañera***

The film *Quinceañera* is set in present-day Los Angeles and the main protagonist is Magdalena (Emily Rios), a fourteen-year-old school-girl who is planning her fifteenth birthday celebration, her *quinceañera*. During her dress fitting, her mother Maria (Araceli Guzman-Rico) and aunt

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<sup>115</sup> The intergenerational memory that Marianne Hirsch calls 'postmemory' – which describes the memories formed by second and third generation in relation to events that they were not part of – sits uncomfortably here (1997; 2012). The memory that Fausta embodies is her own as is her narration.

notice that she is getting too big for the dress, even though it has been specially altered for her. The older women wonder if Magdalena could be pregnant. Although she has not had sex with her boyfriend Herman (J. R. Cruz), her mother takes her for a pregnancy test. When the test proves positive, Magdalena's father Ernesto is furious and believes she is bringing shame on the family. Despite her protestations, Magdalena has to leave home and move in with her uncle Tomas (Chalo González) and cousin Carlos (Jesse Garcia). Magdalena and Carlos research the term 'pregnant virgin' and Magdalena finds out that it is possible to get pregnant when the sperm is still outside of the body. She tells Herman who begins to plan what he might do when the baby is older. Herman, however, tells his own mother that he has nothing to do with Magdalena's pregnancy and he goes away to school. Magdalena is then taken by her mother to see a doctor who examines Magdalena and tells them that her hymen is intact and that she has been telling the truth. She is still a virgin. When Ernesto hears this, he asks his daughter to forgive him and Magdalena eventually has her *quinceañera* whilst pregnant.

The changed landscape of the uterus and the effect this has on the wider community is shown through the narrative of Magdalena whose pregnancy is controversial because she is not yet an adult (woman), and because she claims that she has not had sexual intercourse. The film is set in Los Angeles in Echo Park, an area that in the past has traditionally housed the Mexican-American community, but is now being gentrified with an influx of young, white affluent Americans. The backdrop to the film, therefore, is of a community undergoing a rapid process of change. The community Magdalena belongs to is Catholic, but the ceremony *quinceañera* is not based on any religious ritual: it is a cultural tradition brought from South America to the US where it is not only a celebration of a significant birthday, it is also an important part of social identity within the Latin American community. Karan Ann Marling explains that the roots of this ceremony are obscure and might be Aztec or European and that the *quinceañera*

was only formally recognised as a ritual by the Catholic Church in the US in 2007 by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (2010: ix-3). This ceremony, therefore, sometimes includes a Catholic mass. The role of the event, however, remains a cultural one that functions to ‘transform [...] and physically connects a person to “Mexican culture” – a time and space that has particular meaning for each individual’ (Davalos, 2010: 20). As the *quinceañera* symbolises the transition of the girl from a child to an adult, it is common or even expected, according to Davalos, that there are disagreements between the girl and her parents (18). In the film, minor disagreements, such as wearing a second-hand dress, turn into bigger arguments when Magdalena asks for an expensive Hummer limousine to take her to the ceremony. These arguments are then given much higher stakes within the narrative when her pregnancy is discovered.

The narrative suggests that the main concern of other people is not the pregnancy itself, but the immorality of losing virginity under the age of consent, outside of marriage, and before the *quinceañera*. The narrative also revolves around the impossibility of non-penetrative fertilisation – the virgin birth. The fact that Magdalena has technically not had sex complicates the narrative around her uterus for all the protagonists, including Magdalena and her father Ernesto. For Magdalena, the fact that she is pregnant is as significant as the fact that she has not had sex. Despite the fact that both things are true, her pregnancy automatically means, to everyone else, that she is no longer a virgin. When her father reacts to her pregnancy with disgust, it is because of her lost virginity, rather than the pregnancy. Although Ernesto might have strong feelings about the presence of the foetus, he does not make these feelings clear. The space of the uterus, then, means different things to each of them. For Magdalena, the uterus is a location for reproduction and she is concerned about being pregnant. For Ernesto, the uterus is also a location for reproduction, but primarily it is a location for sin. In rage, Ernesto

constructs a biotourist narrative whereby his daughter has engaged in full penetrative sex and her uterus becomes a location whose spatiality it now identified as a place that contains sin, as well as the foetus.

Magdalena's changed corporeality affects her father so profoundly that he does not want her to be near him. Ernesto makes it clear in his dialogue that his perception of Magdalena has changed because of his changed perception of her uterus when he tells her that she is 'so full of sin that [she] can't admit the truth' and that her 'wickedness is there in front of [her] for the world to see'. Although sin is a moral concept rather than an object, the image of the uterus being "full" of sin transforms the spatiality of the uterus. Ernesto invites Magdalena to "see" the wickedness or evilness that is in front of her. Ernesto transforms the scale of Magdalena's uterus into something that not only he can see, but also that anyone can see – a bioscape – suggesting that his perception of its proportion has become distorted (the uterus in early pregnancy would still be deep within Magdalena's pelvis and not be seen) and in Ernesto's eyes it is gigantic. He acts out moral, religious and personal antipathy, which reflects his beliefs on sexuality, religion and morality. He expresses strong emotions, fuelled by quotations from religious texts, telling her that fornication is a sin against the body. He decides that he wants Magdalena to leave the house, and refuses to look at her.<sup>116</sup> His reaction demonstrates an extreme reaction to the changed integrity, or condition, of the uterus and by association Magdalena. His reaction also shows that his own corporeal integrity has been changed. On a deep physical level, Ernesto show that his emotional response moves through his whole body, from the viscera through the musculature to the external surface of his body, which is reflected in the texture of the film.

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<sup>116</sup> Ernesto quotes Corinthians 1, 6:18, which says, 'Flee fornication. Every sin that a man doeth is without the body; but he that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body' (1997: 210).



Figure 33. Magdalena insists she has not had sex in *Quinceañera*.



Figure 34. Magdalena's father calls her a liar in *Quinceañera*.

Ernesto's dialogue with Magdalena, as he confronts her about her pregnancy, is emotionally charged and their emotional distance is emphasised by their separate framing. Ernesto has already blamed his wife for allowing Magdalena to have a boyfriend. In two-shot with his wife in the centre of the frame sitting on the edge of the bed, Ernesto's torso is placed at the right edge of the frame in a hand-held shot. As he tells her 'look at the state she (Magdalena) is in now', the camera remains on his wife. The camera pans to the left as Magdalena enters the bedroom and speaks to him. A shot-reverse-shot sequence begins with the first shot of Ernesto in centre frame turning his back on Magdalena as he tells her to 'go away'. When Magdalena insists the pregnancy test is wrong, and that she has not 'been with a boy', Ernesto moves forward in the frame until they are in matching close-ups (Figure 33 and Figure 34). Ernesto insists that the test must be true, implying that he can "see" that her uterus. Ernesto does not contest the pregnancy or the presence of a foetus; rather, his explosive reaction is to the fact that he thinks she is lying to him. His reaction also demonstrates the biotourist dynamic between the internal body and the perception of it in relation to the outside world. The tone of their voices creates distance between them, while the close framing on each character emphasises their physical reactions and the intensity of their argument.

Ernesto's facial expression changes: his eyes widen, he draws back his lips to show his teeth, he leans forward and appears large in the frame. Magdalena remains in the same position, just at the door, as the camera moves into a close-up when it reframes on her face. The effect this has is to create a distance through the use of shot-reverse-shot instead of a two-shot, which emphasises the emotional distance between them. The distance is amplified by their voices culminating in Ernesto averting his gaze and saying, 'I don't want to see you'. This call and response is very different from the call and response of Fausta and her mother in both tone and sentiment, and it serves to create physical distance rather than physical closeness. It creates an affective circuit whereby the uterus, as part of Magdalena's internal body, creates a physical reaction, an affective intra-action, in Ernesto both internally and externally. His emotional, visceral gut reaction is expressed in his outward bodily movements as he paces the room, and turns his back on his daughter. The physical space between them also registers as emotional tactility: tactile, but not touching. Each protagonist moves towards the centre of frame and then away into the opposite side of the frame from each other, emphasising their physical and emotional distance. Ernesto rejects his daughter by not looking her, as if the bioscape of her uterus is a presence in the room between them. This rejection of eye contact is also a rejection of what is happening biologically within the uterus as his gaze is averted from Magdalena's uterus and its capacity to store vice.

When Magdalena meets with Herman, her boyfriend, the scenes contrast with the scenes with Ernesto, as for Herman the uterus is a location that functions as an unexpected receptacle for his sperm as well as the location for reproduction. Reproduction for Herman is something that is both happening and not happening. He accepts that Magdalena is pregnant, but is unable to admit his role in the pregnancy to his mother. The uterus, then, has a dual function, as a location in which his future child is growing, and as a location where someone else's child is growing.

The integrity of the uterus, for Herman, remains the same. As a way to prove his paternity, Magdalena shares medical information with Herman that she has found by searching for the term “pregnant virgin” on the internet. The information that she shares with Herman is about qualities that sperm possess. Their conversation is in contrast to that of Magdalena and her father. This is an intimate scene that is both serious and playful. Magdalena and Herman are positioned together in the frame and their shot-reverse-shot includes both protagonists in the frame. Magdalena reads to Herman that ‘sperm are very determined beings whose sole reason to exist is to get inside the fallopian tube’. By saying this, the scale of the sperm is transformed and anthropomorphised. The sperm’s determined journey is confirmed by Herman when he says that ‘my sperm must be pretty strong swimmers, huh?’ The architecture of the uterus in this conceptual journey through the body into the uterus is transformed and enables Herman to create an image of the foetus in the future when he says, ‘I’m sure he’ll be a great kid [...] we can make him a papoose and take him travelling with us’. For Magdalena, the biological question of conception is crucial. Her search for biological questions involves the transformation of scale, and the biotourist journey of Herman’s bodily fluids. The presence of the foetus in the uterus, however, precipitates a distance between the two.



Figure 35. In a hand-held shot, Magdalena leaves Herman’s house crying in *Quinceañera*.



Figure 36. Magdalena is isolated in the frame in *Quinceañera*.

Although there are many scenes in the film where the camera is hand-held, one of the most affecting, and noticeable, is when Magdalena is asked by Herman's mother to leave him alone. This sequence is all hand-held, but the action of the camera in each part of the sequence is different. Magdalena visits his home only to find that he is out of town and that his mother is the only person in the house. Magdalena's position in the frame begins to change as she is shot in close-up speaking to Herman's mother, then she moves to centre frame as she walks away from Herman's house (Figure 35). The camera is hand-held and placed in front of her as she walks. The camera follows her precariously looking forwards, but travelling backwards. This emphasises the embodiment of Magdalena's reaction. It also suggests the effect on the body of the biotourist narrative that has been created by Herman's mother. In this narrative, there is no "meeting" and "greeting" of the foetus, there is no familial recognition. There is, however, a recognition that Herman's mother is involved in a strong intra-action with the bioscape of the uterus. She is touched emotionally by the presence of the foetus, but this touching as part of an intra-action is negative. This reaction to the uterus is foreshadowed in a previous shot where Magdalena phones Herman and does not get a reply. While Magdalena telephones, the shot is wide enough to mask the movement of the camera (Figure 36). In this moment, there is a contrast between her previous intimate scenes with Herman, as this sequence is replaced by silence and her solitary position in wide-shot. In the foreground is a sapling that mimics her position rooted to the ground as she makes her phone call. Her liminality in the scene is emphasised as the football game in the background leads the spectator's eye away from Magdalena as she makes her telephone call and realises that Herman's mobile phone number has been disconnected. The presence of the foetus that initiated Herman's biotourist narrative of the "baby" in the future, has been replaced by the isolation of the pregnant person in the frame, as the pregnancy is acknowledged, but the foetus is rejected.

The space of the uterus becomes a contested site, not because it contains a foetus, but because the integrity of the bioscape has been breached. This is reflected in the corporeality of the film where Magdalena is framed according to how other protagonists perceive what is happening in the uterus and their relationship to this event. Her father averts his gaze from his daughter's body as a way to avoid "seeing" the sin as part of the bioscape that perceives of as a presence in the room. Herman cannot accept paternity in any real way, although he takes pleasure in the perception of his sperm being able to swim strongly, and the creation of a foetus that becomes alive for him only while it is in the uterus. The moment when Magdalena realises that the presence of the foetus has resulted in being rejected, not only by her father, but also by the biological father of the foetus, is the moment when her embodied reaction is reflected in the aesthetic of the scene. Magdalena's pregnancy precipitates a reaction, but the intra-action with the bioscape of the uterus depends on the biotourist dynamic, which influences whether the response is to the space of the uterus or the aliveness of the foetus.

### **A Conversation with the Foetus in *Ain't Them Bodies Saints***

*Ain't Them Bodies Saints* is set in an unspecified era, that might be the present day, in the southern states of north America, and the main protagonists are a young couple Bob Muldoon (Casey Affleck) and Ruth Guthrie (Rooney Mara) who find out they are expecting a baby just before they commit a robbery for which Bob is arrested.<sup>117</sup> A policeman is killed and Bob takes the blame for wounding a police officer Patrick (Ben Foster), although it was Ruth who fired the gun. While Bob is in jail, he writes frequently to Ruth. Ruth, meanwhile, gives birth to Sylvie (Kennadie and Jacklynn Smith) and settles with her daughter and is watched over by her neighbour and guardian Skerritt (Keith Carradine). Three years later, Bob escapes from jail,

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<sup>117</sup> It was the director's aim to evoke the cinema of the 1960s and 1970s. Although the film was set in Texas and much of the filming was done in that state, filming also took place in Louisiana.

after many attempts, and makes his way on foot across the county to Ruth. Bob has written to Ruth who has made plans to leave with him. Patrick knows that Bob has escaped so he questions Ruth and reads her personal letters from Bob. Ruth, however, insists that Bob is not coming for her and does not give Patrick any additional information. Bob finds his way to Skerritt's store where Skerritt warns him to stay away from Ruth and their daughter. He also warns Bob that there are people out to kill him. Bob then visits Ruth, but stays outside the house and only watches Ruth and Sylvie from outside. Later, Skerritt is shot and Patrick takes Ruth and Sylvie to the police station for their own safety. Bob, meanwhile, is cornered by a group of bounty hunters and shot. Patrick takes Ruth home, where they discover that her front door is open. Bob is found lying on the floor of the bedroom bleeding heavily. Sylvie comes into the bedroom and she sees Bob for the first time. He returns her gaze. Patrick takes Sylvie to another room and Bob dies in Ruth's arms.

Bob is separated from Ruth and his unborn child for most of the film and the narrative charts his traumatic journey back to them. Their lives are, therefore, fragmented, but their narratives are closely connected through their embodied experiences. Their embodiment is highlighted in the narrative through the juxtaposition of images, voices and music that bridges geographical spaces and locations, and in the repeated sequences of actual touching between protagonists.<sup>118</sup> The film is positioned within the western genre, including small-town life, shoot-outs, jailbirds and the battle for the female hand. The film's narrative core, however, relies on the spaces and silences between events and between protagonists. With its slow pace and repeated scenes, the spectator is encouraged to understand these spaces and silences as a dynamic of looking into the body as part of a biotourist narrative, particularly in Bob's extended conversation with the

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<sup>118</sup> Director David Lowery was an editor before he was a director, which may explain the attention to storytelling and character building through editing.

foetus. Corporeality in the film is expressed through the use of voice, close-up framing, and touching of protagonists. This tactility is not always because characters are in close proximity, but to emphasise the close embodied connection that Bob and Ruth have experienced as a couple and to stress that this tactility influences the intra-action between Bob and his unborn child.



Figure 37. Bob talks to the foetus through Ruth's body in *Ain't Them Bodies Saints*.



Figure 38. Bob is cradled by Ruth as he dies in *Ain't Them Bodies Saints*.

Although Bob is separated from Ruth, his dialogue continues as a voice-over, which emphasises their physical distance and emotional closeness and allows him to construct a biotourist narrative in relation to his unborn child. In one of the film's opening sequences, Bob talks to his unborn child (Figure 37). Importantly, this sequence is intercut with the final sequence of Bob dying (Figure 38), which illustrates how powerful the spoken narrative of Bob has been throughout. In his voice-over, he describes his imagined relationship with his daughter whereby he creates a conceptual image of a future together. In this future, he has built a house, he and Ruth have grown old, and their grown child is returning home. His dialogue is taken from the opening scene, but its importance in creating a conceptual image becomes significant when the dialogue, as a conceptual narrative, is finally superimposed over the image of Sylvie and Bob meeting for the first time at the end of the film (Figures 39 and 40). It is this moment that punctuates the biotourist narrative: he has no future with his grown daughter. This moment is

reflected in the cinematography of each sequence where matching shots encourage the spectator to empathise with Bob and to understand that his biotourist narrative was created while the foetus was in the uterus.



Figure 39. Sylvie sees Bob for the first time in *Ain't Them Bodies Saints*.



Figure 40. Bob sees Sylvie for the first time in *Ain't Them Bodies Saints*.

The two sequences are intercut so that the end of the film establishes that Bob has been talking to the foetus throughout the film and not to Ruth. Matching shots emphasise the connection between events at the beginning of the film and in the final sequence, and they also emphasise the physicality of Bob and Ruth's relationship. In the opening sequence (Figure 37), Bob's head is cradled by Ruth in her lap as he sings through her dress to the foetus. In a matching shot at the end of the film, Ruth cradles Bob as he is dying. In the opening sequence, Bob stops singing and begins to talk and we think he is talking to Ruth. His dialogue is superimposed over the final sequence and he says, 'let me tell you about the future... in the future I am a very old man'. As soon as Bob says, 'let me tell you about the future', there is an immediate cut to a close-up on Bob's bloodied hand as Ruth takes his gun from him. His dialogue carries on and forms an audio bridge between the two sequences, which continue to be intercut, as he continues his narrative of the future: 'we're in our house where everything is green and the sun's almost set'. The intercutting slows at this point to reflect not only the resonance of the moment father and daughter meet, but also the dissonance between the dialogue of the future and the visual reality

of the present. When Bob says, ‘We’re waving to somebody and maybe that somebody is you and we’re really happy to see you’, his daughter Sylvie comes through the door (Figure 39). The audio bridge of the dialogue is crucial at this point. In reality, Bob cannot speak (Figure 40) and his dialogue becomes extra-diegetic. As Sylvie comes into the room and sees him for the first time and the camera cuts between mid-shots of Bob and Sylvie, we understand that Sylvie is simultaneously the foetus who Bob was talking to in the uterus, the child standing in front of him, and the grown woman of Bob’s imagined interaction. Bob has initiated a biotourist narrative, whereby the uterus has become a metaphorical space or landscape – a bioscape – where Bob has been able to “meet” and “greet” his unborn child. The foetus has “come alive”, and the uterine environment turned inside out. By withholding information from the spectator at the beginning of the film and intercutting the opening and final sequences, and by transforming the foetus in scale the spectator understands that, for Bob, the arrival of Sylvie at the door is profound. His personalised biotourist narrative, therefore, is an *imagined* interaction.

In fact, it is not an interaction at all, his dialogue forms an intra-action that includes Ruth. At the opening of the film when Bob sits in the truck with Ruth, his head in her lap, opening her dress, singing along to the radio to the foetus in her belly, telling Ruth, ‘that’s what you’re supposed to do – sing ‘em songs’, the scene is intimate. The camera begins in the truck with close-ups on the faces of the two protagonists, but then cuts to a tracking shot around the outside of the truck. The doorframes and windows of the car then obstruct some of the visuals, which means the spectator has only glimpses of their conversation. As it becomes clear later, this cut to a tracking shot also marks a temporal ellipse where the spectator loses access to narrative information. This information is crucial to the emotional intra-action around the uterus. It is not clear at this point in the narrative that Bob is talking to the foetus rather than Ruth, but this sequence establishes the close physical relationship between the two protagonists. They have

only just found out that Ruth is pregnant. This intimate scene takes place immediately before Bob commits a crime that will separate them for the rest of the film. The fact that Bob tells the foetus about their future signals his ability to transform the moment in the present to an imagined future, and it foreshadows their separation. Moreover, the rhythm of his voice is influenced by its timbre so the slow drawl of his narration contrasts with the violence of imagery towards the end of the film. Bob's voice is an important facet of his character. Most specifically, his voice becomes central to the spectator, and to Ruth, as it embodies his tactile presence in the film. This tactility is reflected by the way Bob talks to the foetus, but he touches Ruth, then when Bob's voice reads his letters, Ruth holds the paper on which he has written. Later, when Bob is dying in Ruth's arms, their entwined hands mimic the image of them both together inside their truck at the beginning of the film. The tactility between Bob and Ruth is an integral part of the biotourist narrative as it encourages the spectator to understand that there is a dynamic between his and Ruth's bodies, the internal body (the uterus and the foetus) and the external world (Sylvie's arrival).

The constant resonance between the past, the present and the future is echoed in the physicality between Ruth and Bob. When Bob returns at the end of the film dying from a gunshot wound he is found in Ruth's bedroom sitting on the floor holding a gun (Figure 41). As he lies against the bedroom dresser, it is obvious that he does not have the physical strength to hold himself for much longer. Ruth supports his body and he lays his head on her lap, mimicking the position they were in inside the truck in the earlier scene. The camera cuts to a close-up on their faces where the sound of their breathing accompanies their physical contact as they touch each other's mouths, noses, faces and hair and Ruth says, 'I've been waiting for you' (Figure 42). This scene reflects their reunion on screen. Although the characters have been present throughout, with Bob being represented by his voice on many occasions, their dialogue repeats the refrain of

their separation: ‘will you wait for me’ and ‘I’ll be there waiting for you’. This is coupled with a musical leitmotif that plays in the van at the beginning of the film, and in Ruth’s singing to Sylvie at bedtime. The music is also used to signal empathy in the spectator in the way the close-up aesthetic marks their meeting, the progression of their relationship and the point of his death.



Figure 41. Ruth cradles Bob as he is dying in *Ain't Them Bodies Saints*.



Figure 42. Ruth kisses Bob as he is dying in *Ain't Them Bodies Saints*.

As Bob dies, a close-up on Ruth’s face cuts to a tracking mid-shot of Ruth’s smiling face in the truck from the earlier scene; at this point, Bob’s dialogue forms a diegetic and non-diegetic bridge between the two scenes to highlight the shift in temporality. As Ruth takes the gun from Bob’s heavily blooded hand, his earlier dialogue describes the future: ‘in the future, I’m a very old man. We’re in [...] our house where everything is green and the sun’s almost set. We’re waving to someone and maybe that someone is you [and] we’re really happy to see you’. This demonstrates the effect of biotourist narrative throughout the film. By juxtaposing the past and the present within the frame, the meaning of that juxtaposition resonates over the final scene. The (conceptual) dialogue between Bob and the foetus establishes that he has transformed the foetus in scale to a person who has grown and is returning home. As well as transforming the foetus into a grown person, Bob also establishes his relationship with the foetus, emphasising that this relationship is separate from Ruth. This is clear in the final sequence when the dialogue

from the opening sequence is revealed. When Ruth asks him to carry on telling her about the house, he tells Ruth ‘I’m not talking to you’. These sequences at the beginning and end of the film emphasise, through matching mid-close-ups and close-ups, the physicality of the two protagonists. It also emphasises the temporal ellipses throughout the film in which the conversation he has with the foetus encourages him to return, and to remember Ruth’s pregnancy.



Figure 43. The last moment of touching before separation in *Ain't Them Bodies Saints*.

Although Ruth’s pregnancy develops while Bob is in jail, the spectator is encouraged to empathise with the embodied experience of birth from Bob’s point of view as the birth is intercut with images of Ruth and Bob together. Before Sylvie’s birth, the last moment Bob and Ruth touch each other is when they are led away by the police (Figure 43). In this scene, they are separated from each other as they are led away by different people. The only physical contact they have is touching the sides of their faces, which they try to do for as long as possible so that only their skin and hair touch. In his letters, Bob talks about wanting to hold Ruth’s face and hair. Bob writes that he wants to ‘take our baby girl in my arms’. When Sylvie is born, the scene is juxtaposed with images of Ruth and Bob together, their arms and hands entwined which is then intercut with images of Ruth and Sylvie’s bodies together. Ruth’s physical connection with Sylvie is in complete contrast to the lack of physical contact Bob has with his daughter.

Ruth carries Sylvie, lies down with her as she reads to her, holds her hand as they walk, and they fall asleep together with their faces and arms together. Bob describes the way Ruth will know he is there even if she cannot see him and says 'she'll feel me coming down the street'. This makes his first glimpse of Sylvie poignant as he stands unseen, and untouched, outside their home; later he tells Ruth that he was 'so close I could touch your cheek'. This marks the final time until he is dying that he gets close enough to touch his daughter, but ultimately fails to do that. Bob's ability to create a somatic biotourist relationship with Ruth and Sylvie through conceptual dialogue demonstrates the strength of intergenerational dialogue and the strength of corporeal sensibility that permeates the film.

The uterus is a space in which a conversation with the foetus spans the whole film. Bob's relationship with the foetus is mediated by the corporeality of the film through extended close-ups, use of the voice, music and the juxtapositioning of touching bodies and he creates a biotourist narrative in order to negotiate the internal space of the uterus. The use of the voice is critical to the way the film is structured, as it becomes an important device whereby the spectator is encouraged to empathise with his vivid memories of close physical contact. Finally, at the end of the film, the extra-diegetic voice provides a contrast between the voice of the expectant father and the voice of the dying man. The uterus provides the location for the extended conversation with the foetus. The foetus is not only in the uterus, but exists as part of a biotourist narrative whereby the foetus is transformed in scale from the unborn to a grown person. Bob "speaks" to the foetus in a way that enables him to recognise her when he sees her, even though, in reality, he is not able to speak. The narration that he has provided throughout, therefore, makes it clear to the spectator that his imagined, conceptual interaction and close contact with the foetus and Ruth forms an affective biotourist narrative circuit.

### **A Mediated Personhood in *Apio verde***

*Apio verde* is set in present-day Chile. Adriana (Catherine Moyazer), falls in love with Diego (Cristián Gajardo), they move in together and soon Adriana is pregnant.<sup>119</sup> All is well until she has a foetal ultrasound and she is told that the foetus has anencephaly, where part of the brain (and head) is malformed or absent. This condition, she is told, is not compatible with life, and the baby will not survive outside of the uterus. Adriana is horrified at the thought of carrying the foetus to full gestation. Diego, however, believes that they should carry on with the pregnancy. Adriana finds out about the reality of the foetus's condition by viewing images on the internet and then finds someone who will sell her abortion pills. She goes to collect the pills and returns home to find that Diego has organised a baby shower without telling her so that when she arrives home their friends and family are waiting to have a party. The room is decorated with balloons and images of babies. Adriana later dreams that she has a healthy baby daughter and that Diego is having an affair. Much later in her pregnancy, Adriana finds out she has cancer and that she cannot be treated whilst she is pregnant. Diego, meanwhile, is being pressured to speak against the abortion laws at meeting of the Chilean Senate. Adriana is distressed and leaves home, returning to a nun, Mother Mariana (Sonia Mena) who organises an abortion, but Adriana does not go through with the procedure and returns to testify at the Senate meeting. Adriana becomes increasingly distressed and it is not clear if what is happening to her is perceptual or actual as Diego attempts an abortion in their home and attacks both Adriana and her mother. The film ends when Adriana plunges a sharp piece of wood into her vagina.

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<sup>119</sup> *Apio verde* means green celery in Spanish. The term is used in a version of the song "Happy Birthday", as in 'apio verde to you'. It is also a reference to the way abortions were carried out whereby celery is introduced into the vagina causing an infection, which results in an abortion. Adriana hears this from the second doctor she sees at the abortion clinic half-way through the film. The title has no translation into English.

Adriana runs the risk of being charged with a criminal offence and being imprisoned for three years if she has an abortion so the film presents a domestic drama that is, from Adriana's point of view, a horror story. The laws around abortion in Chile stipulate that it is illegal under any circumstances.<sup>120</sup> The unborn foetus exists as a "baby" in the perception of other people, but for the pregnant person in Morales' film, the foetus is considered as it is in reality: one that is incompatible with life. The film uses thriller tropes whereby Adriana's point of view becomes distorted, psychologically and in the frame, as she discovers that trusted people appear to be part of a conspiracy. She is both visitor and host of her own body and of her foetus. When she realises that the foetus is gravely ill, she "sees" it in a starkly different way to those around her. The film also uses horror tropes such images of bloodstained medical instruments, in order to reflect Adriana's state of mind and the horrific nature of her predicament. On the surface, the film appears to be part of the horror genre, but I read against this to discuss how the internal space of the uterus is reconfigured as a contested location, which moves the unviable foetus into one that has a mediated personhood.

The film centres on the distinct ways in which Adriana, Diego and others "see" the foetus or rather understand its personhood. Adriana and Diego both think of the foetus as their child, and each one constructs a narrative that centres on its presence, but each has a different perspective. On the one hand, Adriana believes that 'a child would give its life for that of its mother's' and believes that removing the foetus is a kinder action than leaving it to grow. Diego, on the other hand, says that as they both wanted to have a child, she cannot now change her mind based on

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<sup>120</sup> The film is based on a case that was taken to the Chilean Senate in 2012 as the law to allow therapeutic abortion was discussed. The proposals for change were rejected. A measure of how sensitive this subject matter is in Chile is the fact that Morales was unable to secure a distributor because of its controversial subject matter.

the medical information they now have. For Adriana, the presence of an unviable foetus in her uterus that she will have to carry until the moment of its birth is horrific. The uterus in the film is a contested space in the eyes of the law, whereby the foetus, from the moment of conception, is protected as if it were a person. This means that the uterus becomes a bodily space where the foetus is conceptually separated from the pregnant body. However much Adriana protests that it is her body and it is up to her what she does, the reality is that she has to battle against the legal and social view of personhood of the foetus.

The pregnant body is, therefore, negotiated differently by Adriana and by everyone else. The biotourist dynamic between the internal world of the uterus and the eternal world is influenced by the human and personalised narrative that surround the foetus. In this intra-action, the foetus in the bioscope of the uterus is “alive” as much as it is terminally ill and dying. The pregnant body and the uterus form an embodied space whereby the foetus is interpreted as “baby”, “son” and “child” by other protagonists. Adriana also “sees” the malformed foetus as “baby”, her “son” and her “child”. The horror that Adriana feels about having a foetus – and therefore, as she understands it, a “baby” – who is malformed is shown in her response to images of babies from real life, as they appear outside of the uterus. Adriana views slides of actual foetuses with anencephaly on the internet. At the beginning of the film, one of the first sounds to be heard over the titles is the sound of slides going through a projector along with the sound of Adriana’s voice panting and crying as if frightened and/or in labour. This sound mix foreshadows the importance of the slides in contextualising the reality of the malformed foetus for Adriana.

When the spectator can see what Adriana has been looking at, the images are stark. The slides are shown full screen: the computer screen fills the camera frame so that the spectator is forced to view the images. The images are not hidden from the spectator and there is no extra-diegetic music to provide a guide to the emotions that the spectator is encouraged to feel. The only sound

in this brief sequence is the non-diegetic sound of the slides turning in a slide projector. The effect this has is to place the spectator in the position of Adriana's point of view, and consider his or her own response to the foetus – or “baby”. The computer screen takes the place of the uterus as Adriana and the spectator can see what Adriana is frightened of. It presents a biotourist dynamic as both the spectator and Adriana are encouraged to renegotiate Adriana's uterus as a narrative space. The fact that Adriana has accessed these images suggests that it is important for her to see a true representation of her foetus's medical condition in order to understand the implications that this has for her own image of her own “child”. The body of the foetus is also renegotiated in the juxtaposition of these images next to Adriana's body. There is no evidence in the film that anyone else, apart from medical professionals, understands what her foetus looks like in reality. The photographic images that she is looking at show babies with severe abnormalities of the head. The babies are shown in various positions: facing the camera, in profile, being held, dressed in baby clothes or simply with an identifying nametag. The photographs include a baby in, what appears to be, its mother's arms as well as another woman snuggling up to a baby, their heads held together and framed in a close-up. Adriana also looks at diagrams of pregnancy, at discussions of the medical condition anencephaly. and black and white photographs of babies with severe spinal malformations. The images are of full-term babies, which is crucial to understand. The foetus inside Adriana is less than three months of gestation, and is therefore a miniature version of these images at a few centimetres long. In viewing these images, Adriana is purposefully finding out how the foetus growing inside her might look as a baby at birth.



Figure 44. Adriana's friends insist that she celebrates her pregnancy in *Apio verde*.



Figure 45. The decorations include the image of a cut-out "baby" in *Apio verde*.

The dissonance between the traditional images of pregnancy and the embodied reality of carrying a non-viable foetus is reflected in the cinematography when Diego organises a surprise baby shower. From Adriana's point of view, the people who gather to wish her well are framed in wide angle, which distorts the image of their faces and bodies, making their heads seem larger (Figure 44). The wide angle also has the effect of distancing the group from Adriana's point of view, as they appear to be disappearing into the hallway. This emphasises the physical and emotional distance she feels towards the group who are celebrating and recognising a foetus that does not exist. Adriana's friends and family create an image of a "baby" by cutting out cardboard images of a baby and sticking it on the wall (Figure 45) as a way to celebrate the pregnancy, not knowing that the "baby" is only alive because it is attached to Adriana's uterus. The cut-out baby has a head that is larger than its body which mimics real life, but also is a reminder of the way in which Adriana's foetus is malformed. This scene takes place immediately after she has collected abortion pills and is looking for somewhere to hide them in her bedroom: she still has the packet of pills in her hand when she is confronted by the group of friends and is still in the process of renegotiating how she "sees" the foetus inside her uterus.

The group at the baby shower includes her obstetrician Tomás (Andrés Gomez) and his wife Lucía (Catalina Aguayo). Tomás joins in the counting game where people take turns to spin

Adriana for ‘one month, two months, three months’: he takes hold of her at four months and counts to five saying ‘Diego told me what you were planning. Do you know that if you wait you can donate its organs?’ Later Lucía warns Adriana that ‘if you take the pills, you might not be able to get pregnant again...you might lose your dream of having a family’. As a final warning, Diego tells Adriana that Lucía had been told that her own baby would not be born and now he is a healthy boy. Adriana is surrounded by the imaginings of other people based on an image of a “baby” that does not exist for her at any point in her current pregnancy. The imagined “baby” is not the one she intends to abort; it is the actual foetus inside her that she wants to terminate. The baby shower has been planned by Diego in order to present the imaginary image of a healthy “baby” with the expressed intention of persuading Adriana not take the pills that will abort this foetus.

The embodied reality that Adriana experiences is contrasted by the use of fantasy sequences. When Adriana is alone, she dreams or imagines alternative scenarios: Diego removes the foetus himself; Diego has an affair with Lucia; she gets up in the night to take her turn comforting her own toddler in the next room. Alongside these sequences are scenes, which show the contrast between Adriana’s lived body experience and the reality of preparing for a child she will never have. For example, when Adriana imagines a child crying in the room next to her she is shown alone, while Diego sleeps. The static camera is positioned directly above Diego who is sprawled across the bed. Taking up a quarter of the frame is a crucifix hanging on the wall. The feet of the figure of Christ point directly towards Diego’s head. Adriana is placed at the top of the frame alongside Diego, but central in the frame. Adriana’s hands are clasped as if in prayer. The soundtrack includes gentle piano, which is an audio bridge from the previous scene in the church. The sound of a baby crying fades in. Adriana leans over to Diego and says, ‘should you go or me?’ but he does not wake. As she walks into the next-door bedroom, the piano is

accompanied by a song. Adriana is filmed in soft focus in a pale pink light as she walks slowly around the bed where a young child is lying. The child has dark hair like Adriana and Diego and is dressed in pink patterned pyjamas while Adriana is dressed in a high lace-collared dress, which is also pink-hued. As she picks the child up it stops crying. Adriana does not talk, but her breath can be heard comforting the child. Adriana breathes in small gasps and the child murmurs in reply touching Adriana on the chest. Lights stream past them as the light was coming from the ceiling on a revolving lamp. The child looks directly at the camera as they are both framed in a close-up. This is Adriana's biotourist narrative whereby she renegotiates the space of her uterus to create a conceptual image of the child that she wants to have.

The sequence of Adriana's imagined future child is juxtaposed with another image of Adriana, which emphasises her reality, with a wide-angle close-up as she leans over her new – empty – cot. In this shot, Adriana is placed just off the centre of the frame to allow Diego to enter the back of the shot. The wide angle forces a distortion of perspective so he appears further away from Adriana than he is in reality, emphasising their physical and emotional distance. A light source appears to be inside the cot and this shines on her face, focusing attention on her while showing the contrast between her smiling face in her fantasy and her closed expression in this scene. Ignoring Diego when he speaks, Adriana says, of the baby when it is born, 'on the day of the birth, we could buy him a little one-piece suit'. This piece of dialogue suggests that she will go through with the birth. As she says this, Diego walks towards her. He appears much closer to her as the perspective evens out and he stands in the centre of the frame. At this moment, the couple are given equal prominence in the frame as they share the same vision of the pregnancy going ahead. Adriana asks Diego 'do you think coffins exist for babies?' She does not wait for his reply, but it is clear that she is thinking ahead to the reality of giving birth to a baby who will be dead or die shortly after birth. This demonstrates that even though she

has a strong image of her imagined future child, it does not distract from the image she has of the actual foetus in her uterus. She confirms her emotional attachment to the malformed foetus as her actual future child by saying ‘I want to have a place for them where we can visit and be a family’. This shows that Adriana is able to hold separate images of the foetus: from the scan, as a future imagined child, and as her sick baby at birth.



Figure 46. Diego paints a family on Adriana’s belly in *Apio verde*.

Despite the fact that Adriana’s foetus will not survive for long after birth, she and Diego create an image of a family by painting Adriana’s growing belly. The belly is painted twice: at the beginning of the pregnancy before the scan is performed and after a few months when they know their future child will not survive, but they are continuing with the pregnancy. The paintings are similar. Diego initiates a biotourist narrative when he paints a house, a tree, a river and three people across Adriana’s belly (Figure 46.). When the first painting is done, Diego says ‘here’s where we’ll live, near a river with grass...you, me and our little baby’. Adriana’s belly is shown in close-up and the film is speeded up to reflect their impatience at becoming a “family”. At this point, they have already bought a cot and talked about names. At the second painting, their mood is sombre. Again, Adriana’s belly is shown in close-up and the film speeds up so that the painting takes shape more quickly. The pregnant belly is not a prosthetic so the consistency of the skin is lifelike, adding to the sense of realism. When the camera moves to

reveal the two protagonists, Adriana's body is hidden behind one arm of a crucifix, which frames her head, and that of Diego. Adriana's body is hidden as the actress is not pregnant, but it also serves to cut part of her body out of the frame and separates it from that of Diego's, emphasising their physical and emotional distance. When Diego asks her if she likes it, she shakes her head and says, 'it looks more deformed'. The difference in their expectations is a result of the scan.

Waiting for the scan results changes the dream image that Adriana has created of a baby girl. Adriana sits in the waiting room outside the scan room, and this scene is intercut with a sequence which involves Lucía being advised to have her dog euthanised. The two sequences are placed together and intercut to emphasise the different medical approaches to a suffering animal and to an unviable foetus. Although the foetus feels no pain, it is made clear to Adriana that it might survive for hours after birth and pain is not something that is explicitly ruled out. As Adriana sits waiting, she is foregrounded in a wide-shot, placed at the bottom of the frame to one side. The effect this has is to place Adriana as only one of many people waiting for medical appointments, and to emphasise the everyday nature of receiving bad news. It also foreshadows the bad news by introducing a sound bridge between the scan room and the waiting room. A low, constant tone on strings or synthesiser fades in over the end of the scan sequence and is then overlaid with the sound of a foetal heartbeat. As Adriana sits, the camera moves position and reframes in two jump-cuts. The first jump-cut advances the timeline, subtly changing the action of the character to signal the temporal ellipse. The camera has moved position to a lower angle where Adriana remains at the right hand side of the frame, but the low-angle makes her appear larger in the frame. Moving closer to Adriana, the focus is on her rather than the rest of the people in the waiting room which emphasises that many people have been seen and have left. The second jump-cut holds Adriana at the right hand side of the frame

in a wide angle mid-close-up so that the emptying waiting room can be seen. The depth of field has narrowed so that the people left waiting are now out of focus in the periphery of the frame. This slow divide between Adriana and everyone else foreshadows her increasing isolation throughout the film.

Although the medical condition that affects Adriana's baby is incompatible with life, the perception of the people around her is that it is a living child. Adriana is the only character in the film who considers the implications of the physical reality of the foetus. The foetus exists as a "baby" in other people's perception; for Adriana it exists as a "baby", but one that is incompatible with life. This leads to a biotourist narrative that reflects a cognitive dissonance whereby those around her prepare for the birth of her "baby", whilst Adriana prepares for the termination of the foetus, or the birth of her actual baby that will die. The perception of the "baby" for Adriana is reflected in the way she sees those around her as distorted images, as dreams, and as conspirators. It is also reflected in the corporeality of the film as jump-cuts emphasise the passage of time while the foetus is in the uterus. The imagined healthy "baby" that she dreams about is not the one that she wants to abort, it is the actual foetus inside the uterus that she cannot contemplate giving birth to. It is the imagined "baby", however, that she is encouraged to think of as real. The personhood of the foetus is in conflict, but this conflict arises from how it is perceived, not its physical reality. The horror and thriller aesthetic in the film emphasises the emotion that Adriana feels about the reality of the foetus. The personhood of the "baby" is therefore mediated and the uterus becomes an emotional and legally contested location.

## **Conclusion**

Biotourism emphasises the dynamic created between the internal and external body and stresses the crucial role of interconnecting narratives around the uterus. By establishing the nature of

the biotourist narrative in each film, it is possible to understand how it is possible to renegotiate the internal space of the body. The perception of the internal landscape – or bioscape – of the uterus as a space in which to “meet” the foetus moves constantly between the dynamic created between the internal body and the external world. The perception of the foetus also changes in the intra-action of protagonists with the foetus and the bioscape of the uterus. Through the transposition of scale, the foetus is able to “talk” and bear witness to events at which they were present, but could not understand, as in *The Milk of Sorrow*, or the foetus can be part of a conversation, that is one-sided as in *Ain't Them Bodies Saints*, but in each case their presence is crucial as part of a biotourist narrative. In each of the films in this chapter, the intra-action of spectator and protagonists in relation to the uterus is not intrinsically visual, but it depends on the ability to conceptualise the journey through the bioscape of the uterus and to understand that the body is being remapped and looked into. It is not only the invocation of the senses that influences how the bioscape is read, it is also important to recognise that corporeality of the film, as well as that of the characters in the film and the spectator, contribute to the interconnection of narratives.

In remapping the body, it is fragmented so that the foetal-maternal becomes changed and demands interpretation through a biotourist narrative. In the *Milk of Sorrow*, the foetal experience in the bioscape of the uterus does not only belong to the foetus, it is understood as part of the process of community recollection and memory. In *Quinceañera*, the uterus becomes an embodied place, not only for reproduction, but as a location for sin. The actual embodied experience of the pregnant person is subsumed by the importance other protagonists give to its capacity to store wickedness so that this has an embodied presence in the room. In *Apio verde*, the uterus becomes a bioscape that is read differently by each protagonist. The pregnant person,

however, creates her own biotourist narrative based on the concept of a “baby” that, in reality, will not survive.

There is clearly a tension in the way biotourism is understood. On the one hand, it is a specific list of criteria as described by Sawchuk, which applies to the internal body as a whole; on the other hand, as Roberts and Kroløkke suggest, it describes the self-reflective intra-action between the spectator and protagonists in relation to the uterus. Sawchuk’s notion of the transposition of scale as transforming anatomy into landscape has implications for reading the narrative space of the uterus and this can be seen in the embodied intra-action between characters in each film. Biotourism articulates the narrative around the uterus by emphasising how transformation of space from miniature to gigantic can explain the extent of the sensorial spectatorial dynamic around the uterus. By introducing the notion of travel or tourism through the body, protagonists and spectators create their own spatial orientation or cartography of the uterus in order to make sense of interlocking narratives. By concentrating on the biotourist intra-actions around the narrative space of the uterus, I suggest that interconnectivity of narratives can be described, as Barad does, as intra-action. The intra-action of narratives encourages the spectator to think of them as interlocking and where the uterus becomes a location in which memories of an individual or a community can be understood. In Chapter Three, I investigate in more detail the implication of the transference of memories through the narrative space of the uterus by referring to Marks’ notion of the recollection-object to investigate the role of haptic visibility in determining how objects are woven into the narrative landscape of memories.

## CHAPTER THREE

### The Recollection Object and Thresholds of Bonding

Birth is a threshold that indicates a physical and temporal movement of the unborn to the world of the living and changes the focal point of the spectator from the body (that contains the unborn) to the newborn. A threshold can be understood as a physical space that connects two locations marking a moment of change or the next step in a journey, but it can also be seen as a temporal or emotional shift between the past, the present and the future. The four films discussed in this chapter – *Up* (2009), *The Bad Intentions* (2011), *Pan's Labyrinth* (2006), and *Birth* (2004) – all have narrative similarities in that each one deals with questions of birth and of childhood and all have a strong element of fantasy that drives each narrative. The films demonstrate the tension between the living and the unborn. The birth object itself – the foetus – provokes a different response from the spectator and other protagonists depending on its proximity to birth. In this chapter, I examine how the frame of the uterus, as an integral part of the threshold between life and death, can be used to read the relationship of the spectator and protagonists to objects inside and outside of the uterus. I do this by referring to the notion of the recollection-object, which is, according to Marks, ‘an irreducibly material object that encodes collective memory’ through physical contact (2000: 77-78). This recollection-object can be a person or a thing but, as Marks suggests, it is transformed or even erased in the process of encoding memory or memories (122).<sup>121</sup> The recollection-object is interpreted by spectators

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<sup>121</sup> Marks says the recollection-object describes fragmented imagery in intercultural films such as *Dreaming Rivers* (1988, Martine Attile, UK), *History and Memory: For Akiko and Takashige* (1991, Rea Tajiri, Japan), *Finagnon* (1995, Gary Kibbins, USA), *Seeing is Believing* (1991, Shauna Beharry, Canada), and *Amor, mujeres y flores/Love, Women and Flowers* (1988, Marta Rodríguez and Jorge Silva Colombia). Marks establishes that intercultural films express embodied experience so that a ‘particular sort of recollection-image [...] calls up different past for different people’ (2000: 77-78).

as something that has meaning to them. The relationship between spectator and image/object also depends on an invocation of the senses and sense memory which, when applied to human relationships, is a powerful bonding process. Bonding, however, is not necessarily a positive force and ‘can involve hate and fear as well as love’ as Janelle Taylor suggests in relation to the foetal ultrasound scan (2008: 78). In each film in this chapter, the bonding process is influenced by the way the protagonists and the spectator makes sense or bonds with images or objects, including the foetus, in the threshold between life and death.

The recollection-object becomes a cue in each film that an embodied connection – or bond – is being made visually, but an emotional, embodied reaction through the memory of other things is also invoked. In the scan, complex social relationships with the foetus are understood to develop through what Taylor calls the theory of ultrasound bonding. This theory of bonding has become, as Taylor suggests, a ‘catch all term’ to describe an emotional, social attachment to the foetus, which is not always evidenced (2000: 78). This connection is based, she explains, on a miscorrelation between the pleasure of seeing the scan and the maternal relationship to the foetus.<sup>122</sup> This miscorrelation suggest that the use of the term bonding does not take into account the way the foetus as an object provokes a range of responses that are negative *and* positive and not essentially maternal. As Marks suggests, ‘when language cannot record memories, we often look to images. When images fail to revive memory, we may look to the well-kept secret of objects. Unpacking the secrets held encoded in images and objects, we find the memory of the senses’ (2000: 195). What Marks establishes is the importance of objects to invoke memories. Although she argues for cultural specificity, she also explains the power that objects gain from being circulated and passed around between people. It is important to note that the image and

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<sup>122</sup> Taylor suggests that this miscorrelation results in “bonding” being used to justify the increase in use of scan equipment, to prevent women from having abortions and the commercial use of the ultrasound image.

the object are not interchangeable in Marks's use of the term. She takes the Deleuzian notion of the recollection-image and extends it to describe objects that, while they may not have a primary visual connection to an event, are capable of invoking a memory, or an image, of something else.<sup>123</sup> In this, she stresses that 'objects are not inert and mute but [...] they tell stories and describe trajectories' (80). It is not, however, the objects themselves that tell stories, it is the embodied response to those objects that imposes a narrative trajectory. I suggest that Marks is talking about Jan Assman's 'communicative memory [...] that lives in everyday interaction and communication' and it is these everyday interactions that give objects their communicative value (2011: 18).<sup>124</sup> Marks frequently uses collective memory to describe the way in which people with the same life experiences respond to images, perceived smells, textures and, to a lesser extent, sound. However, the use of the term collective memory is problematic in the context of my discussion and it is more accurate to talk about a shared, embodied memory (of things) rather than a collective memory.

### **Recollection and Life Narratives**

Memories are not static and are strengthened by the way they are shaped through generations and by the way shared memories of the same thing are interpreted. According to Paul Connerton (1989: 6), the temporal layers of memory – particularly memories that are shared in communities – are formed by creating a context through recollection.<sup>125</sup> Recollection, in this

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<sup>123</sup> Deleuze relates the recollection-image to his work on other kinds of image – the perception image, the movement-image, and the time-image – as well as to the recollection-image in Bergsonian attentive recognition. Deleuze uses the term as a way to articulate the relationship between the image and the virtual image (1989: 45-46).

<sup>124</sup> This discussion of memory is part of a much wider discussion about memory and memorialising, which I am not able to address in detail in this thesis. Assman responds to Maurice Halbwach's (1992) notion of collective memory to argue that there are different ways of remembering. The importance of Assman's work is that he separates collective memory into cultural memory (which he says is institutionalised) and communicative memory (which he says is not institutionalised).

<sup>125</sup> Paul Connerton talks more broadly about social memory and the ritualistic, habitual and institutional way memory is inscribed. He notes how oral history is transformed in the action of recording it through writing as the narrative is moved from the body to the page (1989: 75). In his

sense, is the way past experiences and knowledge are used to make sense of an object or person or situation. The act of recollection means that memories, particularly intergenerational memories, are in a constant state of negotiation and renegotiation. As Michael Rothberg suggests, memories are multi-directional in that they depend on a constant movement between the past, present and future (2009). It is not only the temporal movement of memories through generations that changes, however: the point-of-view of memories changes constantly so that memory is not static. It is dependent and moulded by differing point of view, depending on life experience. Max Silverman also suggests that there is a depth to memory – the palimpsestic memory – where memories become layered and are interpreted through other memories to create life narratives (2013).<sup>126</sup> This suggests that memory has a materiality and is spatialised by being understood to have both breadth and depth. Life narratives, however, are not always remembered in the same way. According to empirical and theoretical research into intergenerational memory, there is a *reminiscence bump* where recollected or remembered memories more frequently come from late adolescence to early adulthood, and the most remembered events are likely to be positive ones (Steiner *et al.*, 2014).<sup>127</sup> This suggests that

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discussion of social memory, Connerton differentiates between two forms of social practice: *incorporating*, where gestures or bodily actions exist only when the person is present or the action is taking place, and *inscribing*, when the person or action is over or not present but is recorded in some way (72-73).

<sup>126</sup> The politics of memory has an extensive scholarship that comes out of Holocaust studies and is not limited to the work of Rothberg and Silverman. The importance of Holocaust studies is that collective and individual recollections and interpretations of memory have been, and are still being, collected from successive generations.

<sup>127</sup> The reminiscence bump has been investigated by Ashok Jansari and Alan J. Parkin who conducted experiments on groups of people aged 36 to 60 (1996: 85-91). Their findings suggest that there is a difference in way older people remember. They found that there is some evidence to show that the older age group can recall events in the past more easily because they are able to contain or put aside recent events – something that younger age groups find more difficult to do. Jansari and Parkin emphasise, however, that the reminiscence bump is present across age groups. Gillian Cohen and Stephanie Taylor urge caution when talking about reminiscence as often assumptions are made about certain age groups, arguing that research can reinforce the stereotype that older people are ‘living on the past’ and not connected to the contemporary (1998: 601-610). They note that both young and old reminisce, and the question about how often and about what is likely to be heavily influenced by differences in lifestyle, health status, gender, personality, and time constraints. They also talk about the

memory recollection and memory formation are dependent not only on the period when these memories are first formed, but on the intensity of the period when the events take place. The imbalance in remembered events from different periods of life – life chapters – shows that memory is dependent on many factors for recollection. The reminiscence bump suggests that traumatic events are remembered in relation to positive events. This is significant when analysing the narrative of each film in this chapter as often the actions of protagonists, in relation to the foetus are assigned or viewed as negative or positive, when, in effect, these actions are part of a more complex process of establishing, negotiating and renegotiating memories as part of everyday life.

When Marks explains that objects tell stories, she refers to the value that is ascribed to them and ‘the discursive layers that take material form in them, the unresolved traumas that become embedded in them, and the history of material interactions that they encode’ (2000: 80). As well as this communicative quality, she also refers to Walter Benjamin’s notion of *aura*, which describes the quality of the object that can ‘speak to us of the past, without ever letting us completely decipher it’ (81).<sup>128</sup> She suggests that *aura* is a way to understand what Benjamin (1968: 188) means when he describes as an object ‘looking back’ at the spectator. This understanding of *aura* acknowledges the materiality of the object. I suggest it also brings to mind the notion of the ‘familial gaze’ where, according to Marianne Hirsch, ‘the familial look, then, is not the look of a subject looking at an object, but a mutual look of a subject looking at an object who is a subject looking (back) at an object’ (1997: 9). The mutuality of spectatorship that this describes speaks to the way negative actions and thoughts towards the foetus can be

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way negative reminiscences are sometimes masked by positive ones and that this can result in negative reminiscences going unrecorded in ethnographic studies.

<sup>128</sup> Marks also refers to Deleuze’s notion of the fossil when he describes its affective quality as radioactive. She likens this ‘radioactivity’ to Benjamin’s *aura*.

understood as a process of remembering or forgetting, which is part of understanding the past or coming to terms with the present. It also speaks to the way that different realities are created through this negotiated spectatorship. In each case, the foetus becomes something else. The birth object – the foetus – has a different quality as a recollection-object depending on its position in relation to the threshold of birth. Crucially, the threshold of birth changes the relationship of the protagonists who also have contact with the object. Whilst the birth object has meaning for the spectator, there are many layers to the way it is recognised and interpreted that depends on its proximity to the threshold of birth. Through recollection, the object has meaning depending on who is looking at it and is in a constant state of negotiation and renegotiation.

Memory has a materiality that depends on its quality of breadth and depth that is part of the everyday process of mutual spectatorship. This constantly changing spectatorship means that memories have a temporal quality whereby they are dependent not only on whether they are seen as positive or negative, but also to their position in relation to the moment the memory is made. The uterus as a frame not only foregrounds what is inside the body, but also indicates when the recollection-object becomes a reminder of the internal frame. The quality of the recollection-object changes in this process, whereby its ability to represent something that has been lost, but is constantly seen in relation to other things. Remembering and forgetting, therefore, take place not only in the everyday, but also in the perception of the everyday in fantasy, or recreated reality.

### **Recreating Fantasy through Reality**

The dynamic of fantasy relies on the way it unlocks facets of our own embodied world, which is based on real life and the everyday. Fantasy can renegotiate what is seen as real and what is experienced sensorially or through the imagination. Everyday fears are channelled through

narratives of loss in all of the films in this chapter. These narratives vary in intensity, from fear of losing a parent, to the loss of a child or partner, to the larger question of death and mortality. Everyday imagery and fantasy are linked, therefore, by how they describe emotional attachment or bonding. As Marks suggests, images can transcend understanding and be ‘so volatile that they consume the film that contains them’ (2000: 51-52). There is a fine line that differentiates fantasy and fiction, and John Walters argues that defining fantasy in the cinema is problematic whereby too wide a scope would include all fiction film and too narrow a scope would exclude work that should be included as having elements of fantasy (2011). He makes a critical point when describing his own perception of fantasy when he says,

[a]s I watch fiction films, I am aware of being presented with a set of circumstances that could occur within my reality but am equally assured that the characters and locations existing in the film could never be found there. When faced with fantasy in film, however, I am conscious of being shown a series of events that, according to the rules of reasonable logic, could *never* occur within my reality. Fiction and fantasy are thus made distinct. (1; emphasis in original)

His distinction is useful, but it is not necessarily the case that fantasy and fiction are completely distinct. The films in this chapter use fictional and fantastical notions in order to emphasise the fragile quality of the everyday. The fantastical image of the foetus, for example, has its roots in reality. Talking to the foetus and imagining that the foetus is listening – cocooned in the uterus – is something that exists in reality. The transformative nature of the uterus is in its location as part of the threshold between death and birth. The foetus, while it is inside the uterus, can be imagined in many different ways and this contributes to the creation of a fantastical narrative where the foetus has a central role. It is not the location of the uterus that creates the fantastical image of the ‘baby’ that appears in *Up* or *Pan’s Labyrinth* nor does it create the unseen heroic adversary waiting (*in utero*) for the death of its sibling, as in *The Bad Intentions*, or the reincarnation of the foetus as in *Birth*. The uterus provides a location whereby fantasy is created

by the perception of a threshold of life, which depends on whether the foetus is inside or outside of the uterus.

The foetus exists in the threshold of life, or perhaps more accurately, on the threshold of viability. This suggests a liminality between life and death that is precarious. As Lorna Weir argues, 'a threshold stabilises a relation between inside and outside' and by altering the nature of that threshold, between life and viability, the relationship between the internal and the external shifts (2006: 2). The notion of the threshold not only suggests a precariousness between life and death, which I mention above, but also marks the point where things begin to change. In birth, the threshold depends on life and death (which can be inside or outside of the uterus) where the definition of life exists internally and is intrauterine (within the uterus) and perinatal (around the time of birth). At these points, the foetus can exist as something that is both real and part of fantasy. As Walters argues, fantasy 'forges a sincere connection with the ways in which we experience and understand [...] reality': thus, 'in fantasy we discover not only fragments of our world, but fragments of ourselves' (2011: 30). This, however, does not fully explain the significance of images that are imagined but, nevertheless, experienced as real. The constructed image of the foetus *in utero* or the changed nature of the foetus in reincarnation, for example, where the foetus becomes a recollection-object that disintegrates at the threshold of birth. The foetus before this transformation is fetishistic.

The fetishistic image provokes strong emotions of both pleasure and disgust, but can also reveal something about the spectator. Marks explains that the fetish was originally used to describe an object that had 'lifelike powers' as a result of its contact with something or someone sacred and was used by a 'particular stratum of Europeans to describe [European, African and Catholic] peasant superstitions' (2000: 87). Marks argues that the fetish as a 'forbidden object of desire is already an intercultural one' and that fetishism is a 'mutual act that reveals information about

both participants in the exchange' (88). Marks suggests that the fetish is something of value either as a commodity to be traded, but also as 'an object that changes as it circulates in new contexts' (80). Although Marks is talking about transnational objects, I find her analysis helpful to my readings of the films in this chapter. Coupled with *aura*, the affective nature of the fetish can be understood. Marks argues that '[a]ll fetishes are translations into a material object of some sort of affect' (80).<sup>129</sup> Importantly, Marks identifies the process by which the fetish becomes affective so that it 'beckons the viewer to excavate the past, even at his or her own peril' (81). When the fetish is applied to the foetus, it describes the image created by the separation of the foetus from the body so that the foetus as a recollection-object is disembodied. Petchesky explains that it is a combination of disembodiment and movement that makes the foetus an iconic image: thus, the fetishised image of the foetus is one of a miniaturised adult, a homunculus. This is not a baby, but a proportionally small person (1987: 268).<sup>130</sup> Taylor suggests that the notion of the fetishised foetus describes something that has been 'falsely endowed with "life"' in order to be commodified' (2008: 46). This suggests a personhood that does not exist – is not seen – but depends on the transformation *in utero* of the unseen foetus.

The unseen foetus, therefore, can become part of the everyday, even as it becomes part of fantasy. This relies on the fragile nature of everyday life and the power of everyday fears of loss whereby the foetus exists in the liminal space between life and death. In this way, the fantasy exists as long as the foetus remains in the uterus. The fetishised foetus is allowed to become part of a fantasy as it reflects something of the outside (out of the uterus) world and

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<sup>129</sup> Marks gives her detailed analysis of the fetish to emphasise that a psychoanalytic analysis is only *one* interpretation of the fetish.

<sup>130</sup> Petchesky also notes that this image of the disembodied foetus as a person floating in space has been assumed, according to Barbara Katz Rothman (1986), to be male: a space-man.

something of the spectator who “sees” it. The ability of the spectator to create a fantastical image of the foetus changes depending on the spectator point of view as an adult or as a child.

### **The Child in Focus**

The child’s eye for fantasy and imagination changes the way the foetus is seen within the uterus, but it is important to say that the role of the child protagonist is placed in the film to reflect something of the adult world and not necessarily to reflect the embodied experience of the child. As Patricia Holland (2004) points out, the embodied experience of the child is not well documented so that, in film studies, there is inevitably a misunderstanding about what constitutes the embodied representation of the child.<sup>131</sup> She argues that documenting children’s history, as a way to understand their embodied experience, is a very different concept from documenting the history of childhood. The history of childhood, she argues, is more likely to be documented from the adult’s point of view. The child in film does not necessarily represent the child itself. Creating sympathy for a character relies on the spectator – young and old – being able to identify with elements of each characterisation. Temporal shifts in the narrative mimic the child’s point of view by mimicking the way the child understands and creates memories according to Karen Lury (2010: 7). This is shown in the way children create imagery around what is internal and unseen such as the image of the sibling *in utero*, the fantastical foetus, and uterine locations. The embodied experience of the child in cinema is equally seen through the adult lens. The child, particularly the child in the representation of war, becomes a

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<sup>131</sup> Holland points to the difficulties of documenting the actual history or experience of the child from the child’s point of view and her work investigates the dynamic between the image and the spectator by looking at how a repeated image – rather than the single image – creates resonance for the spectator. She collects images of children from a variety of popular sources, magazines, photographs, packaging, adverts, brochures, postcards, etc. The images, she explains, are from the everyday and the routine; it is only after she has collected that she categorises her images according to themes and dates. She argues that these repeated images – such as the baby, the foetus in the foetal ultrasound, or the dying child – that she has collected over twenty years come to represent much broader themes such as childhood and death.

vehicle for the sensorial or visceral narrative. The cut-out pictures in *The Bad Intentions* and the fairy-tale in *Pan's Labyrinth* are all suggestive of the world of the child where imagination begins to fragment coherent or realistic narratives. This fragmentation allows each narrative to be interpreted differently according to spectator experience, particularly the experience of violent conflict.

The child in each film could be positioned as representing the trauma of the nation or nations, but Lury rejects the idea of the child as representative of the nation to argue that the child's perspective allows the 'adoption of an alternate mythic temporality, specifically the "once upon a time" of the fairy-tale' (2010: 6). I agree with Lury that the use of the fairy-tale enables a different time frame in which to understand narrative. The fairy tale is clearly a narrative device in *Pan's Labyrinth*, where the child itself becomes a recollection-object that invokes memory for the spectator, and is part of the child's narrative as witness to war in *The Bad Intentions* even if the fairy-tale is of the child's making. Lury argues that the child 'does not represent innocence but rather challenges the conventions of a certain kind of history-telling' (2010: 143). She explains that fairy-tale is 'situated [...] between speech and writing, endlessly revised and retold, it allows for a temporal dislocation, a validation of sensory experience and a promotion of the irrational to which the child has privileged access' (2010: 125). This suggests that the representation of the child, as opposed to the embodied experience the child, is used as a blank canvas on which to superimpose meaning.

### **The Act of Recognition**

When the character of a child is used as a witness to events, it becomes, according to Lury, a conduit for adult projection, or the adult voice. Lury observes that the representation of the child from an adult point of view is a form of *prosopopoeia*, a conversation between the living (adult) and the dead (child) (2010: 11) where the child (and childhood) is 'other' to the adult or the

adult world. The child, she argues, ‘cannot speak “properly” to the adult they have since become’ (11). The child can confront trauma in a child-like way that allows ‘a more visceral or haptic confrontation’ (2010: 125). Emma Wilson suggests that the trope of the missing child ‘affords particular emotive opportunities for thinking mourning and commemoration’ and confronting loss ‘of a loved one, loss of identity’ (2003: 158). The missing child, she argues, becomes a cue for the narrative to confront themes such as kinship bonds, nostalgia, the future and the past as well as caring and belonging (2). Wilson also suggests that the style of cinematography can mimic the child’s point of view by bringing the audience to the level of the child, for example, with low camera angles, close-up shots and disorientating shots (2003: 335). The child, or the representation of the child, therefore, loses the essence of the child’s embodied experience, and so loses the authentic voice of the child. That is not to say that the voice of the child fails to be part of an accurate representation of the child, but the child, I argue, becomes the bond – or recollection-object – that bridges memories of the child and the adult.

In *Birth* the young child embodies both adult and child but, in reality, there is no child, the child has become other and is now missing. The othering of the child, according to Olson and Scahill, happens when the child steps outside of its role of the vulnerable or the dependent or the innocent and becomes marginalised (2012: x). The function of the child, Lury suggests, is to become other to the adult and that is one of the main functions of the child in adult narrative cinema. The child’s perspective, therefore, is constructed according to an adult perception of the world. This does not explain how a child can be thought of as an adult through reincarnation. Robert J. Lifton and Eric Olson describe the process by which death is acknowledged, but is understood by its relatedness to life as ‘symbolic immortality’. (2004). Lifton and Olson say that ‘[t]his relatedness is expressed in many kinds of symbolization that enable one to participate in ongoing life without denying the reality of death’ (34). I suggest that the child in

*Birth* disrupts this process of symbolic immortality and interrupts the process of grieving. The child is lost in the process of becoming someone else. The transformation takes place in the uterus before birth but the recognition only takes place when the foetus becomes a recollection-object.

Recognition suggests a collective spectatorship, and it is more accurate to talk about a spectatorship, as discussed in Chapter One, in which the image or object becomes real in different ways for each spectator. The recollection object – or the recollection image or the memory image – ‘disrupts the coherence’ of the present when it is construed – or interpreted – in different ways depending on who is looking at it (Marks, 2000: 77-78).<sup>132</sup> This disruption of coherence implies that there is an interpretative relationship between objects and memory where memory can be real or imagined and part of an embodied experience for the spectator and protagonist. This blurring of images is usefully described by Marksian haptic visuality as ‘mutuality’ – in which the spectator becomes lost in the images on screen – and ‘implies a tension between viewer and image’ (Marks, 2000: 184-5). This tension or mutuality is a key factor in understanding how narrative around the embodied space of the uterus implies a ‘social relationship formation’ (Taylor, 2008: 78). This social relationship could be described as a bond – a formation of the relationship that is important in the creation of the memory object. The term “bonding” suggests that things that are brought into contact create an emotional connection, but it can also apply to things that are brought into contact by other forces.

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<sup>132</sup> Marks acknowledges Deleuze’s use of the terms ‘recollection image’ and ‘memory image’ which they both take from the work of Bergson who writes about memory and temporality in his 1911 *Matter and Memory* (2004). Bergson established, in his work on aphasia, that memory can exist despite the brain’s inability to transmit this memory through speech.

As Taylor suggests, bonding can also describe the way in which things are brought together by chemical or physical reaction and she questions the use of bonding in relation to the unborn foetus. She argues that the notion of bonding in relation to the scan is flawed (2008: 78). This stems from the assumption that it is the image of the foetus in the scan that creates a bond, implying that a bond – for whoever is looking at it – cannot exist without it. Bonding associated with the ultrasound, Taylor explains, suggests that it provides a social glue that brings together the parent – particularly the mother – with the foetus, which sidelines the emotional attachment, or non-attachment, to the foetus that would occur anyway without any visualisation. Clearly, the image of the foetus in the foetal ultrasound is of central importance; less clear, however, is why this technological image moves from a position of central importance to become a marker of positive or negative bonding.<sup>133</sup> She suggests that bonding with the foetus is part of a more complicated process of building narratives of kinship. In this process, the foetus or the image of the foetus is an integral part of developing kinship. As I have already suggested in Chapter Two, the formation of kinship can be part of the memory of the wider community and part of the intergenerational embodied storytelling. In this way, the foetus becomes a recollection-object as a conduit for collections of memories that are constantly being renegotiated and retold.

Embodied memory or the collaboration of memories suggests a relationship or a reaction to what is real. The notion of what is real is often conflated with Baudrillardian notions of the hyperreal where an object not only substitutes for, but also replaces, the real as a *simulacrum*.<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> Taylor argues that the process of relationship forming has been lost in scientific race to prove how important the foetal ultrasound is to medicine. Nicholson and Fleming, in their discussion of the development of the foetal ultrasound, agree that the effectiveness of the ultrasound to improve perinatal outcomes is not always clear; however, the use of the foetal ultrasound coupled with the foetal ultrasound image is now a fundamental part of antenatal primary care (2013: 262-263).

<sup>134</sup> In *Simulacra and Simulation*, Baudrillard provides a clear distinction between what is simulation and what is pretence or fakery where ‘to simulate is to feign to have what one doesn’t have’ (1994: 3). He notes that ‘pretending, or dissimulating, leaves the principle of reality intact [whereas] simulation threatens the difference between the “true” or the “false”, the “real” and the “imaginary”’

This replacement of the real does not explain the way the recollection-object is transformed through the narrative process, neither does it explain the way the imagined image is understood to be real by the protagonist.<sup>135</sup> Although a notion of the real can apply to what can be seen, it does not explain *how* imagined images are perceived as real, and this is a crucial distinction. Marks suggests that it is in the process of recognition – which brings simulation (an approximation to the real) and *simulacra* together – that haptic visuality works. She argues that ‘by shifting from one form of sense-perception to another, the image points to its own asymptotic, caressing relation to the real, and to the same relation between perception and the image [and that this displays] an elastic, dynamic movement’ (2000: 192-3).<sup>136</sup> I suggest Marks is agreeing with Lury that there is a temporal quality to this spectatorial dynamic. This elastic, dynamic movement between the (perceived) image and the spectator suggests a tactility that is not only described by physical touch, but also by emotional response and it is here that the element of fantasy allows a slowing down of the narrative time frame to allow an interpretation of the reality of the embodied experience rather than the reality of the image. Clearly, the notion of a sensorial and emotional response does not fully explain how the spectator can ‘identify with sense memories [they have] never had’ as Marks notes (2000: 198). The memory of objects, nevertheless, suggests a relationship to what is perceived or interpreted to be real.

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(3). Baudrillard also indicates that there is fluidity or blending in simulation between what exists and what simulates that existence. Simulacrum, he argues, does not have a basis in reality, as it is not a copy or simulation of the real.

<sup>135</sup> See Richard Rushton for a fuller discussion of filmic reality (2011:126-147).

<sup>136</sup> Marks does not reference Baudrillard. The only mention that Marks makes is in reference to Marxist scholarship which she dismisses on the one hand as ‘dry positivism’, and on the other hand as ‘Baudrillardian dazzlement at the world of self-replicating signs’ (121). Marks argues that Benjamin’s (1968) ideas about the ‘demystification and *re*-mystif [ication] of the object’ were dismissed by Marxism (121; emphasis in original). She argues that the appreciation of the materiality of the object was lost by the Marxist focus of ‘social relations encoded in the object’ (121). Marks suggests that the more mystical elements that the object can represent have also been dismissed.

Renegotiation and reinterpretation explains the transformation of the recollection-object from one collection of memories to another where the recollection-object becomes the marker of temporal changes in memory. Marks refers to this transformative quality when she talks about the recollection-object as a transitional-object. Using the term transitional-object is a helpful way to signpost how strong emotional attachment to objects becomes part of the everyday physical life of the protagonists.<sup>137</sup> In this way it is not only the foetus itself that becomes a recollection-object but the objects that are marked by the presence of the foetus. Marks argues that the recollection-object transcends time and exists through physical contact. Tactility not only describes what can be physically touched with the body, it also describes the way the body reacts emotionally through the senses as part of the cinematic experience. Jennifer Barker terms this experience as *inspiration*: where the act of viewing includes the affective nature of the film's aesthetic. Barker describes the cause and effect between the spectator and the film whereby the film becomes inscribed by spectator response (2009). This response, she explains, describes how the spectator 'cause[s] the film to erupt in sound' or 'inspire[s] a close-up' (2009: 148, emphasis in original). This two-way response is actually a description of the narrative structure and suturing the spectator where the 'expressive, affective qualities of the film and the viewer's affective responses [are] two sides of a single structure that exists in the space between film and viewer' (148). Moments of heightened emotional drama can be understood as underscoring the 'intersubjectivity of viewer and the viewed, as well as [how the] tactile contact between film and viewer moves *through* the body and opens onto something larger than either

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<sup>137</sup> The term 'transitional object' comes from the work of D.W. Winnicott and relates to comfort objects that young children and babies carry around with them when their parents or carers are not with them (1986). This is not the same as the Kleinian Object Relations Theory that refers to child and adult development. Marks replaces the idea of the transitional-object with the notion of transnational objects: objects that cross cultures and geographical spaces like commodities.

film or viewer' (149; emphasis in original). In each film, the experience of the child and the embodied experience of the child is a crucial element.

### **Intimacy and Remembering in *Up***

In the film *Up*, the elderly main protagonist Carl (Ed Asner) is widowed and lives in the house he originally bought when he was a newly married man. Early in their marriage, his wife, Ellie (Elizabeth Docter), has a miscarriage and they have no children. After Ellie dies Carl refuses to talk to anyone including Russell (Jordan Ngai) a young boy scout who tries to convince him to help him get a Wilderness Explorer badge for service to the elderly. City developers are keen for Carl to move so that they can demolish his house to build new apartment blocks. Carl refuses to leave until he is embroiled in a confrontation when the developers destroy his precious post box, which reminds him of his wife. When he attacks the site manager, he is visited by the community services with details of a retirement home. He agrees to move, but instead attaches balloons to his house and flies out of the city in the direction of Paradise Falls in South America, a place his late wife Ellie had always dreamed of visiting. As Carl flies, he discovers Russell is on his porch. Although Carl objects, they end up travelling together. Carl tries to ignore Russell, but eventually has to save his life and bring him back to the city where Russell gets his badge of merit. During their adventures, Carl finds a note from Ellie in her adventure book that tells him to have his own adventure and the film ends as Carl begins to engage with the world around him once more.

Although many films made for children (and families) tackle larger themes aimed at adult audiences – the position of women, the role of the father, and children leaving home – the narrative in *Up*, unusually, tackles the issue of the unspoken grief of miscarriage and

infertility.<sup>138</sup> Desmond O'Neill, writing in the *British Medical Journal*, calls the film a 'gerontological Trojan horse' which 'combin[es] the hero role [...] with the pains of ageing, bereavement, [and] intergenerational solidarity' and goes on to say that there are few films which tackle 'courtship, infertility and death in the opening 10 minutes' (2009: 922-933).<sup>139</sup> O'Neill mentions the opening sequences, which are designed to have an emotional impact on the spectator, so they can understand their impact on the main protagonist, Carl. In common with live-action film, the animated film relies on spectator identification, particularly emotional identification where the spectator must suspend disbelief in their response to the construction of a digital image. As Richard Neupert observes, the Pixar production house uses the aesthetic of digital animation to represent embodied emotions (2014: 219). Neupert explains that early digitalised images were not able to represent the human form and Pixar began to create narratives that used the non-human objects such as lamps and cars and attributed emotions to these objects by animating them to mimic human movement (215-224). Representing emotions, he suggests, distracts the spectator from the artifice of the inanimate constructed image. Pixar is known as a production house that prioritises emotionally complex intergenerational narratives and *Up* was the first animated feature to open the Cannes film festival. I focus my analysis on the opening sequence to explain how the complexity of life chapters that shape people's lives is established from the beginning of the film and the narrative around the uterus and the foetus underpins the narrative arc of the main character.

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<sup>138</sup> Its opening sequence has been much lauded by critics for its narrative brevity and emotional punch (Bradshaw [2009]; Ebert [2009]; and French [2009]).

<sup>139</sup> The *BMJ* prints film reviews of medical relevance written by medical journalists, medical staff and others. Such reviews have tackled issues around euthanasia, ageing and bereavement such as Gonzalo Casino's review of *Mar adentro/The Sea Inside* (2004, Alejandro Amenabar) which deals with the issue of euthanasia (2004).

The four-minute sequence at the beginning of the film concentrates the lives of the main protagonists, Carl and Ellie, from their young married life to Ellie's death. The sequence is without dialogue or voice-over and illustrates the attention to emotional identification. Coupled with the opening of the film that portrays Carl and Ellie meeting as children, the short sequence explains succinctly the mood of Carl – which is an important establishing factor in the film – who is now widowed, but explains how he has become inward-looking as a result of his wife dying and the landscape changing around him. The short sequence is not placed at the absolute beginning of the film; it appears a few minutes into the narrative after the two main characters have been established in their lives as children. This is crucial as it establishes the close bond that Carl and Ellie have as children (their love of fun, adventure and plans for the future) and that, although they are ageing, they retain similar characteristics and qualities throughout their lives. Crucially, I argue, the sequence establishes the foetus and Ellie's adventure book as recollection-objects for Carl, and illustrates the way the frame of the uterus changes when the threshold of life and death is crossed from the site of the foetus to the site of loss.

The sequence has a sophisticated narrative structure which functions as a complete narrative in itself as well as acting as the inciting incident for the film as a whole. The conventional story of a young couple setting up home and the nursery is quickly and starkly stripped back to reveal the key moment in their life when they learn they will never have children. The sequence is played with music but without dialogue or sound effects. This means that the dynamic between the screen and the spectator relies on an embodied reaction from the spectator. The embodied dynamic between the two characters is an essential element in the narrative construction that emphasises their emotional bond, but also places the spectator into the narrative around the uterus. This can be seen in the transition between two scenes: in the nursery and in the hospital. The two scenes are linked cinematically with a tracking shot from one scene to the other and

acoustically by the slowing of the musical soundtrack. The tracking action of the camera (incorporating a screen wipe to change the scene) acts as a temporal shift and demonstrates how the visual in the nursery can become the visual and the sensory in the process of a change of frame, highlighting that a threshold has been crossed. The camera tracks from the bright colour of the nursery to the darkness of the hospital corridor. There is a visual contrast between the two scenes. The scene in the nursery shows the nursery in bright colours, the metaphorical stork – bringing the baby in its beak – painted on the wall, the couple, sharing the decorating jobs (Figure 47). These activities indicate nest-building and preparation for a first baby, including the new cot with new bedding. The tracking camera between the two scenes is crucial as it indicates a passage of time – an ellipsis. During this ellipsis, the journey to hospital, the telling of bad news and any medical procedures have all taken place, and the focus is on the frame of the uterus. The foetus becomes a recollection-object as it encodes memory of the miscarriage.



Figure 47. Carl and Ellie preparing the nursery in *Up*.



Figure 48. Carl and Ellie in the hospital, receiving bad news in *Up*.

The threshold of life and death is crossed in this ellipsis and the spectator only shares this moment of change through the affective way the characters respond. The anticipation of the birth is a public event – a celebration – and something to be seen as shown on the scene in the nursery. The pregnant body is prominent in the frame. The frame of the uterus is present in Ellie’s embodiment, and it is also in the centre of the frame in the form of the metaphorical journey of the stork pictured on the wall bringing the “baby” in a sheet. The miscarriage, by

contrast, takes place in the narrative gap and is presented as intimate. Rather than the stork in centre frame, it is the anatomical position of the foetus in the uterus that hangs over Carl and Ellie's heads (Figure 48). The miscarriage becomes a private event where the spectator can only get a glimpse of the scene and only sees what is happening through a doorway in the centre of the frame. This highlights the threshold between public and the private in relation to birth. It also establishes the foetus as a recollection-object that exists in this conceptual shift from public to private and acts as a bond between the two characters. It is at this point that the uterus, representing the interior of the body, functions as the site of fiction. It is a fantastical location where there is no baby. The spectator is separated by the narrative gap from what has happened to Carl and Ellie, and given few visual or narrative clues about these lost scenes apart from the contrast between the two. The narrative gap, therefore, brings together the memory of Carl and Ellie in the nursery with the image of Carl and Ellie in the hospital. This temporal ellipsis creates a dynamic between the past and the present where 'the image has to be present and past [...] at the same time' (Deleuze, 1989: 76). This temporal shift, I argue, relies on a visceral response for effect as the haptic and the optic now form a dynamic of bonding. Because of the elliptical moment, the threshold of life and death changes the nature of the foetus as recollection-object. As a result of its death, it disappears or disintegrates. This scene is pivotal as it suggests that the miscarriage or Ellie's death is the inciting incident in the film.

The miscarriage initiates action in the narrative, but is a weak inciting incident as this narrative strand is solved very quickly. The consequence of not having a baby for Carl and Ellie is that they carry on with their lives together without children of their own. In order for the presence of the foetus to have any additional meaning, the miscarriage must be remembered as a bonding part of their life chapters and as part of the threshold between life and death. It is crucial that the spectator shares the visceral response of the two protagonists to the miscarriage, as the

emotions that it engenders are an integral part of the narrative. The important factor in this four-minute sequence is that it signposts the significance of the miscarriage and the loss of the foetus and its relationship to the other life chapters that the protagonists share. It also highlights how significant the death of Ellie, as his life partner, is to Carl and demonstrates the importance that objects have to each of them. This narrative around the uterus also establishes that Carl is capable of expressing deeply felt emotions. Importantly, if the sequence had been longer, and with dialogue, the visceral response would be significant, but not so crucial. As can be seen throughout the rest of the sequence, which charts their completed life together, Carl and Ellie enjoy a fulfilled life doing very ordinary things such as going to work and enjoying their own company. The sequence of the miscarriage, therefore, has been constructed to tell Carl's backstory by relying on a process of bonding whereby memories are created for both the protagonists and the spectator. These memories are designed to resonate throughout the film, and to be remembered as the film progresses.



Figure 49. Carl points to the sky and Ellie looks up in *Up*.

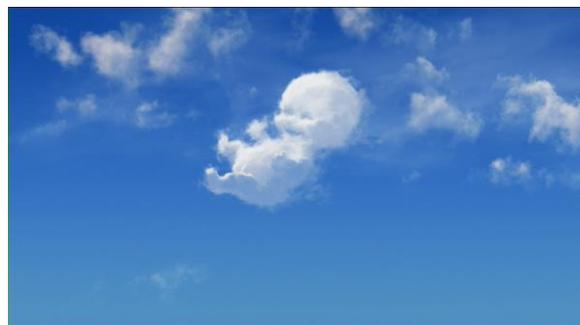


Figure 50. Carl and Ellie look at the shape of a baby in the clouds in *Up*.

The foetus becomes a recollection-object when Carl and Ellie lie in the park and Carl imagines the shapes in the cloud as shapes of a “baby” (Figure 49). Carl and Ellie create a vivid image of a baby, a fetishistic image of a baby floating in the sky, disembodied and separated from the uterus (Figure 50). This establishes the image of the baby as a recollection-image or recollection

object and is a perception of a “baby” rather than something exists and is real. The image of a baby functions strongly as a recollection-object for both the protagonists and the spectator. For Carl and Ellie, this image is associated with the tactility of their relationship: the climb up the hill where Ellie takes Carl’s hand and the close physical contact on the rug. The haptic quality of the scene, the vivid green colour and movement of the grass coupled with the bright colours of the scene is echoed in the nursery scene and later in the sequence in their garden following the miscarriage. What is clear is that the foetus as a memory and as a recollection-object is transferred into other objects through tactility. This physical contact explains the importance of Ellie’s adventure book as a reminder of Carl and Ellie’s life chapters including the miscarriage. The recollection-image evolves and becoming absorbed into objects that are associated with – but are not representative of – the original memory. There are other objects associated with Carl and Ellie’s shared memory: the grape juice bottle-top that Ellie gives Carl when she first meets him; the mismatched chairs they always sit on; the painting of Paradise Falls – which has centre place in their living room – but it is Ellie’s adventure book that becomes closely associated with the memory of miscarriage.

The adventure book becomes an object imbued with memories of Ellie, of Carl and Ellie’s childhood, the miscarriage and the foetus, Ellie’s death, and Carl’s own adventure. It has become a recollection-object (and a transitional object) that invokes embodied memories for the protagonists and spectator. The book as recollection-object becomes part of a communicative memory, which transcends time, and resonates in collective memory and through their physical contact. The adventure book is first seen when Carl and Ellie meet as children. Ellie shows Carl her book (Figure 51) and shares with him her dreams of travel to South America and Paradise Falls. The next time we see the book, Carl is offering it to Ellie as a comfort after her miscarriage (Figure 52). In each interaction, the adventure book is imbued

with a memory that instantly becomes part of their shared past. It is also a visual cue for the spectator to remind them of the emotional life moments when the book is seen. Later, when Ellie realises she is dying, she gives the book to Carl (Figure 53). When Carl is at a turning point in his adventure (which is the final turning point in the narrative of the film), and on the point of giving up he opens the book to find that Ellie has placed photographs of their life together in her section of ‘stuff I’m going to do’ (Figure 54). When Carl and Ellie exchange the adventure book, this physical contact is an extension of the physical contact and bond that marks their relationship with each other.

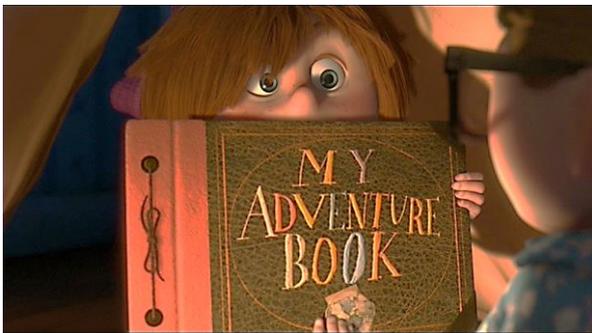


Figure 51. Ellie lets Carl read her private adventure book when they are children in *Up*.



Figure 52. Carl gives Ellie her adventure book as a way to comfort her in *Up*.



Figure 53. Carl passes Ellie her adventure book in hospital before she dies in *Up*.



Figure 54. An emotional turning point for Carl is opening Ellie's adventure book in *Up*.



Figure 55. Ellie sits quietly when she returns home after the miscarriage in *Up*.



Figure 56. Carl watches Ellie from the window in *Up*.

This physical contact is seen in other moments of the couple sitting, dancing, and cleaning together, and it can also be seen in the sequence that leads to the exchange of the adventure book following the miscarriage. Without dialogue, this scene shows that the close physical connection between Carl and Ellie is reflected in the body of the film, on the screen. Ellie sits with her face to the sun and to the breeze after her miscarriage and the movement of the breeze in her hair (Figure 55) is echoed in the subtle animation of Carl breathing (Figure 56). When Carl watches Ellie in the garden, his point of view becomes the spectator's point of view. Almost imperceptibly, he can be seen breathing as his chest moves in and out. The slow pace of movement of Ellie's hair coupled with Carl's slow breathing forms a rhythm which gives the impression of an embodied empathy. While Carl, and the spectator, watches Ellie, the slow breathing suggests Carl's (and the spectator's) embodied response to the situation. This embodied response contributes to the pace of the film, where not only does the action slow down, but also the spectator's embodied response is slowed; the action in the scene depends on this embodied identification and marks the sequence as a threshold between life and death. The exchange of touch and movement is echoed in the scene of Ellie's death where she gives her adventure book to Carl then strokes his chin, touches his tie, and holds his hand, all gestures relating to their everyday life together. This interaction between protagonists is haptic and the spectator response is through haptic visuality. As the foetus moves between the images of the

“baby” in the sky, and the “baby” carried by the stork, I suggest the uterus also moves and reframes the action that forms these life chapters

The narrative around the uterus has a temporal strength both in how it becomes part of a memory associated with the recollection-object, but also in how it advances the narrative overall. The adventure book, as a collection of embodied memories is critical to the narrative. It is only by considering his response to the adventure book that Carl can complete his mission and resolve the narrative. The adventure book, positioned as part of the close emotional bond created by the couple, can be considered as part of the recollected narrative around the uterus. Each memory whether it has positive or negative intensity, has meaning not only for the protagonists, but also for the spectator. Later in the film, as Carl surrounds himself with objects which remind him of his life with Ellie, his home effectively acts as a place ‘imbued with memories and palimpsests of relationships’ (O’Neill, 2009: 922). In this palimpsest is the memory and imagery around their shared experience of losing a foetus. When Ellie dies, Carl has to place those memories in objects, including the adventure book. The film demonstrates the quality of objects in representing memory as the objects speak to the past as something that is not always understandable. They can be understood through the sense of mutuality whereby the spectator and the protagonist understand that remembering and forgetting are part of gathering memories. It also shows that haptic visuality draws in the audience to share the sensations of grief through not only imagery, but also through a sensory connection. This dynamic of collected embodied memories not only signifies something that is lost, but also can be suggestive of something that is missing. The foetus only exists for a short time in the film, but the embodied experience remains throughout the film in the transfer of the recollection-object between the protagonists. The foetus as a recollection-object, inside the uterus can disappear, not only as a result of pregnancy loss, but also because the baby has been born.

### **Everyday Battle of Embodiment in *The Bad Intentions***

*The Bad Intentions* is set in 1982 and 1983 in the capital city of Lima in Peru during the civil war. The main protagonist is an eight-year-old girl, Cayetana (Fátima Buntinx) who lives a middle-class life in the city. Her mother Inés (Katerina D'Onofrio) travels frequently. Her biological father, who is separated from her mother, does not always arrive for his scheduled visits and her stepfather spends long hours in his painter's studio. Cayetana, then, spends most of her time in her room or being fed and dressed by staff. She explores the grounds of their gated house by herself. The only time she leaves the house is to be driven to school. While at school, she is interested in the stories of Latin America's revolutionary heroes and she incorporates them into her everyday life as lucid dreams, engaging with her heroes as if they were real. On one of her trips home, Inés reveals that she is pregnant. Cayetana is devastated by this news and believes that when the baby is born she will die. She spends the time leading up to the birth, preparing for her own death. Eventually, when the baby is born and she does not die, Cayetana refuses to follow her heroes, explaining that she has to stay and get to know her brother.

Cayetana's embodied, emotional feelings of love, fear, and death are experienced through her lucid dreams of heroes and heroic sacrifice. Her feelings are also influenced by her life in Lima in the middle of a civil war. Cayetana's imaginative dreams surface at the very opening of the film during the credits sequence and emphasises the importance she attaches to the concepts of heroism, liberation and valour. Her dreams establish that her character is highly imaginative and her imaginative state of mind influences her emotional and embodied engagement throughout the film. Her dreams encourage her to have a visceral response to her mother Inés's (Katerina D'Onofrio) pregnancy. She understands the foetus to be her heroic adversary and she sees the foetus in this way because she has developed a complex system of images and objects

in order to make sense of the world around her. Although she dreads the birth of her sibling, while the foetus is in the uterus Cayetana creates a heroic character for it. Cayetana fetishises the foetus so that it becomes a recollection-object that she understands as real and is something of value to her. This helps her to position the foetus in her everyday world, as she understands it, which includes the foetus's role in her revolutionary battle.

One of the most vivid ways that Cayetana uses her imagination is to consider her unborn sibling as her heroic rival. This creates a bond between her and the foetus that incorporates the history and myth of her revolutionary heroes and introduces this bond to their own life story. She spends long hours cutting out figures of Latin American revolutionary heroes and pasting them into battle scenes, which she then narrates with graphic detail of killing and torture.<sup>140</sup> Cayetana experiences the material presence of her revolutionary heroes. As the narrative progresses, she steps into the world of her dreams to become a revolutionary character herself. It is helpful here, I argue, to think about Marks' suggestion that the 'optical perception privileges the *representational* power of the image, haptic perception privileges the *material* presence of the image' (2000: 163; my emphasis). This is reflected in what Cayetana says at the beginning of the film when she tells the figure of José Olaya, 'I want to be a hero, like you'. She exists in the threshold between the life and death of her heroes, which explains her anxiety over her own

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<sup>140</sup> There are many revolutionary heroes in Cayetana's lucid dreams. Simón Bolívar fought for the liberation of Peru, Bolivia, Colombia, Venezuela and Ecuador against Spain in the early nineteenth century. Juan José de San Martín was an Argentinean who fought against the Spanish at the same time as Bolívar. Francisco Bolognesi Cervantes was a colonel in the Peruvian army in the mid to late-nineteenth century who died in his last military battle, which was fought in Arica on the border with Chile. He refused to surrender and said he would fight until the last shot/cartridge – *hasta quemar el último cartucho*. The fighting was chaotic on both sides and he was killed along with most of the other Peruvian soldiers. Túpac Amaru, a supposed descendent of the last Inca leader, led an uprising against the Spanish in the late eighteenth century and was killed, as Cayetana describes, by having his legs and arms roped to four individual horses who were then ridden in different directions. His body was then quartered and decapitated. José Olaya, a fisherman, showed great courage when he swam across the sea with covert messages for the liberation soldiers. When captured he was tortured but refused to speak. For more, see Benjamin Keen and Keith Haynes (2009).

embodiment. She identifies her daily life with their battles for liberation and her embodied connection becomes increasingly real. Cayetana recreates images not only from what she can see, but also from what she can hear and feel. She hears the sounds of voices shouting and horses galloping. She mimics the way fingernails are torn off, pulling at her own fingernails as she narrates the images. This establishes that not only that she has an embodied connection to the story, but also that the spectator is encouraged to witness the haptic quality of her lucid dreams.

She has been told in history lessons that when Latin American heroes Simón Bolívar and José de San Martín met to liberate Peru, Bolívar said that ‘two suns cannot shine in the same sky’. Although this did not necessarily mean that one of them had to die, Cayetana translates this into meaning that she cannot exist in the world at the same time as her sibling when it is born so that her mortality, as she understands it, depends on the foetus remaining in the uterus. While the foetus is *in utero*, she remains alive. The foetus, then, becomes a recollection-object for Cayetana that is a marker of her own mortality. Although Cayetana’s negative thoughts about her the unborn foetus are seen by the other characters in the film as jealousy and malice, these feelings can be read differently if it is understood that Cayetana believes that she and her sibling are both heroes awaiting their first meeting. Cayetana’s lucid dreams are crucial to the way she experiences the world. Her visceral response is to the actual embodied world around her, *and* to her imagined images of revolutionary heroes. For Cayetana, mortality, as a threshold she must cross, is an actuality that she has learnt from historical narratives and this creates a visceral, embodied connection that she shares with the heroes.

Cayetana cuts out images of historical heroes with scissors. Her collages fill her wardrobe and cover her desk with overlapping pictures where she forms and reforms a tactile and optical connection. Sarah Thomas explains that ‘this imaginative realm serves not only to demonstrate

Cayetana's progressive claiming of agency, but also to align the adult spectator with the child's perspective, bringing the adult viewer into the child's world rather than the other way around' (2014: 54). Thomas makes an important point about agency and while there is no evidence that Cayetana turns her everyday into a fantasy in order to understand it, what is clear is that she turns her mother's pregnancy – and particularly the foetus – into a fantasy that she incorporates into her everyday life. The recreated battle scenes become a way for Cayetana to escape the reality of the life around her. Violence and the shedding of blood is part of that reality. The use of a sharp razor blade, rather than scissors or a pencil, demonstrates the ease with which the body can be cut. She pours red paint onto the picture that shows the capture and torture of indigenous leader Túpac Amaru. The picture shows that he has ropes tied around each limb and is then pulled in opposing directions. His body, as she says, is so strong it does not separate. She takes her razor blade to make cuts across the pictures of his limbs (Figure 57), as if she were cutting them apart. The imagery in this sequence is visceral. Cayetana takes this violent moment in history and places herself in the action, slicing through the limbs of the hero who is being tortured. In this way, it can be understood that Cayetana has an understanding of the threshold between life and death, and that crossing this threshold involves an embodied sacrifice.



Figure 57. Cayetana drips red paint and cuts the picture in *The Bad Intentions*.



Figure 58. Cayetana smears her blood onto her brother's crib in *The Bad Intentions*.

In order to understand her actions in relation to the foetus, it is crucial to understand this visceral embodied connection. When Cayetana cuts her finger with a razor blade later in the film and then smears her blood across the fresh linen of her baby brother's new crib (Figure 58), it is because she is anticipating her own death. Her mother has gone to the hospital to give birth and it is not only the thought of the baby that is causing her distress, but the fact that the foetus is about to cross the threshold of the uterus from the unborn to the newborn. The birth of the baby, if it is alive, is a threat to her own mortality as she has imagined it, so there is a context for her action. Cayetana's mortality and that of the baby is, therefore, entwined. This explains an earlier sequence where Cayetana is taken to school by her mother in the car. They are late and travelling at speed. Suddenly, when she feels the movements of her foetus, Inés takes Cayetana's hand and places it on her pregnant belly. Cayetana becomes distressed, and removes her hand immediately. It is as if this tactile experience is too visceral for her and it overwhelms her. In this moment, she is forced, physically, to experience the foetus in the embodied frame of the uterus as well as the imagined character she has created for it. The foetal movements, for Cayetana, reinforce the likelihood of her own death. When Inés asks if she can feel the baby move, Cayetana says no and asks if it is dead. By touching her mother and feeling the movements of the foetus, the separation between the unborn and the living is brought into sharp relief for Cayetana and her own notion of the threshold between life and death is simultaneously reinforced and destabilised.

Cayetana's fascination with death and dying is not only in relation to how the body works, but also in relation to how the body dies. Her fascination is influenced by her embodied anxieties about her own health. When she first mentions Túpac Amaru, she says that he fought for the rights of the miners who, among other hardships, suffered from asthma. Cayetana has asthma and thinks that her mother, and everyone else, wants to swap her for a healthy child. She asks herself, 'why do they want a new baby, what's wrong with the old one? Is it no good because it's got asthma?' While she is asleep, and before the baby is born, Cayetana dreams that the medical members of staff, who are caring for her newborn brother, meet her in the garden. They explain that the newborn needs blood and vital organs to survive and that they have her parent's permission to take them from her as the baby's closest relative. She has no desire to die by choice to save her brother, so she tells the medical staff that her organs are no use as she is adopted. The fact that Cayetana dreams about her bodily parts being used to protect her sibling gives insight into her relationship with her own body and suggests that she has an understanding of the difference between fantasy and reality. She understands that her own body has an actual biological bond to the body of the foetus, which suggests that the foetus not only exists in her imagination, it also exists as a material presence for her and that her understanding of death and mortality is sophisticated.



Figure 59. Cayetana brings her finger towards the blind maid's eye in *The Bad Intentions*.



Figure 60. Cayetana pinches her baby brother's nose in *The Bad Intentions*.

Cayetana repeatedly experiments with the mechanics of the body and she uses tactility as a means to discover how it works. When her grandmother's blind maid brings her a glass of milk, Cayetana stands in her way so that she can bring her finger close to the maid's eyelid (Figure 59). She does this so that she can see how close they can be before the maid is aware of what she is doing. The implication is also that she could hurt the maid as her fingernail is almost touching the maid's eye. Cayetana's finger is framed in the centre of the shot, emphasising that she is holding it in front of the maid's eye. It is Cayetana's eyes, however, that are in focus in the shot. As she knows the maid is blind, this suggests that it is her own eyes and her own sight that she is trying to understand, not that she is trying to harm someone else. In a similar way, when she is alone with her newborn baby brother in the hospital, she pinches his nose to see if he will stop breathing (Figure 60). She holds his nose with her fingers until he moves uncomfortably, struggling to breathe. She then takes her fingers away and desperately blows in his face so that she is sure he is breathing as if she is not sure whether, now it is born and outside of the uterus, the baby is alive or dead. Again, this demonstrates a sophisticated knowledge of how the body works. It is as if she is trying to understand the materiality of both kinship and mortality by pushing people away physically or psychologically on the one hand, and trying to find physical and psychological closeness on the other.

Cayetana understands loyalty, friendship and kinship by experimenting with her collages, retelling heroic escapades and recreating scenes of violence and torture, but she is constantly surrounded by conflicting images in her own life. When she creates her own vivid imagery, it affects her on a visceral and emotional level: a haptic level as well as an embodied level. Taken from many sources, the images, along with her narration of accurate historical detail, provide a counterpoint to the actual images she sees around her every day. When she travels to school, she sees the body of a dog hanging on a street corner, a hammer and sickle in flames on the

outskirts of the city and the sculptures of war heroes in every plaza. Cayetana understands the couple, who live just outside the walls of her house, as neighbours, but she has to physically climb a ladder to wave to them. When the wall is raised, for the protection of her own family, she is unable to see the couple and they are removed visually from her everyday life. She speaks to the man who begs in the street and who approaches the car asking for money. He says he cannot sleep, so she offers him her asthma medication because it makes her feel sleepy. She is, therefore, both physically removed and immersed in a world that she understands through fragmented snippets of conversations alongside images that she sees from the inside of a car, over the wall of her house and through the car window. Her understanding of kinship is constantly complicated and her revolutionary heroes provide emotional stability for her and provide what she understands as an embodied presence in her own life.



Figure 61. Cayetana looks at her mother through a plastic stencil in *The Bad Intentions*.



Figure 62. Cayetana's mother is framed in the doorway in *The Bad Intentions*.

The heroes function as transitional objects, which make Cayetana, feel safe in an environment that is becoming increasingly dangerous; they also function as recollection-objects, unlocking memories of her cultural history and making sense of her present world. The emotional detachment that Cayetana has from actual people, including her sibling, shows that she identifies more closely with virtual figures and strangers. In her relationship with her unborn sibling, she forms an emotional attachment (not necessarily positive but an embodied emotion

nonetheless), but her emotional disconnect, which is both psychological and physical, is shown visually. When Inés first arrives home from her travels, she wants to see Cayetana, but she cannot be found. Cayetana is hiding in a kitchen cupboard. She comes out of the cupboard, then views the scene in the lounge through a set of glass French doors. She moves the glass door back and forwards so that the images are clear, then dislocated and blurred, mimicking the embodied distanciation, aware that she is watching the people in the room. She does this again when her mother comes into her room. Cayetana looks at her mother through a plastic stencil (Figure 61), so that her image is blurred and fragmented. Even when she removes the stencil, her mother's pregnant body is framed in the doorway and there is an unreal quality to the image as shadows obscure her face (Figure 62). Cayetana experiments with her own haptic visuality, creating a distance between what is real (what she can see), and what she feels viscerally. Towards the end of the film, it is clear that Cayetana has some insight into her lucid dreams. Despite her experimentation with seeing and imagining, she does not follow her heroes into their final battle. She knows, from her history lesson, that their final battle is doomed. When her sibling is born, and she does not die, a threshold has been crossed whereby she can distance herself from her imaginary heroes. Her baby brother ceases to be her adversary and she decides to stay and get to know her brother.

Cayetana contextualises her mother's pregnancy, with the foetus as her heroic adversary, as part of her lucid dreams and she engages in this fantasy to make sense of her everyday world. She conflates historical facts and her everyday life so that she can position the foetus *in utero* within the context of her everyday reality, which is living a sheltered life in a city that is in the midst of a civil war. In her fantasy, the foetus demands her personal sacrifice and death, but she experiences an embodied disconnection from the real object in the uterus. It is only when she is forced to confront the reality of the foetus, by touching it through the frame of her mother's

body and the uterus, and finally touching the baby when it is born, that reality and fantasy come together and this affects her profoundly. Whilst the foetus is in the uterus it remains a fetishistic image, and a powerful recollection-object with which she understands her own world. The foetus as a recollection-object, and the frame of the uterus, however, disintegrate once the baby has been born.

### **The Uterine Image and the Child in *Pan's Labyrinth***

*Pan's Labyrinth* is set in Spain in 1944, following the civil war, and the main protagonist is a young girl, Ofelia (Ivana Baquero), who travels with her sick and pregnant mother, Carmen (Adriana Gil), to join her new stepfather, Captain Vidal (Sergi López) in his military settlement in the mountains. Vidal and his soldiers are loyal to General Franco, but in the surrounding hills guerrilla forces – *maquis* – continue to fight against the regime.<sup>141</sup> Mercedes (Maribel Verdú), the housekeeper, who befriends Ofelia, passes information to the guerrilla forces hiding in the woods. Not long after Ofelia arrives, she follows what she believes to be a fairy who leads her to an area in the woods that has been forbidden to her. There she meets the Faun who recognises her as the lost Princess Moanna of the underworld and gives her three tasks to complete in order to stay alive forever, and be reunited with her father the King. Ofelia follows the Faun's instructions, but becomes increasingly concerned by her mother's worsening health, although Vidal is more concerned about the survival of his unborn son. The Faun gives Ofelia a mandrake root to care for which will keep her mother alive. Despite completing the tasks, and tending to the mandrake root, her mother dies giving birth to her baby boy. Vidal wants to keep the newborn baby, but Ofelia takes the baby away from him. Vidal corners Ofelia in the Faun's labyrinth and shoots her. Mercedes arrives with the members of the *maquis* and takes the baby

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<sup>141</sup> The *maquis* fought against the Franco regime, and retreated to France where they continued their fight against the regime for many years. See Peter Anderson and Miguel Ángel del Arco (2015) for historical context, and H. R. Kedward (1993) for a detailed overview of the *maquis* in southern France

from Vidal who is then killed. Ofelia's story is told in reverse. At the beginning of the film, Ofelia's blood runs back into her body. By contrast, at the end of the film, even though she has been shot and is bleeding, she is taken to the underworld by the Faun to claim her right to become an immortal princess.

The film encompasses grief, loss and embodied memory through a fantastical narrative journey. Although the narrative is about the aftermath of the Spanish Civil War, the film is part of a trilogy of films set in Spain and Mexico.<sup>142</sup> The three films have narrative similarities in that they deal with fantasy and fiction, but the narratives also deal with the notion of everlasting life that is embodied in vampires, ghosts, and imaginary creatures. Ofelia is told by the Faun that she was 'not born of man' and that 'it was the moon that bore you'. This indicates that she is disconnected from the uterus and that she functions as a conduit in the film to bring together reality and fantasy so that she becomes a recollection-object that creates a bond between the historical trauma of civil war and the allegoric trauma of the child in the fairy tale. Her journey through fantasy is imaginative, but it also speaks to the liminality of her existence in the world of the living and the world of the dead. By moving between fantasy and reality, she is both alive and dead. Ofelia explores the world beneath the ground where the contrast between the real world and her fantasy is referenced in sequences that are designed to mimic the internal body, particularly the uterus, and uterine shapes. In contrast to the other films I have discussed in this chapter, these shapes are explicit and built into the sets of the film, so that the uterine imagery creates a deliberate aesthetic.

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<sup>142</sup> The two other films in the trilogy are *Cronos* (1993, Mexico), set in Mexico and about the discovery of a mechanical figure who can give everlasting life to humans, and *The Devil's Backbone/El espinazo del diablo* (2001, Spain/Mexico/France/Argentina), set in Spain in 1939 at the end of the civil war which involves a young boy who is sent to an orphanage and finds the presence of a ghost. Each film in the trilogy concerns childhood, kinship and loss.



Figure 63. The Faun's face and horns have a uterine shape in *Pan's Labyrinth*.

The uterus and the uterine have differing qualities whereby the uterus is a location for the foetus and the uterine describes the spatiality of the uterus. del Toro says the film is a uterine fantasy world with 'a fallopian palette of colours: we used crimsons and golds, and everything in the fantasy world is very rounded while everything in the real world is cold and straight' (2006). Although the film does not stick wholly to this palette, the film does experiment with uterine imagery. The incorporation of the assumed texture, colours, and fabric of the uterus into the landscape reflects a fantasy image of the internal body rather than an actual reconstruction of the uterus as an organ. The face of the Faun is uterine, with horns taking the place of the fallopian tubes. The fig tree where Ofelia has her first challenge is also shaped like a uterus with its dying branches resembling fallopian tubes (Figure 63). The bedhead in her mother's room has a uterine shape carved into it, and the drawing of the monster she encounters (the Pale Man) in one of her tasks, shows that his body and arms are shaped as uterine. This aesthetic design signals the narrative shift between what Ofelia perceives as real and what she imagines as fantasy. As a narrative device, the space of the uterus links the stories in each world, so that the notion of the uterine is critical to both and del Toro uses uterine imagery to create a corporeal disconnect between what the spectator understands as an embodied reality and an embodied fantasy.



Figure 64. The fig tree has a uterine shape in *Pan's Labyrinth*.



Figure 65. Ofelia crawls through the muddy interior of the fig tree in *Pan's Labyrinth*.

The importance of the uterine space is not only in its aesthetic, but also in Ofelia's embodied journey through it. The uterine space becomes a series of fantastical images made up of colours, sounds, sensations and smell where it exists in what Barker describes as the 'murky, mysterious interior, the viscera of the spectator and the cinema' where the texture of the images on screen provoke a gut reaction from the spectator (2009: 120). The uterus as a murky and mysterious place has roots in horror and del Toro draws on this genre to create a fantastic location with reference to the abject when Ofelia's first mission is to enter the roots of the uterine-shaped and decaying fig tree (Figure 64). Ofelia's embodied encounter with the elements in the tree result in her being covered in mud and rain, which, according to Lury, is a recurrent trope of the child in the fairy-tale (2012: 7). The internal space of this uterine tree is cavernous, muddy, sticky and full of insects (Figure 65). Long shots and close-ups on Ofelia reveal how long and narrow the space is, and how confined she is as insects scramble up her arms. Each time she brushes them away, she covers herself in mud so that she becomes camouflaged and increasingly part of this internal environment. The uterine shape is designed as a place that 'disturbs identity, system and order' something that 'does not respect borders, positions, rules' (Kristeva, 1982:

4).<sup>143</sup> In other words, it is a space that is dangerous for Ofelia, but it is both a refuge from her real life (where no-one can find her), and a life-saving space (if she can complete the task), so that the abject becomes a powerful force of protection or emotional support during this extremely traumatic period of her life.

The internal space of the uterine tree emphasises her separateness from the adult world as well as her un-humanness. She functions as a recollection-object for the spectator as a reminder of what Antonio Gómez L-Quñones calls the ‘unshareable anxieties’ that she is unable to communicate with anyone else (2012: 50). The notion of the mysterious interior, however, is linked more closely to the fantastic uterine space rather than the actual interior space of the uterus. The Faun’s uterine shape means that the uterine theme is not limited to female protagonists or to the female reproductive body.<sup>144</sup> The uterine imagery in the design of the horned and hooved Faun places it within the aesthetic code of the film and signals that the figure of the Faun encompasses mythology, reproduction, guardianship.<sup>145</sup> The Faun, however, is a figure who is fantastical, but also has a human-like appearance. As Ann Davies notes, the figure of the Faun signifies ‘matter out of place’ and its affectivity, as a monstrous figure, is in its

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<sup>143</sup> Kristeva is essentially talking here about hierarchical patriarchal systems, not simply personal and political codes, but this quotation illustrates the essence of the abject as she has described it and reflects the mood that del Toro is creating in this sequence.

<sup>144</sup> The Faun is recognised as a male; however, Donald Mackenzie describes the *glaistig*, a half-goat half-woman tutelary spirit of Scottish mythology associated with domestic animals and agricultural life who has a fierce temper. She guards the milk production and, if she is kept happy by the farmer, will bring luck and plenty (2010: preface).

<sup>145</sup> The ‘Faun’ has been translated as ‘Pan’ for English speaking audiences, which does not take into account their different mythological roots. Robert Graves explains that, in Greek mythology, ‘Pan, whose name is usually derived from *paein* “to pasture”, stands for the “devil” or “upright man” of the Arcadian fertility cult’ (1958: 102, emphasis in original). Pan in Greek mythology is a half-man half-goat, and is a tutelary spirit who lives in the mountains and fields, guarding domestic animals and beehives, but is feared for his temper and his ability to cause panic. In classical mythology, Mark P. O. Morford, Robert J. Lenardon and Michael Sham explain, Pan’s passion for the nymph Echo made her flee his advances. When Pan pursued her, he causes the shepherds to panic and destroy Echo so that only her voice remained (2011: 322). The faun and the satyr, half-goat (and the satyr half-horse or half-donkey) in Greek and Roman mythologies are known as fun-loving and sexually active. del Toro himself feels uneasy about the translation, from Faun to Pan; see Diestro-Dópido (2013: 85).

‘resemblance to the human template’ (2014: 29). This is significant given the Faun’s concern that Ofelia has become human. In order to return to her rightful place in the kingdom of the underworld, the Faun must be sure that she has not become human. This establishes her otherness as a non-human. The Faun recognises that Ofelia is not human and Ofelia recognises the Faun not only by his (uterine) appearance, but also as a smell. Smell, or the suggestion of smell, is a highly potent in haptic visuality and, as Marks suggests, invokes memories and associations with places and people.<sup>146</sup> Marks explains that the senses (in the spectator) can be aroused by narrative identification, so that by describing the Faun as a smell, the spectator is encouraged to think of the Faun not only as a visual presence, but perceived as an image that provokes the sense of smell (2000: 213). When Ofelia says the Faun ‘smelled of earth’, she implies that he is (as is the uterus) associated or connected to the elements. A connection to the elements, for example, being covered in earth, as Lury suggests, is a marker of the child in the world of the fairy-tale, but Ofelia’s journey, however, is not only as the child in the fairy tale: it is part of her embodied rite of passage.

Ofelia’s narrative journey reflects a nation at a time of crisis, but her journey is also one of self-discovery. Richard Lindsay suggests that the ‘strange and fertile symbolism of the film represents a coming of age struggle intimately familiar to women’ when he likens the uterine imagery and themes of birth and blood-letting in the film to an adolescent girl’s physical journey through puberty (2012).<sup>147</sup> Given that the film is inherently associated with the uterine

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<sup>146</sup> The word ‘smell’ does not fully acknowledge the physical process of inhalation and the emotion that is evoked and the significance of smell is not only culturally specific according to Constance Classen, David Howes and Anthony Synnott, but significant across age groups, nations and locations (1994). They argue that there are languages that have more words to describe the process of smell. They give the example of Quechua, spoken in the Andean highlands, that has a word – *mutquichacuni* – for a group to smell something together, and a word – *aznachicun* – to have oneself or let oneself be smelled (112).

<sup>147</sup> This quotation is taken from his abstract.

in its aesthetic design, the uterine imagery associated with Ofelia is based on the fantastical uterus not the actual anatomical journey of the pre-pubescent female. Although its function is dictated by the health and wellbeing of the person, it cannot determine a dramatic journey without other narrative factors. del Toro's intention is to produce a feminisation of the masculine hero narrative – and the film does experiment with masculine and feminine spatial territories – but the trope of the hero is not necessarily gendered or related to puberty. If del Toro's film is a comment on the adolescent girl's narrative journey, then the physiological function of the uterus has been distorted even if the director says the film is about a girl who gives birth to herself, and that Ofelia's 'idea of heaven, ultimately, is to go back into her mother's belly' (Kermode, 2006). Ofelia's journey is linked to the space of the uterus and to the foetus, but it is clear from what is happening to Ofelia's mother that the uterus, as a location, is not a safe haven.



Figure 66. The blank page of Ofelia's book slowly turns blood-red in *Pan's Labyrinth*.



Figure 67. The pattern on the page turns uterine in *Pan's Labyrinth*.

The first time Ofelia opens the Book of Crossroads – *el libro de las encrucijadas* – given to her by the Faun, its blank pages fill with fairy tale images and story that leads her to the roots of the fig tree, the next time she opens the book, the blank pages fill with blood-red uterine images (Figure 66 and Figure 67). The appearance of the uterine shape slowly filling the blank page signals her mother's haemorrhage, but it also signals the destruction of the uterus as a safe place

for the foetus and for the health of Carmen. The book itself is supposed to tell Ofelia what will happen in the future, so the imagery functions as a way for Ofelia to understand what is happening to her mother. In order for Ofelia to protect her mother and to protect the uterus, she must believe that the mandrake root baby that the Faun gives her is real. The root baby acts as a transitional object that provides comfort to her, and allows her to care surreptitiously for her mother. When it is destroyed (by Carmen), it precipitates the birth of the baby and her mother's death as if it is connected to Carmen's uterus. As the Faun explains to Ofelia, the mandrake root dreamt that it was human, and, therefore, she must give it milk and two drops of blood every day. Ofelia is then connected viscerally, with her own blood, to the root baby. This is emphasised when Carmen throws the root baby into the fire. The camera zooms in on the screaming root baby and cuts to Carmen collapsing so that the change in the uterus is juxtaposed with the root baby.

When Vidal sees the root baby, seeing milk and blood under the bed, his facial expressions show that he is disgusted by the sight and the smell. He sees Carmen's uterus only as a location for his son and appears to have little interest in Carmen herself. This is demonstrated when she arrives for the first time and steps out of the car: they are framed in a two-shot, Vidal looks down and the camera follows his eye-line with a zoom into a close-up of his hand on her pregnant belly followed by a cut to a two-shot close-up of the two of them standing together. It is only after touching her belly that he says welcome – *bienvenidos* – to her. He sees the foetus as a recollection-object that is not a bond with Carmen or Ofelia, but a bond with his deceased father. The foetus, therefore, is already part of Vidal's past present and future whilst it is in the uterus. The uterus as a frame, however, is only intrinsically important to him while the foetus is inside. Later in the film, when Carmen takes his hand to describe how they first met, he flinches and pulls his hand away, dismissing the story as idiotic. His response to her body take

a more sinister tone when Carmen is heavily pregnant and extremely ill. Vidal tells the doctor that if he has to choose, he is to save the life of his son. The implication is that Carmen only has any worth to him whilst she is pregnant.



Figure 68. The foetus inside the uterus in *Pan's Labyrinth*.



Figure 69. Lennart Nilsson's photograph of the foetus.

Despite the uterine references throughout the film, the visual representation of the foetus is brief. As Ofelia begins to talk to the foetus through her mother's belly, she is framed in a close-up with her head pressed against her mother's body. The camera then moves from this close-up, but it moves downwards, rather than inwards through the body, so that there is a demarcation between the world of reality and the world of fantasy. This demarcation, signalled with a horizontal wipe, is reflected in the sound design. The camera moves downwards, and the sound of a low bass rumble fades in. This is then followed by the sound of bubbles, rising in fluid, and the sound of a heartbeat. The foetus is curled over with its head slightly bowed and its eyes are closed (Figure 68). The space of the uterus is vastly out of proportion to the actual space that a foetus of this gestational age would have in reality. The umbilical cord is shown attached to the placenta. Around the placenta, like a halo, there is a bright circle of light that illuminates the foetus. The aesthetic of this constructed foetal image mimics the constructed images of the aborted foetus and bears a strong resemblance to Nilsson's images of the foetus *in utero* (Figure 69; Nilsson *et al.*, 2010: 192-3). There is no live foetus and there is no actual anatomical uterus

in either image, no female body. Neither foetus is alive: one is a fantastical image and one is dead. The foetus, however, reacts to Ofelia's voice by moving its head very slightly upwards as if it is listening to her story. The uterus, therefore, becomes a backdrop for the image of the foetus whilst the foetus itself has a limited visual role as a recollection-object.

It is the child Ofelia who functions as a recollection-object in *Pan's Labyrinth*. Ofelia's fantastical journey in the film emphasises the context of historical trauma, but she is positioned in the film not only to see trauma through the eyes of the child, but also to enable the narrative of the fairy tale to juxtapose reality and fantasy. By creating a child who is neither alive nor dead, Ofelia is able to move in different spatialities and temporalities. By referencing the uterus and uterine shapes, the world of reality and fantasy are connected visually, but also in their association with Ofelia. The life of the foetus is positioned as precarious because of the fragile nature of the uterus as a location of the threshold between life and death as well as a location for the foetus. Although the uterus and the uterine are crucial as bonds between reality and fantasy, the foetus has a limited visual role as a recollection-object. Ofelia talks to the foetus, but it is Vidal who considers the foetus part of his own continuity of life. For Ofelia, the birth of the baby signals her own transformation as a recollection-object. As she disappears into the underworld, where in reality she is dead, her imagination takes over in the journey from life to death as she is granted everlasting life.

### **The Foetus Reincarnated in *Birth***

The film *Birth* is set in present-day Manhattan. The main protagonist Anna (Nicole Kidman) lives in an apartment block with her upper middle-class family. At the beginning of the film, her husband Sean (Michael Desautels) is shown collapsing and dying whilst running in Central Park. His death is shown as a flashback from the present day of the film, which is ten years after his death. Anna's current fiancé Joseph (Danny Huston) announces their engagement at a

family party. Her late husband's sister-in-law Clara (Anne Heche) is also invited to the party, but when she arrives, she makes an excuse and goes into the park to bury a parcel. A young boy follows her and digs the parcel up. Later, the boy turns up at Anna's apartment claiming to be her dead husband. Nobody believes that the boy, who is also called Sean (Cameron Bright), is a reincarnation. Slowly, however, Anna begins to believe him and spends increasing amounts of time with him and they plan to live together when he turns eighteen. Clara eventually confronts the young boy, claiming that she had an affair with Sean, and that the boy should recognise her. As a result of this confrontation, the boy eventually admits that he is not Sean. He returns to school, and Anna marries Joseph.

In the film, the threshold between life and death is embodied in the character of the ten-year-old boy who claims that he is the reincarnation of Anna's dead husband. Some of the other characters in the film believe that the boy is an imposter who has memorised details of Anna's late husband life from stolen letters that he has found in the park. The drama in the film, therefore, comes from the tension that results from the boy's claim to re-embodiment as it challenges their beliefs about the living and the memory of the dead.<sup>148</sup> The dramatic tension centres not only on the validity of the young boy's testimony, but also on the emotional impact that the suggestion of reincarnation has on the protagonists. The main protagonist Anna moves between disbelieving and believing the boy's testimony, which causes her emotional trauma that is both disturbing and comforting for her. The adult relationship that she develops with the young boy – which, seen in isolation, is inappropriate and negative – is part of her emotional re-bonding with her deceased husband. The young boy becomes a vivid recollection-object for Anna, offering her a way to remember and communicate with the person she still loves. At the

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<sup>148</sup> There are many beliefs about death, the afterlife, immortality and reincarnation. Tony Walter, in his empirical research in the UK, divides the belief in reincarnation into three areas: modern, postmodern and kin-based (2001).

beginning of the film she is completely sceptical that her dead husband has been reincarnated, but her emotional journey is punctuated by significant events, reminding her of her husband, that make Anna question the threshold of life and death. This means that at the end of the film Anna is grief-stricken on her wedding day as she recalls the boy's final letter to her. After returning to school, and to being a child, the boy writes to her to say, 'I've been seeing an expert [...] they said I'd been imagining things [...] it's a good thing its gone away now [...] I'm really sorry I made you sad. The good thing is that nothing really happened [...] I'll see you in another lifetime'. Her palpable grief implies that the experience with the young boy throughout the film provokes a response in her that brings deeply-held feelings and memories of her dead husband close to the surface of her present-day life.



Figure 70. Sean runs under a bridge where he collapses and dies in *Birth*.



Figure 71. Anna meets ten-year-old Sean at the location of her husband's death in *Birth*.

The director Jonathan Glazer heavily signposts the threshold of life and death by beginning the film with a sequence set ten years in the past, where the adult Sean collapses and dies underneath a bridge in New York's Central Park (Figure 70), and matches this sequence to the present day when Anna meets the boy (Figure 71). The two sequences appear at different points in the film, but the *mise-en-scène* in each forms a graphic match in the framing of the bridge and the movement of the camera. In both sequences, the camera begins with a static long shot of the characters' journey towards the bridge and then tracks backwards underneath the bridge,

keeping the protagonists in the frame. Along with a low bass rumble, this framing gives the impression that the camera is drawing both Anna and Sean towards it: Sean to meet his death and Anna to meet his reincarnated self. The young boy chooses this location for his first private meeting with Anna. In order to prove that he is her reincarnated husband, he tells Anna that she will know where he is going to wait for her. The meeting of Anna and the boy under the bridge suggests that he understands the importance of the location to Anna as the site of her husband's death. This, in turn, suggests to Anna, and the spectator, that he is telling the truth. The boy asks Anna if her brother-in-law, who is a lawyer, were to ask him some questions and he gave the right answers would she then believe him. Although she remains doubtful, Anna asks him immediately who told her that there was no Santa Claus. Unable to give a name, the boy insists that he will know them when he sees them. At this moment, Anna begins to doubt her own scepticism, as the boy claims to recall events that happened before he was born, but tells him 'you're just a little boy' and rushes away. It is only later, when Anna sees the physical effect of her rejection on the boy that she begins to consider that he might be telling the truth.



Figure 72. The boy collapses when Anna tells him to leave her alone in *Birth*.



Figure 73. At the opera, Anna is distressed, but has to remain calm in *Birth*.

In order for Anna to believe the boy, she must accept that her husband's death coincided with the boy's birth and that there was an embodied moment when the dead body entered the body of the foetus *in utero*. Anna remains unconvinced by the boy until she rejects him and, as a

consequence, the boy collapses. Anna and Joseph have already confronted the boy and his father to warn the boy to stay away: Anna tells the boy ‘you are hurting me, do you understand that? I don’t want you to bother me’. His consequent physical collapse – knees buckling and falling to the ground (Figure 72) – is only witnessed by Anna. The boy’s father is looking away, but Anna turns her body slightly and glances back in time to see the boy drop to his knees. This physical collapse sparks a visceral reaction in Anna and is one of the most striking moments in the film. It ends with a four-minute-long close-up on Anna’s face in which she tries to stifle her conflicting emotions while watching an operatic performance. Sean’s collapse is synchronised with the opening bar of the opera’s overture. This musical bridge continues over the sequence and follows Anna’s journey in the lift from her apartment building to their late arrival at the opera. The camera picks out Anna and her Joseph, but focuses on Anna as she takes her seat. Once seated, Anna is framed in close-up (Figure 73). Importantly, there are other opera-goers sitting behind her and their bodies remain out of focus, but remain at the edges of the frame. The slow rhythmical breathing of these bodies emphasises Anna’s frantically stifled breathing. Anna’s expression changes subtly and can be read as moving from fear to sorrow to affection as she begins the process of believing that Sean might be telling the truth. The camera is static but hand-held so that it follows any slight movement and to keep Anna in centre frame. Anna’s face moves briefly and sharply when her concentration is broken by Joseph’s quiet comments in her ear. It is only the camera and the spectator, however, that witness Anna’s embodied response. The light reflecting the gloss on her top lip guides the spectator’s eye from her lips to the light shining on her earrings, which in turn draws the spectator’s attention to the beaded necklace on the person behind her. This draws the spectator’s eye to the breathing bodies beside her. The effect is to emphasise Anna’s embodied response and emphasises the tactility of the moment, and the haptic quality of the scene, so that the spectator shares the moment of Anna’s

physicality, which implies that she is considering the possibility that her husband Sean has crossed the threshold between death and life in a moment that takes place *in utero*.



Figure 74. The first breath of air for the boy as he is born in *Birth*.

The transfer of the dead adult into the foetus (reincarnation) takes place while the foetus is in the uterus. The threshold between life and death is signalled visually by the suggestion of an embodied exchange of adult and child immediately after Sean's death in the opening sequence of the film. At this point, there is no reference to the pregnant person as the pregnant body of the mother cannot be fully seen and at the birth is sidelined by the narrow depth of field that focuses on the baby's body. The specificity of the moment of reincarnation is reinforced visually by a temporal ellipsis with the foetus being born under water. The foetus, at this point, is on the threshold of life. Even though it is on the point of birth, the shift to the moment of reincarnation happens when the foetus is still submerged, which marks the time between Sean dying and the foetus leaving the uterus and taking its first independent breath. The moment of birth, as the point of the baby's first breath (Figure 74), is signalled by the same musical motif that began the film: plucked violin strings, flute and triangle, but without the sinister bass undertones of brass, woodwind and cello strings. This musical bridge links the two sequences of Sean's death and the birth of the baby, and gives weight to the suggestion that some essence

of Sean has been transferred to the foetus.<sup>149</sup> The temporal ellipsis occurs immediately after Sean's death. The bridge where Sean dies is framed like a tunnel that, when juxtaposed with the birth scene, makes metaphorical reference to the birth canal. Importantly, this moment of death, reincarnation and birth is witnessed by the spectator, not by the protagonists. This moment, however, is not marked by any reference to maternity. There is no additional visual or audio information about the baby or its biological heritage. The only thing that seen in addition to the baby are the hands that lift the baby out of the water bath, which implies that this reincarnation is separate or separated from the maternal body and the uterus. The importance of this sequence is to establish reincarnation, but also to establish that this change in the foetus enables it to become a recollection-object for Anna, suggesting that the future bond between them is present in the foetus whilst it is in the uterus.



Figure 75. Joseph watches Anna and Sean in the carriage in *Birth*.



Figure 76. Slow zoom into a close-up of Joseph as he watches the carriage in *Birth*.

The bond that occurs between Sean, the foetus and Anna has an effect on Joseph who, even if he does not believe the boy is a reincarnation, understands that his ambiguous presence is 'disrupting the coherence' of the present and is having a negative influence on his own

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<sup>149</sup> Laurence E. MacDonald describes the technical sound bridge that connects this death of one person and the life of another. He mentions the way the music drops out immediately before the birth, but does not explicitly mark this moment (with the foetus still in the uterus) as the moment of reincarnation (2013: 468).

relationship with Anna. As Joseph waits for Anna in an apartment they are viewing, he realises, as he looks out of the window (Figure 75), that she is with the boy and that they are taking a carriage ride around Central Park. Joseph's mood changes when he stares out of the window at them. He concentrates on what he is seeing and his body remains still, as if the image has rooted him to the spot. This is seen in the aesthetic of the sequence. Joseph stands by the window of the apartment and the grey sky is reflected across his body, creating what appears to be a dissolve. This suggests the quality of his embodied, emotional response to the boy's presence and marks his anxiety that the boy, for Anna, represents her dead (but now alive) husband. The reflection of the leafless trees in the park surround his body. The branches are reflected across his body and around his head, which creates the impression that he is slowly disappearing within them. The railings outside of the apartment form part of the lower frame of the image. Their pointed arrows draw the eye towards Joseph, but also direct the slow zoom. As the zoom starts, the low bass tones of cello mixes into the flutes, violin and xylophone, which is then gradually replaced by the full strings. This signals the musical motif that connects all of the protagonists.<sup>150</sup> The sweeping score builds in intensity with the slow zoom so that by the time the camera stops in an extreme close-up of Joseph's face (Figure 76), the image is overwhelmed by the volume of the theme music. It is clear that both Anna and the boy are the focus of Joseph's point of view and the reason for his static stance. In this moment, the frame of the uterus, as the location of the threshold between life and death that Anna's husband has crossed, also signals the presence of the boy as a recollection-object.

The moment when the boy draws Joseph's gaze to the window signals that the boy functions as a recollection-object for Joseph, and compounds his unhappiness that, as the boy suggests, Anna has not shared with Joseph every detail of her previous romantic life. The implication is that

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<sup>150</sup> Laurence E. MacDonald describes this as 'a five-tone motif for strings' (2013: 468).

Anna's loving memories of her husband are only shared with the boy and that these private memories have resurfaced for Anna and threaten the relationship she now has with Joseph. In this way, Joseph is forced to confront Anna's memories, even if he does not know what they are. By implying that the boy knows what Anna's memories are, the boy becomes a powerful recollection-object for each of them, imposing a narrative trajectory that for Anna is positive and for Joseph is negative. That the boy is the object of their attention is emphasised in the cut from Joseph's close-up to a long shot of Anna. The close-up on Joseph is not static when the cut appears so the zoom has not quite finished and the cut is on movement towards Joseph's eyes. The long shot of Anna is also cut on movement in an extremely slow tracking shot that moves towards her. The effect of this transition is to focus the spectator's gaze on Joseph's embodied reaction, and then carry his gaze through to Anna as the frame moves towards her. The tracking shot does not end up on a close-up of Anna, but it gets close enough to her to see that her eye-line shows she is looking out of the left-hand side of the frame, and her gaze is on the boy playing in the park. By editing the shots on this movement, the point of view of each of the protagonists, and the spectator, ends on the boy. The body of the boy disappears to be replaced by a man who has been dead for ten years.

Although he functions as a recollection-object, when he returns to being a child, the boy's own embodiment as the recollection-object changes, it disintegrates. The young boy is not only a vehicle for memories, he is also a catalyst for those memories and he is transformed through them so that he becomes something different to who he is. The recollection-object, however, remains as part of Anna's memory and part of her shared narrative with the boy. The recollection-object that is embodied by the young boy has a powerful effect on Anna. As she wades into the sea at the end of the film, it is his letter confirming that he will leave her alone, which has a profound emotional effect on Anna. Although the boy rejects his role as the

embodiment of her dead husband, Anna remains emotionally connected to him. The bond that has been created between them is physical and emotional, but it relies on Anna believing that her husband returned from the dead. When the boy as recollection-object disappears, Anna's emotional connection to the recollection-object to it does not diminish. The recollection-object, then, becomes a forceful presence that has been created in the uterus, but that exists outside of the frame of the uterus. It remains ambiguous whether young Sean has rejected the idea of reincarnation or whether he will appear once again in Anna's life.

## **Conclusion**

Birth is a physical threshold that marks the moment that the foetus leaves the uterus, but the threshold between life and death is more complex and is not limited to this single moment. The recollection-object as a material object that encodes memories can help describe the fragility of the life and death threshold through a process of bonding. In this chapter, the recollection-object is both inside and outside of the uterus. In *Up*, the memory of the foetus is linked not only by the proximity of the birth, but also by its close proximity to other objects. The adventure book exists to collect memories through images, but it also functions as a recollection-object in the way it is passed from person to person during distinct life chapters, including the miscarriage. The memories that each recollection-object can invoke depend on who is looking at it and this is not limited to the protagonists in the film. The spectator is included in this looking and the bond that is created by the object is understood to have meaning for the protagonists and also for the way the narrative of the film is understood.

The recollection-object can also be embodied in a person. In *Pan's Labyrinth*, the recollection-object is the main character who is surrounded by uterine images and shapes so that she has to negotiate them as part of her imagined journey to everlasting life. In *Birth*, the recollection-object is the boy whose transformation in the uterus means that his physical presence constantly

challenges the protagonists and the spectator to consider how the life of the child and the death of the adult can exist in the same body. In *The Bad Intentions*, the foetus in the uterus and the imagined revolutionary heroes become recollection-objects that establish an emotional embodied reality for the main protagonist as a way for her to understand everyday life.

The recollection-object indicates that an embodied memory is being made. This suggests that in recognising the recollection-object as something meaningful, the object is understood to have a material, corporeal presence. The presence of the recollection-object is also transient and exists to make sense of memory as a communication. Once its usefulness becomes less important, and once a bond has been created, the recollection-object disintegrates or becomes something else. The foetus *in utero*, for example, becomes a memory in the transfer of objects between people, or is forgotten when the baby is born. The recollection-object that exists because of a transformation in the uterus, can disintegrate when its function as a conduit for memories ends. The frame of the uterus is crucial to understanding the corporeality of memory and the mutuality of spectatorship whereby memories of life and death gain their intensity from a constant negotiation and renegotiation. This negotiation involves remembering, but also forgetting, and the resonance of the recollection-object remains in the way it establishes a bond, either negative or positive between protagonists and for the spectator. This bond depends on the movement of the recollection-object across the threshold between life and death. The foetus is a marker of the mutuality of spectatorship, but the uterus is a frame for the way the recollection-object influences the narrativity of each film.



## CONCLUSION

The centrality of the uterus has not been considered as a subject for investigation in film studies and my thesis has argued that it should be considered a narrative space in close textual analysis. Re-evaluating the uterus in terms of its affectiveness and centrality as a frame, rather than its gender specificity, has enabled me to develop a critical discussion that moves away from representation (of the female reproductive body) towards an interconnection (of bodies, objects, and narratives). The uterus has been understood as a fragmented location and a contested site in pregnancy because of its separated corporeality, as part of the pregnant person and as part of the foetus, but this fragmentation demands a complex discussion. It is in the separation of the uterus and the foetus, I argue, that the uterus becomes a narrative space and is crucial to my argument. Although separation can be seen as negative in the way it fragments the female reproductive body and isolates the foetus, I posit that its presence suggests an embodied connectivity that moves between bodies and relies on multiple narratives for meaning. The existence of multiple narratives around the uterus has not been considered in film studies and I have demonstrated the complexities of repositioning of the uterus in close textual analysis. I position the uterus as a narrative space by framing my film readings phenomenologically to move pregnancy beyond representation to the spectatorial dynamic of the embodied spectator (both within and outside of the film text), narrativity and the corporeality of the film.

The uterus is a space that has been considered both public, and open to the gaze, but also hidden and unseen and the narratives around the uterus gain their potency from a sense of interiority. Interiority, as I suggest, is a social construct, that has led discussion of the female reproductive body and the uterus away from the position of normative. In my discussion of the abject, for example, I proffer that there are other elements that have been overlooked, such as the

significance of the male reproductive body and the affectivity of bodily products. It must be emphasised that while the abject must not be overlooked, it should not be thought of as a shorthand for discussing the female reproductive body in textual analysis. I suggest, however, that reading the uterus as a narrative space opens up exciting possibilities for re-reading films that deal with pregnancy in the horror genre and for reading films about abortion. I do not consider these two types of films as similar to each other, but they would benefit from the way I have read the films in my corpus. Although I have touched on the horror genre and the abortion film as subjects, neither has had a central focus in my analysis. In each type of film, however, the uterus is a crucial part of the narrative, irrespective of the type of pregnancy and irrespective of whether there is a pregnancy on screen. For many films pregnancy functions only as a narrative device as a way to establish the character of the pregnant woman, to create a mood within the film or to bring disparate characters together, but the uterus itself is rarely a subject or an object within a narrative. In the pregnancy horror film and the abortion film, the uterus is central, which suggests that the qualities of the uterus as a narrative space are intrinsically important to any readings.

My research has suggested that it is not possible to investigate pregnancy by only viewing films that are considered part of a “pregnancy genre”. In my film readings, I have interrogated the intergenerational narrative which features in every film in the corpus and the importance of the foetus *in utero*. My corpus of films – *Juno*, *Maria Full of Grace*, *Gestation*, *Stephanie Daley*, *The Milk of Sorrow*, *Quinceañera*, *Ain't Them Bodies Saints*, *Apio verde*, *Up*, *The Bad Intentions*, *Pan's Labyrinth* and *Birth* – were chosen for how they exemplify contemporary films that address pregnancy, but my grouping also suggests that there is a significant corpus of films that have not been considered together before. Contemporary films from the Americas that have become available towards the end of writing my thesis can now be read in relation to

each other by reading the uterus as a narrative space. *Ixcanul/Volcano* (2015, Jayro Bustamante, Guatemala/France) is about a young woman from a poor family who is promised in marriage to her father's boss, a coffee plantation manager, but is already pregnant by her boyfriend. *Alias María* (2015, José Luis Rugeles, Colombia/Argentina/France) is about a young guerilla fighter who is concealing her (forbidden) pregnancy while forced to look after her commander's baby. *Nasty Baby* (2015, Sebastián Silva, USA/Chile) is about a gay couple whose neighbour agrees to become pregnant for them and they all committ a crime. *Aurora* (2014, Rodrigo Sepúlveda, Chile) is about a woman who attempts to adopt a dead baby left on a rubbish site so that it can be buried legally. A critical analysis of each individual film might ordinarily rely on representations of maternity, but my thesis argues against this. Moreover, there is no reason to see or read these films in relation to each other, but, I argue, it is now crucial to group these films together and to read each film in relation to the narrative space of the uterus.

Narrative space is not only where the film action takes place, it is also where narrativity is understood and relies on the spectator's ability to read film space in relation to the visual and the conceptual. As I explain, narrative space is not only on-screen, it is part of off-screen space. In order to read this space as meaningful, the frame must be understood to have what Sobchack describes as 'gentleness'. It is not sufficient, however, to say that the frame has this quality without explaining how this spectatorial dynamic can be read. Throughout the thesis, I argue that the uterus, as part of internal space, should be considered as off-screen space, or as Deleuze calls it an 'Elsewhere', and I stress the importance of interconnectivity of the internal body and the spectator's ability to read this space. Importantly, I ungender the gaze, so that the pregnant body is not objectified or identified as intrinsically gendered. This is crucial to my argument as it opens up other points of view and other ways of looking at, and through, the body. Although the uterus can be considered as a theatre that unveils the foetus, or a metaphorical space for

transforming the foetus into a “baby”, in essence it can be thought of as neutral because of its quality as a narrative space.

The theoretical discussion in my thesis is interdisciplinary and has engaged not only with feminist scholarship on the body, but also with empirical research into the foetal ultrasound, and this informs my film readings. In this way, I argue, my thesis offers a unique contribution to the critical medical humanities as well as contemporary film analysis. Reading through collaborative coding, biotourism and notions of bonding, I have addressed the way in which the unborn foetus becomes a “baby”, as well as understand how the uterus is spatialised, and consider how negative and positive bonds around the uterus are reflected in the film’s corporeality. As a visualising technology, the foetal ultrasound separates the pregnant person from the foetus, and the foetus becomes the subject of the gaze. Looking inside the body to find the foetus has resulted, I argue, in the uterus being overlooked. My reading of each film, therefore, repositions the uterus as a frame, which in turn repositions the foetus as both visual and conceptual, and is where my analysis intersects with research into the scan. Engaging with contemporary empirical research on the scan enables me to consider the spectatorial dynamic that acknowledges both the multiple narratives around the uterus *and* the embodied experience of pregnancy. Despite the fundamental historical scientific misunderstandings about human reproduction, medical thinking has stressed the maternal-foetal interconnection; the foetal ultrasound, by contrast, has helped to emphasise a disconnection by isolating the foetus. The increased prominence of the foetus has led ultimately to cultural and political discussions of foetal rights and reproductive rights, but importantly for my argument, has resulted in the uterus being displaced. Rather than consider this displacement as irretrievable, I am rethinking the uterus as a frame to establish how it can be seen as part of the spectatorial dynamic of viewing. By bringing together film theory and empirical research on the foetal ultrasound, I establish

strong links between the modes of address of cinema and the scan. More importantly, by shifting the emphasis from representations of the pregnant person and the pregnant body to the narrative space of the uterus, I unlock narrative strands that show pregnancy can be considered in more meaningful ways than an extended discussion of gender and maternity.

It is not sufficient, however, to discuss the uterus as a frame in film without placing this into context in film theory, and I stress the importance of thinking through the lens of phenomenology as a methodological and theoretical conceptual framework. As Fischer suggests, there have been many references to the maternal-infant relationship in film where the image, viewing, and acoustics of cinema have been likened to being in the womb or where the dream-like quality of viewing is compared to the infant at the breast, and she argues that it is important to pay attention to the ‘maternal register’ (1996: 31). This suggests that there is already an attention to the maternal register in film studies, and also to the foetal register more broadly across cultural and visual studies. My research, however, indicates another perspective, the uterine register, which focuses on the embodied spectator, the corporeality of the film and the interconnectedness of narratives. This uterine perspective challenges assumptions about the maternal or the maternal-foetal in film theory and critique. Although scholarship on the foetal ultrasound has offered the complexity of discussion that is crucial in relation to my discussion of the uterus, the foetal scan itself is not my main focus. My critical aim is to understand how pregnancy creates multiple narratives, not how the scan operates. For this reason, my theoretical route in film studies has a clear link from Sobchack’s embodied spectator to Marks’s haptic visuality and to contemporary discussions within film philosophy on affectivity. Throughout the thesis, I emphasise the importance of the embodied spectator and the gaze, but there is still a critical need to engage with the corporeality of the body in relation to pregnancy and reproduction. Sobchack suggests that film theory has ‘generally ignored or elided both cinema’s

sensual address and the viewer's "corporeal material being", and she welcomes the work of Williams, Marks and Barker, among others, as they counter the lack of scholarship on the 'sensuality of the film experience and [how] it constructs meaning' (2004: 55; 56). Contemporary film scholars like Laine, Beugnet, and Brinkema have addressed this lack of scholarship through detailed textual analysis on the corporeality and affectivity of film, and this is where I situate my own work.

Yet I am aware of Laine's acknowledgement that it is impossible for a researcher to leave behind their own emotions when they embark on a phenomenological approach to analysis. Certainly, I have written this thesis as a way to write myself and my own subjectivity into film critique, but I do this because I cannot always recognise my own lived body experience in film scholarship. I agree with Laine when she goes on to say, that a phenomenological perspective can 'set in motion, put into context and [be] shared by others' (2015: 18). By paying attention to what Laine describes in the spectatorial experience as 'moving outwards from within' and the corporeal specificity of the the film as 'moving inwards from without' (18), I have presented a perspective on the uterus, which reflects my own experience. I argue, however, that my own experiences intersect with others. Sobchack suggests that phenomenological readings may be informed by a particular experience, but should be resonant and applicable to other possible or future experiences of other spectators (2004: 5). Phenomenology, as Frampton points out, describes 'our *experience* of things' where there is an interconnection between the subject and the object (2006: 39; emphasis in original). My argument is not to present a new or alternative view of reality by offering new philosophical meaning, but to investigate the processes in film that can be understood to have different meaning according to the lived body experience. My central argument is to (re)consider how the female reproductive body can be read in film

through the uterus as a narrative space, but crucially, the overarching discussion in the thesis is how to rethink gendered embodiment and reproduction.

It is only by revisiting the body that the maternal-foetal separation can be reclaimed as something that is uniquely positive in the analysis of the uterus as a narrative space, and whilst it is important to place film and cinema in a national or historical context, I argue that film analysis must address the lived body experience that – in the case of pregnancy – can express narratives that otherwise remain undocumented. Paradoxically, the focus on the historical and the social has brought an increased interest in phenomenology and philosophy as a way to make sense of the personal experience. In my investigation, I argue that empirical research of the foetal ultrasound is of vital importance to the discussion of pregnancy, yet the discipline of film studies has not considered how important this is for film analysis of the female reproductive body. One of the reasons for this, I suggest, is the invisible line that separates visual culture and film studies. Cartwright warns that, although visual culture embraces the study of cinema, film studies as a discipline could be considered as ‘teetering’ as it converges and is conflated with various media, falling between comparative studies on the one hand and historical and cultural studies on the other (2002: 7-23). Scholarship on the affective quality of film, I argue, counters this precariousness, but in order to preserve the richness of film studies, the precariousness of the discipline should also stand as a warning when deciding what is, and is not, considered part of the study of film. This thesis sits clearly within the discipline of film studies as it focuses on film form and film theory and presents a strong argument for the importance of close textual analysis. The interdisciplinary nature of my thesis, however, should not result in the thesis being understood as a broad study of visual culture, nor should it detract from my focus on film as both medium and text. The films in this thesis could not have been brought together without my interdisciplinary approach. By rethinking the uterus, I argue that it is no longer sufficient to

limit analysis of pregnancy and the female reproductive body to certain genres, or to representations of the body, maternity and the foetus. As the restriction of reproductive rights across the Americas continues, my thesis also challenges attitudes to pregnancy beyond cinema and is, therefore, crucial to all disciplines including historical, social and political analysis and the medical humanities. Moreover, it is no longer sufficient, I argue, for any comprehensive analysis of pregnancy and the female reproductive body in film studies, to ignore the critical value of the uterus as a narrative space.

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*Inside Out* (2015) Dir. Pete Docter, Ronnie Del Carmen, USA: Walt Disney Pictures, Pixar Animation Studios (Walt Disney Studios Motion Pictures)

*Ixcanul/Volcano* (2015) Dir. Jayro Bustamente, Guatemala/France: La Casa de Productions, Tu Va Voir Production (Twin Pics)

*Jane: An Abortion Service* (1995) Dir. Kate Kurtz and Nell Lundy, USA: Independent Television Service (ITVS) (Women Make Movies)

*Junebug* (2005) Dir. Phil Morrison, USA: Junebug Movie, Epoch Films (Eureka Entertainment)

*Juno* (2007) Dir. Jason Reitman, USA: Fox Searchlight Pictures, Mandate Pictures, Mr Mudd (Fox Searchlight Pictures)

*Kept and Dreamless/Las mantenidas sin sueños* (2005) Dirs. Martín de Salvo and Vera Fogwill, Argentina/France/Netherlands/Spain: Avalon Productions, Hubert Bals Fund, Instituto Nacional de Cine y Artes Audiovisuales (INCAA) (Four Film)

*Knocked Up* (2009) Dir. Judd Apatow, USA: Universal Pictures, Apatow Productions (United International Pictures)

*Labor Pains* (2009) Dir. Laura Shapiro, USA: Millenium Films, Nu Pictures, Latitude Films, Overnight Films, Plum Pictures, Grand Army Entertainment (First Look International)

*Las Libres: The Story Continues* (2014) Dir. Gustavo Montaña, USA/Mexico/Argentina (At Dusk Media)

*L!fe Happens* (2011) Dir. Kat Coiro, USA/Canada: Stardust Pictures, Dot Dot Dot Productions (Lionsgate)

*Lion's Den/Leonera* (2008) Dir. Pablo Trapero, Argentina/South Korea/Brazil/Spain: Matanza Cine, Patagonok Film Group, Cineclick Asia (Halycon Releasing)

*Look Who's Talking* (1989) Dir. Amy Heckerling, USA: TriStar Pictures, Management Company Entertainment Group (TriStar Pictures)

*Look Who's Talking Too* (1990) Dir. Amy Heckerling, USA: TriStar Pictures, Big Mouth Productions (Columbia TriStar Home Entertainment)

*Look Who's Talking Now* (1993) Dir. Tom Ropelowski, USA: TriStar Pictures (TriStar Pictures)

*Love, Women and Flowers/ Amor, mujeres y flores* (1988) Dir. Marta Rodríguez and Jorge Silva, Colombia/UK (Women Make Movies)

*Madeinusa* (2006) Dir. Claudia Llosa, Peru/Spain: Oberón Cinematográfica, Vela Producciones, Wanda Visión S. A. (Dogwoof)

*Maria Full of Grace/ María llena eres de gracias* (2004) Dir. Joshua Marston, Colombia/USA/Ecuador: HBO, Fine Line Films, Journeyman Pictures, Projecto Tucan, Altercine, Santa Fe Productions (Fine Line Features)

*Men Women and Children* (2014) Dir. Jason Reitman, USA: Paramount Pictures, Right of Way (Paramount Pictures)

*Misconceptions* (2008) Dir. Ron Satlof, USA: Cineglobe Productions, Lineage Pictures, Misconception Productions, Royal McBee (E1 Entertainment)

*Miss Conception* (2008) Dir. Eric Styles, UK/USA/Germany: Blue Angle film, Blue Angels Films, Miromar Entertainment (Corinth Films)

*Monsters, Inc.* (2001) Dir. Pete Docter, David Silverman, and Lee Unkrich, USA: Walt Disney Pictures, Pixar Animation Studios (Buena Vista Pictures)

*Moon* (2009) Dir. Duncan Jones, UK: Liberty Films UK, Xingu Films, Limelight Fund, Lunar Industries (Sony Pictures Classics)

*Music on Hold/ Música en espera* (2009) Dir. Hernán Golfrid, Argentina: BD Cine, Cine.Ar, Film Suez, HD Argentina (Argentina Video Home)

*My Foetus* (2004) Dir. Julie Black, UK (Bivouac Productions)

*My Life Without Me* (2003) Dir. Isabel Croixet, Canada/Spain: El Deseo Milestone Entertainment (Alliance Atlantis Home Video)

*Nasty Baby* (2015) Dir. Sebastian Silva, USA/Chile: Fabula, Funny Balloons, Versatile, Killer Films (Network)

*October Baby* (2011) Dir. Andrew Erwin and Jon Erwin, USA: Gravititas, Provident Films (Christian Art Media)

*Orphan* (2009) Dir. Jaume Collet-Serra, USA/Canada/Germany: Dark Castle Entertainment Appian Way (Optimum Releasing)

*Pan's Labyrinth/El laberinto del fauno* (2006) Dir. Guillermo del Toro, Mexico/Spain/USA: Estudios Picasso, Tequila Gang, Esperanto Filmoj, Sententia Entertainment, Telecino (The Criterion Collection)

*Persona* (1966) Dir. Ingmar Bergman, Sweden: Svensk Filmindustri (The Criterion Collection)

*Precious* (2009) Dir. Lee Daniels USA: Lionsgate, Lee Daniels Productions, Smokewood Entertainment Group (Future Film)

*Pregoland* (2014) Dir. Jacob Tierney, Canada: Optic Nerve Films, Titlecard Pictures, Collingwood Management, Téléfilm Canada, Canadian Film Centre (CFC) (Film Rise)

*Pulp Fiction* (1994) Dir. Quentin Tarantino, USA: A Band Apart, Jersey Films (Miramax)

*Quinceañera/ Echo Park* (2006) Dir. Richard Glatzer and Wash Westmoreland, USA: Cinetic Media, Kitchen Sink Entertainment LLC (Sony Pictures Classics)

*Reservoir Dogs* (1992) Dir. Quentin Tarantino, USA: Live Entertainment, Dog Eat Dog Productions (Miramax)

*Revolutionary Road* (2008) Dir. Sam Mendes, USA/UK: Dreamworks SKG, BBC Films, Evamere Entertainment Neal Street Productions, Goldcrest Pictures (DreamWorks)

*Rosemary's Baby* (1968) Dir. Roman Polanski, USA: William Castle Productions (Paramount Pictures)

*Rosita* (2005) Dir. Barbara Attie and Janet Goldwater, USA: Attie and Goldwater Productions (Bullfrog Films)

*Saved!* (2004) Dir. Brian Dannelly, USA/Canada: United Artists, Single Cell Pictures, Infinity Media (United Artists)

*Seeing is Believing* (1991) Dir. Shauna Beharry, Canada: National Film Board of Canada, Studio D (Groupe Intervention Vidéo)

*Stephanie Daley* (2007) Dir. Hilary Brougher, USA: Redbone Films, Silverwood Film (Liberation Entertainment)

*The Back-Up Plan* (2010) Dir. Alan Poul, USA: CBS Films, Escape Artists (CBS Home Entertainment)

*The Bad Intentions/Las malas intenciones* (2011) Dir. Rosario García-Montero, Peru/Argentina/Germany/France: Barry Films, Garmont Films (3C Films Group)

*The Blonds/Los Rubios* (2003) Dir. Albertina Carri, Argentina: Barry Ellsworth (Primer Plano Film Group)

*The Book of Life* (2014) Dir. Jorge R. Gutiérrez, USA: Reel FX Creative Studios, Twentieth Century Fox, Chatrone (Twentieth Century Fox)

*The Borrowers* (1997) Dir. Peter Hewitt, UK/USA: Polygram Filmed Entertainment, Working Title Films (Fabulous Films)

*The Brood* (1979) Dir. David Cronenberg, Canada: Canadian Film Development Corporation, Elgin International Films Ltd., Mutual Productions Ltd., Victor Solnicki Productions (Anchor Bay Entertainment)

*The Brothers Solomon* (2007) Dir. Bob Odenkirk, USA: Carsey Werner Company, Revolution Studios (Sony Pictures Releasing)

*The Colombian Dream/El colombiano dream* (2005) Dir. Felipe Aljure, Colombia, Cinempressa (Fondo Mixto de Promoción Cinematográfica)

*The Crime of Father Amero/ El crimen de padre Amero* (2002) Dir. Carlos Carrera, Mexico/Spain/Argentina/France: Alameda Films, Artcam International, Blu Films, Cinecolor, IMCINE (Columbia TriStar Film)

*The Fly* (1986) Dir. David Cronenberg, USA/UK/Canada: SLM Production Group, Brookfilms (Twentieth Century Fox)

*The Handmaid's Tale* (1990) Dir. Volker Schlöndorff, USA/Germany: Bioskop Film Cinecom Entertainment Group, Cinétudes Films Daniel Wilson Productions Inc., Master Partners, Odyssey (MGM/UA Home Entertainment)

*The Milk of Sorrow/La teta asustada* (2009) Dir. Claudia Llosa, Peru/Spain: Generalitat de Catalunya – Institut Català de les Indústries Culturals (ICIC), Ministerio de Cultura, Oberón Cinematográfica, Televisió de Catalunya (TV3), Television Espanola (TVE), Vela Producciones, Wanda Visión S.A. (Dogwoof Pictures)

*The Motherhood Archives* (2013) Dir. Irene Lusztig, USA (Women Make Movies)

*The Pregnant Man* (2008) Dir. Elizabeth McDonald, UK: September Films (Discovery Health)

*The Return of Dracula* (1958) Dir. Paul Landres, USA: Gramerco Pictures (MGM/UA Home Entertainment)

*The Sea Inside/Mar adentro* (2004) Dir. Alejandro Amenábar, Spain/France/Italy: Sogepaq, Sogecine, Himenóptero, Union Générale Cinématographique (UCG) (Fine Line Features)

*The Silent Scream* (1984) Dir. Jack Duane Dabner, USA (American Portrait Films)

*The Switch* (2010) Dir. Josh Gordon, USA: Mandate Pictures, Bona Fide Productions, Echo Films (Lionsgate Home Entertainment)

*The Tingler* (1959) Dir. William Castle USA: Columbia Pictures, William Castle Productions (Columbia TriStar Home Video)

*The Uterus Chat* (2014) Dir. Ted Satterfield, USA (Ted Satterfield)

*Touristas* (2009) Dir. Alicia Scherson, Chile: La Ventura, Visions Sud Est (Tiger Releases)

*Ventre Livre: Freeing the Womb* (1994) Dir. Ana Luiza Azevedo, Brazil (Women Make Movies)

*Virgin Tales* (2012) Dir. Mirjam von Arn, France/Germany/Switzerland/USA: Ican Films GmbH (Women Make Movies)

*Wild Bunch* (1969) Dir. Sam Peckinpah, USA: Warner Bros., Seven Arts (Warner Home Video)

*Too Young To Be A Dad* (2002) Dir. Éva Gárdos, USA/Canada: Lifetime Television, Jaffe/Braunstein Films, Nova Scotia Film Industry Tax Credit (Warner Home Video)

*Toy Story* (1995) Dir. John Lasseter, USA: Pixar Animation Studios, Walt Disney Pictures (Buena Vista International)

*Twins* (1994) Dir. Ivan Reitman, USA: Universal Pictures (United International Pictures)

*Undertow/Contracorriente* (2009) Dir. Javier Fuentes-Léon, Peru/Colombia/France Germany: Elcalvo Films, Dunamo, La Cinefature, Neue Cameo Film (Axiom Films)

*Up* (2009) Dir. Pete Docter and Bob Petersen, USA: Walt Disney Pictures, Pixar Animation Studios (Walt Disney Studios Motion Pictures)

*WALL-E* (2008) Dir. Andrew Stanton, USA: Walt Disney Pictures, Pixar Animation Studios (Walt Disney Studios Home Entertainment)

*Way Down East* (1920) Dir. D.W. Griffith, USA: D.W. Griffith Productions (Film Detective)

*What to Expect When You're Expecting* (2012) Dir. Kirk Jones, USA: Lionsgate, Alcon Entertainment, Phoenix Pictures, What to Expect Productions (Lionsgate)

*Who Says It's Easy?/¿Quién dice que es fácil?*(2007) Dir. Juan Taratuto, Argentina:

Film Suez, Primer Plano Film Group, Rizoma Films, Zarlek Producciones  
(Primer Plano Film Group)

*Xtro* (1982) Dir. Harry Bromley Davenport, UK/USA: Amalgamated Film Enterprises

(New Line Cinema)

*4 Months, 3 Weeks, 2 Days/ 4 luni, 3 saptamani si 2 zile* (2007) Dir. Cristian Mungui,

Romania/ Belgium: Mobra Films, Centrul National al Cinematografiei (CNC),

Mindshare Media, McCann Erikson, Televiziunea Romana, Saga Films, Hubert

Bals (Artificial Eye)



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