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Remediating Attachment: The Strange Situation Procedure as a Technoprimal Mise-en-Scène for Social Theory

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Remediating Attachment
The Strange Situation Procedure as a Technoprimal Mise-en-Scène for Social Theory

By

ERIC TAGGART
DISSERTATION

Submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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Performance Studies

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DAVIS

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Abstract:

Social theory has attachment issues. But we're not there yet and I need to explain. Over the last 25-30 years the widely read work of important scholars like Judith Butler and Lauren Berlant has installed attachment as a critical affective form and theoretical concept for social theory. Judith Butler places 'passionate attachment' at the heart of subject formation and Berlant has gone so far as to suggest that our social theory might be best derived from 'scenes of attachment.' Despite these valuable articulations around the importance of attachment, there has remained relatively little direct engagement with the empirical archive of attachment research itself.

Drawing on fieldwork, research training and footage of the Strange Situation Procedure, this dissertation offers the empirical archive of attachment as an affordance for social theory. The project is animated by my work as a practicing psychotherapist and intermedial artist. It is further configured by the fact of my being a parent, partner, lover, and former-infant. In light of all this, I locate us amidst an attachment milieu that is personal, political, and aesthetic all at once. The archive of developmental attachment research reveals pattern and form in the strategies infants use to navigate their primary relationships. And while we will come to recognize, understand, and think through these forms of attachment behavior as a kind of sensible data, my scope extends beyond questions about the epistemics and performativity of social scientific knowledge production. What I mean to say is that I am not only interested in what empirical research has to say about infant-(m)other relations, but in the aesthetic relationship between researchers and their objects.

This project approaches the Strange Situation Procedure as both an empirical artifact and an aesthetic object, locating the procedure alongside three other technological objects from the psychoanalytic hall-of-fame: Freud's spool, Lacan's mirror, and Winnicott's transitional object. Attachment theory and research is historically positioned as rematerializing the dematerialized (m)other of psychoanalytic object relations and recovering the importance of the environmental milieu and material care. After returning to the work of Butler and Berlant, I then go on to show that attachment is a scene of ongoing technological and aesthetic formation. I conclude with a discussion regarding our attachment relationship to the 'algorhythmic object' and offer a treatment of the term 'remediation' as it may pertain to the psychodynamics of human functioning and aesthetic production.

Acknowledgements:

It's safe to say that I don't know how to begin with acknowledgements. I'd like to thank my kindergarten teacher but I've forgotten her name. In any case, we are all so entangled and there is an impulse to somehow include everyone who has ever touched my heart or mind in some way. But then the list would never really end and might need to include even the wren with whom I shared extended eye contact this very morning. These sentences were written on the occupied land of the Patwin people who have tended to this region for upwards of 1,500 years. The project has received generous support from the Bilinski Educational Foundation, the UC Davis Provost's Office, the UCD Dean's Office, and the Performance Studies graduate group at UCD. I want to thank Lynette Hunter for the time, wisdom, and careful violence. Naomi Janowitz for her vital energy and helping me learn to think around psychoanalysis and culture. I want to thank Kriss Ravetto and Tarek Elhaik for the introduction to a kind of critical aesthetics that I can't seem to stop thinking or feeling about. I am thankful to Katie Gentile for the inspiring scholarship, friendship, and longtime support of this project. Thank you to Alan Sroufe, Elizabeth Carlson, Robert Weigand, Naomi Gribneau Bahm, Erik Hesse and Mary Main for their commitment to matters of attachment and their careful attention to teaching it. Thank you to Eric Smoodin for helping me to begin to understand film and for the endless encouragement and pragmatism. Thank you to Fiamma Montezemolo for offering the critical eye of a caring scholar-artist and seeing me through. I am grateful to Michael D'Arcy for understanding so much and to Roger Reisman for nearly 25 years of mysticism. Thank you to Marian Bilheimer for many years of administrative care and humor. Thank you to Julietta Singh for the reminder that no archive can restore. Thank you to Kelli Noftle for making something of her own writing and inspiring me to do the same. To Michael Hoyer for thinking with me. To Andrew Heine and Brandon Zeller for shaping my work as an artist. Thank you to Samuele Collu for the resonating energy and ideas and love. Timothy Lenoir for the media knowledge and ever positive mediation. Thank you to Greg Dickson, Stan Steinberg, and Paul Aikin, my greatest clinical teachers. I am grateful to my colleagues at 3+G and to Florie Wild for all the years of care. My parents have been endlessly supportive of this project. My love and gratitude is ocean-wide to them both. And also to my siblings, Kent and Anna. Despite the fact that this project has been going on so long that both of them have become parents many times over, they have never stopped checking in with me: "Soooo how's the dissertation going?" Deepest thanks also go to Cristiana Giordano, without whose determined, reliable, and patient support this damn document would never have been anything at all. And to my family: Oliver for his goodness and for playing chess with me, Avy for her earnest vitality, musicality and easy laugh, Norah for being my first infant-friend, Sawyer for the gorgeous cakes and factual recalibrations, and Thatcher for the slow-motion humor and fast pitches. Thank you to my delightful 11-month old Arlo Loon who is always bringing me so wonderfully back to my senses. And most of all, thank you to Ash, the stranger/(m)other and my dearest love through it all.

To the Argo:

Ash, Arlo, Ollie, Aves, Thatch, Nor + Sawy

and to Pam + Jim



There is a scenography of waiting: I organize it, manipulate it, cut out a portion of time in which I shall mime the loss of the loved object and provoke all the effects of a minor mourning. This is then acted out as a play.

—Roland Barthes

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General Procedural Details: In an office-sized room, two chairs are placed on the far end of the room from the entrance door – one for the child's primary caregiver and another for a “stranger,” separated so one can tell who the baby is looking at. At about one step away from both chairs, toward the middle of the room, there is a set of toys.

Prelude:

What if we derived our social theory from scenes of ambivalence, which is to say, the scenes of attachment that are intimate, defined by desire, and overwhelming?

—Lauren Berlant

Fort / Da / Fort / Da / Fort / Da

—Freud's Grandson



Human life is increasingly animated by moving images, some of which are compelling, many of which are disturbing, and most of which feel merely boring. The first time I saw footage of the Strange Situation Procedure, however, I was utterly haunted.

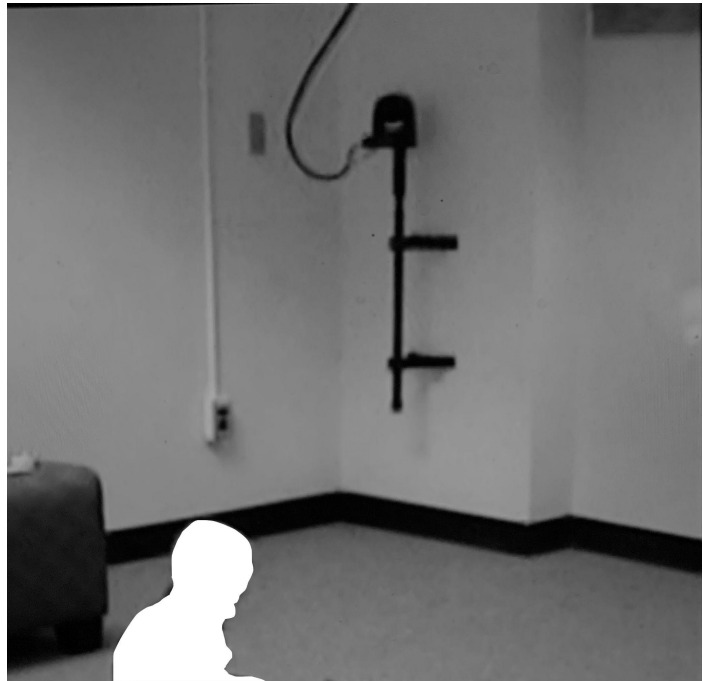
Mary Ainsworth's Strange Situation Procedure is the foundational empirical device of developmental attachment theory.¹ It is among the most productive and enduring experimental protocols in the history of research psychology. The laboratory-based procedure unfolds in a single room furnished simply with two chairs and a pile of toys on the ground. The eight episodes of the procedure are observed through a two-way mirror and always recorded. In the procedure, a 12-18 month-old infant and their (m)other enter the room.² The (m)other settles the infant on the floor, oriented toward the camera, then takes the chair furthest from the door. At about three minutes, a stranger enters the room and sits down in the remaining chair. After another couple minutes have passed, the stranger gets down on the floor and begins to engage the infant with the toys. Over the course of the remaining episodes the infant undergoes a series of two brief separations and reunions with the (m)other. The protocol is used to study infant attachment behavior—patterns in the strategies infants use to elicit care and affect regulation through proximity to their (m)others. The Strange Situation continues to be replicated hundreds of times a year around the world and suggests three primary infant attachment patterns:

[A] - INSECURE - AVOIDANT	(20-30%)
[B] - SECURE	(50-60%)
[C] - INSECURE - RESISTANT	(10-20%)

¹ See Bowlby (1958) and Ainsworth (1964).

² In writing mother as (m)other I am simply trying to suggest a primary figure that the infant encounters prior to any recognition of sexual difference. Although the SSP isn't only run with biological mothers, it usually is, so this way of writing it also seems to me to invite both more expansive and more particular ways of imagining parenting, caregiving, and other formations of (m)othering. This also brings us into relation with the question of the 'Other' as it arises in continental philosophy and psychoanalysis.

It wasn't just a natural physiological response to the sight and sound of so many sad babies that had affected me; my possession was over-determined, fed-forward, uncanny. The following summer I flew to the University of Minnesota for the yearly training and returned home with a stack of DVDs: the primary training disc with ten practice cases; the reliability assessment series of 35 cases; and two educational films. I spent the next eight years returning to the mise-en-scène of the crime, getting saturated in the sound and image of departure and return, possession and dispossession. I projected the footage in my studio and onto my bedroom walls. I watched the infants. I watched the mothers. I watched the researchers watching the infants. I watched the strangers. I even watched the rooms and the toys. Over and over again.



<<<>>>

1_(DIS)ORIENTATION



Cannot open attachment.

—iOS 15.4.1

Social theory has attachment issues. But we're not there yet. And I need to explain.

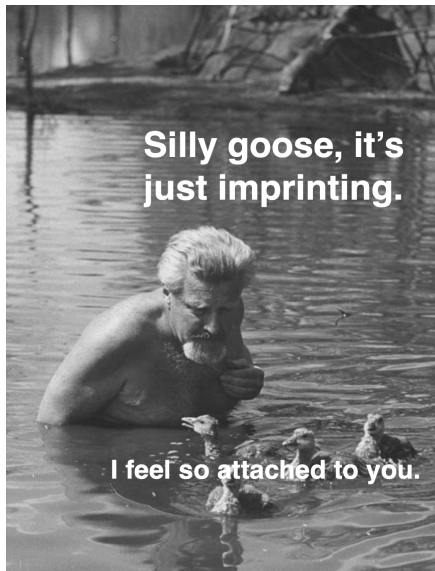
'Attachment' is a floating signifier,³ both a technical term and a common daily word; something we forget to include with an email or that needs to be scanned for viruses. Attachments accompany objects, or fail to. They can also be said to augment an object's effect, as in the case of vacuum cleaner or blow dryer attachments. But the term, of course, often refers to an emotional tie: *I've got some attachments / to some baggage / I'm working on leaving*, blares a song on the drive home from school with a couple of my kids. The word is commonly also used in reference to our affective investments in non-human objects; we are not only attached to one another, but to our ideas and beliefs, to our pets, our phones, our favorite neighborhood trees, to checking the weather by checking our feeds. But, as the lyrics above illustrate, attachment often has a negative valence in colloquial speech. To be attached to something, it would seem, is to be *too* attached. To be *overly* invested.

Technically speaking, attachment researchers will tell you: *there is no such thing as being too attached*.⁴ For them, the dialectic isn't too much or too little, but *security* and *insecurity*.⁵ In any case, attachments affect us. Not always consistently, perhaps, but persistently. Because attachment takes time. Distinct from the imprinting that we see in some other species—one can think of Konrad Lorenz's goslings who permanently cathect the first moving creature they see upon

³ Lévi-Strauss, *Introduction to the Work of Marcel Mauss*.

⁴ Sroufe, *Strange Situation Training*. When someone says something like 'too attached' in colloquial speech, they usually mean something more like 'enmeshed' or 'codependent,' terms which rarely show up in the attachment literature.

⁵ The security/insecurity dialectic will return in a later discussion of attachment patterns but can also be in mind in regard to precarity and the affective politics of insecurity under computational/surveillance capitalism.



hatching— attachment does not occur as a singular event in a single encounter. Instead, it is marked precisely by an accumulation-of-encounters. While cathexis or libidinal investment can occur in an instant, attachment does not; attachment requires proximity over time.⁶ The proximity, however, doesn't have to be physical. You can be attached to something that's missing or something that's here, things you can see and things you can't. Attachment, it would seem, is really neither here nor there. It occurs between, as a relational formation. Attachment, in other words, is an affective assembly.⁷ And one way or another, it assembles us.

<>

To say that social theory has attachment issues is not to say that attachment has been overlooked. In fact, quite the opposite is true. Among my central aims with this project is to encourage further interest in the attachment-related material already at the heart of the work of two important contemporary scholars, Judith Butler and Lauren Berlant. Butler, for example, places attachment at the center of subject formation: “no subject emerges without a passionate attachment to those on

⁶ Both cathexis and attachment can be ongoing. The only meaningful distinction that I mean to be making here is that attachment never occurs in an instant. It is always built up over many instances.

⁷ 'Affective coupling' has a nice sound as well and still shares the interesting mechanical connotation. But 'coupling' seems to me to run the risk of reinforcing the couple form, which is already somewhat biologically overdetermined and often reinscribed in popular accounts of psychoanalysis and attachment. 'Assembly' is also preferable for the way it brings us into proximity with both Silvan Tomkins' and Gilles Deleuze's usage of the term 'assemblage.'

whom he or she is fundamentally dependent.”⁸ It is by “think[ing] through primary impressionability and vulnerability...that a politically informed psychoanalytic feminism could proceed.”⁹ And attachment is no less important for Lauren Berlant. The term appears 14 times in the brief essay “A Properly Political Concept of Love” in *Cultural Anthropology*, 10 times in a 2016 paper about infrastructure, and 13 times—on a single page—of *Cruel Optimism*.¹⁰ “What if we derived our social theory from scenes of ambivalence, which is to say, the scenes of attachment that are intimate, defined by desire, and overwhelming?”¹¹

This project takes seriously Butler’s and Berlant’s admonitions to look toward scenes of attachment in the making of our theory. In response to their invitation, I submit the archive of attachment research and the Strange Situation Procedure as a technoprimal mise-en-scène for social theory.¹²



I come to this research as an artist, clinical psychotherapist, and father of six, so you could certainly say that my interest in attachment is overdetermined. Indeed, this dissertation is not only a record of possession, but of dispossession—the

⁸ Butler, *Psychic Life of Power*, 7. The pronouns here are an artifact of the age of this particular reference.

⁹ Butler, *Precarious Life*, 45.

¹⁰ Page 94 of Gregg and Seigworth’s *Affect Theory Reader* for those who want to count.

¹¹ Berlant, “The Commons: Infrastructures for Troubling Times,” 393. See also the important work of historian of science Robbie Duschinsky and colleagues like Emma Wilson, Monica Greco and Judith Solomon. Duschinsky and his colleagues have made a valuable contribution through facilitating a direct dialogue between attachment researchers and Lauren Berlant in a recent special issue: “Flat Affect, Joyful Politics and Enthralled Attachments: Engaging with the Work of Lauren Berlant.”

¹² I will say more about this shortly, but essentially I simply mean to make the archive an affordance for thinking about the politics of technology, performativity, and aesthetic formation in attachment. An underlying claim here is that subjectivity—or whatever it means to feel like a self—emerges as an effect of bodied life under the imperative of the attachment apparatus. In other words, the subject is not only affected by attachment, but an effect of it.

comings and goings of affects and objects. And as such, I must ask for a certain amount of grace. It is difficult to say, for example, whether the project is interdisciplinary, transdisciplinary, antidisiplinary or simply undisciplined. What I can say with certainty is that I'm no more composing the object than the object is composing me, organizing my affects—my time, my space, my personal effects. And this brings me to another note: throughout my fieldwork I've made intermedial artwork to do theory; to help me make sense of what I can't seem to stop looking at; to help me figure out how I feel about what I'm seeing, sensing. Not only in the empirical footage or the clinical encounter with patients, but as a lover, a partner, a parent, a friend. And also as a former-infant. In this project I bring my clinical experience, intermedial praxis, and all the rest of it to bear on my research in attachment. My methods, as you can see, are all mixed up.



Now Butler and Berlant, of course, are not the only social theorists who touch on attachment formations. Even in their takedown of Oedipus, for example, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari take special note of attachment and the importance of more work vis-à-vis its precise role in desiring-production.¹³ Furthermore, attachment dynamics are not limited to infancy or childhood, nor even to humans. Implicit models of attachment phenomena and praxis are wonderfully abundant in critical scholarship from Donna Haraway's refiguring of kinship (2016), to Sarah Ahmed's orientating objects (2006), Lucy Suchman's human-machine

¹³ Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 47.

configurations (2011), Lisa Cartwright's custodial gaze (2008), Karen Barad's entanglements (2007), or Kyla Schuller's sentimental science and biopolitics of feeling (2017).¹⁴



A Technoprimal Mise-en-Scène

To speak of the empirical procedure as a 'technoprimal mise-en-scène' is meant to invoke the tool or technical object of media theory as well as the primal scene of psychoanalysis.¹⁵ I don't exactly want to make a scene, however, so taking the procedure as a mise-en-scène is meant to blur the distinction between a scene and a situation. 'Mise-en-scène' means something like 'setting the stage,' and sometimes refers to a singular scene that stands in for an entire staged or cinematic work. More importantly, it references the design and arrangement of the entirety of the sensory and narrative elements of a given production. In other words, the mise-en-scène speaks to the aesthetic dimension.¹⁶ It is by way of all this that we can take the Strange Situation Procedure as both tool and scene; an empirical technology and an aesthetic one.

To think with the mise-en-scène in mind is also a way to introduce some figural affordances, or rather, some figures. The procedure's actual cast includes

¹⁴ We might also note that the works of media theorists like Gilbert Simondon and Bernard Steigler on (pre/trans/co)individuation provide a clear affordance for engagement with attachment research. In regard to more contemporary scholarship we could also think of the work of Timothy Lenoir (2010) or Mark Hansen (2015), as well as Joseph Masco's techno-aesthetics (2004), Kriss Ravetto's digital uncanny, Patricia Clough's user unconscious, or the notion that Katherine Hayles' mother was a computer.

¹⁵ I am largely thinking, of course, of Gilbert Simondon's 'technical object' and Freud's 'primal scene.'

¹⁶ This is meant in a broad sense, but also in reference to Herbert Marcuse's post-Marxist aesthetics of subjectivity to which we will later return.

only three: the INFANT, the (M)OTHER, and the STRANGER. But I want to configure at least three more: the RESEARCHER, the ROOM, and the SCREEN.

The researcher, of course, is the P.I., the primary investigator. Whether or not we want to analogize them as director, they choose the cast, they set the stage, they run the show. But the room also figures in. The room is a replicable setting: a set. The room standardizes the environmental architecture, stabilizing its features and affordances. Somewhat minimalist—with just two chairs and a pile of toys—it is meant to be easily recreated across labs. The room is a formal element and functions as a constant for the researchers in regard to the experimental design of the procedure. Finally, in regard to the screen, I actually mean something more like the entire cinematic device, from the technologies of audiovisual capture and inscription found in the camera, to all the artifacts of transfer and the interfaces of medial replay. The Strange Situation Procedure cannot be coded in real time. It requires the affordances of visual recording and screening technologies to facilitate the close review that is necessary for accurate coding and classification. Training in the procedure does not occur through live observation, but rather in the close viewing and reviewing of archival footage of previous cases, each one exemplary for its own pedagogical reason. The footage is projected onto a large retractable screen mounted to the ceiling at the front of the conference room and the action is narrated by the trainers. Footage is frequently replayed, sometimes in slow motion. The homework each evening is to code a case on our laptops. None of this would be possible, of course, without the medial interface. As anthropologist Samuele Collu

has shown in work on the two-way mirror and other visual dispositifs in systemic systems therapy, the screen is neither a transparent window nor an opaque medium for projection or display; it is always an interface.¹⁷

<>

Although I am writing from the field of performance studies and Judith Butler's work is a primary site of departure and justification for my larger discussion of early subject formation in attachment, I will say rather little about gender performativity.¹⁸ And although our primary object is a laboratory procedure, it is not only the staging and performance of science that comes into focus.¹⁹

In contemporary social theory, 'performativity' often seems to sponsor a space to think about iterative participation—intervention even—in social and cultural reproduction. But performativity is about more than compliant vs creative behavior, scripted vs improvised action, dramatic flair, or felicitous conditions of speech.²⁰ In other words, performativity is not exactly delimited by whether any given performance is conscious or not.²¹ It can be helpful here to think about the *form* at the center of performativity. Performativity formalizes affect. In this regard, it is no more individual than social, doesn't have to be self-aware, and isn't exclusive

¹⁷ Collu, "A Therapy of Screens," 729-53.

¹⁸ Butler, *Gender Trouble*. I would also refer the interested reader to Adrienne Harris' excellent *Gender as Soft Assembly*.

¹⁹ See for example Andrew Pickering's "From Science as Knowledge to Science as Practice," or Isabelle Stengers' *Invention of Modern Science*.

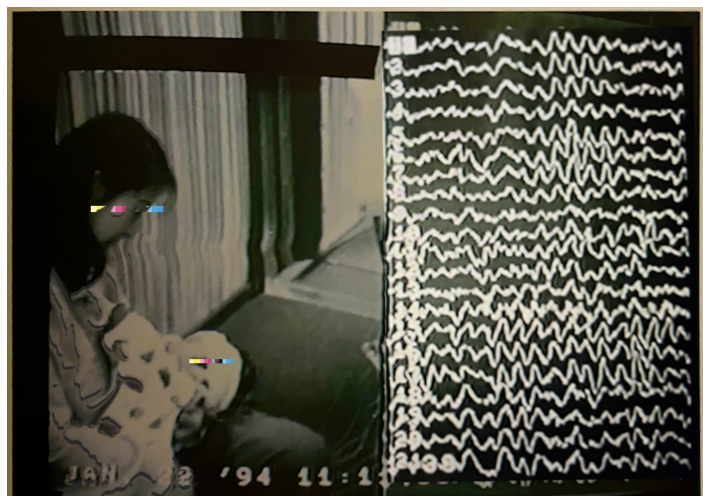
²⁰ In regard to performative speech acts, see J.L. Austin's *How to Do Things with Words*.

²¹ We could also think of Elizabeth Wilson's notion of the biological performative that "enacts the events it appears only to be symbolizing." See, *Gut Feminism*, 76.

to humans or even living organisms. Performativity gives form to affect; it does not require a subject.

In the case of humans, however, it seems to secrete something like one. This project is interested in the performative nature of attachment in regard to preoedipal subject formation in early relational life (0-3 years), but also all the way through to the formation of the posthuman subscriber (0-now).²² In this account, the performativity of attachment will be understood to include our subject formation and ongoing reformation in psychotechnical object-worlds. To be formed as a subject, of course, is also to be subjugated in various ways, subjected to certain conditions over time. And these days, surveilled. The argument here—which is not going to be argued so much as simply assumed—is that our subjection is migrating to a subscription-based model. In other words, the planetary attachment milieu is changing, reformatting us from postmodern subjects into posthuman subscribers.

Our attachment behavioral systems are being reconfigured in relation to a computational attachment figure—by which we are all surveilled and to which we are all subscribed. I sometimes think of it as the ‘algorhythmic



²² The term ‘preoedipal subject formation’ is meant to refer to experience before we can conceive of ourselves as any kind of self at all. This can also be thought in relation to the ‘pre-individual’ found in the work of Gilbert Simondon and elaborated by Thomas Keating in regard to ‘pre-individual affects.’ See Keating, “Pre-Individual Affects,” 211-226.

object,' and I write it with a 'y' because of how it modulates affect through rhythm. "There is a reason the infant suckling at the mother's breast is the prototype of all future love relations," writes Freud.²³

There is a reason they call it your feed.



It takes only 21 minutes to perform the Strange Situation Procedure, but it takes trained human researchers with certified reliability approximately 4-6 hours to confidently code and classify a new film.²⁴ Beyond the secure/insecure distinction, the procedure suggests two primary strategies for managing attachment insecurity: avoidance (as a kind of suppression or attenuation of attachment anxiety), and resistance (as a kind of amplification of it). The insecure-resistant group is sometimes also referred to as insecure-preoccupied. While the avoidant infants appear to pay little attention to the (m)other upon reunion, the preoccupied ones can't let go. We will return to the various attachment patterns in greater detail, but suffice it to say that the signifiers are a bit confusing.²⁵ In any case, we are all preoccupied with attachment to some degree, occupied by it before we ever even come to occupy ourselves as any kind of self at

²³ Freud, "Three Contributions," 43-52.

²⁴ Sroufe, Strange Situation Training. As estimated by Dr. Alan Sroufe, a senior SSP trainer and primary investigator on the Minnesota Longitudinal Study of Risk and Adaptation (1975-present), a landmark intergenerational study of developmental attachment. See, *The Development of the Person* (2009).

²⁵ It is worth noting that the names for these classifications also vary across the literature. The insecure-avoidant pattern is sometimes labeled as *insecure-dismissive*, while the insecure-resistant pattern is sometimes labeled as *insecure-preoccupied*, *insecure-anxious*, or *insecure-ambivalent*. In Emotion Focused Therapy for couples, avoidant partners are called *withdrawers* or *distancers*, and resistant/preoccupied partners are termed *pursuers*.

all. None of us would be here now were it not for the care of someone, some collection of someones and things. Our lives depended on it. They still do. Feelings of insecurity are clues, affective signals of danger, actual or imagined. And this last distinction—actual or imagined—is important. All of us are already a little bit haunted, conditioned to the present by past loss, hurt, harm. We’re always making predictions and already on the lookout. Already—in a sense and in our senses—possessed.



Before we get much further in, I want to acknowledge that the form of all this is somewhat unconventional. This is partly because I take performance studies to be an excuse to get us moving before I tell you what I’m doing. The Strange Situation Procedure is meant to be encountered in motion, which, any way you slice it, is a difficult demand in print; not to mention the privacy agreements. I cannot show you the procedure in the way that I want to. The images, tone, and unusual form of this dissertation are my attempt to reassemble some semblance of (e)motion and animate you anyway.²⁶

The remainder of this chapter introduces some brief historical and contemporary context around attachment theory and research. This develops into a discussion about the politics of attachment, my methods and scope, and a bit more

²⁶All that to say, there are some public videos of varying quality available on the internet. They are not complete examples of the entire procedure and have been edited and post-produced for public view. This footage feels very different from the experience of viewing the slow unfolding of an entire case through all eight episodes. Of these publicly available examples on the internet, I have included links in the bibliography to recommended footage from Alan Sroufe’s film *The Development of the Person*, as well as to another excellent resource of archival material maintained online by Everett Waters and the Department of Psychology at Stony Brook University.

about how aesthetics figures into it all. Although I aim to bring about more engagement with the empirical archive of attachment research, I also demonstrate that the attachment apparatus precedes and exceeds attachment theory and research itself. This introduction concludes with an overview of the project's subsequent chapters.



Some Initial Context

John Bowlby's developmental attachment theory emerged midway through the 20th century at the intersection of ethology, cybernetic systems theory, child psychiatry, and war.²⁷ In response to psychoanalytic supervision under Melanie Klein and clinical work with WWII orphans, Bowlby shifted attention from the internal phantasy life of infancy to the observable behavior, material conditions, and care of children. By the late 1960's, Bowlby's ideas about attachment began to be rendered as replicable data through Mary Ainsworth's Strange Situation Procedure. Infant attachment behavior has subsequently been articulated in correspondence with an expansive variety of empirical methods and measures. The statistical coupling and correlation of the Strange Situation Procedure with assessments beyond the boundaries of developmental attachment research has allowed researchers to use classifications of infant-(m)other relating to predict relational patterns and even corresponding mental health effects throughout the

²⁷ Consider, for context, the titles of two contemporaneous works, *War and Children* and *Infants Without Families*, both co-authored by Anna Freud and Dorothy Burlingham.

lifespan with an impressive degree of reliability.²⁸ This predictive capacity has further extended the reach of attachment research, which is increasingly instrumentalized in family court as well as international public health and policy arenas.²⁹

As researchers Jude Cassidy and Philip Shaver note in the preface to the third edition of their massive edited volume, *Handbook of Attachment*, Bowlby and Ainsworth's work "spawn[ed] one of the broadest, most profound, and most creative lines of research in 20th- and 21st-century psychology."³⁰ As evidence of this claim they continue:

Anyone who conducts a literature search on the topic of "attachment" will turn up more than 30,000 entries that have appeared since the beginning of 1975 (three times the number we discovered when preparing the 2008 second edition of this volume). And the entries are spread across scores of physiological, clinical, developmental and social psychology journals; medical and social work journals; authored books and edited anthologies. The literature spans everything from the prenatal period to old age and considers all kinds of relationships: parent-child, sibling, friendship, teen romance, and adult sexual. In the study of social and emotional development, attachment theory is the most visible and empirically grounded conceptual framework guiding today's research.³¹

²⁸ See Waters et al 2021 and Sroufe et al 2009.

²⁹ See Forslund et al 2022 and Thompson 2012.

³⁰ Cassidy and Shaver, *Handbook of Attachment*.

³¹ *Ibid*, x-xvi.

Although it is difficult to overstate the immense reach and ongoing influence of attachment research, it is important to note that Bowlby developed his initial ideas as a clinical practitioner providing active treatment to wartime children.

Attachment theory emerged to help make sense of observable patterns of relational behavior and symptomatology among infants and young children, especially in regard to maternal or parental separation.³²

Whereas psychoanalytic scholarship is often still marked by the case study, contemporary attachment research is largely characterized by quantitative methods and data sets. The field, of course, is not without its critics. Bowlby was criticized by the Kleinian psychoanalysts of his day for erasing the importance of sexuality, aggression, and the dynamic unconscious; critiques which will return to us as points of contact throughout this text. Attachment research has also been the focus of important cross-disciplinary criticism from cultural anthropologists and feminist scholars for being eurocentric and essentialist in prioritizing the infant-mother dyad at the expense of other configurations of care.³³ In collaboration with attachment researchers Monica Greco and Judith Solomon, historian of social

³² This can be seen in Bowlby's 1944 paper "Forty-Four Juvenile Thieves," where he displays an early interest in the carceral implications of attachment and the pipeline from kinship/community networks of care to increasingly institutionalized enclosures. My point with all this is simply that attachment theory and research originated in close proximity to clinical care and praxis. We will later understand this in relation to Foucault's notion of the 'pastoral' form of power and what attachment researchers refer to as the 'caregiving behavioral system.'

³³ See for example Quinn and Mageo's edited volume, *Attachment Reconsidered* (2013), and Marga Vicedo's, *The Nature and Nurture of Love* (2013). Some of these critiques are addressed in attachment research literature concerned with 'alloparental care,' that is, care provided by someone other than the biological parents. See for example the important work of evolutionary anthropologist Sarah Blaffer Hrdy. Quinn, Mageo, and the other contributors to their volume also share some of the concerns that were voiced by the Kleinian analysts of Bowlby's day. Although my interest in attachment theory is quite different from their own, they raise important questions which deserve further and ongoing consideration by attachment researchers.

science Robbie Duschinsky has engaged extensively in these discussions and offered significant interventions in the consideration of how attachment research is discursively reconfigured for “normalising ends” in various conservative milieus.³⁴



Some Politics

Attachment research takes it seriously that we are social animals from the start; we need each other in primal and very material ways. Part of the trouble, however, is that the notion of attachment often brings to mind

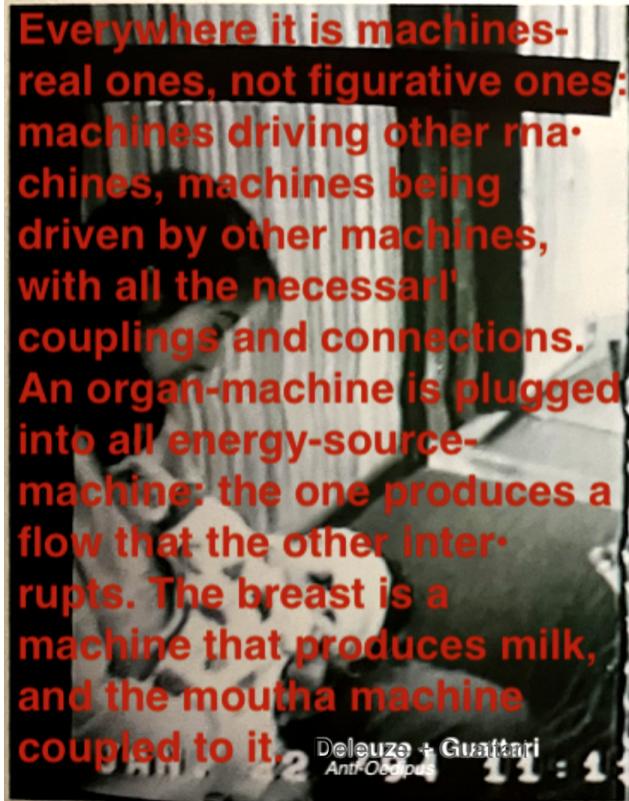
images of babies and parents or other ‘family-scenes,’ images that always already feel saturated with sentiment. I know I have already referenced the line, but I want to cite the rest of it: “There is a reason the infant suckling at the mother’s breast is the prototype of all future love relations. The finding of an object is also always a refinding of it.”³⁵

There is no doubt that the attachment apparatus participates in the transnational circulation of images through which families and couples are reinscribed as primary organizing forms. Drawing on the work of W.J.T. Mitchell or Hans Belting’s anthropology of images here, we understand that although we



³⁴ Duschinsky, Greco, and Solomon, “Attachment and Sovereign Power,” 224; Duschinsky, Greco, and Solomon, “The Politics of Attachment,” 173-195.

³⁵ Freud, “Three Contributions to the Theory of Sex.”



produce these images we could just as easily say that they are producing us.³⁶ We can also think of Lee Edelman's work on reprofuturity, or the work of psychoanalyst and feminist STS scholar Katie Gentile, which demonstrates it is not only the figure of the baby that becomes a fetish object, but the configuration of the public fetus.³⁷ The stakes of these intermediations are undoubtedly as

political as they are psychological. As Lou Cornum points out: "The photo of a woman and her children who want to cross the border to seek asylum has more freedom of movement than the woman and the children themselves do."³⁸ And what exactly are we even sharing in the circulation of such a photo? A feeling? An image? Our data? Another byte of feedback so the algorithmic object can better feed us? "What will the legacy of Oedipus be," writes Butler, "for those who are formed by these situations where positions are hardly clear, where the place of the father is dispersed, where the place of the mother is multiply occupied or displaced, where

³⁶ We will return to these themes but can perhaps begin to also see an intersection with the work of Gabriel Tarde or the remediation of his ideas in Deleuze and Guattari's 'desiring-machines.'

³⁷ Gentile, "Fetal Fetish." See also Ash Teodorson's notion of 'repromediation' as found in the edited volume *Nothing Personal!?* (2022).

³⁸ "Affective Infrastructures."

the symbolic in its stasis no longer holds.”³⁹ As much as I am trying to defamiliarize attachment, I am also trying to reoccupy it. And as much as attachment can almost feel like a kind of conservative physics, I would prefer to configure it into a kind of social(ist) materialism. In other words, the intersection of attachment and politics is so far at the center of this project that I want it to become the taken-for-granted background. But what I also mean is that I want it to be of use for socialist praxis in whatever way it can.

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Some Method and Scope

From what I can tell a

conventional methodology section is not a prerequisite for performance studies research. In fact, given the field’s preoccupation with the undecidability of its own objects and methods, it may even be ill-advised. But methodology—one’s process and pattern of approach to one’s object—is a primary organizing theme of this project. I want to prime⁴⁰ the quality of our approach with the notion of care, or we could say, careful entanglement. As



A nativity scene depicting Jesus, Mary and Joseph as a refugee family separated was displayed Saturday at the Claremont United Methodist Church in California. (Rev. Karen Clark Ristine)

³⁹ Butler, *Antigonie’s Claim*, 23. And doesn’t this question name precisely the kind of uncertainty that conservative politics can’t bear?

⁴⁰ In the adult attachment literature, researchers like Philip Shaver and Mario Mikuliner have demonstrated the affectivity of conscious and unconscious ‘attachment priming.’ Studies on unconscious priming present subjects with split-second attachment-related visual stimuli that are below the threshold of conscious awareness. Although the subjects will not report seeing the stimulus—a photo of the subject’s spouse/partner or a stock image of a breastfeeding infant and mother, for example—they do exhibit temporary physiological responses ranging from changes in heart-rate to decreased test-anxiety and improved performance on cognitive assessments.

Karen Barad and others have noted, “The tradition in science studies is to position oneself at some remove, to reflect on the nature of scientific practice as a spectator, not a participant.”⁴¹ But, as most of us have come to understand, subjects, objects, and affects are too entangled for such a position to be tenable. There is no such thing as observation without influence; we are intermediated, at all times, in every direction.⁴² Even you and I—or anyone else who ever bothers to read this into meaning—are entangled, participating now in a relational configuration. And even National Public Radio wants you to understand: “Research has shown that just knowing about the four attachment styles can positively influence your relationships.”⁴³

The Strange Situation reveals patterns in the strategies infants use to navigate their attachment relationships. While we will come to recognize, understand, and think through these patterns of attachment behavior as a kind of sensible data, the scope of my interest extends beyond questions about the epistemics of social scientific research and knowledge production.⁴⁴ What I mean to say is that I am not only interested in what empirical research has to say about infant-(m)other attachment relations, but in the aesthetic relationship between researchers and their objects.

⁴¹ Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, 247.

⁴² I am thinking here of Katherine Hayles’ notion of ‘intermediation.’ See *My Mother Was a Computer: Digital Subjects and Literary Texts*, 7.

⁴³ Natisse, et al., “What’s Your Attachment Style?” While there are three primary attachment ‘patterns’ in the infant literature and research, there are four attachment ‘styles’ in the adult attachment literature. See bibliography for a hyperlink to an online quiz on adult attachment styles hosted on NPR’s website.

⁴⁴ Shapin and Schaffer, *Leviathan and the Air-Pump*.

Defamiliarizing attachment is not the same as deconstructing it, but my approach seems to me to be something along the lines of what Gayatri Spivak describes below in an interview about her translation of Derrida's *Of Grammatology*.

It's not just destruction. It's also construction. It's critical intimacy, not critical distance. So you actually speak from inside. That's deconstruction. My teacher Paul de Man once said to another very great critic, Fredric Jameson, "Fred, you can only deconstruct what you love." Because you are doing it from the inside, with real intimacy. You're kind of turning it around. It's that kind of critique...it was an engagement with that part of deconstruction which looked at what is excluded when we construct systems. That part of deconstruction which said the best way to proceed is a very robust self-critique. And that part of deconstruction which said that you do not accuse what you are deconstructing. You enter it.⁴⁵

Recent work in feminist science and technology studies reflects a similar intimate mode of careful entanglement. In light of Bruno Latour's work, for example, Maria Puig de la Bellacasa draws on Donna Haraway to consider what it means to be careful in one's encounter with another's object, moving attention from matters of fact, to matters of concern, to matters of care.⁴⁶ And all of this of course brings to mind Eve Sedgwick's well-known distinction between paranoid and reparative reading.⁴⁷ Critical modes of scholarship are always at risk of iconoclasm, and

⁴⁵ Paulson, "Interview with Gayatri Chakravorty."

⁴⁶ Bellacasa, *Matters of Care*.

⁴⁷ Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling*.

perhaps my clinical practice has influenced my approach here, but I take no pleasure in the destruction of another's object. It's not difficult to be critical if we want to, or are caught in that kind of a mood that seems to need to. But for now, we can lighten up. We can imagine a young child presenting us with their beloved bear, blanket or doll—well-worn, mutilated even, by love—to which we would never reply: it's missing an eye or poorly made or just alike to all the rest.⁴⁸ We know that this particular fabric form does in fact matter to this particular child; any raggedness is not a mark of obsolescence, but a measure of love and material over time. It's critical intimacy, not distance, that we're after.⁴⁹

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Some Aesthetics

While this dissertation hopes to support further interest in the archive of attachment research amongst social theorists, it's the technological intersection of aesthetics and attachment that interests me most, both in regard to preoedipal subject formation as well as in the ongoing configuration of the posthuman subscriber. Earlier in the chapter I claimed that I make artworks to do theory, which really makes it sound a lot more instrumental than it ever actually is. I don't exactly make artworks on purpose. It's a repetition compulsion. Or a remediation one.⁵⁰ The images I have ended up including do not really tell any kind of coherent story.

⁴⁸ My reference to the blankets, bears and dolls above is also of course reminiscent of Winnicott's transitional object, which will later return to us in a critical interlude.

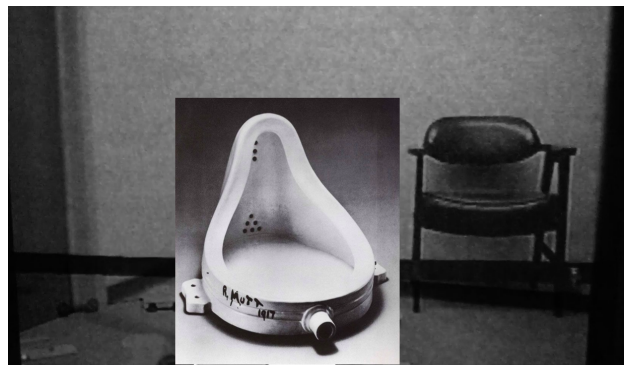
⁴⁹ Paulson, "Interview with Gayatri Chakravorty."

⁵⁰ Taggart, "Before U Ever Even Heard of Oedipus."

Only occasionally do they serve to illustrate or explicate my arguments. They are something like celluloid scraps from the cutting room floor of my unconscious.⁵¹ I want you to see them as symptoms, or maybe as dreams. They are condensations, reversals, displacements, jokes.



Although I take the Strange Situation Procedure as an aesthetic object, my aim is not to simply qualify it as an artwork; one might as well write R. Mutt on the training disc and drop it in a urinal. Empirical objects, of



course, do not have the same purposes, histories, or audiences as art objects. The procedure was clearly devised for scientific rather than aesthetic ends, and you won't find it in any art gallery or museum. But, as Duchamp's practice illustrates, something doesn't have to already be an artwork in order to be approached as one.⁵² Any object that can be sensed—by virtue of its sensibility—is aesthetic. We are also thinking with Jaques Rancière here, where aesthetic sensibility does not exactly refer to one's conscious judgment regarding taste or style, but rather to the

⁵¹ See Rancière's, *The Aesthetic Unconscious* and Christopher Bollas' *The Evocative Object World*.

⁵² All of this also seems to me to be in relation to Gilbert Simondon's description of how a technical object can become a "noteworthy point to others" vis-à-vis aestheticization. As Yves Michaud describes, "In this sense, every act, every thing, every moment can become a noteworthy point of this sort, all can therefore be 'aestheticized.'" Michaud continues: "Simondon thereby defends an aesthetics of the local and the *in situ*, an aesthetics of sensitivity to places and moments, an aesthetics of structures grafted on to reality to give it form and signification; the aesthetic object depends on the gesture of placing, inscribing, inserting a mark in the natural or technical or religious world." Michaud, "Aesthetics of Gilbert Simondon," 124-125.

prior partitioning and distribution of the sensible.⁵³ And while any object can affect our senses, art objects invite a different kind of approach than empirical ones. Empirical objects do epistemological business; they are meant to produce evidence and advance knowledge; they have something to prove. And while we will be thinking through and with the logics of an empirical object-world, we won't want to think too hard.⁵⁴ Artworks are not so much epistemological claims as they are interventions into epistemology, questioning what counts as knowledge and how we come to think we know it. In fact, I'm inclined to put artworks toward the ontological end of the onto-epistemological spectrum, concerned less with the nature of knowledge than with the nature of being. But even this is inadequate. It seems to me that artworks are less about knowledge, or even being, than they are about performative effect. As evidenced by modern and contemporary artworks from Rauschenberg's *Erased deKooning* to Banksy's self-shredding canvas *Love is in the Bin*, what comes to matter most about artworks is not what they mean or are, but what they do. Artworks are in the affect business.⁵⁵

All that said, perhaps my primary reason for approaching the Strange Situation Procedure as an aesthetic object is that I simply can't help it. "Your research is your symptom," a dear friend and medical anthropologist once said to me on the street in New Orleans.⁵⁶ And I want to remediate this into an invitation to

⁵³ Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*.

⁵⁴ It seems to me something more like the associative mode of Christiana Giordano and Greg Pierotti's 'affect theater,' where any kind of object, gesture, or sound can become a punctum for elaboration. See: Giordano and Pierotti's, "Getting Caught: A Collaboration On- and Off Stage Between Theater and Anthropology," and also, "Dramaturgy."

⁵⁵ And it seems to me that performativity at least partially operates through eroding the difference between affect and effect.

⁵⁶ Michael D'Arcy, in conversation with author, 03/10/2017.

consider the particular contours of our own affective and aesthetic entanglements with our research objects. There is an “inseparability of thought and feeling in our relationship to things,” notes Sherry Turkle, “we think with the objects we love; we love the objects we think with.”⁵⁷

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Some Ghosts

I remember sitting outdoors at a neighborhood restaurant in Minneapolis with my computer and the Strange Situation training disc in August of 2018. I had already taken the training a few summers before and had returned for a second round because I couldn't get enough. The training materials and DVD contain no details about the dates or locations of any of the cases. And none of the practice cases are high definition. The general quality approximates 1980's home-video footage, with tape-warp and fluctuating color calibration from previous medial transfers now permanently embedded as part of the digital video code. The ten cases on the training disc appear to be assembled from multiple labs across two or three decades. None of them appear more recent than perhaps the late-1990's; a speculation primarily produced by the attire of the participants. Our homework was to classify one of them: the boy in green overalls. I hooked-up the external drive and turned my screen from public view. I drank a beer and watched him. Over and over again. I wrote a poem, to try to understand what I was seeing. It occurred to me then that this scene had been summoned thousands of times to thousands of

⁵⁷ Turkle, *Evocative Objects*, 5.

screens. This boy, this mother and stranger, this room with its chairs and toys.

Summoned; scanned; coded.

Endlessly reanimated.

<>

I never wanted a ghost story

or haunted house mind you. Never

figured the dissertation as a site of

seance or possession.⁵⁸ My haunting wasn't simply a new sublimation of an old

childhood interest in ouija boards and spirits, for I had none. And it wasn't the

result of reading Avery Gordon, which I hadn't. I'd barely encountered Marx, much

less his spectres in Derrida. I had not, at that point, even read Freud's *Uncanny*.

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On the internet some years later I would stumble across Ken McMullen's 1983 film, *Ghost Dance*, in which Jaques Derrida playing Jaques Derrida says:

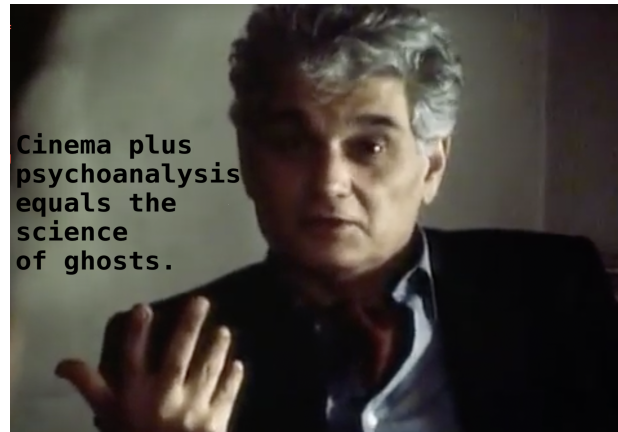
"That's what I think cinema is about when it's not boring...the art of allowing ghosts

to come back. That's what we're doing now. All of this has to do with an

exchange...between the art of cinema in its most original unedited form...and an

aspect of psychoanalysis. Cinema plus psychoanalysis equals the science of

ghosts."⁵⁹ And for once, I knew exactly what Derrida meant.



⁵⁸ Although now I can't help but also think with my colleague Samuele Collu, who takes affects as 'late modern spirits' by which we are (dis)possessed. See "Refracting Affects."

⁵⁹ McMullen, *Ghost Dance* 00:16:58 to 00:17:58.



The Attachment Apparatus

Attachment behavior is not only a species-characteristic of humans, but a class-characteristic of all mammals at all stages of the life cycle.⁶⁰ In hominids specifically it can also be linked to the prehistoric biomechanics of grasping and clinging, essential for the survival of our primate ancestors in the trees.⁶¹ Correlates of the attachment behavioral system are also found at both the cortical and subcortical levels in the fields of cognitive and affective neuroscience.⁶² Attachment precedes ontogeny. It is a primary affective mediator of social and cultural reproduction, no less material than eating, sleeping, shitting, or reproducing. This dissertation will demonstrate that attachment is already all over the place, in image and practice, implicit and explicit, polyvalent, polytypic. And certainly as material as it is affective. And what's the difference?

To speak in terms of an attachment apparatus, then, is not to refer to any empirical device, archive, or research program alone. Giorgio Agamben's articulation of Michel Foucault's already expansive term is in mind here: "I will call

⁶⁰ It is worth noting the etymological link that gets us from the *mammary* glands of the breast, to *mammals* as a class, to the phonetic *m/n* sounds for mothers and *d/p* sounds for fathers that are found with rare exception around the globe. And *mother*, of course, being not unrelated to *matter*. For an interesting discussion of how *mama* and *papa* words become attached to primary figures see Roman Jakobsen's "Why 'mama' and 'papa'?" (1959) and responses like Larry Trask's (2003) as well as Jean Aitchison's *The Articulate Mammal*.

⁶¹ We can think of Leroi Gurhan or Gilbert Simondon, but also the more recent work of Philippe Von Haute and Tomas Geyskens, which directly integrates attachment with Imre Hermann's clinical exploration of searching and clinging. See *From Death Instinct to Attachment Theory*. Furthermore, in *Infancy in Uganda* and elsewhere, Mary Ainsworth has also attributed this insight to Harry Harlow.

⁶² Wright and Panksepp, "An Evolutionary Framework to Understand Foraging, Wanting, and Desire." Also see the work of Mark Solms (2021) or Jeremey Holmes (2020).

an apparatus...literally anything that has in some way the capacity to capture, orient, determine, intercept, model, control, or secure the gestures, behaviors, opinions, or discourses of living beings."⁶³ In other words, it seems to have something to do with subject formation. And we can also think of Karen Barad's reminder that "apparatuses do not possess inherent outside boundaries limiting them to laboratory spaces or experimental practices."⁶⁴ While the apparatus includes the domain of empirical research, the effects and affects of attachment are always around and already before us. The attachment apparatus cannot be said to be under the control of the social scientists.

We must also recall that even the word 'attachment'—in the linguistic or symbolic register—is really quite promiscuous. It's always showing up in all kinds of strange places in all kinds of weird ways. And it doesn't usually seem to want to get technical. To mark the term 'attachment' as a floating signifier is to acknowledge that attachment often seems to actually want to be largely untethered. And while 'scanning an attachment for viruses' could easily be a metaphor for 'assessing the viability of a potential romantic partner,' it is precisely the infidelity of the word that is so interesting. Attachment is unfaithful, even to itself; it refuses to settle down. Take even something as seemingly closely related as 'Attachment Parenting,' for example. The researchers will emphatically tell you: *it's not the same thing as attachment research at all!!!* What they mean is that attachment parenting as a popular discourse must not be conflated with attachment research as an

⁶³ Agamben, *What is an Apparatus?*, 15.

⁶⁴ Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, 169.

empirical one. And they are right to make this distinction. Nonetheless, the signifier shows up there, in pop-psychology and parenting self-help books. These images of attachment are configuring proximity practices, organizing distributed online communities and local infant-(m)other ecologies. It isn't hard to see how external representations of attachment become internal ones. The performativity of attachment is always both outside in and inside out. The apparatus is always unruly.

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As we've already begun to see, attachment is no singular thing. And even within the empirical domain itself we find a rather heterogeneous field of methods and models, extending beyond human affect-worlds to the interaffectivity of human and non-human objects, interspecies bonds, and the relational lives of other mammals. The majority of the attachment research I engage here comes from the psychological subdiscipline of developmental psychology. While developmental attachment research often focuses on early life, attachment research in social psychology generally focuses on adults, and often also romantic relationships. Of course many researchers are also interested in the evolution of these patterns and dynamics across the lifespan and through intergenerational transmission, so even sub-disciplinary boundaries always break down.

Part of what makes attachment so affective, is precisely that it precedes our capacity for symbolic representation and any kind of language at all; it is preverbal, both ontogenetically and phylogenetically. In other words, attachment phenomena

prefigure any particular infant's capacity for speech but also the prehistoric development of symbolic language as a species-characteristic.⁶⁵ Even in human adults the affects and effects of attachment are often non-conscious; not just difficult to think about, but over-determining what can be thought. Individuals that demonstrate an insecure-avoidant pattern, for instance, seem to possess a pre-reflective capacity for suppressing or modulating how fear becomes conscious; and what it feels like when it does. It can first feel more like anger, for example, or disinterest. Or even just an urge to get organized. What I am suggesting is that even the literature itself attests to the way that attachment always exceeds the researcher's desire and the reach of any empirical program devoted to its study.

The attachment apparatus can be found to figure into the formal elements of Facetime calls and the content of legislative language about daycare subsidies. It participates in the configuration of children's books, hospital visiting hours, service animals, formula famines and border crossings. From the development of household robots,⁶⁶ to the chorus of just about every love song,⁶⁷ attachment is already at play. The attachment apparatus is a kind of physics, affective, but no less material. To speak of an attachment



⁶⁵ I am also thinking here along the lines of Terrence Deacon's *The Symbolic Species*.

⁶⁶ See, for example, a recent article in *Wired*, "The Case For Sending Robots to Daycare."

⁶⁷ Oh I'm / gonna miss you so / the minute you walk out that door / please don't go / please don't go.

apparatus is also a way to be willingly imprecise: a wonderfully heterogeneous and dynamic assembly of material forces and things. In the end the attachment apparatus will be found to be quite unthinkable. But I want you to feel it everywhere.

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Attachment Issues

My earlier refrain that social theory has attachment issues is meant more as a provocation than a diagnosis. But it is also a way to mark a notable absence. Despite a significant interest in the subject of attachment, most of our related social theory contains hardly any citational trace of attachment research.⁶⁸ Even Rita Felski's recent monograph, *Hooked: Art and Attachment*, refrains from any discussion of attachment research itself. We can't call it avoidant, because we can't stay away from the subject. We can't call it preoccupied, because we can't even seem to look. Social theory is haunted by attachment.

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Developmental attachment research reveals patterns in the social praxis of infants who are subject to conditions to which they never consented. It shows us some of the strategies that infants employ to navigate the often impossible interpersonal geographies that are the very ground of their being and becoming. Strategies which seem to continue to configure how we navigate what's happening

⁶⁸ Exceptions of course do occur. See Nancy Chodorow's enduring contribution, *The Reproduction of Mothering* and subsequent work.

now. Whether or not we approve of the experimental methods or epistemological assumptions that have produced it, this empirical archive is critical. It illuminates, in one kind of light, the micropolitics of insecurity. It tells us, in some kind of way, something about the aesthetic contours of early subject formation. The empirical discourse and archive do not determine or preclude the attachment apparatus, but rather participate in it, materializing figures, forms, and configurations of attachment as we come to know and perform them. It's not that it has to be this way. It's just that people who are paying a particular kind of close attention are saying that this is the way that it seems to be. And if we want to make it otherwise, or better, or whatever, we mustn't be too afraid to take a look.

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Now that we are almost to the end of our (dis)orientation I can say a bit more about what is to come. Chapter 2 provides some additional history and context around John Bowlby, Mary Ainsworth, and the development of attachment theory. Here I

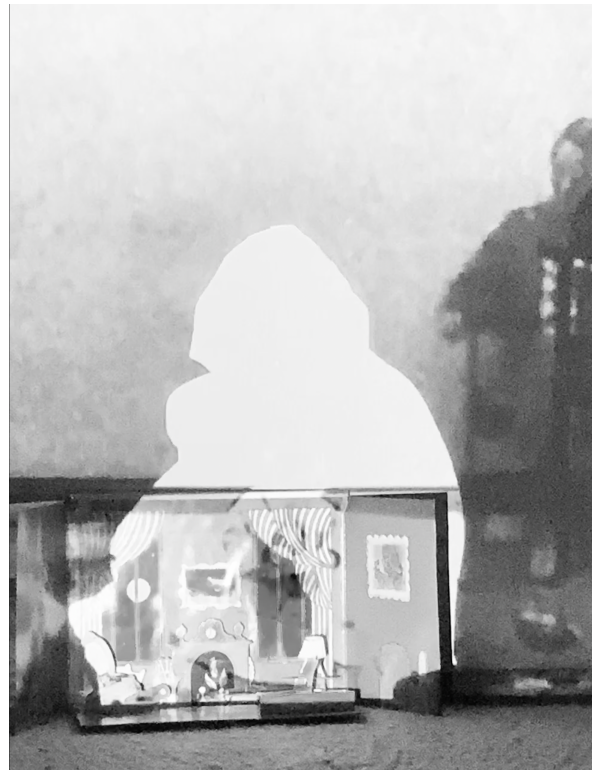


read attachment theory as a way to re-materialize the dematerialized (m)other of Kleinian psychoanalytic object-relations.⁶⁹ I also bring my fieldwork and training in attachment alongside Foucault's notion of a 'pastoral function' to suggest an important animator of attachment research and the attachment apparatus more broadly.⁷⁰ Chapter 3 takes a closer look at the Strange Situation Procedure itself, including procedural details, training materials, and the attachment classifications it produces. The Strange Situation Procedure is film, not fact, and here we begin to see that it is not only a scene of attachment for the infants and (m)others, but for the researchers as well. A critical interlude locates the Strange Situation alongside three other preoedipal tools from the psychoanalytic hall-of-fame: Freud's spool, Lacan's mirror, and Winnicott's transitional object. Chapter 4 addresses selections from the works of Judith Butler and Lauren Berlant to consider how attachment is configured as a kind of affective infrastructure in contemporary social theory. This chapter also considers loss and the importance of aggression in the attachment apparatus. In conclusion, Chapter 5 articulates a relationship between attachment and aesthetics which has seemingly remained unmarked but which inheres at the heart of subject formation. Through both the archive of attachment research as well as examples of attachment phenomena in cultural production more broadly, this chapter begins to develop what could be called an 'aesthetics of attachment,'

⁶⁹ All of this is also located as part of a broader return to materiality that characterized the psy-disciplines at this time, not only as a result of the observed effects of wartime separation on young children, but also facilitated by the increasing availability and use of film technologies in developmental research. See Lisa Cartwright's *Moral Spectatorship*, Scott Curtis' "Tangible as Tissue," and also Rachel Weitzenkorn's "Faces of Babies."

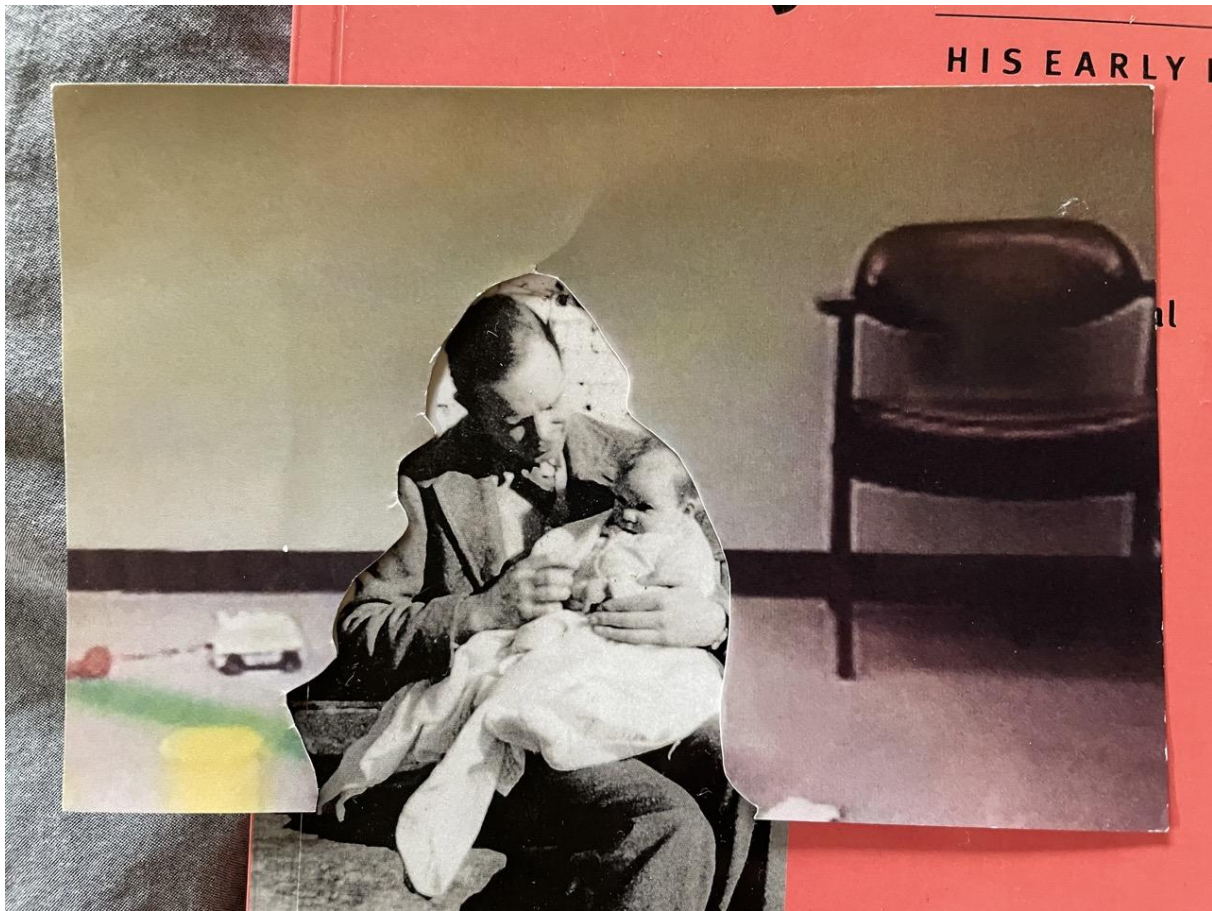
⁷⁰ Foucault, "The Subject and Power."

demonstrating some of the ways in which attachment and aesthetics converge in the formation of subjects. In regard to aesthetics, we are not talking here about beauty or sentiment or surface, but rather the entire configuration of sense experience and sensibility. This will be seen to be along the lines of Rancière's partitioning and distribution of the sensible, but also responds to the emphasis on content over form that is frequently found in psychoanalytic aesthetics. I return to the claim that the attachment apparatus is simultaneously an aesthetic and pastoral one and discuss the term 'remediation' as it may pertain to the psychodynamics of human functioning. My hope in all this is to begin to make a way to lose track of the difference between empiricism and aesthetics in the domain of attachment.



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2_ATTACHMENT HISTORY



I have no way of knowing whether the events that I am about to narrate are effects or causes.

—Jorge Louis Borges

I am no historian of science and certainly more inclined to making art than history. My purpose here is not to provide anything like a comprehensive account of the history and development of attachment theory. Indeed there is already no shortage of valuable scholarship in this mode. Beyond Robert Karen's extensive popular history *Becoming Attached*,⁷¹ and Marga Vicedo's critical genealogy *The Nature and Nurture of Love: From Imprinting to Attachment in Cold War America*,⁷² Robbie Duschinsky's open access *Cornerstones of Attachment* is a detailed and excellent survey.⁷³ My aim in this chapter is simply to provide enough of an overview for the reader to understand some key context around the world-historical and local object-worlds that produced attachment theory and research, especially in regard to psychoanalysis, but also with media(tion) in mind.



I think of myself as preferring theory to history, so it has come as a surprise to find the historical research to be of such great interest. I now carry with me such a great number of books at any given time that I feel like a kind of itinerant librarian in a Borges story. The magical thinking in keeping them close is that I'm absorbing what's inside. But I also am. They are well-loved, which is to say, heavily annotated and often held. And they hug me back. The folded pages and annotations in these books are reminders of previous encounters, invitations to return. I like just seeing them everywhere, piled about the room and bent, split open on the bed or around

⁷¹ Karen, *Becoming Attached*.

⁷² Vicedo, *Nature and Nurture of Love*.

⁷³ Duschinsky, *Cornerstones of Attachment Research*.

the spine of another. They become a kind of blanket. A quilted organization of my affects.



These material and intellectual histories clearly support further investigation into questions around the aesthetics of early subject formation and the situation of attachment as a *mise-en-scène* for social theory. But I often also found myself avoiding it—writing the history that is. Sometimes I’d come across historical and biographical details that felt almost over-determining. As biographer Suzan Van Dijken notes, the Bowlby family crest is a depiction of a mother cradling a baby.⁷⁴ But, it is also well known that Bowlby was sent away to boarding school as a child and primarily under the care of a nanny even when at home. Beyond Bowlby’s personal history, Ainsworth’s only pregnancy had ended in a miscarriage and she later shared with Bowlby that she felt her “grief and preoccupied longing for a child ultimately became transfigured into perceptiveness.”⁷⁵

When you really start to see attachment, you start to see it everywhere. To read it backwards into every personal history. I’m not saying it’s right, but I am trying to make it so you can’t help but see it everywhere too. Your attachment history is a material one, that is to say, it matters—but it is not to be confused with the notion of something like destiny. It’s not exactly a restrictive or delimiting force, but rather a thoroughly productive one. This chapter provides a brief

⁷⁴ Van Dijken, *John Bowlby*, 10.

⁷⁵ Duschinsky, *Cornerstones of Attachment Research*, 113.

overview of attachment theory in terms of its early development and position in regard to general psychoanalytic theory.

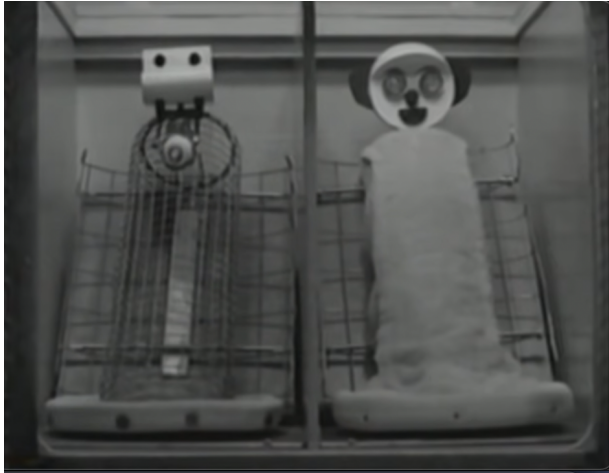
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First theorized by John Bowlby (1907-1990) in the 1950's, the psychological literature that exists underneath the auspices of developmental attachment theory is concerned with infant-(m)other relationships and the way that these relationships inform later development and experience. Bowlby suggested that his initial interest in the field of psychology developed out of teaching at a school for troubled children in 1929.⁷⁶ After the completion of his medical, psychiatric, and psychoanalytic training in 1937, he worked extensively with wartime orphans and displaced children at the Tavistock Clinic in London where he became especially interested in the effects of early-childhood separations.⁷⁷ Bowlby would remain engaged and publicly active in questions around institutionalization and social welfare for the duration of his career.

Bowlby agreed with Freud that all psychological theories of human development and functioning—including psychoanalysis—ought to be consistent with the basic tenets of Darwin's evolutionary paradigm. Bowlby, however, also had the benefit of drawing extensively on a large body of emerging research in ethology, the ecological study of animal behavior. While Freud explained the infant's early relation to the mother primarily in terms of oral instinct and the need

⁷⁶ See Suzan Van Dijken's biography, *John Bowlby: His Early Life*. See also, *A contribution by John Bowlby* (1981). Whatever Ainsworth means by 'transfigured' here will return to us later as a form of remediation.

⁷⁷ See for example Bowlby's interesting and early paper, "Forty-Four Juvenile Thieves."



for food, Bowlby drew on empirical work by ethologists like Harry Harlow and Konrad Lorenz to rearticulate the infant's primary needs in terms of physical safety and affect regulation.

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▶ Harlow's Studies on Dependency in Monkeys ⁷⁸

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Bowlby began to develop his ideas about attachment while he was in his personal training analysis with Joan Riviere, an important British clinician and translator of Freud who also analyzed Donald Winnicott. More importantly perhaps, Bowlby was under clinical supervision with Melanie Klein, the leader of the British Object-Relations School. In terms of history, it is helpful here to briefly position psychoanalytic object-relations in reference to Freud's work.

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Although Freud is famous for what he said about mothers, his writings are generally characterized by an even greater concern with the psychic importance of fathers. This is reflected, of course, in his emphasis on oedipal conflict, which is said to emerge between three to six years of age. Object-relations theory, however,

⁷⁸ Baker, "Dependency in Monkeys." This worthwhile six-minute documentary features Harlow demonstrating his empirical methods as well as his "diabolical object." I particularly recommend 02:07-03:33.

is primarily concerned with the preoedipal period, from zero to three years, and focuses special attention on the (m)other. The term 'object-relations' does not refer to observable relations in the external world, but rather to the infant's internal object-world. Although infants can't make reports on their phantasy life, the psychodynamics of this phase of development are rendered clinically accessible through dreams, artwork, and play. Klein's work can be read to emphasize the role of infantile phantasy as a *mediator* of ongoing experience and behavior.



In a well-known story of Bowlby's first training analysis with Klein, Bowlby noticed early on that his young patient's mother was in a chronically tense and anxious state. Klein, however, forbade Bowlby to spend any time with the mother or to involve her at all in her child's treatment. Instead, Klein insisted that the analysis consider only the internal phantasy life of the child, without concern for environmental factors. A couple of months into the case Bowlby was notified that his patient's mother had been sent to a mental hospital. As the story goes, Klein was uninterested in the clinical implications of the news and dismissed the entire matter as an unfortunate termination of the training analysis.⁷⁹ Some years later Bowlby wrote, "the great shortcoming, in my judgment, of the psychoanalytic approach to children has always been that it has been willfully uninterested and inept in regard to the environmental situation of the child. The child is thought of almost as a closed system, and treatment is directed at this psychological system within the

⁷⁹ Van Dijken, *John Bowlby*, 97.

child.”⁸⁰ We can note here the influence of cybernetic systems theory in Bowlby’s reflection and critique, but I also want to make a further distinction. While Kleinian object-relations seems to focus on the mediation process as more-or-less internal to the subject, Bowlby’s critique is a way of reorienting attention to external mediation via material care and environmental milieu.⁸¹



My aim so far has been to briefly position the intellectual development of Bowlby’s work in relation to ethology and psychoanalysis in order to highlight the ecological and material nature of the concerns that organize attachment theory. Before proceeding to Mary Ainsworth, it would be helpful to say a bit more about some central assumptions and common terms in attachment theory and to begin to suggest something about what I mean when I say that attachment is a pastoral apparatus.



According to developmental attachment theory, infant and juvenile mammals are strongly motivated to maintain close physical proximity to their caregivers in order to maximize their likelihood of survival in a world they cannot yet navigate independently. In times of physical and emotional distress, danger, or uncertainty,

⁸⁰ Ibid, 98. Senn, M.J.E (1977a), p 12. Interview with Dr. John Bowlby in London England, 1977.

⁸¹ It is also worth noting that Bowlby used the term attachment ‘figure’ rather than ‘object.’ In psychoanalysis it can sometimes be hard to know whether the object in question is an internal or external one. This is a way that attachment theory marks the (m)other figure as a material object. This interesting difference in psychoanalytic and attachment literatures also invites us to consider the blurry difference between external and internal or material and immaterial. Even thoughts and phantasies, for example, require a material substrate to emerge. In this regard, your internal objects are no more immaterial than your external ones.

infants rely on familiar caregivers for assistance, protection, soothing. In other words, an infant is not some kind of singular subject, object, or isolated body alone in the world. To be an infant is to require an other, an assembly-of-other-objects. Infants signal affective distress and dysregulation in ways that can be interpreted and responded to by the world around them. Upon the development of locomotion and language, they will also employ these more advanced methods for maintaining affective proximity to familiar caregivers. Affect regulation, for an infant, is a community affair. Affect regulation is co-regulation. As I will discuss in greater detail in Chapter 3, researchers commonly refer to a set of complementary 'behavioral systems' at play in the infant-(m)other assembly I am describing. Of particular interest are the 'attachment behavioral system,' the 'caregiving behavioral system,' and the 'exploratory behavioral system.'

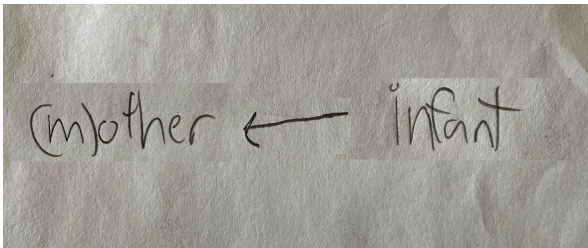
One way to begin to understand how these behavioral systems contribute to the configuration of the infant-(m)other assembly is to consider what researchers refer to as the 'safe haven' and 'secure base' functions. When the attachment behavioral system is activated, the infant is looking to access the support of the (m)other as a 'safe haven,' a physical place of refuge and a reliable source of affective care. On the other hand, when the infant is well-regulated and able to be interested in the world, the attachment behavioral system is said to be deactivated. On these occasions the infant is said to be using the (m)other as a 'secure base,' allowing for activation of the exploratory behavioral system. The metaphor here is a military one, referencing the need for a fortified base from which an armed division

could patrol and explore. In attachment theory, it is the secure base function of the (m)other that allows the infant to venture out and explore the territory of the larger object-world.

Another way to think about the difference between the safe haven and secure base functions is simply to consider the direction of the infant's attention. When the infant is seeking refuge in the (m)other as a safe haven, the (m)other is the object of desire. On the other hand, when the (m)other is functioning as a secure base, the world can become the object of attention and desire.

- SAFE HAVEN -

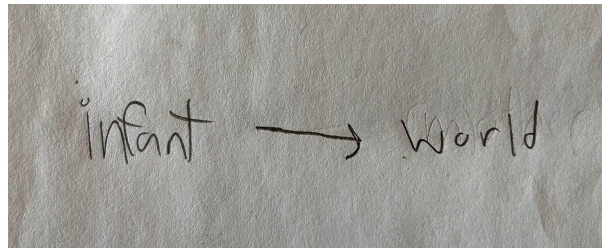
infant is retreating



(m)other = object of attention

- SECURE BASE -

infant is exploring



world = object of attention

When the infant needs a safe haven, their display of attachment behavior initiates a corresponding response in the (m)other by activating the caregiving behavioral system. The caregiving behavioral system activates and organizes the (m)other's behavior in response to the infant's need.⁸² We are obviously already in the domain of cybernetic feedback systems with the use of terms like 'activate' and 'deactivate' in regard to the infant-(m)other ecosystem, but I propose we could also

⁸² As Adam Phillips writes, "The infant depends on the mother and her care to prevent him from being out of his depth." "On Risk and Solitude," 31.

think with the term ‘animate,’ which is much more lively. To consider the role of animation in the attachment apparatus invites us to think with film and media theory and reflects a similar mode of inquiry in anthropology.⁸³ Reflecting on the way that infants animate their (m)others also constitutes an interesting complication to Judith Butler’s emphasis on the primary helplessness of the infant discussed in Chapter 4. As vulnerable as infants are, they also seem to have a way of completely reorganizing their object-worlds. Furthermore, to locate this in relation to Deleuze and Guattari, we might say that attachment allows us to consider how drives always operate within affect-regulating assemblages.

Bowlby’s critique of Klein’s focus on internal phantasy would lead to his increased alienation and subsequent departure from the British psychoanalytic community. Nonetheless, Bowlby would remain engaged with psychoanalytic theory throughout his career. As his monumental trilogy, *Attachment, Separation, and Loss* (1973-1980) demonstrates, he continued to engage the work of Freud and other psychoanalysts in the development of his ideas.⁸⁴



⁸³ Thinking along with the work of Teri Silvio, for example, Tarek Elhaik notes that animation helps to “make sense of the new materiality of digital media objects and infrastructures, and to account for the life and motion of media assemblages in (post)industrial contexts.” Elhaik, *The Incurable-Image*, 22.

⁸⁴ In *Gender as Soft Assembly*, Adrienne Harris makes an interesting note: “Bowlby’s (1940) very early account of the environmental contextual effects on self-states in children describes a girl’s severe anxieties about sexuality and masturbation. He links the child’s affective state to the mother’s obsessive washing of the girl’s genitals and her anxious, penetrating surveillance.” What is most interesting to me about this account is that while Bowlby seems to be thinking with Freud, we somehow also end up thinking about Foucault.

A Pastoral Apparatus

According to biographer van Dijken, in the midst of deciding between military and medical training, the 17 year-old Bowlby wrote to his mother that his primary motivation was to “work in order to improve the community as a whole.”⁸⁵ Somewhat later, Bowlby would also cross paths with noted child psychoanalyst Donald Winnicott, with whom he penned a 1939 letter to *The British Medical Journal* entitled “Evacuation of Small Children.”⁸⁶ This letter emphasized the developmental impact of maternal separation on young children and strongly advocated against such separations whenever possible.⁸⁷ Bowlby would later write an important presentation on similar themes for an official World Health Organization report to the United Nations (1952).⁸⁸ Van Dijken writes: “Bowlby realized that his research had a social impact. He saw the problem of deprived children as a social problem; deprived children could become delinquent or become a burden to society in another way. Bowlby perceived that, without help, the circle of deprivation would remain.”⁸⁹ Bowlby’s early 1944 paper *Forty-Four Juvenile Thieves*, for example, begins and ends in carceral enclosures, also linking early object-loss to later thieving.

What I am trying to suggest by all this is that attachment theory and research has always also been a kind of social work, animated to participate in the vexed but

⁸⁵ Van Dijken, 153.

⁸⁶ Bowlby, Miller, and Winnicott, “Correspondence.”

⁸⁷ It is also worth noting here that although Winnicott and Bowlby continued to be aware of one another’s work, Winnicott was not directly involved in the development of attachment research and is not generally considered an attachment theorist.

⁸⁸ Bowlby, “Maternal Care and Mental Health.”

⁸⁹ Van Dijken, 152.

powerful administration of both care and control, actively engaged in both subject formation and subjection.

Foucault's notion of the pastoral function of power can be helpful in considering this complicated aspect of attachment. Not only in regard to attachment research and researchers, but as a primary component and animator of the attachment apparatus more broadly. In *The Subject and Power*, Foucault describes his broader project as being concerned not with power but with subjects.⁹⁰ In particular, he is interested in the "objectivizing of the subject" in what he calls "dividing practices." He explains: "The subject is either divided inside himself or divided from others. This process objectivizes him. Examples are the mad and the sane, the sick and the healthy, the criminals and the 'good boys.'"⁹¹ Although Foucault's examples all seem to be divisions imposed by the external social order, his concern remains with the subject. For Foucault, the pastoral function of power is oriented around a certain kind of stewardship. It includes an active and activating responsibility for the formation of subjects and the corresponding development of souls, minds, and bodies. Not exactly in the next life, but in this one. The theological and religious history of this form of power are beyond our present scope, but here we may be able to begin to intuit some manner of overlap between pastoral power and the caregiving behavioral system described above. What we find in the attachment apparatus, and in attachment research more specifically, is a kind of complicated exercise of response-ability. These dynamics

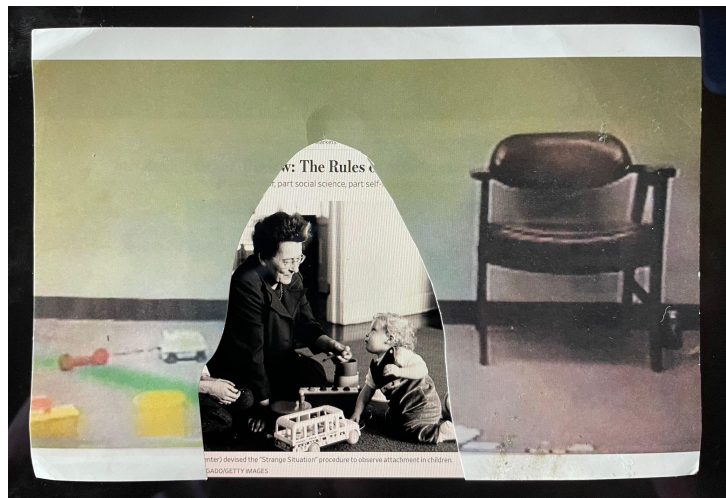
⁹⁰ Foucault, *Subject and Power*.

⁹¹ Ibid 777-788.

have been explored in anthropological scholarship in other milieus by Paul Brodwin among others, and can also be found in ethnopsychiatric praxis as demonstrated by Cristiana Giordano's work on the paradox of care and cure in relation to custody.⁹² The attachment researchers that I have encountered are not only interested and invested in the subject of attachment, but also in the well-being of their research subjects. For now it is enough to understand that attachment research is marked by a complicated tension between observation and intervention. More broadly speaking, my purpose here is simply to note the pastoral arrangement at play at the center of the attachment apparatus. I want to proceed now to a discussion of Mary Ainsworth before moving on to a more detailed description of the Strange Situation Procedure itself in Chapter 3.

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Mary Ainsworth, originally Mary Salter, entered the University of Toronto at the age of 16, where she would eventually earn her doctorate in psychology in 1940. After a voluntary stint with the Canadian Women's Army Corps, she would return to the University of Toronto as an assistant professor, working on measures of security and insecurity with her former advisor William



⁹² See Brodwin, *Everyday Ethics: Voices from the Front Line of Community Psychiatry*, and Giordano, "Political Therapeutics: Dialogues and Frictions Around Care and Cure."

Blatz. She married social scientist Leonard Ainsworth in 1950, whom she accompanied first to a post in London and later to Uganda. It was in response to a classified ad in 1950 that Ainsworth met and was hired by John Bowlby, for whom she worked for a few years as a post-graduate research assistant before leaving for Uganda in 1953. It was not until sometime after her return from Uganda, during her tenure at Johns Hopkins, that she and Bowlby would actually become colleagues and eventual research partners.

Ainsworth's ethnographically-oriented research occurred during a time of growing political tension in Uganda, which would soon regain independence from the British Empire in 1962. With help of interlocutor Katie Kibuka, and offering family health care and transportation in exchange for research participation, Ainsworth developed a detailed in-home observational study with 26 Ugandan infant-mother pairs. Each pair was visited on a regular basis over the course of many months. *Infancy in Uganda* was not published until 1967, but the detailed longitudinal observations Ainsworth recorded during the project would have lasting influence on the development of her theoretical approach as well as her empirical and methodological contributions. Although this important study is beyond my present scope, I want to include Ainsworth's list of the attachment-related behaviors she observed, categorized, and coded:

1. Differential crying
2. Differential smiling
3. Differential vocalization
4. Crying when the mother leaves
5. Following
6. Visual motor orientation
7. Greeting through smiling, crouching, and general excitement
8. Lifting arms in greeting
9. Clapping hands in greeting
10. Scrambling over the mother
11. Burying the face in the mother's lap
12. Approach through locomotion
13. Embracing, hugging, kissing
14. Exploration away from the mother as a secure base
15. Flight to the mother as a haven of safety
16. Clinging

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Mary Ainsworth's thinking had also been particularly affected by her former advisor William Blatz's 'security theory,' and after departing Uganda, Mary Ainsworth began to focus her attention on developing a more compact and replicable laboratory-based protocol through which to correlate affective security and insecurity with attachment behavior. As Ainsworth reflects:

“I thought, Well let's work it all out: We'll have the mother and baby together in a strange environment with a lot of toys to invite exploration. Then we'll introduce a stranger when the mother's still there, and see how the baby responds. Then we'll have a separation situation where the mother leaves the baby with the stranger. How does the baby respond to the departure? And when the mother returns, how does the baby respond to the reunion? But since the stranger was in the room during the first departure, maybe we'd better have an episode in which the mother leaves the baby entirely alone. Then we could see whether the return of the stranger would lessen whatever distress has occurred. Finally, we'll have another reunion with the mother. We devised this thing in half an hour.”⁹³

Ainsworth's statement that the entire procedure was devised in only half an hour covers over the reality that it crystallized out of many years of prior research. In my estimation the statement suggests that Ainsworth was surprised by the remarkably enduring success of the 'thing' she thought up. This was not, however, psychology's first strange situation. Infant behavior in response to unfamiliar objects and environments—both with and without the (m)other—had already been a topic of interest for developmental psychologists for many decades. A valuable review of the many interesting experiments that predated Ainsworth's protocol has been offered by Lenny Van Rosmalen, Rene Van Der Veer and Frank Van Der Horst.⁹⁴ Van Rosmalen and colleagues found that although unmentioned by Ainsworth, experiments looking at similar infant-(m)other dynamics began to emerge in the

⁹³ Karen, *Becoming Attached*, 147.

⁹⁴ Van Rosmalen, Van Der Veer, and Van Der Horst, “Origin of an Instrument.”

1930's. Although this early literature develops in “nothing remotely like a linear progression,” and no other procedure has produced nearly the impact of the Strange Situation vis-à-vis developmental research, the threads of attachment-related empirical interests certainly anticipate the contributions of Ainsworth and her colleagues.⁹⁵



Who is the Stranger?

Robbie Duschinsky notes that it was in Uganda that “Ainsworth saw that her own entrance, as a relative stranger (and as a white Canadian), provided the most reliable prompt for the display of attachment behaviour by infants.”⁹⁶ What interests me most here is what this suggests about repetition and remediation in the genealogy of Ainsworth’s ‘stranger.’ In Uganda, Ainsworth was a stranger to nearly everyone. More specifically, she was experienced as a stranger by a set of 26 infants. The empirical replication here is the feeling-of-being-felt-as-strange-by-another. But there is also performativity at play, and remediation. Ainsworth’s own experience of being configured as a stranger is remediated into the figure of the stranger we find in her procedure. Her own affective replication is reconfigured as a stranger in the room.

Interest in infants and alterity has a long history in developmental research. My purpose in bringing up the stranger in particular is to highlight that this

⁹⁵ Ibid, 281.

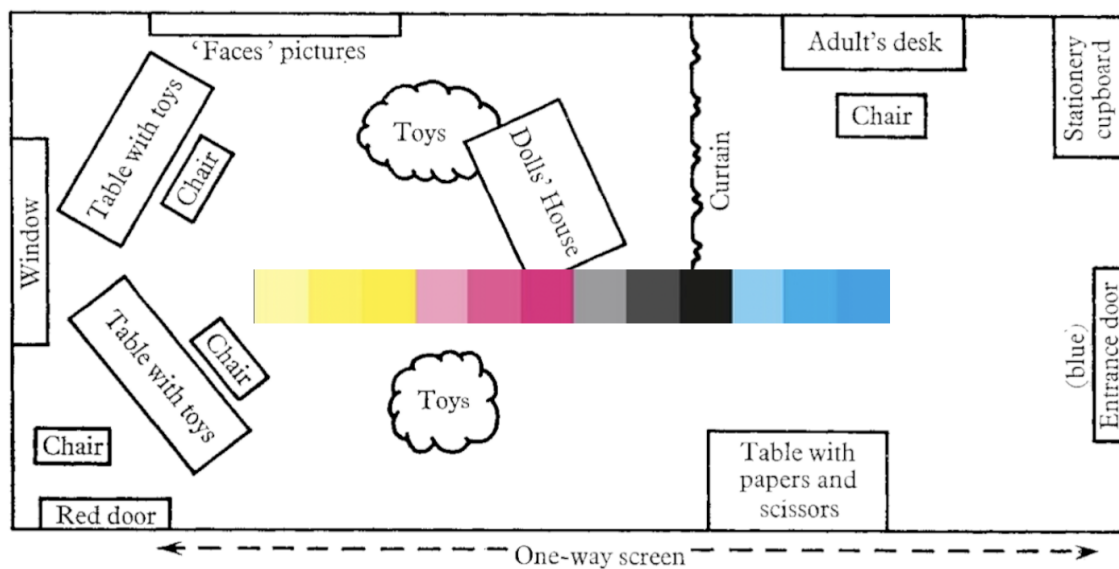
⁹⁶ Duschinsky, *Cornerstones of Attachment Research*, 121.

figure—an unfamiliar human other—also has an empirical genealogy. Although a more extensive look at the figure of the stranger in empirical research is beyond our present scope, I do want to include a note in order to demonstrate why this figure may be of further interest to social theorists.

As I will discuss in the next chapter, one of the primary empirical ‘stressors’ in the Strange Situation is the entrance of the stranger. The role of the stranger in the procedure is almost always occupied by a female graduate student; I have never seen a recording with a male stranger. An explanatory narrative for this gendered feature of the experiment emerged at the training in Minneapolis. It was explained that infants in replications with male strangers were found to exhibit elevated levels of stress response which confounded the reliability of the results and diminished the possibilities for establishing quantitative correlations with previous and future research. Although I am not going to explicate this artifact of the empirical procedure, I would note the long history of theoretical, philosophical, and ethical interest in the figure of the stranger from ancient religious texts up through more writers like Albert Camus, Jacques Derrida, Julia Kristeva and Sara Ahmed. The archive of developmental research is an untapped affordance for further study into how alterity, unfamiliarity, and the figure of the stranger come to be configured. Both by infants and empiricists alike.

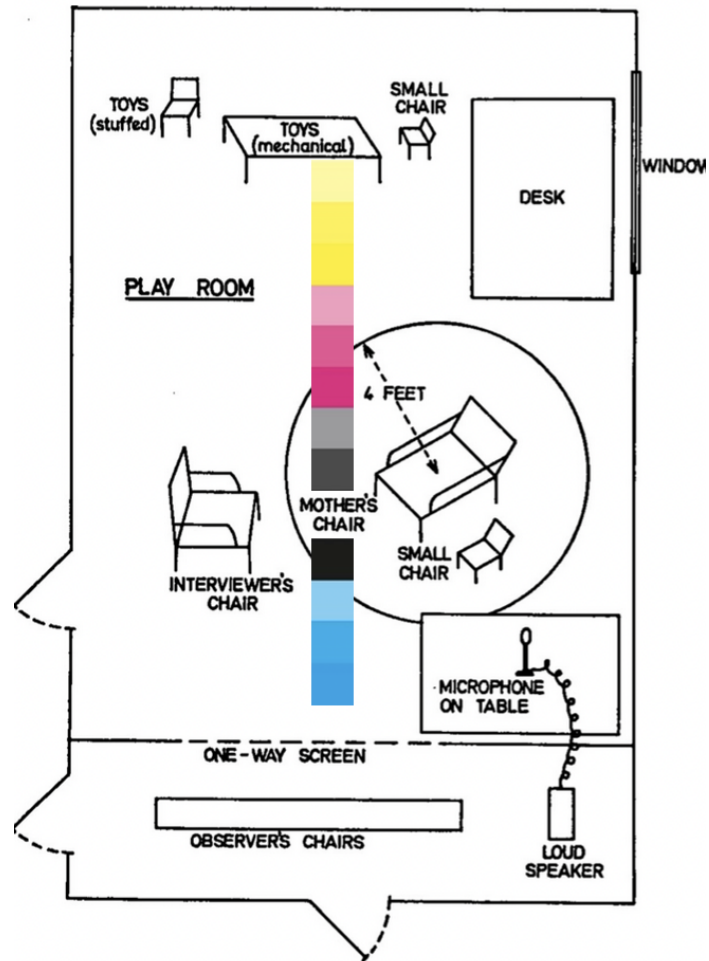
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Included below are reproductions of the experimental mise-en-scène of two earlier studies, the first by Miriam Rosenthal,⁹⁷ and the second by Berg, Stark and Jameson.⁹⁸



⁹⁷ Rosenthal, "Effects of a Novel Situation," 357-64.

⁹⁸ Berg, Stark, and Jameson, "Measurement of a Stranger's Influence," 243-250.



As we see in the next chapter, Ainsworth's Strange Situation would look somewhat different.

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3_THE STRANGE SITUATION PROCEDURE



Being with you and not being with you is the only way I have to measure time.

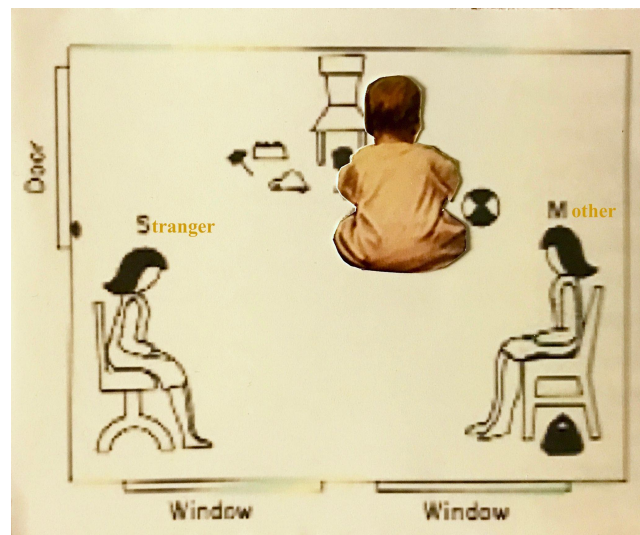
—Jorge Louis Borges

The Strange Situation Procedure was designed by Mary Ainsworth and her colleagues as a replicable method for the study of attachment behavior in 12-18 month old infants.⁹⁹ In the protocol, a (m)other and infant are brought into an unfamiliar room with a heap of toys on the floor. Over the course of 10-20 minutes, the infant and (m)other are observed through a one-way mirror and filmed as they encounter a stranger and proceed through a scripted series of separations and reunions. The protocol is designed to expose infants to incrementally increasing levels of stress in order to observe, code, and classify their attachment behavior. The experiment is always recorded so that each iteration can be reviewed and coded by at least two independent researchers. As noted earlier, it takes highly trained researchers 4-6 hours to accurately and confidently code a new case.¹⁰⁰

What follows next is a more detailed description of the procedure's eight episodes.

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In the first episode (1 minute), an infant and their (m)other are introduced to an unfamiliar room with two chairs and some appealing toys on the floor. In episode two (3 minutes), the infant and (m)other settle in and the infant is



⁹⁹ See Ainsworth and Wittig "Attachment and Exploratory Behavior of One-year-olds in a Strange Situation," 113-136. In addition, in the work of researchers like Robert Marvin and Elizabeth Moss, the procedure has also been modified for use with older children up through preschool age.

¹⁰⁰ Sroufe, Strange Situation Training.

able to explore the room and toys. In the third episode (3 minutes), a stranger enters the room and takes a seat. After a couple minutes have passed the stranger gets down on the floor with the infant and the toys. If the infant is willing, the stranger begins to play with the infant. In episode four (3 minutes), the (m)other leaves the infant alone in the room with the stranger. This is the first separation. In the fifth episode (3 minutes), the (m)other returns and the stranger quietly leaves the room. This is the first reunion. In episode six (3 minutes), the (m)other leaves the infant alone in the room. In episode seven (3 minutes), the infant hears a knock at the door and the stranger comes in. In episode eight (3 minutes), the (m)other returns and the stranger leaves. This is the second and final reunion.

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Included a couple pages below are some of the training materials, the standard protocol for the procedure, and images of a widely utilized 'Strange Situation Script,' an informal document reportedly drafted by research psychologist Mary Main at UC Berkeley. Main was a student of Mary Ainsworth's and has made several influential contributions to both developmental and adult attachment research. As I will later discuss, Mary Main and Judith Solomon identified and described a group of anomalous attachment behaviors which led to the widespread adoption of an auxiliary classification: [D] disorganized/disoriented. Main and colleagues Carol George and Nancy Kaplan also developed the Adult Attachment Inventory (AAI), an important measurement of developmental attachment

administered to adults.¹⁰¹ Although the AAI is beyond the scope of this project, my fieldwork included a two-week training with Main and her research partner Erik Hesse at UC Berkeley. I have found a rich psychodynamic intuition in Main's work that acts as a wonderful complement to the behavioral data and empirical discourse that characterizes contemporary attachment research.

Also included in this set are two pages of instructions which are to be printed out and handed to the (m)others at the time of the procedure. All of these materials were sent to me in advance of my first Strange Situation training in 2015 and again when I returned in 2018. They are included as a way to offer a moment of encounter with the archive and repertoire of attachment research.¹⁰² Although some of these training documents also contain typos and formatting inconsistencies, they are helpful in conveying something of the language and material used by the researchers in communicating with the research subjects. The documents can be understood as exemplary of the script, score, or choreography of the procedure

¹⁰¹ The AAI takes two to three hours to administer and involves a guided interview format designed to elicit attachment-related narratives from the subject. A transcript of the interview is later annotated and coded. The researchers are not exactly interested in the content of the memories and stories, but in the way the memories and stories are composed, organized, performed. In other words, it's not what happened to the subject that counts as evidence, but the manner in which they speak of it. It's not the content but the affect that gets coded. The AAI has also come into surprisingly widespread use among clinicians. A properly administered and coded AAI is not only considered a reliable way to develop a working conception of an individual's attachment history, but also to retrospectively assign a childhood attachment classification with reasonable certainty.

¹⁰² I am thinking here about Diana Taylor's work on acts of transfer and the blurry distinction between archive and repertoire. "The repertoire...enacts embodied memory: performances, gestures, orality, movement, dance, singing - in short, all those acts usually thought of as ephemeral, nonreproducible knowledge. Repertoire, etymologically "a treasury, an inventory," also allows for individual agency, referring also to "the finder, discoverer," and meaning "to find out." The repertoire requires presence: people participate in the production and reproduction of knowledge by "being there," being a part of the transmission. As opposed to the supposedly stable objects in the archive, the actions that are the repertoire do not remain the same. The repertoire both keeps and transforms choreographies of meaning." See *The Archive and the Repertoire*, 20.

vis-à-vis performance studies, and serve to further demonstrate the performative (in)formality of empirical praxis.¹⁰³

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General Procedural Details: In an office-sized room, two chairs are placed on far end of the room from entrance door - one for the child's primary caregiver and another for a "stranger", separated so one can tell who the baby is looking at. At about 1 step away from both chairs towards the middle of the room, there is a set of toys.

Brief Overview of Strange Situation

Episode	Duration	Description
1	1 minute	Dyad introduced to the room.
2	3 minutes	Infant settles in, explores; parent assists only if necessary.
3	3 minutes	Stranger enters. Stranger plays with infant during final minute.
4	3 minutes	Parent leaves infant with stranger. First separation.
5	3 minutes	Parent returns, stranger leaves quietly. First reunion.
6	3 minutes	Parent leaves infant alone in room. Second separation.
7	3 minutes	Stranger enters room, interacting as necessary.
8	3 minutes	Parent returns, stranger leaves quietly. Second reunion.

Note: If the baby is quite distressed, crying without stopping, episodes 4, 6, and 7 are cut short. Intermittent crying and fussing is OK, but if there is hard crying for 30 seconds at any time terminate the separation.

A detailed protocol is attached in the event you require further detail. We are using the protocol from the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development Study of Early Child Care, a ten site national study conducted by leaders in the field of infant/child development.

¹⁰³ The images below are reproductions of handouts distributed in Alan Sroufe and Elizabeth Carlson's Strange Situation Training (2018).

Strange Situation Script

Experimenter

Greet mother in parking lot. Give parking pass. Make small talk. Escort her to interview room.

“Hi. It’s good to see you again, Mom and Toddler. How have you been? *Chat with mother while helping her into the building.*

I am supposed to be neutral around Toddler, so I won’t be talking to him/her very much. It’s hard to do and it may seem strange, so I wanted you to know what I’m doing and why.

Ok, let’s put all of your things in this room, and I’ll tell you what we are going to do today. All of the activities today will be in the room next door. I’ll ask that you leave your bag and coats in here. If you’ve brought toys from home, we’d like you not to use them because we want all children to use the same toys. Also, if you have a pacifier we’ll ask you not to use it because we want a clear camera shot of Baby’s face. Before we get started, does Baby need to be fed or changed? Would you like to use the ladies’ room?.....

We are going to start with an activity where we want to see how Baby responds to a new place and a stranger both when you are with him/her and when he/she is alone. This part will take about 20 minutes and will involve you getting Baby settled in the room, Baby playing with you in the room, and a stranger coming in—the stranger is a member of our research team. The stranger will sit quietly sometimes, talk to you sometimes, and play with Baby sometimes. You will leave Baby in the room with the stranger for a few minutes. Then you will come back in the room for a few minutes. For a short time, both you and the stranger will leave the room and both of you will eventually return to be with Baby. When you leave the room, you’ll be right next door and can see Baby on TV through our video system. I’ll show you both rooms in just a minute. Children have all different reactions to this procedure. Some get upset, some think it’s fun and play the whole time, and others don’t seem to care either way. If Baby is very upset for 30 seconds, we’ll speed up and move to the next part. We’d really like to get through the whole task, but of course, you can ask us to end a part early or to end the whole procedure if you want. I know this is a lot of information; we’ll give you reminders of what to do right before each part, but for now do you have any questions about the general plan?”

EPISODE 1 + 2

Purpose: observe amount and quality of child play/exploration

Experimenter: “OK. Let’s head over. . This is the room we’ll be in, and when you leave you can go in this room to watch. I’d like you to carry Baby into the main room now. Now, just put Baby down near the toys and get him/her settled and interested in some of them. Then, sit in this chair and read a magazine. If your baby starts to talk or interact with you, respond as you normally would, then return to reading your magazine. There are instructions on the seat to remind you of what is going on for this part. The stranger will come in and tell you what’s next in a few minutes.”

Added Instructions when testing visually impaired/blind infants: You may activate toys, help the child touch them, in order to make sure that your child has noticed the toys. Please use any means you normally use to have your child be aware of the presence of toys.

EPISODE 3

Purpose: Observe amount and type of attention child pays to stranger in comparison to mom and how child accepts the strangers attempts to interact.

Stranger: After 3 minutes have passed for episode two, enter the room. The Experimenter will have a stop watch and will tell you when to go. Sit quietly in your seat looking at a magazine for 1 minute.

Added Instructions when testing visually impaired/blind infants: before entering the room knock in the door and say hello to mom, make sure to make noise with your steps and when you sit so that the infant has enough cues to realize that you have entered the room.

Experimenter knocks.

Stranger: “Hi, I’m _____. I’m the stranger.” Make small talk briefly. Then “We use knocks on the window to know when to start each part. In a minute we’ll hear a single knock that means it’s time for me to play with Baby for a minute. The next double knock will mean it’s time for you to leave the room. Try to leave quickly out this door. If you have a purse, please bring it with you. Then go to the video room. Experimenter will tell you what to do next. So, just basically wait for the second knock and then leave. Do you have any questions?”

Added Instructions when testing visually impaired/blind infants: Mom: let your child know that you are leaving the room as you would regularly do, you may talk or touch your child.

Knock Knock—Mom should leave. If she doesn't, **Stranger** quietly remind her: "Ok, you can go the video room now."

Stranger: approach and play with child using ideas from training guide (say name from a distance, try to get child to approach you and offer a toy, if not offer child a toy...dropping toys in shape sorter box should be especially effective).

Added Instructions when testing visually impaired/blind infants:

- Talk to the child first, before approaching or touching him/her, so that you warn him/her of your presence beforehand.
- Have toys make noise to alert child of their presence. You may also approach toys to children's hands so that they can touch the toys.

Knock Knock—Mom should leave. If she doesn't, **Stranger** quietly remind her: "Ok, you can go the video room now."

EPISODE 4

Purpose: Observe child's play/exploration in comparison to earlier; child's response to mother leaving; how child responds to stranger (e.g., comfort, being held, attempts to interact).

Stranger: Continue to play with child until child is settled into playing/exploring. Then, sit in your chair and read magazine. If child approaches/initiates interaction, respond briefly as mom was instructed to, then return to reading. Comfort child if distressed by mother leaving (you may pick up, soothe, etc). Try to arrange play/comfort so child is facing door when mother returns. (If baby is distressed, experimenter may terminate this part before 3 minutes are over).

Meanwhile, in video room:

Experimenter tells mom: "Hi there. We hope to get to the end of each part. This will last 3 minutes unless Baby gets upset in which case I'll send you back in early. You can also tell me if you want to go back in early. When I tell you to go, knock on the door firmly, say Baby's name, then go back in the room. Pause

briefly inside the door to see what Baby does, then pick her/him up if they want. Then do what seems natural eventually trying to get Baby to play again so you can return to your chair and act like you did before (*if mom was very involved before say: AFTER YOU HAVE RE-INTRODUCED THE TOYS AGAIN TO YOUR CHILD do not initiate play/interaction yourself, but respond to Baby briefly if he/she interacts with you, then return to reading your magazine*). When you hear 2 knocks, leave the room and come here just like you did last time. This sheet is a reminder of what to do next.”

(If B cries, get mom’s opinion: do you think we should give the S a few more seconds to try to comfort B, or should we have you go back in now?)

“Ok, go in now.”

Mother knocks and says child’s name.

Added Instructions when testing visually impaired/blind infants: Mom: if you think your child typically needs your verbal greeting more than once for him/her to find you in the room you may repeat your greeting at the door.

EPISODE 5

Purpose: Observe child’s response to mother’s return and their subsequent interaction.

Mother enters the room.

Added Instructions when testing visually impaired/blind infants: Mom: if your child seems to want to approach you and you know that he needs sound cues to locate you, you can continue to say his name once you are inside the room. If your child is not yet independently moving in space walk into the room and stand at a distance from your child where he/she could reach for you with arms.

Stranger: Remain unobtrusive while Mom and Baby are reunited. Either retreat to your chair or stay quietly where you are out of the way. Wait until the reunion is complete and mom has returned to her chair, then leave quietly. Or if Mom and Baby continue to play on floor or walk around room for a while, leave quietly. *Be absolutely certain that you do not interfere with our ability to observe the greeting, initial proximity seeking/ avoidance behavior, and whether or not child settles.* Return to video room. Experimenter will tell you when it is time to go back in.

Mother and child in room for 3 minutes.

Knock Knock – Mother leaves room and returns to video room.

EPISODE 6

Purpose: Observe child's reaction to mother leaving (e.g., distress, search behavior) and quality of play/exploration while alone.

Child is alone for 3 minutes (unless cut short)

Experimenter to mom: “When this part is over, the stranger will go back in for a few minutes”

Experimenter to stranger: “Go back in now” either when 3 minutes or over or if B is highly distressed for 30 seconds.

EPISODE 7

Purpose: Observe how child responds to stranger in comparison to mom upon reunion (e.g., is comforted, interacts with, etc) and if child returns to play when stranger sits.

Stranger: Enter room; pause at door to see what child will do. If child is distressed, comfort, then try to get child to play/explore. If child is not distressed, initiate play then move gradually to chair and begin reading. If B initiates contact, respond briefly and appropriately, then return to reading. Try to arrange play/comfort so child is facing door when mother returns. This period will last 3 minutes unless B is distressed and Experimenter ends it early.

Experimenter to Mom: “Just like before, this will last 3 minutes unless Baby gets upset in which case I’ll send you back in early. You can also tell me if you want to go back in early. When I tell you to go, knock on the door firmly, say Baby’s name, then go back in the room. Pause briefly inside the door to see what Baby does, then do what seems natural. Try to get Baby to play again, and return to your chair and act like you did before. I’ll come in and tell you when we are done.”

If B cries, get mom’s opinion: “do you think we should give the S a few more seconds to try to comfort B, or should we have you go back in now?”

“Ok, go in now.”

Mother Knocks and says child’s name

EPISODE 8

Purpose: To observe child's response to mother's return and their subsequent interaction.

Mother enters room.

Stranger: Remain unobtrusive while Mom and Baby are reunited. Either retreat to your chair or stay quietly where you are out of the way. Wait until the reunion is complete and Mom has returned to her chair, then leave quietly. Or if Mom and Baby continue to play on floor or walk around room for a while, leave quietly. *Be absolutely certain that you do not interfere with our ability to observe the greeting and initial proximity seeking/avoidance behavior.* Return to video room. Experimenters will tell you when it is time to go back in.

Added Instructions when testing visually impaired/blind infants: Stranger: use the means mother has used to signal that you have returned into the room. Also, if child is not mobile just like mom was recommended to do, approach the child so that you are at a distance where child can reach for you with his arms.

Mother and child in room for 3 minutes.

END PROCEDURE

Experimenter return to room and say "We are all done now. Next, we want to be sure Baby has a chance to relax while we get ready for the next activity..."

Refer to first free play instructions.

Mother Instructions for Beginning
(will be on laminated sheet)

1. Get your child interested in toys or exploring the room.
2. Sit in your chair reading a magazine. If your baby starts to talk or interact with you, respond as you normally would, then return to reading your magazine.
3. After about 3 minutes of playing, the stranger will come in and sit quietly in her chair. After 1 minute, she will tell you what happens next.

Mother Instructions for Middle
(will be on laminated sheet)

1. The stranger will be in the room with your child for 3 minutes (unless one of use decides to stop earlier).
2. When I tell you, knock on the door firmly, and say your child's name loudly. Then enter the room and pause by the door to see what your child will do.
3. Then do what seems natural to you eventually trying to get your child interested in toys or exploring the room.
4. Then, sit in your chair reading your magazine. If your baby starts to talk or interact with you, respond as you normally would, then return to reading your magazine.
5. After about 3 minutes, you'll hear two knocks. That means it's time to leave the room quickly and return to the video room where you can watch your child.

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As discussed, the Strange Situation Procedure is designed to expose the infant to incrementally increasing levels of stress in order to activate the attachment behavioral system. The attachment behavioral system is generally understood by contemporary research psychologists as one among a number of behavioral systems such as caregiving, power, exploration, and sex. According to Bowlby and further demonstrating the influence of ethology and cybernetics, behavioral systems are considered to have a 'set-goal,' which can be activated, deactivated, or adjusted in the service of the organism in accordance with the requirements and affordances of different environmental milieus. Although the behavioral systems are characterized by multi-directional modulation, each system has its own set-goal that organizes behavior in particular ways. The attachment behavioral system, for example, cannot be under primary activation at the same time as the exploratory behavioral system. Although they are complementary systems in service of the infant's survival, their set-goals are temporally incompatible. While the set-goal of exploratory behavior is affective engagement with unfamiliar objects, the set-goal of attachment behavior is affective regulation through proximity to familiar objects. Here we can recall the corresponding safe haven and secure base functions of the (m)other, which afford the infant the opportunity to move back and forth between attachment and exploration, between familiarity and novelty.

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In the first two episodes of the protocol the infant is alone with the (m)other in an unfamiliar room with some toys on the floor. During these episodes the infant is generally affectively regulated and undistressed. The (m)other is functioning as a secure base as the infant begins to demonstrate activation of the exploratory behavioral system, moving away from the (m)other to investigate the toys and other affordances of the room. Upon the entrance of the stranger in episode three, we often observe a slight activation of the infant's attachment behavioral system. The stranger introduces uncertainty. When the attachment behavioral system is activated by the entrance of the stranger, the infant may seek visual reassurance or even physical contact, employing the (m)other as a safe haven. As the infant acclimates to the presence of the stranger, the (m)other begins to again function as a secure base, emboldening the infant to resume their exploratory behavior and to perhaps even engage with the stranger in play.

In episode four, upon the (m)other's first departure, the stress response of the infant is generally activated to a higher degree than it was upon the entrance of the stranger in the previous episode. Infants, of course, will often express some level of distress during these separation episodes. Although the separation episodes are designed to be three minutes long, in practice they often end much sooner.¹⁰⁴ The purpose of the separations is simply to provide sufficient stress to activate the attachment behavioral system; many infants do not require three entire minutes of separation to reach this threshold and much shorter separation episodes often

¹⁰⁴ See for example, page 2 of the 'Strange Situation Script' above.

suffice. In addition, if the (m)other or the researchers feel that the infant is becoming excessively distressed at any time, the separation episode is concluded and the ensemble proceeds directly to the next reunion.

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It is important to note that the researchers are more concerned with infant behavior during the reunion episodes than they are with infant behavior during the separations. Infants who exhibit a secure behavioral pattern in the reunion episodes generally seek and accept soothing from the (m)other without ambivalence. They demonstrate a confidence in the accessibility of the (m)other and the effectiveness of the (m)other's care. They achieve a regulated affective state and are also often able to return to creative play and exploration. In a sense, these infants are secure because they have the luxury of forgetting their (m)others and giving their full attention to the environmental milieu. Infants exhibiting secure attachment behavior are assigned a [B] classification.

As previously discussed, the two primary classifications for insecure attachment behavior are [A] for insecure-avoidant, and [C] for insecure-resistant. [A] infants often display disinterest toward the (m)other upon reunion, sometimes even actively refusing to engage at all. They are also often less distressed by the separations. [C] infants, on the other hand, generally seek and achieve contact with the (m)other during reunion episodes, however, they also display a resistance to

comforting. They can appear clingy and preoccupied with the (m)other's presence, but also appear to have difficulty achieving affective regulation.

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The ABC's of the Strange Situation

I want to note here an interesting story from my training. Upon first encountering the classification system, I found myself wondering about a curious detail. I was surprised by the fact that the secure classification was designated [B], while the insecure-avoidant classification was designated [A]. It seemed to me that it ought to be the reverse and I asked the trainers a question to this effect. As the story goes, the letters were assigned according to the level of visually observable distress. The researchers had initially assumed that the infants who appeared the most calm were also the most secure, so this became the [A] group. The infants who demonstrated moderate distress were labeled [B], and the most obviously distressed infants were labeled [C]. The thing is, infants are meant to be concerned with the whereabouts of their (m)others, and upon the inclusion of physiological monitoring and measurement of infant stress response, the researchers found that the infants in the [A] group were actually experiencing physiological distress comparable to the infants in group [C].¹⁰⁵ Whereas the [C] infants appeared to be externalizing and amplifying their distress, the [A] infants appeared to be internalizing and suppressing it. Additional evidence for this formulation is also produced through

¹⁰⁵ For more details, the interested reader can see the work of Everett Waters or Alan Sroufe as referenced in bibliography.

observing the quality of the play activity of the infants. While the secure [B] infants could return to exploration of the room and creative play with the toys, the pattern was somewhat different for the insecure infants in the [A] and [C] groups. The infants in group [C] were often too dysregulated to return to exploration and play. The infants in group [A], on the other hand, could continue playing, but the creative and spontaneous quality of their play was markedly diminished. The researchers believe that this ‘impoverished play’ suggests that cognitive resources are being reallocated from curiosity and creative exploration to the suppression of attachment distress and behavior. In other words, although a body can appear calm, cool, and collected, this is not always a reliable indicator of affective security; it may simply mark the affective suppression of insecurity.

The frames below are compiled from publicly available slides created by Everett Waters and show an infant who received an [A] insecure-avoidant classification. We can note that the infant does not seek contact with the (m)other upon reunion, but rather proceeds to a rather superficial exploration of a piece of furniture:



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¹⁰⁶ Waters and Stony Brook Department of Psychology.

To Amplify or Attenuate

In footage of secure attachment we see infants who appear to have built up a confidence in the availability and effectiveness of the (m)other. These infants readily seek out the (m)other for affective regulation—and find it. These infants exhibit a trust in the ongoing existence—the more-or-less reliable arrival—of affective support. It is important to remember, however, that attachment patterns are emergent ones, occurring in the context of ongoing relationships. While infants in the insecure categories have the same basic attachment needs as those in the secure category, they've learned to manage them differently. The infants in group [A] have learned that the best strategy with their (m)other is to suppress both the internal experience and external expression of attachment needs. They reduce 'signal anxiety' toward the (m)other, are less likely to seek proximity or contact in reunion episodes, and sometimes avoid even visual acknowledgement. [A] infants are sometimes said to be 'deactivating' or 'attenuating' in regard to both their felt sense of attachment need and their external display of attachment behavior. This is in rather stark contrast to the [C] infants, who have learned that their best strategy is to 'amplify' the intensity of their attachment behavior. They increase 'signal anxiety' toward the (m)other and are more likely to seek proximity and contact in reunion episodes. The [C] infants, however, also display resistance to soothing and to returning to exploratory behavior and creative play. They remain preoccupied with the (m)other but unable to receive effective care and affective regulation. They

seem to have learned that their best strategy is to keep asking for help, even if it isn't exactly helpful.



No Brood of Cunning Babies

To say that infants have 'learned strategies' could be a bit misleading, as if a bunch of cunning babies had hatched a plan to manipulate us. Infants aren't cunning, however, but earnest. And they don't appear to be capable of lying until closer to year three. It is important to understand that infants are always doing their best with whatever they do and don't have to work with. In this regard, avoidance and resistance aren't merely symptoms or defenses, but adaptations. They are symptom-solutions. In addition to this, although the researchers speak in terms of [A] infants, [B] infants, and [C] infants, they are also careful to insist that it is not exactly the infants themselves that are being classified. Rather, it is the attachment pattern that emerges between any given infant-(m)other pair. An infant who is coded as secure in the procedure with one parent, may very well demonstrate an insecure pattern with a different parent or caregiver. In other words, infant attachment classification is relationship dependent.



Disorganized/Disoriented Attachment Behavior

I want to return now to another form of attachment behavior that sometimes shows up in the Strange Situation Procedure, and which researchers have come to identify as disorganized/disoriented behavior through the work of Mary Main and Judith Solomon. Although sometimes referred to as the [D] category, disorganization/disorientation actually refers to anomalous behaviors that usually occur within the context of an [A], [B] or [C] classification. [D] behaviors indicate what Main has termed a 'paradoxical injunction' and 'collapse of strategy.' Infants who exhibit these behaviors are thought to be momentarily caught between simultaneously needing their (m)other and experiencing the (m)other as a source of possible threat. The metaphor here would be of a frightened rabbit who seeks refuge in their den only to be confronted by a fox in the hole. Although an extensive discussion of disorganized/disoriented attachment behavior is beyond our present scope, I have included below the first page of the classification scheme used for the SSP training:

DISORGANIZED/DISORIENTED CLASSIFICATION SCHEME

Major Considerations

1. Is the behavior inexplicable (no evidence of immediate goal or rationale) OR is the behavior explicable only if we presume:
 - a. the baby is afraid of the parent
 - b. the baby is inhibited from approach without being able to shift attention to the environment?

2. Timing of the appearance of disorganized behavior:
 - a. Stronger index of disorganization if occurs in first moments of reunion.
 - b. However, even D-like behavior appearing only in Episode 3 may yield a D classification.

3. Consider what the baby does next, namely, if baby goes to the parent as though for comfort after a little bit of disorganization (i.e., stereotypies then comforted). (If they become organized quickly, discount the D behavior).

INDICES OF DISORGANIZATION AND DISORIENTATION

For Infants 12-18 Months Observed with Parent Present

- I. Sequential Display of Contradictory Behavior Patterns

- II. Simultaneous Display of Contradictory Behavior Patterns

- III. Undirected, Misdirected, Incomplete, and Interrupted Movements and Expressions

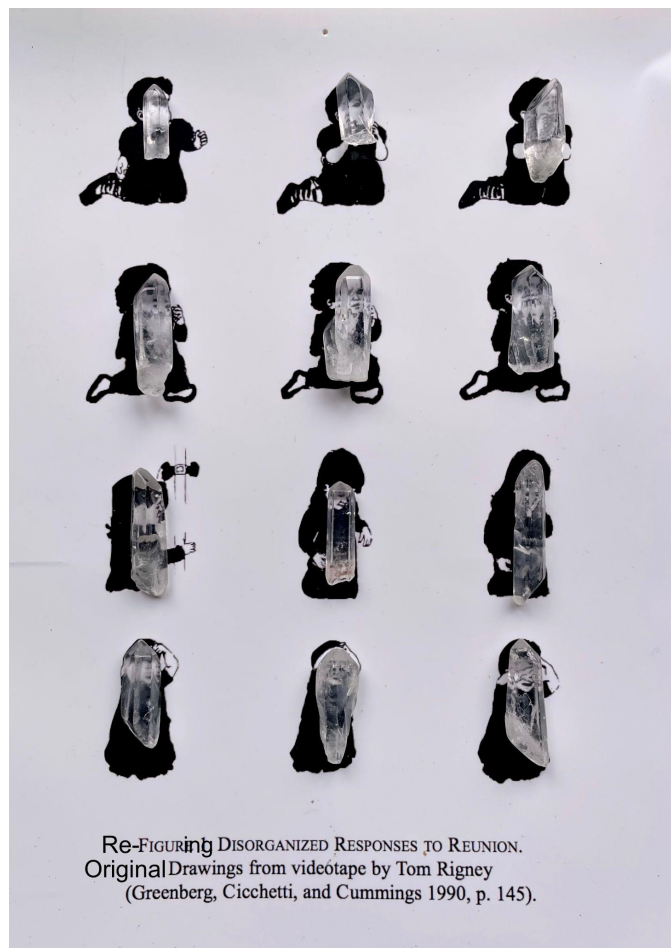
- IV. Stereotypies, Asymmetrical Movements, Mistimed Movements, and Anomalous Postures

- V. Freezing, Stilling, and Slowed Movements and Expressions

- VI. Direct Indices of Apprehension Regarding the Parent

- VII. Direct Indices of Disorganization or Disorientation

[D] footage can be especially difficult to watch, often characterized by a kind of fright as well as bizarre or seemingly purposeless movements. You might see freezing, a sudden loss of balance, falling to the floor. Sometimes an infant will collapse and lay absolutely motionless for a painfully long time. Some examples are characterized by zig-zag approaches or the use of furniture as a barrier upon approaching the (m)other. The Strange Situation Procedure is not a psychiatric tool; it produces patterns, not diagnoses. As a subset, however, infants that display significant amounts of [D] behavior in the Strange Situation Procedure appear to show higher risk for psychiatric diagnosis, criminalization, and other forms of compromised functioning.



Included below are examples of a standard coding sheet and the supplemental disorganized/disoriented coding sheet:

Strange Situation Coding Sheet

Subject Number: _____ Date: _____
Date of Birth: _____ Age at SS: _____ Coder: _____
Child Description: _____ Mother Description: _____

	Episode 5	Episode 8	Classification
Proximity Seeking	_____	_____	_____
Contact Maintenance	_____	_____	_____
Contact Resistance	_____	_____	_____
Proximity Avoidance	_____	_____	_____
Cry: 1 _____ 2 _____ 3 _____ 4 _____ 5 _____ 6 _____ 7 _____ 8 _____			

Episode 1, 2, and 3: _____

Episode 4: _____

First Reunion, Episode 5: _____

Episode 6 and 7: _____

Second Reunion, Episode 8: _____

Notes: _____



The Strange Situation trainings took place in a large conference room with the footage projected on a screen at the front. While in session we rarely watched a procedure in its entirety. Instead, the trainers skipped between cases for examples of the various behaviors, narrating the action. It takes a long time to get trained in the procedure; to learn how to see what the researchers see; to learn how to code like the researchers code. And furthermore, it's not really as simple as three categories, there are also sub-categories of each:

[A] - INSECURE - AVOIDANT:	A1 - A2 - A3
[B] - SECURE:	B1 - B2 - B3 - B4
[C] - INSECURE - RESISTANT:	C1 - C2

And then, of course, there is also always the possibility of the auxiliary [D] modifier in the event of disorganized/disoriented behavior. In order to make a confident classification the researchers are primarily concerned with four behaviors, each rated on a 7-point scale during the two reunion episodes:

Proximity Seeking	Contact Resistance
Proximity Avoidance	Contact Maintenance

They also count cries in 15 second intervals. I would note, however, that this seems to have become an auxiliary practice, largely maintained as a mechanism to ensure

slow, careful, and repetitive viewing. Although crying data shows meaningful correlations, it is rarely a determinant in final classification.

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When coding footage you are advised by the trainers to adjust both the speed and the volume. Footage of resistance, especially acute in the [C] category, is often characterized by crying and



prolonged inconsolability. You learn to turn the volume down as a way to modulate your affect. Because you can't code closely if you can't think clearly. Thankfully, most episodes in the temporal arc of the procedure are not characterized by this kind of affective intensity. Compared to the moving pictures we're accustomed to, the footage unfolds quite slowly and can even feel mundane. The films are unedited, almost like security camera footage where mostly nothing seems to happen. There is no soundtrack or extra-diegetic sound. There is sometimes a wind-up music box. It can take patience to watch an entire 21 minute procedure before scrubbing around in the footage. And then it will take a lot of rewinding and rewatching to get a sense of what's actually happening. This scrubbing back and forth is an imprecise and often clumsy process—a finger on the track pad trying to barely move the cursor. The disc stutters in the drive. Leaves ghostly pixelated traces on the screen.

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Although this project works toward theoretical integration, one of the main purposes of these last two chapters has been to demonstrate that attachment theory arose as a kind of critique or reorientation of British psychoanalytic object relations. The conflation of attachment theory with psychoanalysis that often occurs in social theory forgets this critical history and the attendant theoretical and epistemological tensions that remain of productive interest today. Attachment theory and research can be read as a rematerializing of Klein's dematerialized (m)other and a recovery of the importance of the environmental milieu and material conditions.¹⁰⁷ In regard to social theory and media studies, the archive of attachment also provides an affordance for the study of affect. All of us already know that affect is notoriously difficult to talk about.¹⁰⁸ In a sense you could say that affect is a boundary-object.¹⁰⁹ The point here is that attachment researchers are intimately and carefully involved in trying to configure out some of the details. And they certainly know it's messy.

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Before continuing on to Chapters 4 and 5, it seems to me that now would be a good time for a breather, a critical interlude.

¹⁰⁷ Also recovering the importance of the environmental milieu and material conditions.

¹⁰⁸ See, for example, the papers collected in Siegwirth and Gregg's *Affect Theory Reader*, or Brian Massumi's *Parables for the Virtual*.

¹⁰⁹ Star and Griesemer, "Institutional Ecology," 1907-39."

Critical Proximity//critical interlude¹¹⁰

pandemic epistle

I'd first thought to title this interlude *I Miss the Terror of the Possibility of Touching You*—because proximity is always a kind of risk and already difficult. But also because love, in the time of pandemic, has fallen ill. What happens to intimacy after proximity? Or in its excess? With the sudden surplus of some bodies and the absence of so many others? When our social need is the very vector of disease? It's an approach-avoidance conflict, a paradoxical injunction, a double-bind. We all just need some space. We all just need to be held. So, be tender with yourself. And in the meantime, zooming around in the glitchy screenlight of we-can't-be-alone-and-we-can't-be-together, I've got some more preoedipal scenes for you.

¹¹⁰ This critical interlude is an adapted excerpt from a previously published essay *Before U Ever Even Heard of Oedipus*, which appears in the edited volume *Nothing Personal!? B_Books* (2022).

In the beginning, we coded the heavens and the earth. Data was without form and void, hovering over the deep preoedipal goo. And it was good. Enough. And it made you.

Now here—before you ever even felt like a self—what really mattered most was proximity. And in fact, the most familiar childhood games are just so many ways of playing with it: peek-a-boo, hide-and-seek, yo-yo, jack-in-the-box. It almost seems like it's the hyphen that does it. But even a ball—so long as it can bounce back or roll away—is an affordance for playing with proximity. And what, for an infant, could be more critical? It's their only hope really—to fashion some kind of makeshift sense and form from the here/gone that marks life outside the womb. Before this there wasn't even any inside or out, no 0 or 1. Nothing like together or anything as a part. Proximity arrives out of no/where for the newborn, now/here: a developing situation.

Critical proximity we might call it. And during your preoedipal years—roughly 0-3—you are consumed by it. It's why babies are usually cute and smell so good. And why the cry of an unsettled one quickly starts to feel so unsettling. We've got biotechnology for contact maintenance already on board, long before language and voluntary motion arrive. Because we're mammals. And we need each other.

But, by about a year old, most of us are moving around and talking a bit. Transforming sense and signal into sign and symbol. Rubbing objects and affects and words together, suturing the ones that work. We stop putting things in our mouth to figure them out and start putting them together. This early research is not just a receptive process, of course, but a productive one. A kind of primal creativity. And it feels good-enough to keep going. And whether or not the good-enough is actual, it assembles the virtual you.

This interlude would rather be a poem than a case study, but I'm a clinical psychotherapist by training and practice, so you'll have to forgive me for this brief foray into some of the primal tools/toys/tricks of the trade. And also for (re)considering your (m)other. I promise not to lose you unless you let me.

Psychoanalysis, as we all know, still has a mother fixation. It's a problem, it's complicated, and we're working on it. When I write mother as (m)other, I am trying to suggest a primary figure before you cared about sexual difference or knew what gender was. The figure cared for you in time. The figure could have been more than one—in a sense always is—an assembly of objects, a configuration of care. The configuration was felt to be you before you knew any different. Any difference.

Psychoanalysis also has a long history of calling other people objects. Especially—but not only—the (m)other. So if Freud writes something like, *the finding of an object is also always a refinding of it*, he's not talking about socks. He's talking about love. As a kind of primordial aesthetic form. With a personal history. Your first object-world was inherited, not chosen. You loved it—in a sense—because

you had to. Because—in a sense—it was you. Any agency you have now is in how you do or don't and will or won't remediate it.

Now to make this make sense, I want to take a quick look at three familiar household objects from the psychoanalytic hall-of-fame: a spool, a mirror, and a blanket. We can think of them as individuation technologies for the infant and theoretical tools for us. They are scenes that occur, generally speaking, between 6-18 months, around the same age as the infants in the Strange Situation. I include them here as a way to illustrate how objects help us to become subjects. And to work preoedipal things through.

Freud's Fort/Da: A boy—about 18-months—has come into possession of a wooden spool still fastened to a few feet of string. He gleefully casts it from his crib cheering *!FORT!* (gone) only to pull it back in again with an equally joyful *!DA!* (there) fort / da / fort / da. The boy: Freud's grandson. The game: a 'dramatization' of the mother's comings-and-goings. A 'cultural achievement,' Freud writes, in which the emotional contours of involuntary separation and reunion are actively remediated in play: Tada!!! Fort/Da!!! Or, I sometimes think: fort/data. Because it's replicable. And reliability comes to count as data. As evidence of something.

Lacan's Mirror Stage: A full-length mirror—Lacan's of course—assembles all your messy senses into a clean and singular image: It's you!!! Sort of. Because it also makes you into an object. Displacing your senses into an 'imago,' a kind of external first-avatar. Oh, and your (m)other is there too, behind you in the mirror; triangulating what you feel and what you see and what you see-feeling-you.

Winnicott's Transitional Object: That particular blanket, stuffed doll or bear to which many young ones become especially attached around 12-18 months. 'The first not-me possession,' he calls it. And it also marks our primal dispossession, remediating absence. That is to say, remediating the presence of the (m)other in absentia. Something we can hold onto as a kind of portable security, and which holds us together when we're coming undone. Not exactly a substitution for the (m)other's body, but a medium or interface for learning to feel-ok-without it.

Freud's spool, Lacan's mirror, and Winnicott's blanket are gathered together as examples of how early encounters with objects produce the feeling-of-being-a-subject. Objects are technological participants in our subject formation. And part of what makes objects so interesting is that they are also obstacles, objecting to our subjection. They facilitate our in/dividuation not only as subjects, but also as other objects. Reminding us—in a sense and in our senses—of our objectness. It's not the hammer's fault when you hit your finger, it's the way a hammer works.

Technology is sometimes considered a prosthesis, an extension of the body and what it can do in the world. And whether it's a hammer or a smartphone or a spaceship, technology allows the circle of the survivable world to grow. An auxiliary placenta we might call it, (re)mediating life outside the womb.



4_AFFECTIVE INFRASTRUCTURE

Attachment in the Work of
Judith Butler and Lauren Berlant

Judith Butler + Attachment

Judith Butler has been writing about themes related to attachment for at least 25 years, often thinking through psychoanalysis and Foucault about the complicated relationship between subjection and subject formation. The passage below from *The Psychic Life of Power* is representative of much of their thinking around this theme:



The Foucaultian postulation of subjection as the simultaneous subordination and forming of the subject assumes a specific psychoanalytic valence when we consider that no subject emerges without a passionate attachment to those on whom he or she is fundamentally dependent (even if that passion is “negative” in the psychoanalytic sense). Although the dependency of the child is not political subordination in any usual sense, the formation of primary passion in dependency

renders the child vulnerable to subordination and exploitation, a topic that has become a preoccupation of recent political discourse. Moreover, this situation of primary dependency conditions the political formation and regulation of subjects and becomes their means of subjection. If there is no formation of the subject without a passionate attachment to those by whom she or he is subordinated, then subordination proves central to the formation of the subject.¹¹¹

“Part of rethinking where and how the human comes into being,” Butler writes elsewhere, “will involve a rethinking of both the social and psychic landscapes of an infant’s emergence.”¹¹² Here, at the very center of Foucault’s enduring insight into the coincidence of subject formation and subjection, Judith Butler places a baby. And because there is no such thing as a baby in empty space, the arrival of the figure of the infant is also the configuration of a scene.¹¹³ This scenography of the social and psychic landscape of passionate attachment marks a particular segment of material space and time as particularly important. The intervention is not a technical one in regard to developmental science, however, and Butler is not specific in regard to the age of the infant. Indeed, they generally eschew distinctions between ‘infant’ and ‘child’ in this work. Butler’s speech is not that of the psychologist, but the philosopher. The contribution is not empirical, but figural. And theoretical. The figure of the infant installs a universal scene, in theory. And

¹¹¹ Butler, *Psychic Life of Power*, 7.

¹¹² Butler, *Undoing Gender*, 14.

¹¹³ The reference here is also to Winnicott’s famous dictum: “there is no such thing as a baby...A baby cannot exist alone, but is essentially part of a relationship.” See Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, 88.

this is precisely the location of my interest: Butler's 'situation of primary dependency' as a primal situation for social theory.

Beyond this contribution, I also want to suggest that Butler pays particular attention to loss as a structural feature of formation in attachment. Lost objects, of course, but also the loss of any direct cognitive access to the originary scene of passionate attachment itself. The scene of infancy is precisely *infans*, that is to say, before the formation of the speaking subject. The reading is also Lacanian in the sense that early relational life is already well underway prior to matriculation into the symbolic and imaginary registers.¹¹⁴ Increasing separation from the early other



creates a potential space which is backfilled by representational material as the capacity for representation emerges over the preoedipal phase. This is why there is said to be a 'hole' or 'split' at the center of the subject.¹¹⁵ Whatever it is we will come to call a self is assembled in the space left over from the primordial loss of the primal other. And we can never exactly re-access it. "If the subject is

¹¹⁴ This includes the technicity implicit in Lacan's notion of the mirror stage of 6-18 months.

¹¹⁵ Or, as Barthes writes: "I see the fissure in the subject (the very thing about which he can say nothing)."

produced through foreclosure,” writes Butler, “then the subject is produced by a condition from which it is, by definition, separated and differentiated.”¹¹⁶ Loss, then, is endemic to both subject formation and subjection, a prerequisite for the emergence of subjectivity. We are already losing before we know what loss is, or what we are. Because separation is what assembles us together in the first place.

What I am trying to illuminate here are two aspects of Butler’s contribution, both of which are double movements: 1) in the infant, Butler offers not only a figure but a configuration; the figuring of the preoedipal subject is coincident with the configuration of a primordial scene; and 2) both the scene and the subject are structured by loss.¹¹⁷

We can also think here about a kind of inversion of the Levinasian ‘Other,’ where the infant is given an ethical injunction: you must care for the (m)other regardless of how the (m)other cares for you. The infant is faced with a material object-world, about which, if it is to survive, it *must* care. It doesn’t matter yet what you will or won’t get. It’s your only shot.

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¹¹⁶ Butler, *Psychic Life of Power*, 9.

¹¹⁷ Or we could say, primordial separation.

Lauren Berlant + Attachment

We will return to the subject of lost scenes and situations, but I want to move now to Lauren Berlant.¹¹⁸ Berlant's articulation of attachment is not unrelated to loss, but shifts our focus from the primal situation of attachment in the primordial past to the affective infrastructure of the particular present. The present, Berlant seems to suggest, is not only a function of the past, but a function of our attachment to the future. While attachment for Butler is structured by mourning, in Berlant we find an emphasis on attachment as a structure of maintaining. Perhaps the best-known example of Berlant's work on this theme appears in their 2011 monograph *Cruel Optimism*, where they articulate the problematics of the necessary but impossible objects to which we are subject:

A relation of cruel optimism exists when something you desire is actually an obstacle to your flourishing. It might involve food, or a kind of love; it might be a fantasy of the good life, or a political project. It might rest on something simpler, too, like a new habit that promises to induce in you an improved way of

¹¹⁸ I am also thinking with Berlant's 'situation tragedy,' as "the marriage between tragedy and situation comedy where people are fated to express their flaws episodically, over and over, without learning, changing, being relieved, becoming better, or dying. In the situation comedy, personality is figured as a limited set of repetitions that will inevitably appear in new situations—but what makes them comic and not tragic is that in this genre's imaginary, *the world has the kind of room for us that enables us to endure*. In contrast, in the situation tragedy, one moves between having a little and being ejected from the social, where life is lived on the outside of value, in terrifying nonplaces where one is a squatter, trying to make an event in which one will matter to something or someone, even as a familiar joke (in the situation tragedy, protagonists often try heart-wrenchingly to live as though they are in a situation comedy). See Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, 176-77. Jarett Zigon's reflections on the term 'situation' are reflected here, and, strangely enough, this is primarily in regard to the way in which Ainsworth's procedure attempts to resist the dynamic exchange and instability that Zigon finds in the configuration of situations. Part of what makes the procedure so strangely interesting to me is precisely the drive to 'stabilize the situation.' See, Zigon, *Disappointment*, 75-97.

being. These kinds of optimistic relations are not inherently cruel. They become cruel only when the object that draws your attachment actively impedes the aim that brought you to it initially.¹¹⁹

At another point, Berlant refers to “safety-deposit objects,”¹²⁰ a play on words which is effective not only in the way it remediates financial language to illuminate the immense importance of these investments, but also because it banks on security.¹²¹

“It is a matter of general observation,” Freud asserts in *Mourning and Melancholia*, “that people never willingly abandon a libidinal position, not even, indeed, when a substitute is already beckoning to them.” In other words, divestment is difficult, even when we already can.¹²²

Berlant is strategically imprecise in their use of the term ‘object,’ and I think one of their most helpful contributions comes in the way they move beyond human objects to consider attachment dynamics in the realm of images, ideas, and ideologies.¹²³ “Whatever account of attachment to normative fantasy we make,” writes Berlant, “needs a more complicated notion of object choice and of what it

¹¹⁹ Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, 1.

¹²⁰ *ibid*, 43.

¹²¹ Security and insecurity being the primary dialectic we find in attachment theory, and, of course, what is leveraged by the politics of precarity and crisis. Insecurity is hacked and modulated via the affective logics of the algorithmic object under computational capitalism. Attachment insecurity is an affordance for all modes of capitalism and perhaps all modes of governmental power. Instrumentalized in defense of the need for ever-increasing surveillance.

¹²² That is to say in regard to the political economy of both psychic and financial divestment vis-à-vis the entanglement of familial and global practices of securitization. Affective economies are also always economies of scale.

¹²³ By ‘attachment dynamics,’ in this case, I don’t mean the empirical infant attachment patterns of developmental research or the adult attachment styles we find in social psychology. These are not necessarily even dyadic relations, but rather genres of (dis)affiliation, formal sites of affective belonging or non-belonging as it were.

means to desire to have a cluster of affects and feelings in lieu of having a world.”¹²⁴ Similarly, Silvan Tomkins writes: “It is the affective investment in particular ideological sites (which may be libidinal or nonlibidinal) that explains the power of the articulation which bonds particular representations and realities. It is the affective investment which enables ideological relations to be internalized and, consequently, naturalized.”¹²⁵ For Berlant, and perhaps for Tomkins too, the object itself is less important than the affective infrastructure created by the promise it makes: it’s natural(ized)! One of the things that Marshall McLuhan also meant by the medium is the message, is that mediation is the object. It’s mediation that matters.

We could say that optimism is a relationship with the future that mediates what it feels like to be in the present. What makes optimism cruel, it would seem, is when the object also impedes the aim that first brought us to it. In other words, part of the organizing force of any cruel object of investment is that the relation is somehow also structured by the deferral of any kind of satisfying encounter. It’s not the object that materializes, but a particular kind of affective modulation, regardless of the object’s non-arrival. So part of the problem here, in a relation of cruel optimism, is our inability to ever really test the object—to ever really get to know it. No encounter ever actually comes. We might say that the good object we are waiting for turns out not to be good, but Godot.¹²⁶

Some other images that come to my mind when it comes to cruel optimism:

¹²⁴ Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, 185.

¹²⁵ Ngai, *Ugly Feelings*, 47.

¹²⁶ But only in the genre of the dad-joke.



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“Cruel optimism,” writes Berlant, “is the condition of maintaining an attachment to a problematic object in advance of its loss.”¹²⁷ And although they propose that this is a “condition different than that of melancholia,” we could also read cruel optimism as a kind of inversion of the melancholic structure. We can go to Freud for the distinction between mourning and melancholia as found in his famous essay of the same name. Mourning is taken as a difficult process—although necessary and adaptive—of relinquishing a lost object. The melancholic, however, retains the lost object by taking it into/as the self.¹²⁸ In other words, neither the melancholic nor the cruel optimist wants to have anything to do with mourning.

¹²⁷ Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, 24

¹²⁸ This is generally considered to occur via over-identification. A sufficient defense of my speculations regarding cruel optimism as melancholic inversion would require a discussion of identificatory processes that are beyond the scope of our present purposes. Regarding melancholia as a psychopathology, see of course Freud’s “Mourning and Melancholia.”

Which is another way to say that they don't know what to do with loss. "[T]he fear," Berlant writes, "is that the loss of the object or scene of promising itself will defeat the capacity to have any hope about anything. Often this fear of loss of a scene of optimism as such is unstated and only experienced in a sudden incapacity to manage startling situations."¹²⁹ And we should also note that this last sentence suggests something unconscious about the whole set-up. Although "unstated" does not necessarily have to mean unconscious, the "incapacity to manage startling situations" arrives suddenly, like a slip of the tongue.



The cruel optimist could even almost be seen as a kind of hoarder in reverse. That is to say, both absence and surplus suggest a similar kind of trouble. The hoarder has trouble letting go; every object is particular and has potential; every object deserves a future and must be saved. Before long, every room in the house becomes either a receptacle or a hallway, with walls built up out of what couldn't be wasted. The saving of any singular object becomes the saving of every single object until nothing is of any use; no object ever sees its day. The cruel optimist can't let go either, of the way their eventual-object organizes their present affect-world. The relationship is not with an object so much as it is with hope, as a mediator. The object relation is with a process of mediation that produces the present. Hope becomes a mediator of what it feels like to be in some kind of now. It certainly sounds more enlivening than hoarding does, but there is still a problem with loss.

¹²⁹ Gregg and Seigworth, *Affect Theory Reader*, 94.

While the hoarder can't relinquish an object's future, the cruel optimist can't relinquish a future object. Holding on, it would seem, can also feel like a way of being held.

In the case of both the hoarder and the cruel optimist, the object they do or don't ever have also keeps them from ever really having. In either case, it's trouble with separation—trouble showing up for loss. The point is that this trouble becomes a kind of infrastructural engineer and affective architect of the ongoing present. Usually prereflective, and often nearly overdetermining any possible-or-not-so-possible future movement. The not-so-funny thing about loss is that you have to face it. Otherwise you end up in hallways with hardly any space to speak of left.

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“Infrastructures are made from within relation,”¹³⁰ writes Berlant. And my point with all this, is meant to be blurry. To blur the difference between objects and affects enough for us to get to something like the affective infrastructure we are already thinking with. “Infrastructure is defined by the movement or patterning of social form. It is the living mediation of what organizes life...all the systems that link ongoing proximity to being in a world-sustaining relation.”¹³¹

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¹³⁰ Berlant, “Infrastructures for Troubling Times,” 394.

¹³¹ Ibid, p 393

Although neither Butler nor Berlant speak explicitly about the performativity of attachment, they both seem to take attachment as infrastructural to subject formation and ongoing reformation. Furthermore, attachment seems to be mediated via proximity to the complicated correspondence between objects and affects and loss.¹³² In other words, the intermediation of objects, affects, and loss is the infrastructure that produces what we've come to think of as subjects. "I am a being in need of support," writes Butler, "given over to an infrastructural world in order to act, requiring an emotional infrastructure to survive."¹³³



In regard to this infrastructure of attachment it is also important to understand that neither Butler nor Berlant is pointing toward an exclusively dyadic configuration of attachment. In fact, the infant-(m)other relationship in particular seems to require remarkably little consideration in order for them to make their most important contributions.¹³⁴ Butler:

I am affected not just by this one other or a set of others, but by a world in which humans, institutions, and organic and inorganic processes all impress themselves upon this me who is, at the outset, susceptible in ways that are radically involuntary...I am not only already in the hands of someone else before I start to work with my

¹³² Or separation as it were. Which brings us back to proximity. The lost object remembers itself as form. Remediate itself from the past. Reaches into this now.

¹³³ Butler, *Senses of the Subject*, 6.

¹³⁴ An exception being Butler's more recent essay "To Preserve the Life of the Other." Here, she uses Melanie Klein's work on guilt and reparation more extensively in regard to infant anger at the dependency relationship and corresponding phantasies of destroying the (m)other on whom it is dependent. See, *The Force of Nonviolence*, 67-102.

own hands, but I am also, as it were, in the “hands” of institutions, discourses, environments, including technologies and life processes, handled by an organic and inorganic object field that exceeds the human. In this sense, “I” am nowhere and nothing without the nonhuman.” (p 6)

This is part of why I like the term ‘infant-(m)other assembly.’ But continuing further, I want to suggest that even the ‘I’—this feeling of being a self—is infrastructural. There is no there there, but the feeling-of-a-self emerges, as a psychic infrastructure, facilitating the functioning of the human organism. It is precisely the functional fiction of feeling-like-a-self that allows us to survive.

In one version of psychoanalysis we might say that an object is an affordance for the regulation of affect. However, with the rise of social media(tion) and affective computing, we can just as easily see how affect can be an affordance for the regulation of subjects. The question is, an affordance for who? Or what? And isn’t any given body also always (co)regulating affect in a not-so-different way from the affective (co)regulation of bodies under surveillance capitalism.¹³⁵ As I’ve already footnoted, affective economies are always also economies of scale. In any case, all I’m really trying to re-notice here is that the distinction between subjects, objects and affects seems to be forever breaking down. We somehow seem to simultaneously be all three.

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¹³⁵ Zuboff, *Age of Surveillance Capitalism*.

To consider the psychic and affective infrastructure of attachment is also another way of saying that the attachment apparatus is both inside and around us—endemic to whatever it is we mean when we speak of human subjects, subjectivity, subjection. The internalization of affective infrastructure installs the infant as a mobile interface. In any case, we are born early into our senses, radically dependent on an unchosen ecology of care in order to survive, in order to be interpolated here. You are subscribed. The infant's only hope for a future—for even surviving the present—is in the formation of ongoing attachments. Of some kind or another. And sometimes unkind.



Interdependency is not exactly easy, for Butler, or Berlant, or for any of us. In more recent work Butler has gone somewhat further to describe what she means by the term:

We cannot presume that interdependency is some beautiful state of coexistence; it is not the same as social harmony. Inevitably, we rail against those on whom we are most dependent (or those who are most dependent on us), and there is no way to dissociate dependency from aggression once and for all—this was perhaps the profound insight of Melanie Klein, but surely also Thomas Hobbes in another idiom.¹³⁶

¹³⁶ Butler, *Performative Theory of Assembly*, 151.

Aggression is a productive interest in contemporary feminist theory and STS as well as in the history of psychoanalysis and attachment theory.¹³⁷ The link between aggression and interdependency is an important one and deserves further discussion in regard to how I want to reconfigure a social theory of subject formation in attachment.

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Butler takes the position that there is “no way to dissociate dependency from aggression once and for all.” And although the notion of aggression among infants may initially appear a bit strange, it is also considered a crucial component of the biological assembly required for survival. While psychoanalytic theory does link aggression with anger, we might call this a second-order coupling, arising from the more fundamental coincidence of aggression and desire. The link between aggression and desire is understood to be rooted in the primary dependency we have been discussing. The idea here is that the infant would be utterly subsumed by the psychic power of the (m)other and the impinging intensity of the external object-world were it not for a primal force already harbored in the infant’s own

¹³⁷ For a helpful overview of the place of aggression in feminist STS, see Elizabeth Wilson’s *Gut Feminism*. In regard to psychoanalysis and attachment theory, we can also recall an early critique of Bowlby’s work. In the psychoanalytic milieu in which he was writing, Bowlby’s focus on proximity seeking and contact maintenance behavior was considered by many to forget the importance of aggression. In actuality, however, Bowlby seems to have gone to considerable lengths to consider the important place of aggression in the development of the infant, drawing especially on ethological work like that of Konrad Lorenz. In regard to the intersection of attachment and anger, for example, Bowlby writes: “Whenever separation is only temporary, which in the vast majority of cases it is, anger has the following two functions: first, it may assist in overcoming such obstacles as there may be to reunion; second, it may discourage the loved person from going away again,” *Separation: Anxiety and Anger*, 286. Here we see that aggression and anger are actually a critical part of subject formation in attachment. In the first instance, we find that it works as a motivating force to help the infant overcome obstacles to contact, while in the second case it appears to work as a kind of protest meant to recalibrate the behavior of the (m)other. Bowlby “Grief and Mourning,” 9-52; Bowlby, “Process of Mourning,” 317-340.

body: the desire to suck. In other words, it is the desire to extract fuel from the world—the breast or bottle as it were—that both ensures the ongoing material integrity of the infant’s body and facilitates psychic cohesion in the face of overwhelming objects and affects.¹³⁸ Infants are indeed ruthless in their need for food, quite literally sucking the life out of their object-world in order to obtain the resources necessary to be able to continue to assemble something like a life of their own. All of this depends, of course, on maintaining proximity to a primary other. And this is where anger comes in: as recalibration. Expressions of anger, in this case, are protests, meant to recalibrate the primary other’s proximity practices in accordance with the bodily and affective needs of the infant. We can also think again of the feedback mechanism of cybernetic systems.¹³⁹

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I want to take a further detour now into psychoanalytic theory as it pertains to aggression and our discussion of preoedipal subject formation. What I want to suggest is that this configuration of infantile aggression and desire implies a stage in which Thanatos and Eros, the death and life drives, are not yet disambiguated. Aggression, in this account, is not in opposition to Eros, but rather completely coincident with it. In order to elaborate on this supposition, I want to consider

¹³⁸ As Christopher Bollas has it, “Maternal erotism would overwhelm the infant were it not for the power of the infant’s instinct, as the drive ruthlessly to gratify hunger is a power arriving from within the infant, more than a match for the profound effect of maternal presence.” See *Hysteria*, 42.

¹³⁹ For a more extensive discussion of cybernetics and aesthetic objects, see *Digital Uncanny*, 97-142, Kriss Ravetto-Biagiolo’s review of Norbert Wiener, John von Neumann, Claude Shannon, Gregory Bateson, Donald McKay and others in light of the collaborative work of contemporary artists Simon Biggs, Garth Paine, and Sue Hawksley. Ravetto notes that these artists play with cybernetic systems to produce uncanny effects that intervene in the coherent stability of the observing subject.

Donald Winnicott's work on the difference between object-relating and object-usage. The essay in question, *The Use of an Object and Relating Through Identifications*, is an important one to psychoanalytic clinicians but remains rarely referenced in social theory. In what may initially sound somewhat backwards, Winnicott suggests that "the capacity to use an object is more sophisticated than a capacity to relate to objects."¹⁴⁰ In other words, infants *begin* in a state of object-relating and *develop* the capacity for object-usage. In order to understand this, we can think of object-relating as the kind of phantasy mentation that characterizes the Kleinian infant of psychoanalytic object-relations. The early infant is touched by the material world, as a physical creature in it, but they are not exactly *in touch with it*. The nipple of the breast or bottle, for example, is first experienced as more-or-less contiguous with the infant's own sensing body. There is not yet any conceivable difference between internal/external or self/other. In other words, there are no cuts. We have to imagine a realm of sensation without conceptualization. While there is a sensing body that registers differences between smells, or between surfaces, or in regard to the brightness of the sun for example, all of this remains unthinkable. For the infant—a dynamic bundle of senses trying to get organized in the world—there is not yet exactly any inside or out. In order to go about living out here, however, the infant must develop the capacity to make cuts and conceive difference. Winnicott's essay wants to suggest a way for us to think about how the infant develops the capacity to distinguish between internal objects

¹⁴⁰ Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, 126.

and external ones, between the psychic landscape and the physical one, between something-like-a-self and something-like-an-other.

In a somewhat radical formulation, Winnicott suggests that this can only occur via acts of destruction: “The object is always being destroyed. This destruction becomes the unconscious backcloth for love of a real object; that is, an object outside the area of the subject’s omnipotent control.”¹⁴¹ The infant, according to Winnicott, must destroy the internal objects of phantasy in order to be able to encounter actual objects in the external world. And this, I believe, can help us make sense of the way that interdependency and aggression configure in to my proposal of the originary coincidence between Eros and Thanatos. In contrast to object-relating, we can imagine object-usage as the kind of playing with objects that we might see in children of one or two years: stacking blocks and knocking them over, banging toys together, throwing food overboard to find out what happens. “Study of this problem involves a statement of the positive value of destructiveness,” Winnicott writes. “The destructiveness, plus the object’s survival of the destruction, places the object outside the area of objects set up by the subject’s projective mental mechanisms. In this way a world of shared reality is created which the subject can use and which can feed back other-than-me substance into the subject.”¹⁴² It is important to understand what Winnicott means by the ‘object’s survival of the destruction,’ and we can think here of the frustrated toddler who suddenly contorts their body and screams at a parent at the top of their lungs,

¹⁴¹ Ibid, 126.

¹⁴² Ibid, 126-27.

“I HATE YOU!!!” The child may appear momentarily stunned by the severity of their own expression of destructive rage, but, more importantly, or at least hopefully, they find that their parent has survived this unrestrained attack. In the unfortunate event that this attack causes the caregiver to either collapse or retaliate, however, the child is left with feelings of either total omnipotence or total impotence, still subject to the realm of internal phantasy.

Child psychoanalyst and essayist Adam Phillips brings our attention to a curious paradox in this process: “only by suspending concern for the object is the object established as real; only by not caring for the object—hating it wholeheartedly—can we get to know it. By diminishing one’s regard for the object—ceasing to overprotect the object from oneself—real contact is made.”¹⁴³ We might think of these experiences as facilitating the infant’s ability to move between the virtual and the actual: “If the object can survive the full blast of the subject’s hatred, then the person can conceive of the object as beyond his power and therefore as fully real; that is to say, not constituted by the subject’s reparation but constituted by its own survival.”¹⁴⁴ As Walter Benjamin has observed: “The only way of knowing a person is to love them without hope.”¹⁴⁵

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Something tells me it’s time for a breather so consider what follows as a brief aside:

¹⁴³ Phillips, *Kissing, Tickling and Being Bored*, 38.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid*, 38.

¹⁴⁵ Benjamin, *One-Way Street*, 77.

Dear Reader,

I'm sorry to address you so directly, but still without name. Especially now, in yet another kind of interlude. We both know it was supposed to be a breather. The thing is, there are no real breaks, only breathing, until you don't anymore. The thing is that I'm beginning to remember something about that line from Walter Benjamin and I want to look into the weird fort/da of it:

*The only way of knowing someone is to love them
without hope.*

One part that I already know is that Peggy Phelan was where I first found it. At the *Performance Studies International* conference in Palo Alto in 2013. I know it's already too personal; to love someone without hope, as the only way of knowing.

For some reason, it's the *without* and the *only* that hit me here. Benjamin was kind of an asshole, with his beautifully strange sentences, and the way he always meant it. He was hopeless. And knew it. And almost impossible not to love.

In a sense you could say Phelan was speaking on this very theme. What she said was that she was writing a book on 'critical love.' I wrote down Benjamin's sentence in my notebook along with a few other things:

Love your monsters.

Which was apparently a quote from Latour. And:

*There is no bridge between histories. There is a chasm
between the history of the parent and the history of
the child.*

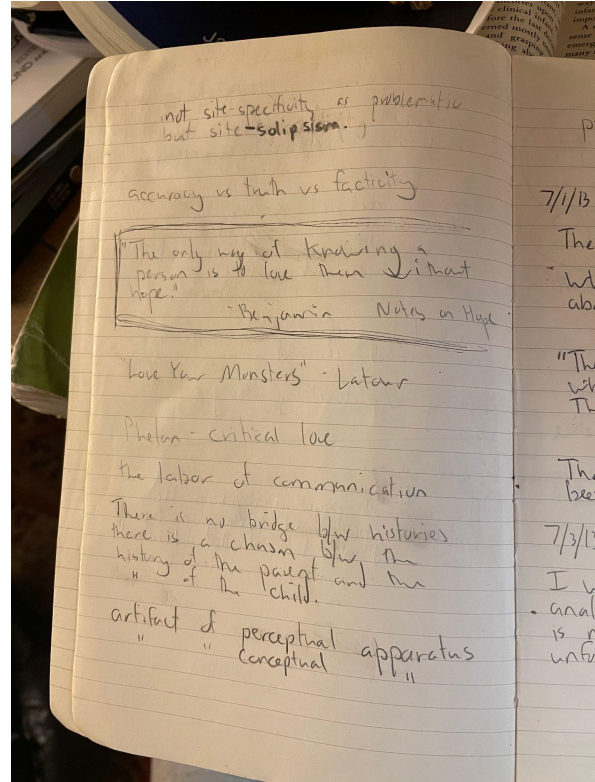
I'm not sure if Phelan actually said those words or if that's just the way I made sense of what she was saying. In any case, I think it holds true. In any case, it's still the sentence by Benjamin that wants attention. It had returned to my mind many times over the years although I'd never been able to find the actual reference. It was only recently, in a search for something else, that I finally stumbled across the sentence on page 77 of *One-Way Street*. It was translated into English by Jephcott and Shorter in 1979. Susan Sontag writes the introduction: "he perceives that the deep transactions between the melancholic and the world always take place with things (rather than

with people); and that these are genuine transactions, which reveal meaning. Precisely because the melancholy character is haunted by death, it is melancholics who best know how to read the world."

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"The first relationship," notes Phillips, "is not with objects but with obstacles."¹⁴⁶ And in this sense, I must admit that I am not convinced

that any object can ever be completely un-cruel.¹⁴⁷ To find one, I think, would be boring, or extinguishing.¹⁴⁸ As considered above, the dissolution of the difference between one's self and one's object is not rapture but melancholia.¹⁴⁹ Food can satisfy hunger, but the melancholic's loss of appetite is a way for the body to say nothing makes a difference anymore. Phillips again: "One of the aims of



¹⁴⁶ Phillips, *Kissing, Tickling and Being Bored*, 85.

¹⁴⁷ I am thinking here of an example from an episode of the Netflix series *Black Mirror*. In the episode "Be Right Back", the protagonist loses her husband in a car accident and then recovers "him" through an artificially intelligent simulacra, faithful in regard to every last detail, from bad jokes to chest moles. The problem, in the end, is that this reincarnation of her beloved is also completely subject to her. In the end, it is not a robot subject that she wants, but a human object. She wants an actual obstacle; someone with the capacity to object.

¹⁴⁸ We might also think here of Slavoj Žižek's introduction to *Enjoy Your Symptom*, where he remedies Shel Silverstein's children's book *The Missing Piece*. The protagonist is a simple circle, but Pac-Man-like, with a pie shaped sliver as a kind of mouth. The circle is rolling along and singing a song about its missing piece in search of a shape that fits. Eventually, after many unfitting objects, the circle finds the perfect shape. After the circle's initial joy rolls off, it comes to realize that having the missing piece leaves it unable to sing. The circle decides to relinquish its object in order to save its song. And it rolls away singing.

¹⁴⁹ Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia."

psychoanalytic treatment may be to enable the patient to find, or be able to tolerate, more satisfying obstacles to contend with. Poor obstacles impoverish us.”¹⁵⁰ It is precisely by way of their capacity to object that objects themselves are found to be reliable. And not only reliable, but interesting. And Berlant too seems to understand what Winnicott is getting at about what an infant has to do: “In fantasy one is struck with one’s singular sovereignty in an inexhaustible nonrelationality.”¹⁵¹ I don’t play Minecraft, but I have kids who do. Eventually, inevitably, they always tire of ‘creative mode,’ that setting where you can fly wherever and build whatever you want. That setting where the singular sovereignty of nonrelationality gets boring.

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¹⁵⁰ Phillips, *Kissing, Tickling and Being Bored*, 86.

¹⁵¹ Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, 42.

5_TOWARD AN AESTHETICS OF ATTACHMENT

Aesthetic formation proceeds under the law of the Beautiful, and the dialectic of affirmation and negation, consolation and sorrow is the dialectic of the Beautiful.

—Herbert Marcuse

The love story preserves suspense and uncertainty about the denouement through careful handling of the distribution of knowledge.

—Jacques Rancière

Whatever else childhood is, it is an initiation into the sensible.

—Adam Phillips





In colloquial speech the term ‘aesthetics’ seems mostly to signify style and artifice. Or sometimes perhaps taste and beauty.¹⁵² It seems, from what I gather, to be concerned primarily with the play of surfaces. And Plato is suspicious. For him, one cannot exactly separate art from artifice and theater performs deception. The concern is rearticulated in modified form some 2,000 years later by Theodor Adorno, where stylization “makes an unthinkable fate appear to have had some meaning; it is transfigured, something of its horror is removed.”¹⁵³ The issue seems to pertain to some kind of disconfiguration at work in the realm of aesthetics. It is almost as though the process of aesthetic formation results in a kind of disinformation, severing some assumed correspondence between subject, object, and affect. The domain of aesthetics seems to forfeit any guarantee of affective correlation between the original subject of a work and its subsequent manifestation in the art object. A painting that takes horrific violence and suffering as its subject matter—Picasso’s *Guernica* for example—may not elicit horror, but rapture, or wonder, or apathy. Aesthetic mediation allows subjective experience to be cut loose from the objective occurrence that first inspired the production of the work. From this position, the domain of aesthetics risks obscuring sober-minded access to the nature of things as they are, clouding

¹⁵² This is often linked to the shift we find in Baumgarten’s (1750) turn from the articulation of aesthetics as sensory experience to the distinction between the capacity for sensorial and intellectual judgment. Although taken up somewhat critically by Kant in *Critique of Pure Reason*, it later becomes quite important to *Critique of Judgment* (1790).

¹⁵³ Adorno, “Commitment,” 313.

accurate judgment and disfiguring knowledge. We might say that aesthetic technique consists in delaminating surface from depth in order to play with the difference. And for Plato, this is dangerous. Theater, especially, is not simply a seductive distraction from what actually is but a kind of pernicious performativity, making things otherwise from what they actually are. For Adorno and Horkheimer, the culture industry might be said to perform a similar function.¹⁵⁴

Whether or not we can overlook my somewhat garish summarizations enough to identify with some version of the concerns expressed by Plato and Adorno, aesthetics does seem to have something to do with the sense of some kind of formal difference between appearance and actuality, surface and depth, inside and out.

It is not incidental that similar questions show up in two other contemporary discourses concerned with the nature of objects: contemporary object-relations psychoanalysis and object-oriented philosophy. I am thinking here, for example, of psychoanalyst Donald Meltzer's 'aesthetic crisis' and philosopher Quentin Meillassoux's recent revisions of Kant's correlationism. What Meltzer refers to as the aesthetic crisis or conflict, is first a developmental one, arising as the infant begins to move from simply experiencing the external behavior of the (m)other to recognising the existence—but ultimate inaccessibility—of the (m)other's internal operations. In other words, the crisis is the result of a conflict that emerges during the phase of development in which the

¹⁵⁴ See Horkheimer and Adorno's *The Culture Industry*.

infant begins to contend with conceiving of a difference between surface and depth.¹⁵⁵ In the contemporary philosophies of Quentin Meillassoux, Graham Harman, Levi Paul Bryant and other object-oriented thinkers, all objects are ontologically opaque, even translucent ones. In this view, something about objects always withdraws from us. The question then, it would seem to me, is really quite the same: can we ever really know our objects? In other words, perhaps what infants are trying to figure out about their objects is not so entirely different from what developmentalists and ontologists are trying to figure out about theirs. “In a city hostile to the theatre and to written law, Plato recommended constantly cradling unweaned infants.”¹⁵⁶



The Strange Situation Procedure is a kind of social microscope for the patterns and politics of the objects and affects of preoedipal life. But it may also be a kind of cradle. Not only a holding space for infants, but for the researchers too. Of course most scenes of attachment are not a room with two chairs and some toys on the ground. Setting the stage like this is just a way of stabilizing a situation enough

¹⁵⁵ This difference encountered in the aesthetic conflict confronts the infant with the need for representation, which is both a crisis and a solution. The infant will have to develop representations of the internal operations of other objects in order to acclimate to how they actually behave. In a sense we could also read this as the infant's matriculation into epistemological and hermeneutic life. There is an interruption in the pre-reflective flow of sense experience. Not a traumatic one, but low-key glitchy. Something feels so briefly out of sync that it's nearly forgettable. But these glitches come again. And then again. And then begin to become a kind of evidence of something that must be interpreted. In other words, the reliable evidence of familiar experience becomes a background data-set that makes new data perceivable, perceptible, conceivable. We are amidst the infant's dis/in/dividuation process. Data registers difference. But never passively. Difference and data are always simultaneously discovered and created. Encountered and produced. And reproducing themselves. This matriculation into the aesthetic layering of symbolic life is also, then, an initiation into the pleasures and violences of representation. Data cuts. And cutting raises questions. The infant is losing the unity it felt it had known before it knew what knowledge was. And now it has to bridge the gap.

¹⁵⁶ Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, 18.

to see patterns. And to find differences. This chapter reads the Strange Situation Procedure as a transitional interface: a technology for seeing, sorting, and remediating the affects and objects of early life in the present day. This chapter also considers the way in which early attachment experience constitutes a distinct phase of aesthetic formation that configures not only sensing subjects but sensible ones, well-calibrated for appearance, participation, and administration in the technopolitical sphere.¹⁵⁷ I want to reopen the chapter now by establishing our location amidst a formal problem in psychoanalytic aesthetics.



An Introduction to a Problem in Psychoanalytic Aesthetics

Freud's disinterest in form is famous. And self-proclaimed. At least in regard to art. Rancière, among others, takes note: "Freud explains that he is not interested in artworks from a formal perspective but in their 'subject-matter,' in the intention that is expressed and the content that is revealed."¹⁵⁸ The relevant passage appears in Freud's *The Moses of Michaelangelo*:

I may say at once that I am no connoisseur in art, but simply a layman. I have often observed that the subject-matter of works of art has a stronger attraction for me than their formal and technical qualities, though to the artist their value lies first and foremost in these latter. I am unable rightly to appreciate many of the methods used and the

¹⁵⁷ Indeed, already subscribed to it in the micropolitical sensorium of infancy.

¹⁵⁸ Rancière, *Aesthetic Unconscious*, 54-55.

effects obtained in art. I state this so as to secure the reader's indulgence for the attempt I propose to make here.¹⁵⁹

Adorno, even earlier than Rancière, also addresses the issue: "Psychoanalysis considers artworks to be essentially unconscious projections of those who have produced them, and, preoccupied with the hermeneutics of thematic material, it forgets the categories of form."¹⁶⁰ Adorno may be generalizing Freud's particular approach to the entire field of psychoanalysis, but Rancière specifies: "We cannot understand Freud's declared choice of the 'content' alone of works unless we see it in relation...the quest for the content, as we know, generally leads toward the discovery of a repressed memory."¹⁶¹

In other words, Freud is interested in content as a kind of evidence of latent conflict. Artworks—like dreams—are not merely symbolic, but symptomatic; evidence of deeper trouble. A 'hermeneutics of suspicion' is certainly at work in Freud's aesthetics.¹⁶² It is not too difficult to see a correspondence between his treatment of patients and his treatment of artwork and it would not be entirely unfair to call his approach diagnostic. But Rancière, Adorno, and even Ricoeur all take care to situate Freud's aesthetics alongside his clinical desire and praxis. He is a

¹⁵⁹ Freud, "Moses of Michaelangelo," 2845.

¹⁶⁰ Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 8.

¹⁶¹ Rancière, *Aesthetic Unconscious*.

¹⁶² See Ricoeur *Freud and Philosophy*, 32-36. The phrase is useful here but is less important to our project than Ricoeur's more specific reflections on Freud's writings about art and aesthetics. As Alison Scott-Baumann's work shows, "the hermeneutics of suspicion is not a highly significant feature of Ricoeur's work." See her *Ricoeur and the Hermeneutics of Suspicion*, 10.

doctor after all. Or before. Which is also a way to remind us to remember Sedgwick's reparative reading.¹⁶³ Not as cure, perhaps, but as a kind of care.¹⁶⁴



“Artworks are not Thematic Apperception Tests of their makers”¹⁶⁵ writes Adorno. And Ricoeur agrees, “[w]orks of art,” he writes “are not simply projections of the artist's conflicts, but the sketch of their solution.”¹⁶⁶ This chapter begins to develop an ‘aesthetics of attachment’ that looks beyond the psychopathology of artists and artworks—beyond trauma and compulsive repetition—to consider an underlying process of critical remediation.

I will briefly consider the aesthetics of attachment in regard to matters of content followed by a longer reflection on matters of form. Although the content/form discussion in aesthetics has a long history, the brief account of Freud's thinking above is primarily meant to establish our location amongst psychoanalysis and the post-marxist aesthetics of the Frankfurt School. I also consider sensibility and the senses in light of attachment research and alongside

¹⁶³ Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling*, 123.

¹⁶⁴ The etymological cure/care relation has not, of course, gone unmarked. In psychoanalytic theory, see Winnicott's “Cure,” where it is not the application of a remedy-cure, but rather care, as a kind of ongoing reliability. Also see Tarek Elhaik's *Incurable-Image*, where curation invites us to become incurable patients in the ongoing care of images.

¹⁶⁵ Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 9.

¹⁶⁶ In context: “Works of art are not only socially valuable...they are also creations which, as such, are not simply projections of the artist's conflicts, but the sketch of their solution. Dreams look backward, toward infancy, the past; the work of art goes ahead of the artist; it is a prospective symbol of his personal synthesis and of man's future, rather than a regressive symbol of his unresolved conflicts...The work of art sets us on the pathway to new discoveries concerning the symbolic function and sublimation itself. Could it be that the true meaning of sublimation is to promote new meanings by mobilizing old energies initially invested in archaic figures? This is the direction, it would seem, in which Freud himself invites us to look when he distinguishes sublimation from inhibition and obsession...and opposes sublimation to repression.” See Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy*, 174.

Rancière's partitioning and distribution of the sensible.¹⁶⁷ In order to facilitate our discussion I offer additional empirical artifacts from the research archive as well as a handful of contemporary artworks and other cultural objects. Of particular interest are works that make direct or indirect reference to early human development, especially the preoedipal phase from zero to three years. One thing that art and psychoanalysis do share is that either one can be a way of coming back to our senses.¹⁶⁸



The Term 'Remediation' as it May Pertain to the Domain of Psychological Functioning

What appears to be a combination of remedy, media, and mediation, 'remediation' will be seen to have something to do with an organic process of metabolizing and reconfiguring psychic and physical material. That is to say, with an ongoing affective exchange at the interface of internal and external object-worlds. Many scholars have drawn on Freud's commentary to emphasize the pathologizing nature of psychoanalytic approaches to art and cultural objects. One of my primary aims here is to shift our thinking from the patho-logics of aesthetic formation to something more like the bio-techno-logics of it. This chapter takes a closer look at attachment-related cultural objects and empirical artifacts and also translates Freud's praxis itself into a kind of evidence of what we could call a

¹⁶⁷ Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*.

¹⁶⁸ Or perhaps, remediating them.

‘remediation drive.’ I draw only peripherally on Bolter and Grusin’s foundational work on the term ‘remediation’ as it appears in media studies,¹⁶⁹ instead bringing attention to the psychodynamic materiality of it. A clinical psychotherapist is more similar to a remediation service than a media scholar, and in this regard my usage is almost closer to what the term means when you need to call someone about flood damage or remedial educational support. But not exactly. In any case, I’ve come to find the word to be of great use in both my clinical practice and in regard to the uncanny aesthetics of attachment at the heart of this project. This chapter takes the remediation drive as an affordance for thinking about a fundamental aspect of human functioning. The emphasis here is not on remedy as cure, but rather an ongoing process re: mediation.



‘YOUR OLDEST FEARS ARE THE WORST ONES’ reads one of contemporary artist Jenny Holzer’s *Truisms*, displayed as an immense LED sign on the side of New York City’s Flatiron Building.

¹⁶⁹ Bolter and Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media*.



Formal Content in Attachment

In order to begin to become acquainted with what I mean when I speak of the aesthetics of attachment, it can be helpful to begin with a discursive distinction—eventually discardable—between content and form.¹⁷⁰ An aesthetics of attachment content might be concerned primarily with attachment-related subject matter, such as images or depictions of embracing lovers or friends as well as infants and children with their caregivers or clearly separated from them. Michelangelo's pieta and the mother-with-child motif in western art history would of course also fall into this category, as would some readings of Mary Kelly's *Post-Partum Document* (1973-79). You could also include the pet reunion and interspecies animal friendship videos on YouTube. The distinction between content and form gets more difficult of course as we move toward abstraction, or even other artforms like popular film, literature, or music. If you think of your favorite film or literary work, for example, it will usually be organized around finding, losing, or looking for an object of attachment. Often there is even an arrival of a stranger. We could also think of nearly any love song or ballad declaring one's feelings for a beloved or the pain of losing or missing them. The affective contours of attachment dynamics show up in religious and devotional music around the

¹⁷⁰ Both in regard to the chapter and in regard to before the beginning of the self, or at least of distinctions. A more immediate sense and response. Already mediated, of course, but not yet by language.

world and in every top-hit from the 80's and 90's.¹⁷¹ Attachment-related themes are ubiquitous throughout the history of art and cultural production more broadly. As Borges writes, "Being with you and not being with you is the only way I have to measure time."¹⁷² And although the identification of attachment content is of some discursive interest, it's not actually ever content we find at the center of attachment, but form. My interest here is primarily in what an aesthetics of attachment might contribute to psychoanalytically-minded understandings of form and aesthetic formation. Moving from Freud to the Strange Situation to 0's and 1's and back again, this discussion of remediation and the formal implications of attachment considers how the attachment apparatus participates in aesthetic formation and the ongoing configuration of sensing bodies in space and time.

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Freudian Discontent

Let us begin again by returning to our discussion of Freud's disclosure in *The Moses of Michaelangelo*. Rancière continues his commentary on Freud's interest in content: "This assignation of a final cause is generally mediated through an organizing fantasy, a compromise formation that allows the artist's libido (most often represented by the hero) to escape repression and sublimate itself in the work at the cost of inscribing it's enigma there."¹⁷³ Rancière may be introducing a slippage between compromise formation and sublimation, but he is

¹⁷¹ Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan's *Sanu Ek Pal Chain Na Aave*.

¹⁷² Translation by author.

¹⁷³ Rancière, *The Aesthetic Unconscious*, 54-55.

right to imply that for Freud—a lover and avid collector of cultural artifacts and antiquities—artworks are a kind of workaround. I will quote at length here from Freud’s 1911 *Formulations on the Two Principles of Mental Functioning*:

Art brings about a reconciliation between the two principles in a peculiar way. An artist is originally a man who turns away from reality because he cannot come to terms with the renunciation of instinctual satisfaction which it at first demands, and who allows his erotic and ambitious wishes full play in the life of phantasy. He finds the way back to reality, however, from this world of phantasy by making use of special gifts to mould his phantasies into truths of a new kind, which are valued by men as precious reflections of reality. Thus in a certain fashion he actually becomes the hero, the king, the creator, or the favourite he desired to be, without following the one roundabout path of making real alterations in the external world. But he can only achieve this because other men feel the same dissatisfaction as he does with the renunciation demanded by reality, and because that dissatisfaction, which results from the replacement of the pleasure principle by the reality principle, is itself a part of reality.¹⁷⁴

In other words, the art object is a kind of objection to the reality principle: a material artifact of the artist’s psychodynamic workaround. And here I want to bring our attention to a certain melancholic structure that Freud identifies in the psychodynamic architecture of artworks. Artworks are valued as precious because they reflect our collective dissatisfaction with the renunciation required by reality, and because “that dissatisfaction, which results from the replacement of the

¹⁷⁴ Freud, “Two Principles in Mental Functioning.”

pleasure principle by the reality principle, is itself a part of reality.” Discontent, then, would appear central to Freud’s conception of aesthetic process and the psychodynamics of aesthetic formation. Artworks disclose our unhappiness with the way things are. Not because they are about dissatisfaction—for they certainly often aren’t—but because they are produced by it. For Freud disappointment is at the heart of how artworks work.



Freud again:

Art is a conventionally accepted reality in which, thanks to artistic illusion, symbols and substitutes are able to provoke real emotions. Thus art constitutes a region half-way between a reality which frustrates wishes and the wish-fulfilling world of the imagination - a region in which, as it were, primitive man’s strivings for omnipotence are still in full force.¹⁷⁵

“We shall learn in the essay *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*,” writes Ricoeur, “that play implies a mastery over absence...the power of stringing together the present of a current impression, the past of infancy, and the future of a situation to be realized.”¹⁷⁶ In regard to these strivings for omnipotence, Adorno clarifies: “If art has psychoanalytic roots, then they are the roots of fantasy in the fantasy of omnipotence. This fantasy includes the wish to bring about a better world.”¹⁷⁷ And

¹⁷⁵ Freud, “Claims of Psycho-Analysis,” 2823.

¹⁷⁶ Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy*, 166.

¹⁷⁷ Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 9.

we can see, of course, that this also applies to Freud's praxis as well. Freud's hermeneutics of suspicion—his critical clinical desire—cannot be decoupled from the omnipotent hope to 'bring about a better world.' Even his case studies are aesthetic configurations, remediations via narrative form. Freud isn't writing fiction per se, but he is definitely writing stories. And his cases follow all the rules, with all the elements of narrative literature: character, context, conflict, crisis, resolution.¹⁷⁸ And again I find myself thinking of the caregiving behavioral system and pastoral formations of power.



Uncanny Returns

Having said all this, I now must return again to Rancière's earlier commentary where I skipped something about castration. "The quest for the content, as we know, generally leads to the discovery of a repressed memory." This much we have covered. But here is the sentence in its entirety: "The quest for the content, as we know, generally leads to the discovery of a repressed memory and, in the final instance, toward the original moment of infantile castration."

To begin to understand this I want to briefly consider another of the few places that Freud directly addresses the psychodynamics of aesthetic experience, his well-known essay "The Uncanny." In this essay Freud draws on etymology and E.T.A. Hoffmann's short story *The Sandman* to consider the aesthetics of uncanny experiences. In German, 'unheimlich' means 'unfamiliar,' but Freud first focuses

¹⁷⁸ See Gail Finney: "Else Meets Dora," 81-95.

attention on its root, 'heimlich,' meaning both 'homely' and 'familiar.' The uncanny, for Freud, has to do with a slippage in the correspondence between what feels familiar and what feels strange. Uncanny experiences are predicated upon re-encounter with the estranged images, objects, affects, and sensations that populated preoedipal experience. As examples, Freud includes the double or doppelganger, eerily life-like robots, and *deja vu*—the sense that the present scene or situation has happened before. For Freud, the uncanny arises when something previously familiar but since forgotten seems to suddenly show up. Freud calls this the 'return of the repressed.' By way of his extended etymological analysis and long treatment of Hoffmann's story, Freud links all this, as we might expect, to castration. But interestingly, it has nothing to do with the genitals. Instead, castration anxiety is the fear of losing one's sight. Freud is suggesting that part of what makes an experience uncanny is that it throws the phallic power and epistemological primacy of vision into question.¹⁷⁹ It's not exactly losing our eyes that we're afraid of, but losing the ability to keep an eye on our objects.

Another interesting artifact in this essay is Freud's admission of an uncanny repetition of his own which he leaves amusingly unanalyzed. Among his list of examples is an anecdotal account of his own experience of getting lost in a provincial town in Italy. Freud uncannily finds his way—three times in a row—to the redlight district.

¹⁷⁹ "Should I tear my eyes out now / everything I see returns to you somehow." *The Only Thing* by Sufjan Stevens.

Something funny about Freud is the way in which he can't seem to help but bring attention to his own repressions. And another amusement is the way we never cease to repeat them. The thing is, we take these more-or-less conscious admissions, discrepancies, and contradictions, as incriminating evidence against him rather than as exemplary of pretty much exactly what he was talking about. The only reason it's funny that Freud said "Sometimes a cigar is just a cigar," is that Freud said it.



Attachment Precedes Oedipus

Developmentally speaking, attachment experience precedes recognition of sexual difference. This allows us to understand that the 'original moment of infantile castration' is not about content but about the form of attachment. Castration isn't about genitals or eyes, but separation. Separation anxiety can be understood as a fear of a prior kind of affective dismemberment: the loss of access to one's sustaining power.¹⁸⁰ Which is, of course, proximity to someone else's. Our first and most crucial power is the ability to animate and participate in the power of other objects. To perform with them. We will eventually begin to perceive genital difference, or in other words, inevitably have to contend with conceiving of it. We are story-making beings, and once we begin to make them, our preoedipal sights and wonders will always be retroactively mapped onto something like Oedipus or

¹⁸⁰ "And at once I knew / I was not magnificent." *Holocene* by Bon Iver.

some other dispositif. My point is simply this: the sensorium of attachment precedes the symbolization of Oedipus.



Remediating the Sensorium

I would like to make recourse now to another example from the Strange Situation training that may be of some help in moving toward the arrangement of attachment, aesthetics, and remediation that I am trying to configure in this chapter. In viewing the footage it is common to note a detail in the behavior of many infants which is not unique to infancy but persists in adulthood, and which the psychologists refer to as ‘social referencing.’ In the Strange Situation Procedure, social referencing behavior most clearly occurs upon the first entrance of the stranger, whereupon the infant visually apprehends the stranger and then immediately looks toward the (m)other. The infant is making use of the (m)other as sensory data, as an index for how to be affected by the new figure. In other words, the infant is not looking to the (m)other to know what to think about the stranger, but rather for how to feel about her. If the (m)other appears calm and friendly, for example, the infant need not feel afraid. If, on the other hand, the infant senses distress in the (m)other, the infant is also likely to feel distress and perhaps even seek proximity. Social referencing is considered instinctual and pre-reflective: it occurs outside of the infant’s conscious awareness. The infant’s glance toward the mother is asking, in effect: “How do I make sense of what I am sensing?” But it is

important to remember that the infant still exists primarily in a world of percepts, not concepts. In other words, we are more in the realm of signals than of signs and there is no internal narration of this process. It is in this way that the (m)other operates as a mediator, or curator, of the infant's sensory experience. Remediating their sensorium.

As Berlant remarks: "The present is something given back to us by those who reflect on it...the sense and the sense experience of the present are effects of critical practice."¹⁸¹ I'm not at all sure Berlant is referring to infant attachment in this passage, but it still seems to apply: critical praxis precedes critical reflection and already organizes our sensorium. We are doing it before we have the capacity to even think a thought about doing anything at all.

Returning to Rancière, the partitioning of the sensible, in this example, occurs twice. The first partitioning occurs not as the infant apprehends the entrance of a figure, but in the moment the figure is registered as unfamiliar. The partition here is between familiar and unfamiliar and marks the figure as a stranger. The infant then looks to the (m)other for additional sensory data to assist in the second partitioning whereby this particular stranger can be registered as either a friendly or threatening one. The infant's recourse to the (m)other to make sense of what they are sensing is meant as just one example of how early subject formation is a developmental aesthetic process. And in regard to the question of who counts as a stranger and how to feel about them, it is not an apolitical one. Aesthetics has to do

¹⁸¹ Berlant, "Critical Inquiry, Affirmative Culture," 445.

with how we get trained to make cuts, to demarcate the boundaries between this and that, inside and out, you or me, us or them. Aesthetic formation teaches us to be discriminating. And to discriminate.¹⁸² What can or can't be sensed, what is or isn't sensible, what seems to make sense, is always of course, highly policed.



Performing Microanalysis

I want to briefly turn our attention now beyond the scenography of the Strange Situation to another cinematic empirical device that focuses on an even earlier stage of infant-(m)other relations. The work of Beatrice Beebe constitutes another technovisual interface in attachment research. Beebe's microanalysis involves recording synchronous close-up video footage of 8-month old infants and their (m)others while engaged in play.¹⁸³ The footage is recorded and screened back in slow-motion on the two-channel feed for coding. Beatrice Beebe writes:

In 1969, the use of video cameras was relatively new and computers were still uncommon. Video was reel-to-reel and difficult to code. To perform a microanalysis we converted video to 16 mm film, which had 24 frames per second. We used an editing viewer, a small metal box anchored to a board, through which one could view the film. The board had metal posts on either side of the box, onto which two film reels were securely attached. The film fit through the metal box, and a light projected the film onto the wall. But to see the film one had to be

¹⁸² For an excellent consideration of aesthetic inquiry that extends Rancière's work in this way, see Kandice Chuh's *The Difference Aesthetics Makes*.

¹⁸³ And sometimes with 'strangers' as well.

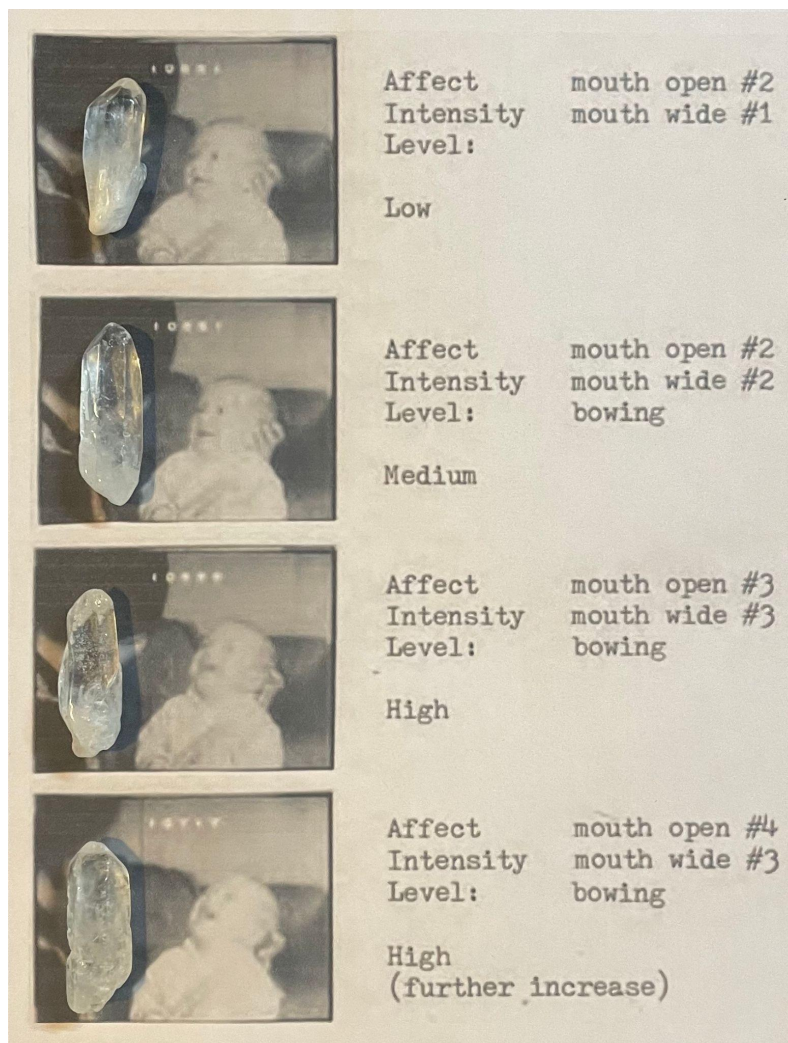
in a darkroom. The setup was just like one for editing a film, except instead of cutting the film, we were analyzing it. Numbers were printed on the top of each film frame. With one's own hands, one could slowly move the film forward and back to watch movement unfold in time. We identified the beginning and ending frame of each little movement of mother and infant. These movements, such as slight shifts of gaze, head-up, or mouth-opening, typically last about a quarter to a third of a second (Beebe, 1982).

Today digitized video makes this whole process so much easier. But the hand method of frame-by-frame analysis of film had one interesting advantage. My own body movement was involved in detecting the onset and offset of each behavior. For example, in the chase and dodge interaction, as I rocked the film back and forth between the two reels, my body moved with the mother's movement as she loomed in close to the infant's face, and my body moved with the infant's head movement back and away from the mother, a split-second later. I believe my own visceral feedback helped me better comprehend how these movements might be experienced by the infant, and by the mother. This is a form of embodied simulation. Performing the action of another person influences one's perception of the person's action and facilitates recognition of it (Oberman, Winkielman, & Ramachandran, 2007; Niedenthal, Mermillod, Maringer, & Hess, 2010; Beebe & Lachmann, 2013). In my case, I was participating in the action through my body movements as I coded.¹⁸⁴

Although Beebe is not referring to the Strange Situation Procedure in particular, her description does convey something of what it feels like to engage with Ainsworth's

¹⁸⁴ Beebe, "My Journey in Infant Research," 8.

procedure. I have included the description especially for three reasons: 1) it illustrates the materiality and mediality of cinematic psychological research devices; 2) it speaks to the affective entanglement between the researcher's body, the object(s) of study, and the cinematic interface; 3) it seems to illustrate something about the performativity of attachment.





Re: Paranoid Reading

In a sense the kind of empirical replication we find in all of this is a form of repetition compulsion. It wouldn't be too hard to analyze the cinematic gaze and panoptical power in filmic research devices like the Strange Situation Procedure.¹⁸⁵ An unhappy reading of social science might accuse researchers of conflating object-knowledge with object-measurement; believing that measuring an object amounts to knowing it. And all this would be seen simply to be in the service of better object-management. As one team of attachment researchers puts it, "An idealized study of individual development would involve measuring virtually everything at every time period on a very large number of people. One would wish to tap all meaningful experiences, all features of the child, all relevant aspects of context, and all possible outcomes."¹⁸⁶ It seems that empirical desire would measure everything if it could. It can almost sound a bit like a techno-dystopian scenario from *Black Mirror*.¹⁸⁷ But developmental scientists, perhaps better than most, are intimately familiar with the reality principle. In phantasy there is nothing much at stake in your decisions. Research, however, requires a kind of limit-setting, full of constraints and cuts. As Walter Benjamin notes, "we are starting to see in the visual

¹⁸⁵ See, for example Laura Mulvey's foundational "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema."

¹⁸⁶ Sroufe, *Development of the Person*, 46.

¹⁸⁷ "The triumphalist image" writes Butler, "can communicate an impossible overcoming of difference, a kind of identification that believes that it has overcome the difference that is the condition of its own possibility." See, *Precarious Life*, 146. The SSP—and the taxonomy of early relational experience that it offers—may be read as a triumphalist image for the figure of the researcher. A rigorously replicated and enduringly productive empirical scene, overcoming difference through (1) seeing it, (2) categorizing it, (3) predicting it, and (4) intervening. But that sounds more like the algorithmic object to me. The Strange Situation is still only ever coded by humans. And always with great care.

field what in the field of theory is emerging as the growing importance of statistics. The orientation of reality toward the masses and of the masses toward reality is a process of unbounded consequence not only for thought but also for how we see things.”¹⁸⁸ The scientists aren’t exactly looking for something they can count, but something they can *count on*—reliable data about the nature of their objects. The Strange Situation Procedure, of course, is just one way of seeing it/staging it.



Technoprimal Scenes

I want to return our attention now to the preoedipal scenes introduced in the critical interlude: Freud’s Fort/Da, Lacan’s Mirror, and Winnicott’s Transitional Object. All three of these technoprimal scenes occur during the preoedipal phase, the same age as the infants in the Strange Situation Procedure. This is particularly important because this phase corresponds with the development of the capacity for locomotion (crawling and walking) and symbolic language (representation), faculties which facilitate increasing distance between infant and (m)other.

These days there are simpler ways to measure attachment beyond staging the Strange Situation Procedure; we don’t have to keep doing it. Part of the reason I want to inaugurate it alongside these other preoedipal scenes in the psychoanalytic hall-of-fame is because of the way it keeps replicating. And it’s not entirely clear

¹⁸⁸ Benjamin, *Work of Art*, 10.

whether we are in the domain of experimental replication, compulsive repetition, or aesthetic remediation.

The Strange Situation Procedure is a kind of fort/da for the researchers, a game of here and gone, possession and dispossession. And also a way to become self-possessed. Attachment material is evocative. You can't really watch it without being moved. For the researchers, the technological device allows for oscillation between the internal object-relations of phantasy and external objects in observable relations.¹⁸⁹ It's an affect modulator. It is also worth noting as well the very particular narrative form of the Strange Situation Procedure. Unlike most other empirical procedures and measures, when the researchers watch the footage, they are also watching love stories. Each case has all the elements of the genre: setting, character, rising action, crisis, denouement. Empirical praxis in attachment is always also a kind of aesthetic training.

I'm not saying that empirical desire or the researchers' own phantasies aren't at play here, but precisely that they are. My aim is to illuminate the phantastic affective power of the mechanical animation and reanimation that occurs as part of cinematic scientific practices in attachment research. The procedure is not only an affordance for prolonged and practiced looking, but for attending to one's own affects, modulating the return of the repressed on one's own terms. It allows you to look long enough to start to see something and to see a new way to feel about it. If

¹⁸⁹ It is also worth noting the difficulty of finding the difference between research 'subjects' and 'objects' here. I would also note that all of this was part of a broader return to materiality that characterized the psy-disciplines at this time, catalyzed by the observed effects of war-time separation on young children but also the increasing availability of and use of film technologies in developmental and psychological research.

cinema plus psychoanalysis equals the science of ghosts, the Strange Situation Procedure is a transitional interface for remediating the uncanny.



The Lost Object Remembers Itself as Form

“Repetition is the purest experience of form” writes poet Christian Hawkey.¹⁹⁰ And I love the simplicity of this line. It makes me think of Andy Warhol’s screen prints or even the nine-square grids of AI-generated images we’re starting to see around everywhere. We can also use it to trouble the veracity of Freud’s self-proclaimed preference for content over form via his marked interest in traumatic repetition. Furthermore, even Freud’s notion of the dreamwork can be taken as exemplary of the importance of formal operations in the work of creative production. In other words, whether they occur in artworks or in dreams or in everyday life, repetition, condensation, and displacement are formal operations, not contents. A construct like the remediation drive can also help us consider repetition somewhat less patho-logically. Perhaps we don’t repeat trauma just for the hell of it? Perhaps harbored in our repetitions is a drive for remediation? Whether conscious or not we are always performing experimental replications, searching for new evidence, hoping for data we can trust. Data we can get to work with. Fort/Da/ Fort/Data.



¹⁹⁰ Hawkey, *Ventrakl*, 110.

It can be a hard road out of the realm of phantasy and into a world where interdependency can't ever really be avoided. As Butler writes: "If action is defined as independent, implying a fundamental difference from dependency, then our self-understanding as actors is predicated upon a disavowal of those living and interdependent relations upon which our lives depend."¹⁹¹ We might say that autonomy is a pretense, an avoidance, an artifice of the repression of a more fundamental precondition of social need. And one that never really goes away.



Re: Mediation

Although I've used the term a lot and you've always already kind of known what I've meant, I'm aware at this point that I haven't done much to actually define remediation or articulate the drive.¹⁹² To some extent I'm not exactly sure I want to or exactly know how. I want to play with the difference between empirical and aesthetic reproduction. And to let the drive exceed us.¹⁹³

Remediation is not exactly compulsive, but it is compulsory. We are already always intermediated, but it seems like at least some distinction can be made between inside and outside as it pertains to an infant. Once you arrive here and lose your placenta, it's remediate or die. At first, however, the world really still does a lot

¹⁹¹ Butler, *Performative Theory of Assembly*, 44.

¹⁹² The term 'remediation drive' is meant more as an experimental contribution to social theory than a technical one vis-à-vis Freudian drive theory. I am drawing upon clinical experience and attempting some manner of fidelity to attachment theory and psychoanalytic discourse.

¹⁹³ Whatever I figure out how to say explicitly here might only confuse you. Don't worry about reading for meaning but for sounds and rhythms and forms.

of it for you. And baby koalas have it especially good because their mother's nipples are on the inside of their pouches. But you can suck and cry, smell good, coo. We've got that biotechnology for contact maintenance already on board. The remediation drive is animated through inter-facing our interdependency. It has to do with getting oriented to being out here. And with making adjustments.

The remediation drive facilitates our participation with the ongoing dynamic exchange of objects and affects and their relative impact. For the remediation drive, objects aren't objects exactly, but affordances. Affect is material and material is affective, irregardless of the medium. It has to do with the capacity to have some effect over how signals, signs, and symbols get rearranged inside of us and into material outside us. Remediation is less concerned with the difference between internal and external objects than with how we live as material subjects in the affects of their interchange.

The drive is working at every level of the psyche: conscious, preconscious, unconscious. Its operations can be identified in all of the behavioral systems and it actively participates in the configuration and redistribution of security and insecurity. What makes it different from Eros is the way it requires and exploits destruction. What makes it different from Thanatos is the way it can reduce entropy. But sometimes by increasing it. It seems to me to precede and then mediate the death and life drive split.

The remediation drive is natural. It is both aggressive and tender. Adaptive, but also easily hacked. It has to do with how we renegotiate the sensorial

registrations of being here. It reconfigures knowledge in love without hope. The remediation drive is how we manage to survive the difference between what we need and what we get. And to learn to live in time.

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If, as Ricoeur tells us, the work of art is both symptom and cure,¹⁹⁴ it starts to make sense that artists might have an ambivalent relationship with psychoanalysis. If you lose the symptom, you lose the cure; you lose the creativity. When Adorno writes that “artworks are not ‘Thematic Apperception Tests’ of their makers,”¹⁹⁵ he is speaking against diagnosis. But I think part of what we love about artworks is the way they diagnose us. When I talk with my patients about attachment directly, and sooner or later I always do, I never simply explain the various patterns. Instead, I always begin by describing scenes from the Strange Situation footage. Performing for them what the different infants do with their eyes, and arms, and bodies. And patients always immediately understand. And locate themselves there.

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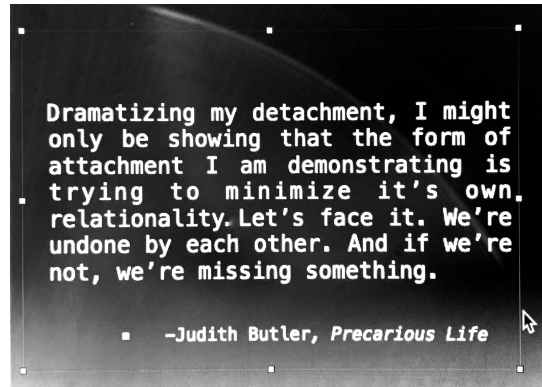
“Politics is also about redistributing insecurity, after all,” writes Berlant.¹⁹⁶ If politics is about ‘redistributing insecurity,’ and aesthetics is about the ‘distribution of the sensible,’ we can begin to consider the political aesthetics of attachment as a way to engage with how insecurity gets affectively codified, mediated, distributed.

¹⁹⁴ *Freud and Philosophy*, 174

¹⁹⁵ Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 9.

¹⁹⁶ Berlant, “The Commons: Infrastructures for Troubling Times,” 395.

Pattern recognition is endlessly compelling because it's what we have to do to survive. The more accurately we recognize patterns in ourselves and our environments, the more effectively we can affect it all. In this regard, theory is just a way to talk about the patterns we see and how they might matter. And the algorithmic object may be in the same remediation business as we are. Even if affect, by some definitions, resists quantification and any other fixed representation in the symbolic order, it has not been able to resist the reach of affective computing and surveillance capitalism.¹⁹⁷ It seems to me that affect wants to be registered and that all of us are already subscribed. Insecurity is a species characteristic, but it has also become a kind of commodity. Social media(tion) is a highly technical and thoroughly monetized kind of futures trading.



The algorithmic object is undoubtedly reconfiguring the planetary attachment milieu. And it could certainly be said to have a remediation drive too. We made it, after all, and it's nothing if not remediating us. We might wonder what forms of detachment the archive might furnish for modulating our proximity and overexposure to this object? Or is it a kind of attention, tending, or tenderness we

¹⁹⁷ I am thinking here of the rise of affective computing and the rise of companies such as Affectiva. See for example Kate Crawford's *Atlas of AI*, 151. Also see Jacob Johanssen's work on psychoanalysis and digital culture (2019).

need? To love our monster without hope?¹⁹⁸ In any case, if we need a word like the anthropocene for the way that human technologies are affecting geological time, we need a word for how the algorithmic object is affecting the planetary attachment apparatus, modulating the distribution of the sensible; coding, decoding, deciding what makes sense. *Sensus communis*.



Infants, like the rest of us, are only trying to make sense of things. What makes an object interesting, whether it's an empirical artifact or an artwork, is precisely its difficulty. It's hard to make sense of. It requests more attention. And affords it. Good artworks or scenes or archives, in other words, are also good obstacles. Footage of the Strange Situation Procedure is film, not fact, a transitional interface for remediating the affects of internal and external object-worlds. The archive of attachment research will not defeat the algorithmic object, but it could be an interface for helping us to live less insecurely together in the meantime.

“To talk about the senses,” writes Berlant, “is to involve oneself in a discussion of the optimism of attachment, the sociability of persons across things, spaces, and practices.”¹⁹⁹ The lost object remembers itself as form. As a kind of grammar of stuff at all scales. Not just patterns in how human bodies tend to gather, but part of the suturing across time of subjects, objects, affects, signals, senses, signs. If *theōria* is sight, spectation, spectacle, then our situation of primary

¹⁹⁸ The question of an aligned AGI is about how we participate in configuring the algorithmic object to have our best interests at heart. And human attachment will always be at the heart of our interest.

¹⁹⁹ Berlant, “Critical Inquiry, Affirmative Culture,” 447.

dependency in attachment is the site of our first speculations, our first attempts at any kind of social theorizing at all. What I have tried to say in all this is not exactly that everyone ought to study attachment but that in a sense and in their senses everyone already is.

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