

Temporality, Reproduction and the Not-Yet in Denis Villeneuve's *Arrival*

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Abstract:

The prolepsis in Denis Villeneuve's *Arrival* emphasises the cyclical nature of the film's narrative and anchors human reproduction as a central theme. Pregnancy, the pregnant body, and the physical, experiential nature of birth, commonly heavily gendered in film, are misleading focal points in the narrative. The presence of the unborn as a subtext in the film problematises Iris Marion Young's (2005) notion of pregnant embodiment as a subjective lived-body experience. The viewer is encouraged to empathise with the complexity of birth, life, and death as part of Louise's lived-body experience, but is finally confronted with the uncertainty of maternity, pregnancy and the unborn. When Barbara Duden (1992) calls the unborn foetus a "not-yet", she describes the process by which the foetus achieves a legal status, and the precarious nature of ascribing life or personhood. The prolepsis, which punctuates the main narrative, emphasises the reversibility and irreversibility of life that does "not-yet" exist. Importantly, the constant hovering over the threshold of life in the film complicates the timeline of reproduction. At the end of the film's narrative, the main character Louise Banks (Amy Adams), is "not-yet" pregnant, is "not-yet" a parent, and has "not-yet" lost a child. The temporal shifts in the film rely on repositioning or reorienting both Louise and the viewer to the "not-yet" reproductive body and the "not-yet" child. By presenting events out of chronological time and returning to the time before and after a child is born, the film ultimately raises crucial questions about the ethics of reproduction, the quality of life, and issues of consent.

Keywords: narrative; reproduction; pregnant embodiment; gender; maternity; foetus

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The film *Arrival* (Denis Villeneuve, 2016) complicates the notion of pregnant embodiment by presenting a “not-yet” born child who dies before conception, and a “not-yet” pregnant body. The film, therefore, raises important questions about pregnant embodiment as a subjective, gendered experience. Although reproduction appears in other Villeneuve films (*Enemy* [2013]; *Maelström* [2000]), pregnancy is much more of an integral theme and subtext in *Arrival*. The ellipsis that is created by the narrative structure challenges the viewer’s understanding of the lived-body experience of the main character Louise (Amy Adams) in relation to her daughter Hannah (Julia Scarlett Dan, Abigail Pniowsky, Jadyn Malone). The child’s life appears as a parallel narrative with fleeting shots and sequences as if they are Louise’s memories of the past whilst the relationship between mother and daughter is constructed so that the viewer is encouraged to believe in the existence of the yet-to-be-born child. The aliens’ concept of time is a recurrent motif, and we are encouraged to accept the changing timelines in the narrative, but it is the film’s narrative structure and corporeality that allows a rereading of temporality in relation to maternity and pregnancy. Although the film explores the ethics of language acquisition, translating the other, and the knowability of science, I argue that pregnant embodiment is ultimately thrown into question by the temporal re-ordering of the film’s narrative.

The film considers how Louise re-imagines time, but the language of the film remains linear in that it offers a vision of the past, present, and future. Gregory Currie (1992) suggests that the viewer does not have to experience a temporal shift in accordance with the anachrony of a film’s narrative, and that we do not need to think of filmic time as only in the present or even tensed. As Currie explains, “presentness within the story does not distinguish anything from anything else” (p. 350). He proposes that a more useful way to think through fictional narrative is by considering the temporal relations between events rather than temporality. Karen Barad (2012) suggests that understanding time depends on how we measure it, and she argues that we are constantly “reworking” the past, present and future as part of “*the making of temporality*” (p. 66, emphasis in original). Patricia Pisters (2012) contends that in the light of contemporary digital imagery, we need to understand how the future “cuts, assembles and orders” from the past and the present and she offers her post-Deleuzian notion of the “neuro-image” (p. 139) to articulate how the futural is visualised. The visual imagery in the film, however, is not complex, and my discussion lends itself to Daniel Frampton’s (2006) observation that “we remake the film via our concepts, and the film remakes our vision” (p. 163). Frampton argues that the viewer “see[s] filmically” as part of a combined, knowing, two-way

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encounter that results in a “*unique* third thought” (p. 163, emphasis in original). This is a helpful way to understand how the film engages each viewer to look beyond what is seen on the screen and beyond the (often gendered) notions of linear or cyclical temporalities.

Although Louise's future appears to be proscribed, the fact that the aliens tamper with the present suggests that the future in the film can be altered and this is reflected in the uncertainty around reproductive choice at the end of the film. Although we are encouraged to understand the aliens' different concept of time, the film is not told from their point of view. The film does not show time as the aliens see it – as happening simultaneously. The conceit of the narrative – that the past is a vision of the future – can only be understood by Louise and the viewer retrospectively, by re-ordering the narrative chronologically. Furthermore, Louise's ability to see into the future relies on her ability to communicate with the aliens which only becomes fully developed at the end of the film. The language of the aliens, Louise is told, “is free of time [and like their bodies] it has no forward or backward direction”. The aliens' own concept of time, however, is paradoxical. If they believe that the future is already determined, then there is no need for them to appear on Earth. When they offer the “gift” of their language, they explain that they need help in three thousand years' time, not in the present. The fact that they understand time as linear and fixed as well as simultaneous suggests that they can function within dimensions of time that appear to be in opposition. That their language and bodies are free of time, however, does not necessarily mean that they are suspended in time or have no concept of the embodied thresholds between the past and the future.

It is crucial to understand that the film exudes embodiment and encourages the viewer to be aware of how the body and the senses are being challenged. The viewer is drawn into the film as it encouraged them to peer into the spacecraft and at the embodied changes of the characters. The sliding bass tone of the soundtrack fades in and out of time with the movement of the camera as it follows the characters up into the spacecraft on a huge industrial lift. This bass tone, accompanied by plucked strings preceding the alien's first appearance as finger-like creatures, appears to overwhelm the characters and make them physically reel. The altered state of gravity also takes the characters' feet from under them as they enter the spaceship where their bodies become increasingly weightless. The changing perspective means that the viewer's point of view is flipped upside down as the framing shifts and the characters are seen to be floating upwards in the frame towards the interior of the spacecraft and then appear to be walk across the ceiling (Figure 1). This provides a visual counterpoint to the physicality of their bodies in their space suits as they



Figure 1. In a wide shot, the characters appear to be walking across the ceiling of the spacecraft.

walk slowly and deliberately and have difficulty breathing through their masks when on the ground. The huge size of the spaceship dwarfs the surrounding landscape but appears weightless hanging in the sky just above the ground. When added to the extreme darkness of the film's visual style and melancholic soundtrack, the film creates a mood that is unnerving, intimate, and sombre. As the effect of physical changes on each character is central to the film's narrative, I suggest that, given the central theme is reproduction, the film is marked by the apparent absence of pregnancy and pregnant embodiment.

Pregnant embodiment

Pregnant embodiment is not crucial to the plot of the film or to the narrative, but it anchors temporal boundaries within the film. The threshold of life and death is continually crossed as each time Louise "sees" Hannah, she does not exist. Pregnant embodiment, as Iris Marion Young (2005) explains, means the pregnant subject is "decentred, split, or doubled" (p. 46). In the context of this film, pregnant embodiment is split and decentred, because it is both understood to have happened and "not-yet" happened to Louise's body. Louise does not have a subjective experience of pregnancy in the film, at least not one to which we are privy. Things happen to her body and her temporal understanding, but there is no indication that she has experienced pregnant embodiment. Any pregnancy, whether it is understood as past, present, or future, takes place off-screen, but it is fundamental to how the spectator understands the temporal ellipsis.

The positioning of the viewer in relation to pregnancy and reproduction does two things, it encourages them to read Louise as maternal, and reproduction as transient and cyclical. The cyclical nature of the narrative, however, means that the female character cannot be read as maternal without considering the implications of the absence of maternity. Placing pregnancy and the growth of the child in a temporal ellipsis unravels the representation of the maternal body and pregnant embodiment.

Although pregnant embodiment is most frequently understood as a lived-body experience that exists as a response to the presence of the foetus, Young argues that pregnancy is commonly understood as belonging to the foetus rather than the pregnant woman. It is pregnancy, she argues, that is considered as “a state for the developing foetus, for which the woman is a container” and that this is, in part, a result of pregnancy becoming a medically “objective, observable process” (p. 46). Importantly, the separation of bodies, she argues, silences the subjective experience of pregnant embodiment and removes not only the individual woman, but any pregnant woman. This challenges how we understand pregnancy as gendered, when gendering is socially and culturally ascribed to the individual and suggests an un-coupling of gender from pregnancy when it is separated from the body. Young is one of many scholars discussing pregnant embodiment and the separation of the foetus and there has been increasing amounts of scholarship engaging with the impact that visualising and reproductive technologies has on our understanding of pregnancy and reproduction (Hartouni, 1997; Lam, 2016; Mitchell, 2001; Petchesky, 1987; Roberts, 2012; Sandelowski, 1994; Taylor, 2008; van Dijck, 2005). But, it is to Barbara Duden (1992) that I turn to begin a conversation on pregnant embodiment and the unborn. She introduces the term “not-yet” to describe the complex historical, cultural, social, and legal status of the foetus where it is, on the one hand, understood as part of the woman’s body, and, on the other hand, as separate from the pregnant body. Her discussion speaks to the way the embodied sensations of pregnancy have been replaced by medical verification whereby quickening, as a subjective embodied sensation known only to the pregnant person, has been replaced by foetal status and that this status is dependent on having, or “not-yet” having, personhood.

Because the foetus *in utero* is not dead and is not alive, Duden says that the unborn “is never there with certainty. In spite of many signs and intimations of its presence, one can never be sure about it” (1992, p. 9). There is no assurance that it can survive outside of the body so Duden suggests it is “a ‘not-yet’ [with] a peculiar temporal dimension” (p. 10) whilst it remains inside the body. In the film, the spectator is encouraged to believe in Hannah’s existence but, viewed differently, Hannah exists in

the temporal space of the unborn: she is neither alive nor dead. Importantly, her life is shown in moving not static images; she is not embalmed in the photograph, nor is she shown as alive, but lifeless. This means that the question of foetal personhood, central to any discussion on reproductive rights, also applies to the conceptualisation of “life”, or of “a child” as it appears in the film. The constantly moving threshold that marks foetal viability or vitality, inextricably linked to the history of the female reproductive body as Duden points out, is challenged by the presence of Hannah. As she exists in the film as a conceptualisation of a child, any embodied link to Louise remains complicated. Crucially, the film places Hannah in Louise’s future which means that she is not an imaginary child created in the present. There is no evidence that Louise is preoccupied with pregnancy or with having a child. This suggests that pregnancy in the narrative of the film is outside of her individual understanding and something other than gendered.

Louise’s presumed pregnant embodiment, whether seen or not, encourages the viewer to believe that the lived-body experience of pregnancy exists in the film and that her experience as a biological mother, as represented in the film, is an expression of her maternal subjectivity. As the “not-yet” is crucial to the resonant denouement of the film, I suggest that the viewer is encouraged to doubt this maternal subjectivity and their own subjectivity in relation to the unborn and the “not-yet” maternal. Imogen Tyler (2000) (agreeing with Battersby, 1998), explains that pregnant embodiment is not only an actual subjective lived-body experience, but also an embodied potential and argues that we should be conscious of multiple subjectivities rather than just one individual. She cautions against exploring pregnant embodiment only as sex-specific as she believes that this discussion returns to questions of sexual difference. Her point is that although sexual difference is important, it should not distract from other ways of understanding pregnant embodiment. Pregnant embodiment is felt not only by the pregnant individual but also shared by others who feel it as part of another person’s body or through an emotional connection. This problematises individual gendered subjectivity and demands a rethinking in the light of scholarly discussion on feminist materialisms (Barad, 2012, 2007; Braidotti, 1994; Dolphijn & van der Tuin, 2012; van der Tuin, 2011) which encourages diffracted critical thinking that engages with the multiplicity and differences of bodies.

Tyler argues that being pregnant is not a metaphor, it is a lived-body experience that has a transitional and transient subjectivity. She argues that we must “reclaim pregnancy as a transient subjectivity by reframing pregnant women as the active subjects of their own gestation”

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(2000, p. 292). She proffers that, when pregnant, she is (quoting from Irigaray, 1985, p. 26) “neither one nor two [who] resists all adequate definition”, adding that she is, “philosophically, a freak” (2000, p. 290). This, Tyler suggests, is difficult to reconcile with philosophical notions of the self as individual. Importantly, Tyler argues that thinking about pregnant embodiment philosophically must include the implications for non-pregnant bodies. I agree that returning to questions of sexual difference encourages an analysis that presumes gendered embodiment and does not tackle the nuances of gendered potentiality where women (and female characters) are understood in relation to maternity because they possess a female reproductive body. Inasmuch as male/female gender definition cannot be presumed or assumed, I believe the film offers another way of thinking through gendered embodiment. It is too simplistic to understand Louise's character development as maternal without considering how the narrative structure and corporeality of the film upends the way we understand her embodied subjectivity in relation to reproduction.

Lisa Baraitser (2014) says that understanding reproduction and non-reproduction as temporal can help to understand the dynamic of “stilled” or “stalled time” as “time that refuses to flow” (p. 1). She argues that temporality is always thought of in terms of a linear progression to the future which is defined not only by dominant cultural narratives linked to social and economic specificity, but also by markers of time that bring people together such as birth and death. Baraitser (referring to Edelman's [2004] notion of “no future”), suggests that we must rethink many timelines including reproduction and birth, hinting to the possibility of a significant move away from “the fantasy of an unfolding future held in place by heteronormative familial trajectories [...] as a dominant cultural narrative” (2014, p. 2). The “infinitely expanding present” (2014, p. 3), Baraitser suggests, is not time that is incapable of change or movement because it appears to have stopped – waiting for birth or living with the memory of a deceased loved one – but is an expression of the dynamic flow of time. This means that there is always a deferred affectivity, a “not yet” that signals a rethinking, Baraitser suggests, of the subjective timelessness in relation to death and reproduction.

In the film, reproduction is established quickly as Louise is seen in a bed with a new-born baby and this contrasts with the gradual changes in embodiment that she experiences throughout the film as she is exposed to extreme environmental changes in the alien ship and to visions of her future life, and of the aliens. The physical effects on Louise punctuate the narrative so that when the narrative returns to what we understand as

the present, this birth scene must be re-evaluated. Young argues that “pregnant existence entails, finally, a unique temporality of process and growth in which the woman can experience herself as split between the past and the future” (2005, p. 47). This splitting and doubling relates to the embodied state of pregnancy as it is experienced by the pregnant person, but in the film, as I have said, it is pregnant embodiment that is split and decentred. The spectator must believe that pregnancy has happened to the body even if, narratively, pregnancy has “not-yet” happened and the foetus does not exist.

Pregnant embodiment in the film is assigned to Louise by her maternal representation but there is no evidence that Louise wants a child or thinks about having a child. Although the lived-body experiences of “circumstantial childlessness” (Cannold, 2000; Tonkin, 2017) may involve the presence of an imagined unborn child, that is not what is happening in this film. Seeing herself with Hannah does not make any sense to Louise. Importantly, it is over half-way through the film that Louise, after seeing herself with a baby, then a child and an adolescent, says to the aliens, “I don’t understand, who is this child?” This moment in the narrative confounds any notion the viewer might have had that Louise was ever pregnant and they are left to ponder the fact that Louise is “not-yet” a parent to and has “not-yet” been pregnant with, Hannah. Her subjectivity, then, must be questioned and her representation demands another frame of reference. Kate Ince (2017), writing about contemporary women filmmakers, explains that Laura Mulvey (1975) and Teresa de Lauretis (1984) argued for alternative frames of reference beyond the positioning of the male subject to the female object and Ince suggests that more scholarship is needed to address questions of embodied female subjectivity that is grounded, as hers is, in a “feminist ethic of embodiment” (p. 22). Lucy Bolton (2015) talks about “female consciousness” as a way to circumnavigate subjectivity. In her discussion on women filmmakers, Bolton explains that the films that she refers to do “something different with female subjectivity [to offer an] alternative way of being for women in the cinema” (p. 3). She suggests that they engage with female interiority rather than female physicality to allow the spectator to engage more directly with the female character. Whilst *Arrival* does deal with Louise’s consciousness and interiority, she has neither control of her visions nor her embodied response so that her subjective experience is one of confusion rather than maternity.

Insofar as the film lands on questions of subjectivity and embodiment, it can only be read as such after repeated viewings. As Laura Mulvey (2006) suggests, it is only by stopping and starting a film repeatedly that the detail within the film’s corporeality can be seen. It is almost

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impossible to register the detail of each shot and to discuss what the film does when it shows Hannah unless there is a constant freezing of the frame. Reading this film, therefore, unearths the tensions between the text that is seen on first view of the film and the meaning that can be read into it through repeated viewings. By slowing down any film and investigating its corporeality, Mulvey suggests, one can find “something extra and unexpected, a deferred meaning, to the story’s narration” (2006, p. 151). Analysing what *Arrival* does with time is only possible when the narrative of the film is slowed so that, as Mulvey explains, “time itself becomes palpable” (p. 150) and depends on the pensively engaged spectator who will accept, as Mulvey says, that “narrative has its own temporality” (183). Although narrative detail in the film remains in the diegetic present, the reveal at the end of the film, that the intense embodied experiences of Louise and Hannah only exist in the future, may change how the viewer understands the affective quality of their own spectatorial encounter. As Steven Shaviro (1993) suggests, an embodied spectatorship depends on “sympathetic participation” or “complicitous communication” where the spectator is “touched” (p. 53) by what is happening to the protagonist rather than identifying with them. Vivian Sobchack (2004) suggests embodied spectatorship can be thought of as “interobjectivity”, where the lived-body is “at once, both an objective *subject* and a subjective *object* [...] that literally and figurally makes sense of, and to, both ourselves and others” (p. 2, emphasis in original). Although there is no way to second guess how the film makes each spectator feel, the way that the film engages the viewer through its narrative structure places ethical thinking about reproduction at the heart of the viewer’s experience.

Do you want to make a baby?

As I have already said, pregnant embodiment is not only something that the pregnant person experiences subjectively, it is a state which encourages multiple subjectivities. This is the beginning of Ian’s (Jeremy Renner) reproductive story and when Ian finds out that Louise has always known that their daughter would die, he leaves her. When Judith Butler (2004) asks the question “what makes for a grievable life?” she does so in relation to global violence and her enquiry is philosophical and political, but her provocation “who counts as human?” and “whose lives count as lives?” and what is an “ungrievable life” (p. 20) is central to the narrative of this film. As Butler explains,

we have ongoing debates about whether the fetus should count as life, or a life, or a human life; we have further debates about conception and what constitutes the first moments of a living organism; we have debates about

what constitutes death [that involve] contested notions of personhood and, implicitly, questions regarding the “human animal” and how that conjunctive (and chiasmic) existence is to be understood. (2016, p. 7)

She suggests that any discussion based on personhood as a marker of life, whether limited to the foetus or not, is not sustainable as it is based on the creation of an individual. She argues that this restricts the debate “not only to a moral domain, but to an ontology of individualism” (p. 19) which is at odds with the necessary interdependent social and environmental conditions needed for life. Kate Greasley (2017) adds that, “given the deep-rooted nature of disagreement about our own metaphysics, it is hardly surprising that disagreement about [foetal] personhood at the beginning of life is so intractable” (p. 106). This discussion and Butler’s argument is much broader and more complex than this, and I am not suggesting that the film has a political message, but it does speak to the ethical (rather than moral) dimension to birth and death as it is encapsulated in the film. Although Louise is in a constant state of “not-yet” being pregnant, “not-yet” having a child, she grieves in the present for the unfolding future in which she loses both her child and her relationship. There is no evidence in the film that Louise takes any moral stand on consent for conception. It appears, however, that she does not tell Ian what will happen to their daughter. In his agreement to – in fact his desire to – make a baby, he is, nevertheless, complicit in whatever occurs in their future, even if he is not aware of his future daughter’s early death.

Because of the way the film is structured, the narrative appears unreliable in that it describes a grief that will only occur in the future. The cyclical narrative provokes the viewer to consider their own attitude to death before life by ending the film at the beginning of the story. In a film about time, the symmetry of the opening and closing scenes is important to the corporeality of the film. The intention is to blur time so that each character is implicated in their interlocking future. It appears that Louise enters into an agreement with Ian, in present time, to have a child that she knows will contract an illness from which it will die. This suggests that Ian cannot see into the future in the way Louise can. Viewed differently, the final sequence presents a more complex analysis. Ian and Louise have both been exposed to the aliens so it is not outside the reasoning of the film to suppose he might develop an image of the future as well. It is not clear what, if any, notion of the future has been presented to Ian. The events come in quick succession and the viewer is led to think that Louise narrates the film in chronological order. Her voice-over, however, appears to take place after the aliens have left and Ian has accompanied

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Figure 2. Ian looks Hannah in the eye and smiles.



Figure 3. Louise smiles and cradles Hannah as she sleeps.

Louise to her house and is divided between the opening four minutes of the film and the closing five minutes. The dialogue and the visuals that we are encouraged to think of as in the present (i.e., not in Louise and Ian's future) take up approximately three minutes of filmic time. This is a crucial point to note as it is in this short space of time that the film appears to ask, but does not answer, the question of consent to conception.

Consent is not what the film is about, but it is this question that remains at the end of the film. The viewer is not an uninformed bystander, and this final sequence is an implicit provocation. The “not-yet” is not only a description of the elasticity of time or of the unfolding of affect, it also describes the un-born-ness of the foetus and the threshold of meaningful life. In the final sequence the pleasure on Ian's face when he holds Hannah (Figure 2) echoes that of Louise from the beginning of the film (Figure 3). The matching shots lead us to believe that neither character knows the fate of their daughter. Both images are part of the future that has been unfolding with ever more clarity for Louise.

If Louise is seeing her future, the implication is that the decision about conception has already been made with the consent of both characters, but the time-frame of the moment of conception remains blurred enough to allow the viewer to question Louise's motives.

When Louise says, "so, Hannah, this is where your story begins. The day they departed", there are only three minutes of the film left but the narrative in this final sequence is full of ambiguity. The visual of Louise's home with a slow tilt from the ceiling to the floor-to-ceiling glass window, that frames the lake outside, matches the opening shot of the film. It is not clear at first if we are just seeing the same shot in the same location at the same time until we see a silhouetted figure outside the window. It is only when Louise knocks on the window and beckons the person inside that the parallel, repeated narrative of Louise and Hannah continues, and now includes Ian. In the parallel narrative, Ian is introduced by his voice, "you ready, babe?", then his hand touches Louise's shoulder, gold band showing, and he enters the frame in a two-shot with Louise in what we now understand is the future. This two-shot appears with less than two minutes of filmic time left. The camera cuts to close-up of Hannah who says, "Daddy". There is now no doubt that Ian is presented as the father and he appears in three sequences: in a close-up beside Hannah in their future; in a close-up beside Louise, as the aliens are leaving, in their past; and in the present in a long shot, outside the house, as a silhouette, beckoned by Louise, that then cuts to a close-up tracking shot of Louise in her home as they dance. The moment that joins these narratives together is the imperceptible cut from Ian and Louise embracing as the aliens leave, to their matching embrace in a slow dance in her home. The different timelines are now running in parallel, but it is not completely clear how much of what the viewer sees is from Louise's point of view. This is where the viewer is encouraged to consider the dramatic irony of their own point of view, which appears to be aligned with that of Louise. With so much narrative information appearing in the final few minutes of the film, the viewer is encouraged to consider whether Louise is choosing her and Ian's future or whether their embodied futures are already written in time. The film does not make this clear.

Ian is an essential part of pregnant embodiment as he is set up as the biological father of the child and his character is subtly used throughout the cyclical narrative as a voice or the person who appears before or after Louise "sees" Hannah. Ian interrupts Louise with the sound of his voice or by touching her lightly, putting his hand on her shoulder, or holding her. His body is, therefore, used as a narrative bridge. This foreshadows the relationship between the two characters and the intensity of their physical relationship that will result in a child. There is no indication in

the narrative, however, that he imagines a future pregnancy or a future child until he suggests to Louise "do you want to make a baby?" It is important to note that there is about fifteen minutes of filmic time between Louise asking the aliens "who is this child?", to Ian's suggestion that they make a baby, which is in the final two minutes of the film. Pregnant embodiment is implicit here. Yet, there is an equivalence that is not the subjective experience of pregnant embodiment. The juxtapositioning of the matching visuals of Louise and Ian embracing bridges the moments of consent and conception. In other words, conception, the beginning of pregnant embodiment, exists in the final sequence but as something that has "not-yet" happened. It is not clear if we are moving back in time to the future as their dance appears to be part of the present in the narrative, which is in Louise's house after the aliens have gone. A glimpse of a ring on Louise's left hand as she dances with Ian suggests that these two scenes are not sequential and there is a greater temporal ellipse between them meaning that the end shot of the film, as Louise and Ian embrace as the aliens leave, is their present. This ellipsis underlines how the film continues to rework temporality to create uncertainty in the narrative.

The prolepsis, which bookends the main narrative and wrongfoots the viewer, baffles Louise who cannot understand the vision-like sequences of a child that invade her consciousness. When Louise is first seen as post-partum (just given birth), she is in a room where she is holding, stroking, and smiling at a baby. The close framing allows the viewer to see what is happening but keeps them at a distance by limiting the view of the room. There is no establishing shot, but there are suggestions of a relationship as we see another unidentified person in silhouette. There is evidence of a marriage with rapid close-ups of a gold ring on Louise's ring finger and on the silhouetted figure. This scene establishes quickly and aesthetically a traditional, biological mother. It is not clear whether the unidentified person is the father, a friend, or medic. From here, a montage shows a progression from the baby to a young girl to a dying adolescent. This sequence is from Louise's future as, in the plot of the film, she is "not-yet" pregnant, she is "not-yet" with the biological father, her daughter is "not-yet" conceived so can not-yet die. But, this opening sequence influences the way we understand Louise throughout the narrative in the present of filmic time. The viewer is encouraged to "see" Louise's character as a mother, as a grieving mother, and therefore "see" her character not as she is but as something she has only the potential to become at the end of the film. This appears at first screening, I suggest, to be a clunky and slightly over-laboured backstory to the main character Louise. We are, however, being set up as viewers to



Figure 4. The camera pivots to the left, following Hannah.

assume pregnant embodiment. This is done by conceptualising Hannah as a “child”.

Hannah is from Louise and Ian’s future. She is “not-yet” alive. It is important, however, for the viewer to believe that she is alive and has died and one of the ways the film does this is to orientate the viewer around the figure of Hannah as child. Not only is Louise becoming a “mother” in the eyes of the viewer, Hannah is also becoming a “child”. The more we see of Hannah, the more we recognise her as “child”. But, she does not exist. Louise and Hannah are both in the process of becoming parent and child. In child development, Emma Uprichard (2008) says that the process of “being” a child always involves “becoming the adult” where the “will-be” is more important than the “is” (p. 304). Hannah is growing up and becoming an adult but the becoming ends in adolescence so she is in a constant state of “not-yet” being born, not-yet “being” a child, but, nevertheless, dying. The importance of orientating the viewer in relation to Hannah is clearly shown in the sequence where Hannah and Louise play outdoors. Hannah is seen from Louise’s point of view and Louise from Hannah’s point of view. There is a subtle change in these points of view as the camera follows Hannah, who is, at first, in the centre of the frame in an out-of-focus long shot. As the camera moves closer and the framing tightens, Hannah remains at the centre of the frame and becomes more distinguishable. The camera pivots to the left (Figure 4) to follow Hannah running as Louise (now out of focus) moves out of the frame. Then the camera follows Hannah to the right (Figure 5) as she moves away from Louise. Finally, Louise remains in the centre frame in a mid-close-up, but as part of a long shot whose subject is Hannah. The viewer must look beyond Louise to Hannah, who is in the distance but prioritised in the frame. Louise’s head then bows into the frame to cover Hannah from view. This encourages the viewer to invest in each

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Figure 5. The camera pivots to the right, following Hannah.

character's point of view by sharing the intimacy of this moment. This shared intimacy is strongly reinforced later in the narrative when Hannah is shown as a young girl, lying down, facing the camera, in soft-light, saying "I love you" and followed by a head-shot of an adolescent Hannah in harsh hospital lights screaming "I hate you". Hannah's dialogue is directed at Louise, but her eye-line, looking out of the frame towards the audience, is designed to provoke a reaction from the viewer. It is as if she is shouting at us. Our subjectivity is important, our multiple subjectivities. It is crucial that we have a vested interest in Hannah as someone who exists.

One of the moments that Louise "feels" then sees Hannah is when she begins to decipher the aliens writing (or figures of expression) almost half-way through the film. Bent over the large format figures, she lays the document in front of her, takes a ruler, and scores the figures. It is at this moment that she "hears" something then "sees" or "feels" the presence of the young child. Because of the opening sequence, the audience is encouraged to believe that this is a flashback, an analepsis, where Louise watches her child, the child who dies in the opening sequence. Importantly, we can understand that she "feels" something. Her body stops and she bends over as if in pain or dizziness. This, I suggest, is a moment of embodied change. Whilst not necessarily a moment of pregnant embodiment, the juxtapositioning with images of Hannah suggests it includes pregnant embodiment. The temporal ellipsis means that pregnancy and pregnant embodiment is assumed between the moment of Louise's embodied "feeling" and the sequence of their conversation. Importantly, the spectator now has an extended view of Hannah. The mid-close-up on Hannah (Figure 6) shows the texture of her hair, woven into plaits, the texture of her dress, the pencil cases and bag on the table, and the out-of-focus landscape in the background. The child is being conceptualised through the aesthetic of the film. Matching



Figure 6. Hannah is seen in close-up as she listens to Louise talking.



Figure 7. Hannah responds physically to Louise's touch by closing her eyes.

eye-lines and point-of-view shots establish the close relationship between Louise and Hannah. Importantly, the detailed side-shots of Hannah demonstrate that she is being conceptualised for the viewer.

Hannah is given a physicality, an aliveness, as she is seen running, painting, drawing, and shouting, which presupposes an active body, one that is engaged with the environment and with the people around her. This is coupled with the physicality Hannah experiences when she is with Ian and Louise. Hannah's body is held, her hair is stroked, she is picked up, her hand is held, and she responds to having her hair stroked by closing her eyes (Figure 7). She has a physical presence within the diegesis of the film that is emphasised by the corporeality of the film as she takes up more filmic time. Earlier in the film, Hannah is seen as if in a flowing or ebbing consciousness that might be memory and this is shown in soft-focus shots, at canted angles in the frame, and as an unrecognisable silhouette. This gives the appearance that Hannah is appearing through the movement of time, in the way memories resurface repetitively. Importantly, it is Louise's body that anchors the narrative so that although time is re-ordered, it appears linear. It is this grounding of

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Louise's character and physicality that allows Hannah's character to be read as a memory.

Although Louise's embodiment is crucial to the narrative, I suggest some caution with the temptation to apportion her embodied changes to pregnant embodiment. Louise experiences intense changes to her embodiment as an integral part of the film. She is doubled up, bending forward, before she "sees" Hannah and this could be read as mimicking a contraction or foreshadowing the deliberate movements of the heavily pregnant person. Again, when she revisits the alien spacecraft alone, she appears as if she is underwater with her eyes barely open and her hair flailing slowly around her head. In another context, her embodied experience at this point could be described as embryonic. It must be remembered, however, that embodied experiences are part of the aesthetic of the film. Before she ever "sees" Hannah, Louise's hands shake, it is through her hands and fingertips that she absorbs the language of the aliens, she feels faint while breathing through an oxygen mask in her spacesuit, she floats upwards and is thrown sideways by altered gravity and the atmosphere of the space ship. Ian also experiences strong embodied reaction. He stumbles when he first leaves the astronauts' cage, falling upwards in the altered gravity. He then vomits into a bin when he enters the changing room on his return to the solid terrestrial surface of the ground. It could be argued that Ian is similarly experiencing something of pregnant embodiment. As the two characters are so intimately linked through the corporeality of the film, and through their future reproductive bodies, perhaps they are both capable of experiencing pregnancy. As pregnancy is absent as embodiment in the present for both characters, we cannot dismiss this equivalence and potential un-gendering of pregnant embodiment.

The film implies, through its narrative construction and aesthetics, that pregnancy and pregnant embodiment "exist" in the narrative whether they are experienced as something that happens to the body or not. This raises important questions about how pregnant embodiment can be understood as a subjective experience. When is pregnant embodiment felt? Is it an individual state that no-one else can share? Or is it that we experience life as a collection of embodied experiences? Embodiment is a subjective experience and is inherent in our understanding of spectatorship. The images in the film are not presented as complex mental landscapes, but the film encourages a conceptual understanding of time and reproduction. The viewer knows that the child has died from the beginning, but it is not until the final ten minutes, in the narrative turning point that resolves the film, that they realise that the child has "not yet" been born. At the end of filmic time, the foetus is not alive,

it is “not-yet” conceived, “not-yet” developed, and “not-yet-born”. Louise is also “not-yet” pregnant, “not-yet” a parent, and has “not-yet” lost a child. Louise, however, must be understood as a person who is not pregnant at the end of the film. The subjective experience of pregnant embodiment is not only in the subjective “now-ness” of pregnancy and maternity, it also exists in the “not-yet” or “not-ever”. Thinking of pregnant embodiment as temporal in the narrative means including, as Tyler suggests we should, the non-pregnant. One of the questions that the film provokes is, should Louise knowingly give birth to someone who will die? Given the fact that this is inherent in all human reproduction, I suggest that the ending of the film, where the moment of consent is undetermined, presents us with ethical rather than moral questions about the worth of life and consent for conception. My reading of the film encourages us to think differently about pregnancy and pregnant embodiment so that we are not so distracted by notions of maternity and motherhood that we fail to “see” pregnancy and only “see” it on-screen when it is visible to us as a body or is explicit in an embodied state within the narrative and then only as it relates to the characterisation of the woman. I am not suggesting that the film knowingly presents the ethics of reproduction as its main aim, but I do argue for its central importance. Moreover, as there is very little film scholarship that engages with contemporary issues of reproduction that are distinct from female subjectivity or representation, this article highlights the pressing need for a more complex discussion on the ethics of pregnancy, reproduction, and reproductive rights.

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