

Moving Rhizomatically:
Deleuze's Child in Twenty-First Century American Literature and Film

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THE GROWNUP

All this stood upon her and was the world
and stood upon her with all its fear and grace
as trees stand, growing straight up, imageless
yet wholly image, like the Ark of God,
and solemn, as if imposed upon a race.

And she endured it all: bore up under
the swift-as-flight, the fleeting, the far-gone,
the inconceivably vast, the still-to-learn,
serenely as a woman carrying water
moves with a full jug. Till in the midst of play,
transfiguring and preparing for the future,
the first white veil descended, gliding softly
over her opened face, almost opaque there,
never to be lifted off again, and somehow
giving to all her questions just one answer:
in you, who were a child once—in you.

Rainer Maria Rilke, trans. Stephen Mitchell

For Paul,

In mysterium potentia est

Abstract

My dissertation critiques Western culture's vertical command of "growing up" to adult completion (rational, heterosexual, married, wealthy, professionally successful) as a reductionist itinerary of human movement leading to subjective sedimentations. Rather, my project proposes ways of "moving rhizomatically" by which it advances a notion of a machinic identity that moves continuously, contingently, and waywardly along less vertical, less excruciating and more horizontal, life-affirmative trails. To this end, my thesis proposes a "rhizomatic semiosis" as extrapolated from the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari to put forward a notion of language and, by implication, subjectivity, as dynamic and metamorphic. Rather than trying to figure out who the child is or what it experiences consciously, my project wishes to embrace an *elusiveness* at the heart of subjectivity to argue for continued identity creation beyond the apparently confining parameters of adulthood. This dissertation, then, is about the need to re-examine our ways of growing beyond the lines of teleological progression. By turning to Deleuze's child, an intangible one that "makes desperate attempts to carry out a performance that the psychoanalyst totally misconstrues" (*A Thousand Plateaus* 13), I wish to shift focus away from the hierarchical, binary, and ideal model of "growing up" and toward a notion of movement that makes way for plural identities in their becoming. This endeavour reveals itself in particular in the work of John Wray, Todd Field, Peter Cameron, Sara Pritchard, Michael Cunningham, and Cormac McCarthy, whose work has received little or no attention at all—a lacuna in research that exists perhaps due to these artists' innovative approach to a minor literature that promotes the notion of a machinic self and questions the dominant modes of Western culture's literature for, around, and of children.

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—Introduction—

Toward Different Modes of Growing: Moving Rhizomatically

I believe children are our future.

—Whitney Houston, “Greatest Love of All”

On the subject of children we are very deeply confused.

—George Bernard Shaw, *A Treatise on Parents and Children*

A rhizome has no beginning or end: it is always in the middle,

between things, interbeing, intermezzo . . .

—Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand*

Plateaus

That “the child” is a blind spot, a mystery at once strangely familiar and yet elusively unrepresentable, constitutes a secret whispered amongst scholars in the fairly recent field of childhood studies.¹ In 2000, Rutgers University at Camden founded its Centre for Children and Childhood Studies, followed by its introduction of the first American doctoral-degree program in the field of Childhood Studies in 2007. The Centre’s launch of its annual series of international graduate conferences in 2009 continues academic studies of “the child,” which, perhaps, began with the establishment of the Children’s Literature Association in 1973 and

¹ See also Honeyman 2, 9.

the vast proliferation of academic journals and literary entries on children and their literature since the last quarter of the twentieth century.²

Indeed, “the child” was at the centre of twentieth-century discourse, as predicted by Ellen Kay in as early as 1909. That “the child,” as we in the twenty-first century pervasively know it, is a product of the Romantics has been largely theorized by childhood historians such as Philippe Ariès, whose *Centuries of Childhood* has become a seminal text for childhood studies. No longer conceived of as deficient little adults, children received philosophical attention by John Locke whose idea of “the child” as a *tabula rasa* predominantly confirms adult rationalism and enlightenment. His conception of the child contrasts with the one by Jean-Jacques Rousseau toward the later half of the eighteenth century, who, in his imaginary pupil Emile, sets off the child against the influences of an adult world in order to bring out the child’s own capabilities (119, 281).³ However, Rousseau’s perspective on the child and Rousseau’s educational endeavour rest on adult observations and prescriptions that come to chronicle childhood. Writes Frances Ferguson, “Rousseau’s attempts to see children and to see them clearly also involved segmenting the time of their lives into a series of stages and treating those stages as if they could be coherently described and predicted. The time of childhood, that is, became a space, and

² See *Center for Children and Childhood Studies*. Children’s Literature Association is a pan-American organization on publications, conferences, scholarships, awards, and professional opportunities in the field of children’s literature. For more details, see their website *Children’s Literature Association*. Also, see, the list of journals and associations posted on the Rutgers website *Center for Children and Childhood Studies*.

³ See also Honeyman 96. In the context of child development, she points to two contradictory linear trajectories that refer back to the opposing views of Locke and Rousseau: developmental recapitulation, a biological development of the inferior, primitive, savage-child toward the ideal of adult rationality via education, and romantic neoteny, that is the already advanced child as being corrupted by progressing socialization. Honeyman views the latter as being predominant in American fiction. See especially Chapter Four in *Elusive Childhood*.

children came to have their own institutions and live in a world apart from adults” (216).⁴

Rousseau’s child, then, becomes an object of study in separation from the adult and with a life that occurs along a chronological progression towards adulthood. It is here that one may speak of the birth of the enlightenment politics surrounding Western culture’s imperative of “growing up” to adult completion.

The Romantics take up Rousseau’s child within a religious context and add the concepts of innocence and divine bliss. William Wordsworth sings of the redemptive and holy child in his lyrical ballads, Thomas Day worships children as the core of Christianity, and Anna Laetitia Barbauld begins to devise literature geared toward the age-specific stages of childhood (215). According to Ariès, the nuclear and private family—a concept, which emerges in response to eighteenth-century industrialization and discourses of morality (353, 398-406)—further adopts the image of the innocent child, which serves as a holy centre around which the family now organizes itself. In the Victorian age, the child is then given the status of a fully-fledged human subject with thinkers and writers such as Charles Dickens and Mark Twain dedicating entire novels to children and titling their work with the first and surname of their child protagonists. Dickens, in particular, sees the child as a figure to mirror social ills. According to critic James Kincaid, toward the end of the nineteenth century, as a result of the simultaneous emergence of the child as a subject in its own right and the discourses on sexuality, the innocent child is now able to be “sexualized” (15-16). The fin-de-siècle, therefore, is the era when the concept of paedophilia arises, raising public concern about the physical and mental well-being of the child,⁵ and when the sexual and innocent

⁴ I will address this issue of space in connection to the child in my initial chapter on John Wray’s *Lowboy*.

⁵ Lewis Carroll, author of *Alice in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking Glass*, for instance, was accused of paedophilia. Biographers, however, call him a celibate paedophile obviously

child makes it into the emerging and expanding psychological discourses only famously to appear in the work of Sigmund Freud at the early beginning of the twentieth century as both a sexual and latent child, that is, a sexually dormant child after the age of five until puberty that hitherto sublimates its sexuality into other activities (16).⁶

According to Virginia Blum, “the child” of the twentieth century finds its *raison-d’être* in particular in the discourse of psychoanalysis (23-34). Sigmund Freud, whose work appears to be devoted to the adult, then, perhaps studied nothing but the child—a polymorphous one, whose sexuality is taken away only to be processed by an Oedipal straightjacket that channels desire into adult heterosexual personhood, producing dissident and perverted forms of sexuality along with adult neuroses and psychoses.⁷ Psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan continues to construct a child, toward the middle of the twentieth century, which no longer depends on a material father to experience a threat of castration but on the law-bearing words of the father that bring about the child’s symbolic castration. The child learns that it cannot fulfil its mother’s desires located elsewhere, and it is torn from its imaginary union with its mother and given language to articulate its loss. The child thus ascends to a subject position within language driven by loss, anxiety, and the consequent desire for a never to be accomplished completion of its self. The child’s castration, then, occurs in the sense that language fails fully to articulate the child’s desire and provokes the

to downplay the scandal surrounding an icon. See Reed.

⁶ On Freud’s discussion on latency, see “Three Essays” 261-262.

⁷ On child sexual perversity see Freud, “Three Essays” especially 268; see also Massé, “Constructing the Psychoanalytic Child: Freud’s *From the History of an Infantile Neurosis*” 149-162. Freud defines neurosis as a mild personality disorder in which anxiety and obsessional thoughts dominate. Psychosis is a mental disorder defined by hallucinations and schizophrenia. See Freud, “Civilization and Its Discontents” 734. I shall take up Freud’s and Deleuze’s perspective on “schizophrenia” in my first chapter. For a discussion of the child and sexuality, see Chapter Two. Blum also ruminates about Freud’s devotion to the child since though “the subject of psychoanalysis may be the adult, its object is the child” (27).

adult-child's wish to return to the imaginary union with its mother ("The Mirror Stage" 75-79). Both Freud's and Lacan's accounts employ Oedipus as a regulatory mechanism—situated in the realm of the material family for Freud and in the phallogocentrism of the symbolic order for Lacan—that constitutes a rather reductionist, distressing, and wearisome imposition on and rendition of human identity. Moreover, these psychoanalytic accounts of the child are fed by adult wish fulfilments and longings that too often confuse the actual child with an imagined one, provoking a distorted lived agenda and way of life for both adults and children.

That "the child" is rather a mysterious territory is the argument of Virginia Blum's study *Hide and Seek: The Child Between Psychoanalysis and Fiction* in which she argues for the fantasmatic status of the child central to the psychoanalytic enterprise. This argument serves to support psychoanalytic efforts to capture the child for purposes of adult projections. However, this projection fails precisely due to the inability to locate childhood in relation to the adult subject (24). According to Blum, psychoanalysis namely forms a discourse

that unlike imaginative literature, refuses to examine the inevitable aporias occurring when adult subjects treat as ultimately knowable a subject-position they have both internalized and forsaken. . . . Finally, of all postindustrial discourses, psychoanalysis is the most deeply dependent on accounts of childhood for its very rationale because the psychoanalytic account of the human subject is that of a subject who was once (and continues unconsciously to be) a child. (8)

In other terms, the psychoanalytic child as an analysand and object of study forms a retroactive product of an adult imagination, instigated by the binary divide of adulthood and childhood that offers childhood as an imaginative space and produces an investment in the fictional status of the child that curtails any lived experience of the actual child itself.

Continues Blum on this adult focus on the child: “In an effort to present the ‘reality’ of the child and its perceptions, we cannot help but interpret the child in light of adult motives; we cannot help but interpret *ourselves* through the child” (5; emphasis original). This cross-reading is particular evident in accounts that approach the child as an object of study to chronicle developmental phases where the adult investigates what he or she wants to see and to prevent abnormal behaviour in the child in particular in a gendered context.⁸ To this end, Blum exposes Freud’s child to be a fictive product of his adult concern about adult sexuality and Jacques Lacan’s employment of the child to be an imaginative counter-space to an anxiety felt on an adult-level, a fear perhaps provoked by social menaces or the unpredictability of life. It is this intersection of psychoanalytic imagination and myth-making in regards to the child, sold as truth-claims, with literary imagination that has Blum point to the fictional status of both texts: “scientific” psychoanalysis and fictional literature (13). However, while psychoanalysis fails to acknowledge its adult readings and fantasmatic appropriations of the child, literature recognizes, exposes, and perverts these adult projections and impositions on the child in order to imagine alternatives.

⁸ There has been a recent focus on infant psychology. Mowder’s 2009 *Evidence-based Practice in Infant and Early Childhood Psychology*, for instance, integrates a variety of psychological perspectives with implications for interventions to articulate “the needs of young children and their family . . . in terms of infant and early childhood practice and training” (xi). These needs and observations, however, also derive from an adult perspective and its retroactive ruminations about an infant position the adult once inhabited. The “evidence” based on infant observation, then, is merely to confirm the adult’s speculations based upon what adults want to see and to stigmatize unfitting behaviour as deviating from the infant’s developmental stages within a heterosexual framework. The actual study-object, the infant itself, however, remains silent and needs to be spoken for. Or, as Gilles Deleuze writes, “Mrs Klein interpreted, *interpreted*, INTERPRETED. . . ” (*Essays Critical and Clinical* 62; emphasis original). On the child as an object of inquiry, see also Blum 29-34; for an account on child development and the Darwinian myth, see Morss especially Chapters 1-3.

Rather than falling into silence on the subject of “the child,” it does require to be talked about—quite urgently, as I propose; however, this conversation ought to occur in a different kind of language than adults employ and that “the child” entices us to use. To talk about “the child,” then, is paradoxically to speak about a rather elusive entity. Following Jean-François Lyotard’s definition of “[t]he postmodern[, which] would be that which, in the modern, puts forward the unrepresentable in presentation itself; that which denies itself the solace of good forms . . . that which searches for new presentations, not in order to enjoy them but in order to impart a stronger sense of the unrepresentable” (81), Susan Honeyman in her 2005 study entitled *Elusive Childhood: Impossible Representations in Modern Fiction* argues that “the child” confronts the adult with the very impossibility of the representation of childhood that serves as an imagined *locus amoenus* for the adult (16, 28, 53). Honeyman’s turn to the field of childhood studies reveals her dissatisfaction with Western scholarship on the topic of “the child,” which constitutes a form of condescension. According to Honeyman, nobody is authorized to talk about “the gay” or “the black” in such a way as “the child” is the object of study within a field that is geared toward a specific audience, unlike author-oriented studies such as of African American women writers (4, 8-9).⁹ Her study examines the techniques of authors (Henry James in particular) to talk about the inarticulable alongside adult appropriations of “the child” as well as adult “narrow standards [of children] as innocent, helpless, asexual, irrational, unschooled” (2) to be passed off as “truths.”¹⁰ Honeyman hints at childhood as “a *tabula rasa* for adult constructions” (2). According to her, these constructions “seem all the more legitimate for their lack of opposition, as

⁹ Honeyman lists two books authored by children: Daisy Ashford’s *The Young Visitors* [sic] (1919) and Anne Frank’s *Diary of a Young Girl* (1947). See *Elusive Childhood* 8.

¹⁰ I will investigate this phenomenon of boundaries between children and adults in Chapter Two.

discursive boundaries already exclude possible counter-expressions from unspeaking or illiterate young still in process of achieving the socialized means to power in adult ideologies—[that is the] mastery of literate language” (2). Pointing to a language barrier that separates children and adults, her study’s scope does not fully explore this issue of language other than “expos[ing] overlooked opportunities for subversion fostered by these imposed silences” (3) or entertain the idea that we need to depart from a mode of language invested in the binary of signifier and signified (I shall take up this issue particularly in Chapter Four). It is in her concluding remarks, all constructions aside, that Honeyman considers the deconstruction of childhood as giving way to “an unavoidably eroding social space of pre-verbal and pre-ideological possibility, unknowable from an adult position and accepted as unknown . . . [with] unlimited subversive possibilities. Not simply subjects, objects, or outsiders but intermittently occupying each position, children could be defined as those who are ‘becoming’” (151). Honeyman references Gilles Deleuze at the end of her study as a possibility of re-evaluating the present rhetoric of adulthood and childhood and the limitations it imposes on human identity. By taking up Honeyman’s final premise and promise, my project begins from where her study ends.

The main problem, as I see it, is that even though Honeyman and Blum view children as elusive, their thinking is not followed through and beyond adulthood. To talk about the child is also, and above all, to talk about the adult. What makes this elusiveness become transparent as these children move into adulthood? Or, asked differently, how can this elusiveness be retained, and why? What happens as these children grow up to adult completion (rationality, marriage, professional success, investment accounts)? Why do teenagers, aside from being naturalized as rebels against the dominant regime, exhibit a strong tendency towards suicide? Why do we now hear of so many gay teens being bullied to

the point of suicidal death? We can no longer blame hormones and genes for these mishaps, nor can we blame parents (and in particular the mother) for the collapse of childhood identity in these youngsters, fuelled by a concept of innocence which is often merely ridiculed by adults admonishing children not to make such a fuss. In Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's terms, "Where are the 'helping professions'" (*Tendencies* 155)? I would say they are slowly coming to the rescue;¹¹ however, in a deficient way. Psychoanalysis and literature, to name two of those professions, are still invested in a language of signifier and signified that constitutes "our faulty dependence upon language [...], emphasizing the void and lack of verbal representation for children in adult discourse" (Honeyman 32, 45); this lacuna, in turn, perpetuates a vicious circle of incomprehensibility and "discommunication" amongst (present) children and (future) adults. Therefore, the needed help moves in the wrong direction toward adult appropriations in terms of what is best for the "proto-gay child," in Sedgwick's phrasing. Her posited rescue consists of "a new psychiatry of gay acceptance" and representation (*Tendencies* 160-161), all within a language that too easily confuses a linguistic void with the promises of an abyss.

My project, then, aims to show that children are talking to us in a language that the adult fails to understand, if he or she even attempts to listen to children to begin with. To this end, I wish to advance a notion of language as a "rhizomatic semiosis" which is part of what Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari term "[c]ollective assemblages of enunciation [which] function directly within *machinic assemblages*" (*A Thousand Plateaus* 7; emphases original) by which language is seen coexistent with "becoming," generating new modes of

¹¹ For instance, the "it gets better" campaign launched after Joel Burn's talk in front of Fort Worth City Council on 12 October 2010 has raised awareness of bullying at schools in particular due to sexual orientation. See Burns.

subjectivities.¹² Before I continue with a further explication of my project, however, it is necessary to outline what Deleuze and Guattari mean by the “rhizome” in particular in relation to psychoanalysis.

Deleuze and Guattari’s “schizoanalysis,” as opposed to psychoanalysis, offers vital tools to think about human identity differently than within the binary framework of childhood and adulthood. In their co-authored book *A Thousand Plateaus*, they show a stringent hostility towards what they term “arborescent” models of thought and identity (5-7). As an alternative to this holistic and transcendental theorem of “arborescence”—tree-like structures that privilege hierarchy, uniformity, stasis, and completion—Deleuze and Guattari offer the concept of the “rhizome.”¹³ The “rhizome” does not oppose “arborescent” structures in a binary manner, as those roots that grow deep down into the earth; rather, the “rhizome” *traverses* and *transforms* “arborescence” in favour of *horizontal, decentred* ways of thinking and living that continuously emulate and spread out from the middle like a network of fungi without having any origins and end points: “A rhizome has no beginning or end: it is always in the middle, between things, interbeing, *intermezzo*” (*ATP* 25, emphasis original). In a series of discussions with Claire Parnet, Deleuze further explains these disruptive manoeuvres of the “rhizome” in regards to binaries when he remarks, “we must pass through dualism . . . it’s not a question of getting rid of them. . . . [We must] undo

¹² Deleuze and Guattari’s “assemblages” constitute multiplicities of percepts, affects, bodies, languages—“a whole micropolitics of the social field”—that go into identity formation (*ATP* 7).

¹³ Deleuze and Guattari borrow the terms “arborescence” and “rhizome” from plant biology—a linguistic deployment found throughout their collaborative work. In accord with their plea for philosophy to depart from rigid, a priori conceptualizations toward a mobility of thought that creates new concepts (*What is Philosophy?* 5), Deleuze and Guattari refrain from using words in a representational or metaphorical manner and open words to new meanings (*ATP* 69). To this end, the concept of the “rhizome” is wrested from its conventional semiotic connection to plant biology and made available to new semantic creations: the “rhizome” moves from biology to philosophy.

dualisms from the inside, by tracing a line of flight which passes between the two terms” (*Dialogues II* 26).

Deleuze and Guattari turn to America, which they consider a “rhizome” itself in contrast to an “arborescent” Europe: “directions in America are different: the search for arborescence and the return to the Old World occur in the East. But there is the rhizomatic West, . . . its ever-receding limit, its shifting and displaced frontier. There is a whole American ‘map’ in the West, where even the trees form rhizomes” (*ATP* 19). Deleuze and Guattari view America as a land of opportunity that welcomes the “rhizome” as *any* way of living at the frontier. This potentiality makes Deleuze and Parnet further ponder the “Superiority of Anglo-American literature” and its creation of lines of flight as “[t]he highest aim of literature . . . to cross the horizon, to enter into another life” (*Dialogues II* 27). Continue Deleuze and Parnet: “Anglo-American literature constantly shows these ruptures, these characters who create their line of flight, who create through a line of flight. . . . American literature operates according to geographical lines: the flight towards the West . . . the sense of the frontiers as something to cross, to push back, to go beyond” (27). They view America and its literature as embracing the very essence of life, as being close to life and its upheavals, where nevertheless ruptures fragily emerge that may lead to the creation of lines of flight, that is, lines of escape and active becoming.¹⁴

My project, therefore, traces that line of flight along which the “rhizome” springs up *in-between* the binary of the child and the adult, sweeping up both of them into an experience of “becoming,” which is a continuous becoming-different of identity along vectors or trajectories set by either term (Deleuze and Guattari, *ATP* 249). My thesis thus refrains from

¹⁴ For Deleuze (and Parnet), American literature is thus embedded within a Pragmatist tradition that promotes a multiple, heterogeneous, changing American self that can only be approximated, never fully attained.

Western culture's "arborescent" imperative of "growing up" to adult completion and follows the "rhizome," as it unfolds in the context of twenty-first century American fiction, promoting a notion of human growth (or rather, movement) that is open, alternating, continuous, connective, heterogeneous, and future-oriented. Rather than having the self grow up along a "straight" line up to adulthood, my select novel and film texts welcome the "rhizome" as a mode of movement through life's unruly course along wayward paths, fruitful delays, alternating tracks replete with an incessant curiosity and more life-affirmative ways. To this end, my project is greatly influenced by Kathryn Bond Stockton's recent book entitled *The Queer Child, or Growing Sideways in the Twentieth Century* in which she critiques Western culture's command of "growing up" as a reductive way of human growth and proposes ways of sideways growth to which children are inclined to embark on due to their temporal delay to adulthood (4-9). Like Honeyman and Blum, Stockton, however, fails to conceive of her project beyond the apparent confines of adulthood, which merely renders her sideways growth temporary outgrowths—however fruitful they may be—within the politics of "growth" in contrast to movement.

Growing, then, has received some redefinition. Rather than growing up from child to adult, movement is something that is seductively given to us throughout life's experiences and thus occurs continuously and transformatively within various directions forward, beyond the ageist binary of childhood and adulthood. Kathryn Stockton points to an interdisciplinary connection between twentieth century American literature and recent findings by cognitive science, which has come to recognize the brain's growth (or movement) *throughout* a person's lifespan whereby the brain, as noted by Stockton, bears the "capacity to make neural networks through connection and extension" that continue to spread out in manifold directions (*The Queer Child* 11). These biological features of perpetual connection and

extension further manifest themselves in language to render possible new modes of subjectivities. My approach to a “rhizomatic semiosis” in-between metaphysics and immanence bows to language as a mode that allows us to reconfigure subjectivities and to move through life in less punitive and more affirmative ways. These modes of moving continuously and into various directions beyond the finality of adulthood require a distance to be taken from institutionalized psychoanalytic accounts and their anchorage of identity’s origin in the child. Rather than a uniform, pre-established, static line “straight” up to adulthood, the “rhizome” pursues manoeuvres that are heterogeneous, generative, transformative—“queer.” My thesis, then, aims to prevent psychoanalytic infanticide by foregrounding a resistance to illuminate what needs to remain opaque in particular with regards to childhood studies: the child itself.

To return to Susan Honeyman, my project therefore departs where her seminal study ends, namely with the final sentences as rehearsed above that “children *could* be defined as those who are ‘becoming’ [with] [t]he most distinguishing factor [being] the level of language use. From the perspective of Gilles Deleuze, ‘becoming is itself coextensive with language’ but ‘becoming unlimited’ is an *ideal* directed by always recognizing the slippage and difference born with each utterance” (151; emphasis added). Yet Honeyman’s referenced *unlimitedness* requires a closer look at (linguistic) limits in order to render this unlimitedness “real,” transforming Honeyman’s conditional tense to a present tense—an undertaking which I strive to take up in my second chapter in particular.

If one equates “growing up” to adulthood to a gradual sedimentation of language, an acquisition of mature intelligence that categorizes the world into a priori concepts according to cultural and linguistic markers, then it is this sedation that needs to be critiqued in order to allow for a notion of subjectivity that is continuously creative and welcoming of life’s

changeable events. It is hereby not the aim to fall back onto childish babble in an attempt to imitate the language of children, nor is it an attempt to get children to imitate the language of the adult. One needs language and conceptualizations in order to survive. Rather, it is their meeting *in-between* that bears potential and where language departs from the binary of signifier and signified. It is here where this dissertation departs, by combining language and becoming: rather than forming one cohesive thread that is followed through various literary works in six chapters, my project embarks on different aspects of language that are taken up anew in each chapter following diversity rather than uniformity. Though a dedication to language runs through my entire project, language is dealt with differently in each unit where each one sets the stage for the next one in an accumulative manner without falling prone to one common denominator.

Chapter One, entitled “Growing Up—Growing Low: Cartographies in John Wray’s *Lowboy*,” follows “schizophrenic” protagonist William Heller, also known as Lowboy, as he struggles with adulthood. Being a borderline case within psychoanalysis, William Heller hides from the manipulations of an adult world that aim to mould him into the clinical entity of a schizophrenic person. Turning to a Deleuze/Guattarian “schizoanalysis” rather than psychoanalysis, this chapter follows Lowboy through his underground chase as he perceives the world and, by extension, his subjectivity in its molecularity. Rather than viewing schizophrenia as a concept born of Western culture’s appeal to stable identities, this chapter, following Deleuze and Guattari, views schizo-flows as primary, from which identity is born. This perspective alters Lowboy’s notion of space as he attempts to hide from the “upper” world in New York’s underground, and informs him that the distinction between lives lived in a “lower” world and those carried forward in an “upper” one is a linguistic binary. To this end, this chapter will further explore the linguistic placements of “self” and “other,” “interior”

and “interior,” as well as lives lived in a “lower” world and those carried forward in an “upper” one in its explication of a Deleuze/Guattarian “cartography.” By this formulation, they do not mean a representation of the world in form of a static map, but instead an immanent cartography that renders the world as a series of maps where identity moves continuously and transformatively through life. In terms of language, this chapter breaks down the signifier into the voice and its graph to show how manifold dimensions of meaning are being reduced to the rule of the two-dimensional signifier. *Lowboy* thereby opens up its textual space to a network of meanings, where meaning becomes contingent upon the text’s derailing and subterranean movements that form “rhizomatic” connections.

Chapter Two, entitled “Strange Encounters: Identity and its Limits in Todd Field’s *Little Children*,” turns to boundaries and linguistic barriers to introduce a “rhizomatic semiosis” that renders subjectivity continuously creative and generative rather than static and reductive. For this purpose, I turn to Todd Field’s film *Little Children* (2006) in order to explore current socio-culturally set limits surrounding the child. Paedophilia, the master discourse when it comes to children nowadays, serves Field to demonstrate that Western culture’s present form of child-loving has turned into a love that painfully stifles and isolates due to the very paedophobia—the flip-side of the discourse of paedophilia—provoked by the very limits drawn around the child. By primarily turning to James Kincaid’s theory, my chapter investigates these limits in regards to touching “the child” (literally and metaphorically) and attempts to introduce an illimitable limit or what Deleuze and Guattari term the “Body Without Organs”—a transpersonal, transgerminal field of forces and energies that dismantles forms of organized identity in favour of “becoming,” processes by which the self is under continuous and open-ended construction (*ATP* 153). That Deleuze and Guattari’s “becoming” results in a different purchase on sexuality and knowledge (a shift

toward their more unconscious manifestations) is further subject to exploration in my discussion of Field's film to advance a notion of love that promotes agency rather than sedimentation, vague contours of knowledge as it emerges rather than static epistemologies. I argue that Field's film places the viewer on such a germinal "Body Without Organs" *on the edge* of spectatorship and film plot, creating a vague in-between space. This placement provokes a notion of boundaries not as sites of exclusions but as sites of encounters, in which the self meets its own strange otherness. That this alterity is wedded to language becomes evident in the voice-over narration with a narrator who does not constitute an omniscient God-eye point of view but who forms an assemblage of language, a semiosis that is driven by an abstract machine and that forms a "rhizome" that connectively spreads forward through language, desire, and subjectivity in less vertical but more horizontal ways.

Chapter Three pursues the "rhizome" through Peter Cameron's novel *Someday This Pain Will Be Useful to You*. His protagonist James Sveck is an eighteen-year-old teenager who fails to make sense of the world and has no idea how to live in it. James's plan is to retreat into the Midwestern town called Edge and to lead a life in isolation and solitude. It is through the Deleuze-Guattarian notion of an "event," which is a disturbing occurrence on the virtual level of immanence, that James begins to move forward with his life. Rather than constituting epiphanic moments, his encounter with a Down's Syndrome child, his grandmother, and Thomas Cole's series of paintings entitled *The Voyage of Life* form events that alter his perception of difference, ageism, and innocence within a more aonic, that is, free-flowing, temporality rather than a chronological, teleological one. Moreover, James's encounter with his love interest John at an art gala breaks the shame-driven habituation of his selfhood and opens him (and John) to the potentiality of love that is less Platonic and ego-driven, and more embracing of change and alteration. In terms of language, then, Cameron's

text critiques a metaphorical construction of gay subjectivities that falls back upon metaphysical thinking and promotes a metaphoricity which, following Kathryn Bond Stockton's articulation, forms a temporal stretch of meaning, horizontally outreaching and outgoing rather than inward directed toward an enfolded fixation of meaning. This proliferation of textual congruencies connects to the "rhizomatic semiosis" introduced in Chapter One and followed in Chapter Two and Three: no longer the question of either a literal or a figural language, the latter becomes met-a-phor, as it connects to the body and to the abstract machine.

Chapter Four, entitled "Fissures in Discourse: Language, Memory, and Imagination in Sara Pritchard's *Crackpots*," turns to language and the child. Its three major concerns are language-acquisition and the connection of memory and imagination to language. My analysis follows the novel's two protagonists Ruby and Mason Reese, as they "grow up" to adulthood and experience how language hardens into concepts that divide the world into a priori formed classifications and encounters. In terms of language-acquisition, this chapter moves away from an innate programme of language argued by Noam Chomsky and views language as an event.¹⁵ Rather than being faculties cut off from the subject, memory and imagination are shown actively to assist the subject in transforming identity by virtue of turning regression into progression. These "rhizomatic" manoeuvres of the text, then, allow subjectivity to crack open its frozen linguistic manifestations and cautiously embark on new modes of subjectivity.

Chapter Five, entitled "Beautiful Beloved: Child-Rearing, Aesthetics, and Love in Michael Cunningham's *By Nightfall*," exposes love to rest on a Platonic aesthetic model with idealist identifications, which has violent psychic and political implications not only for the

¹⁵ See Chapter Three for a discussion of the Deleuzian event.

self but also in the self's engagement with others. My analysis follows Peter Harris, a successful art dealer in Manhattan in his mid-forties and his wife, Rebecca, who, it seems, have everything they need to be happy until one day his brother-in-law Ethan, or Mizzy for "mistake," shows up for a visit and has Peter question the world he lives in, in particular the place of love in it. In terms of the child, this chapter discusses this adult trio of self-absorption to love on a Platonic model, which has implications for child-rearing. Rather than loving the other and, by implication, the child as part of the ego's own parameters, this chapter entertains a notion of Deleuzian love or "passion" by which the other is loved *as* an other, all the while maintaining differences and a kind of love that emerges on the passionate lines of the "rhizome."

Chapter Six, entitled "Apocalypse Americana: Family H(a)unting in Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*," investigates a post-cataclysmic America that has punctured the nuclear Oedipal family; and yet, this dismantling of patriarchal discursive structures returns to haunt its protagonists, a father and son who make their way past a desolate landscape and cannibalistic tribes on a road toward the south. For the father, trauma consists of the crisis of his survival, his dislocation from home, and his abandonment by his wife, who chooses death over life. McCarthy's father-persona continues to be haunted by trauma, as he holds on to metaphysical presence closing in on absence to which trauma has sensitized him. He fears the dissolution of his world, of language, and, by implication, his subjectivity. That the father's hanging on to his world turns his hunting for absence—or his wish to presence absence—into a haunting becomes evident in his dreams, in which he is visited by scenes of his dead son and tattered ghostly ancestors. These dream scenarios constitute the crisis of masculine fatherhood in patriarchy that, following David Lee Miller, is founded upon filial sacrifice. Though the father's dreams show these patriarchal structures no longer to work in a

post-apocalyptic America, I argue that his hanging onto metaphysics revivifies these relics, which he is then ready to pass on to his son. That the boy is to repeat the masculine trauma of castration becomes evident on his deathbed at which the father makes sure the boy has internalized the sacrificial flame. And yet, the boy only distantly shares his father's trauma. Born amidst the cataclysm, the boy has never known an America different to a post-apocalyptic one. Though he also experiences life-threatening scenarios, the child's trauma consists in the father's and his own neglect to attend to the wounds of others. Visited by nightmares and replays of earlier scenarios of negligence, the boy gradually struggles between holding onto and letting go of his father's belief. While the boy is attending to his father's trauma, the father fails to listen to the boy outside his metaphysical worldview. The boy's increasing silence attests to their estrangement, and the boy later opposes his father's advice, as he takes a risk by joining an American family at the end of the novel. Rather than constituting a return to Oedipus, however, the boy's encounter at the end of the novel forms an encounter with a de-Oedipalized family and the potential for a new beginning. In terms of language and trauma, this chapter turns to McCarthy's minimalist and accumulative style of writing to argue for the creation of an in-between space located somewhere among experience, imagination, and reality—among writer, reader, and reality—which allows for various movements in and out of the text. Trauma, as I aim to show, opens up a space of absence that becomes the origin for different modes of “rhizomatic” subjectivity.

My chapters themselves unfold and move in a “rhizomatic” manner. Rather than being set up in a linear, straightforward fashion, the individual instalments of my thesis interconnect and build on each other by way of raising questions that are answered in subsequent chapters and by offering answers to questions that arise at a later point. In this regard, my project and its chapters by themselves are an exercise in “rhizomatic” thought:

connective, productive, open—without so much as a final answer but instead providing an assemblage of questions, investigations, and explorations that proliferate and spread out in an infinite and playful network, increasingly complicating and denying the question as to what or who the child is. Rather than closing in on a totality of a complete project, however, as I strive to demonstrate with my terminal unit, this project allows for a return to its other chapters and their renewed invitation to an open textual semiosis.

The historicity with which these chapters are laid out, then, is one borrowed from trauma theory, which, as I claim, allows for the American angle of my project. The history of childhood as outlined in the beginning pages of this introduction is chiefly a British and a chronologically ordered one, one that is perceived immediately by scholars to inform the American tradition. Anthologies that are considered foundational studies for the recent field of childhood studies attest to this phenomenon. For instance, historians Ray Hiner and Joseph Hawes’s anthology, entitled *Growing Up in America: The Children in Historical Perspective* (1985), begins with the very sentence that “[t]he history of childhood is [one of] coming of age” (xiii), thereby immediately inscribing their study within the (European) tradition of representational childhood studies. “To be sure,” Hiner and Hawes continue, “American children have often been expected to act as adults, they have been treated as adults, but they never could be adults because they were children, because their physical, cognitive, and emotional conditions required them to experience the world in special, unique ways that were closed off or changed by their *normal* growth and development” (xiv-xv; emphasis added). The “unique ways” of Hiner and Hawes’s children, however, are conceived within a binary framework of childhood and adulthood, which relegates identity to two mutually exclusive realms in which children come of age by their *normal* (i.e. European) growth to adulthood. Hiner and Hawes’s anthology then strives to shed light on children,

overlooked in research, by studying “their inner life” (xv). What Hiner and Hawes may discover as the “authentic” voice of the American child is perhaps its very metaphorical status as observed by Caroline Levander and Carol Singley in their anthology entitled *The American Child: A Cultural Studies Reader*, published eighteen years later in 2003.

In their study, Levander and Singley demonstrate two recent trends in childhood studies: on the one hand, an inquiry into the child as “a rich metaphor in US culture, literature, and history[,] . . . [a] site of cultural inscription” that helps “to disseminate the ideals governing various cultures” in order to think “in new ways about the adult self and the social, civic, and erotic elements,” and, on the other hand, a documentation of “the impact that the child’s ideological work has on *real* children” (4, 3; emphasis added). Both trends, however, share their indebtedness to representational studies that either ignore the lived experience of children completely or that attempt to reveal miraculously the “true” experience of children. According to Levander and Singley, then, the American child functions as a bearer of American values, virtues, and assets, and it is therefore positioned *against* a European tradition. However, as I claim, such a placement of the American child is blithely unaware of the very conceptualization of American childhood as a form of representation that is in fact in accord with the European tradition. Without knowing it, recent accounts of American childhood duplicate the very framework they are trying to critique.

Childhood studies at the beginning of the twenty-first century, then, have found themselves stuck between Foucault-inspired studies on the discursive constructedness of childhood to mirror adult ideological structures and interpretive accounts that propose to discover the authentic child despite the distortions of an adult ear—an academic one-way street my project aims to deterritorialize. The question underlying this study may therefore

be a Spivakian one of “Can the [Child] Speak?” (“Can the Subaltern Speak?” 271).¹⁶ The answer in this case would be a resounding “yes”—but in a language different from the one adults teach, and foremost attendant to an ear that is willing to listen. To this end, I would like to invite the reader of my thesis to lend an open ear to what “the child,” pursued through my select literary and cinematic texts, wishes to tell us.

¹⁶ See also Honeyman 114.

—Chapter One—

Growing Up—Growing Low: Cartographies in John Wray's *Lowboy*

There were so many things to see that he got dizzy.

Babies see the world this way, he thought. Then they forget.

—John Wray, *Lowboy*

*Immensity is within ourselves. It is attached to a sort of expansion of being that life curbs
and caution arrests, but which starts again when we are alone.*

—Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*

My central aim in this initial chapter is to demonstrate the shortcomings of a Freudian psychoanalysis in regards to the child and to show how the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari provides useful tools to think about identity other than in modes of “growing up.” To this end, I take up the question of “space” in this first chapter. To further elucidate the topic of “space,” especially in regard to Deleuze’s child, whose movement is continuous, requires me to address the issue of language’s spatial placements of “self” and “other,” “interiority” and “exteriority,” “low” and “high,” which put identity, quite literally, into its place. And for this purpose, I shall now turn to John Wray’s novel *Lowboy* to demonstrate each of these important facets of identity and space.

John Wray’s *Lowboy* follows its protagonist William Heller, also known as Lowboy, as he hides in New York’s underground from an “upper” adult world. William’s decision to remain “low” stems from his fear of adulthood and its constriction of space, which causes

him to fall into schizophrenia. Having run away from a mental asylum, William keeps the New York City police department, in particular Detective Ali Lateef, along with William's mother Violet Heller, in suspense, as a thrilling chase unfolds throughout New York's subway system. *Lowboy's* underground adventures make him encounter other characters and also make him invite other characters, along with the reader, to go underground. Wray's third-person narrative, mainly focalized through Detective Lateef, Violet Heller, and William, then constitutes an invitation to its readership to share *Lowboy's* journey and schizophrenic perceptions, as William discovers a world that has by far more to offer than he thought.

In its critique of Western culture's vertical imperative to "grow up" to adult personhood, Wray's novel *Lowboy* places its characters between two discrete and distinct spatializations of lives "lived" in a "low" world and those carried forward in a "high" one. The novel's symbolic, binary distribution of space and along with its linguistic placements of "self" and "other," "interiority" and "exteriority," "up" and "low," however, is undermined by the novel's subterranean movements that continue to unsettle these divisions in favour of a continuously altering, re-configurative, indeterminate notion of material space, which lends itself to what Deleuze and Guattari term a "cartographic" identity. Instead of proposing a unitary subject set over an inert world, Wray's text, in a DeleuzeGuattarian reading, thus subverts a mere symbolic constitution of the self (a speaking "I" set over an inert world) by offering an invitation to "grow low" and to tap into an immanent plane of material forces, energies, and movements within a continuum of "real" space that flows into identity production. These dynamic interactions of the self and the world, then, allow identity to move continuously into various directions, reorienting itself through altering notions of

interiority and exteriority, and thus to continue its “rhizomatic” wanderings within space and through life beyond the apparent finality—and spatial constraints—of adulthood.

Wray’s novel lends itself to a cartographic reading. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari “employ the notion of the map . . . [in order to] explore anti-Oedipal practices of subjectivity” (West-Pavlov 224) that do not lead to the formation of a unitary self set off against an immobile world but that offer a model of open-ended exploration, modification, and reconfiguration of the psyche within a continuum of space (*A Thousand Plateaus* 12-15).¹⁷ For Deleuze and Guattari, the map does not constitute a static replication of the world, but forms what they term a “cartography”—a spatial image of representation that is in constant and dynamic interaction with its environment (*Essays Critical and Clinical* 63).

Write Deleuze and Guattari,

each map finds itself modified in the following map, rather than finding its origin in the preceding one: from one map to the next, it is not a matter of searching for an origin, but of evaluating *displacements*. Every map is a distribution of impasses and breakthroughs, of thresholds and enclosures, which necessarily *go from bottom to top*. There is not only a reversal in direction, but also a difference in nature: the unconscious no longer deals with persons or objects, but with trajectories and becomings; it is no longer an unconscious of commemoration but one of mobilization, an unconscious whose objects take flight rather than remaining buried in the ground. (63; my emphasis)

Deleuze and Guattari think identity in terms of a series of maps that continue in an overlapping, altering way. According to them, the self *does not* move “upward” in the sense

¹⁷ For Deleuze and Guattari and the concept of space, see also Russell West-Pavlov, *Space in Theory: Kristeva, Foucault, Deleuze* 169-246.

of moving along a progression within a series of plateaus; rather, this movement occurs in a horizontal, *displacing*, open direction. This mobility is further motored by a notion of the unconscious that *does not* form a personal container filled with childhood memories, grounding the self in the past, but a notion that bears a mobilizing function as a cartographic process, gradually introducing shifts and modifications into the self.¹⁸

This cartographic conception of identity fed by its unconscious, subterranean movements plays to the narrative structure of Wray's *Lowboy*. His text revolves less the question of what the text means—that is, offering an analysis and solution to the interiorized psychology of its characters—but asks the questions about *how* the text means. *Lowboy* constitutes a narrative space that produces meaning in an ever-expanding “rhizomatic” network of signs that connect by virtue of an unstable ground. The text places characters alongside each other where they initiate, inhibit or promote each other's movements within space. The novel therefore undermines an Oedipal interpretation of the text that aims at capturing the full meaning and ultimate analysis of its characters (perhaps including my own Oedipal-critical interpretation). *Lowboy* dissolves any totalizing interpretation through the text's elusive movements that leave the reader with a feeling of curtailment upon having reached any sense of finally having captured the full meaning of the text (again, including myself). This sense of continuity in meaning is generated by the network of signs—or words—which “seem initially territorialized, literally the guardians of two inviolate and irrevocably distinct realms. But a kind of sliding contagion occurs, and through the course of the book, each term comes to refer to elements within the original territorial space of the other term” (Deleuze, *Kafka* xxvii). It is this sliding contagion among words that opens up

¹⁸ The unconscious as a personal limit of identity, that is, in its function as a container filled with childhood memories is subject to investigation in Chapter Two. On Deleuze's concept of cartography see also West-Pavlov 223-228.

Wray's text to a plurality of meaning where signification does not persist in a universal manner or to an end of ultimate truth, but rather emerges momentarily—transitionally territorialized—in a retroactive act; it disintegrates again within a continuous spatial network of movements, in twists and twirls that allow for the novel's—and, by implication, identity's—continuous “rhizomatic” movement along forward-oriented manoeuvres within indeterminate space.

Before exploring the particular spatializations of Wray's text, I would like to point to a scene at the beginning of *Lowboy* that sets the stage for the dynamics of the text about to unfold. Detective Ali Lateef, entrusted with William Heller's case, observes the strange character of Heller's “Special Case Missing” (SCM): “It was unusual in that it was structured. . . . [It] was unusual in that its shape had not been given to it after the fact, by the investigating officer, but before the fact, by the SCM himself” (Wray 25). Detective Lateef is startled by the reverse order of William's case, whose closure is not applied retroactively by the investigating officer, meaning himself, but whose closure already pre-exists and precedes all investigations. Detective Lateef's noted reversal of William's closed SCM, however, does not foreclose any further action; rather, it constitutes a reversal that provokes an opening onto an uncharted territory, beyond the perhaps customary treatments and conventional filings of the case upon which Lateef and the reader are about to embark. This reversal at the very beginning of Wray's text attests to a twist that Deleuze observes in the act of masochism, namely a reversal of the relations between punishment and pleasure. Here, “the very law which forbids the satisfaction of a desire under threat of subsequent punishment is converted into one which demands the punishment first and then orders that the satisfaction of the desire should necessarily follow upon the punishment” (*Masochism* 88). Deleuze's conversion of a prohibitive law that forecloses any action and activity under the threat of

punishment into one that punishes first and then opens up onto a consecutive realm of desire applies to Wray's text in so far as Lateef's along with the reader's desire is kindled and opened onto a trajectory that leads onto the unfamiliar and indeterminate spatial territory of the textual narrative about to unfold.¹⁹

In addition to this initial instigation of (textual) desire through a reversal of William Heller's case, William's mother, Violet Heller, assists in opening up the narrative space and the plot that is underway. Violet creates a suspension that slows down the work of Detective Lateef through—as he observes—a certain compulsory air of coldness that Violet exudes, as she suddenly stands under Lateef's office door. Notes Lateef, “[t]here was something involuntary, something feral, about the way she held herself. The beautiful woman's indifference to everything around her. She seemed to have no idea of the inconvenience she was causing. She held her cigarette between her thumb and ring finger, a little distastefully, like a twig that she'd just pulled out of her hair” (Wray 25). Violet's apparent coldness and cruelty of her diva-like appearance relates to the decelerated movements of a Deleuzian “Lady in Fur,” who slowly freezes and “suspends her gestures in the act of bringing down the whip or removing her furs; her movement is arrested as she turns to look at herself in the mirror” (*Masochism* 33). Violet's apparent indifference to the case, her air of coldness, and her slowed-down movements illustrated by her smoking a cigarette constitute a form of resistance that disavows dominant structures. Explains Deleuze, “[d]isavowal should perhaps be understood as the point of departure of an operation that consists neither in negating nor even destroying, but rather in radically contesting the validity of that which is: it suspends belief in and neutralizes the given in such a way that a new horizon opens up beyond the given *and* in place of it” (31; my emphasis). Violet thus suspends the validity of the symbolic

¹⁹ On the kindling of desire that gives birth to new images, see Chapter Five.

order and opens up, by virtue of her temporal suspense, the possibility of the emergence of a new (textual) space in place of the old one.

To this end, Wray's novel opens with two instances that foreclose any conventional reading practices that search for finalized meanings. Wray's system of writing comes close to what Deleuze would term a "minority literature," that is a "system of writing . . . inscribed on the very surface of the Real: a strangely polyvocal kind of writing, never a biunivocalized, linear one; a transcursive writing, never a discursive one; a writing . . . where one should look in vain for something that might be labelled the Signifier" (*Anti-Oedipus* 39). Instead of forming a narrative space whose meanings are already in place to unveil a hidden truth (for instance, in readers who look for Oedipal meaning before they have opened the book), Wray's novel opens onto a contingency of meaning, produced alongside a complex network of relations, connections, and movements between signs, which yields the cartographic movements of the text.

Lowboy centres on the angst-ridden identity crises of its protagonist, sixteen-year-old William Heller, produced by Oedipal constrictions of space that have accompanied his growth to adulthood. William ends his childhood with a quest for existential justification and meaning, as he asks his mother, "Why was I born Violet? Tell me why" (Wray 210). The novel's narrator reveals insights into the apparent beginnings of William's crises, which seem to be instigated by his trip with his mother to the countryside shortly after the death of his father when he was twelve. The narrator remarks,

Violet had borrowed a car and they'd driven to the Pennsylvania hills. Let's go *someplace empty*, she'd said. Just us two. Which had made him laugh because who else would have come. The hills had looked wrinkled and brown, like a sad old man's neck, and it had been hot in the car. You're my hero, she'd told him. My little

professor. I can't wait to see what you'll become some day. This was the first day that he'd heard the turbines. (46; emphasis added)

William's trip to the countryside reveals his conceptualization of identity as an individual unit set off against an inert, lifeless world. This is illustrated by his observation of the heat in the claustrophobic enclosure of the car and his description of the countryside as wrinkled, rotten, and dead (46). Violet's description of him in the presence of Lateef, where she portrays William as being "very close to perfect" (82)—gentle, self-contained, independent, and better than all the other children, may underline an agglomeration of William's identity that views the self as a unit with distinct, fixed properties. His mother's remark on her excitement to see what will become of her "little professor" suddenly proves problematic for him, because his mother's comments project his personal unit into the future, where "to become" comes to bear the sense of reaching an end point—namely the full stature of adult personhood.

Violet's projection of William's identity onto the future further entails a re-encounter with Oedipus, in so far as it appears in the symbolic through its very absence. Elucidate Deleuze and Guattari, "Oedipus can always be consigned to the Imaginary, but no matter, it will be encountered again, stronger and more whole, more lacking and triumphant by the very fact that it is lacking, it will be encountered again in its entirety in symbolic castration" (*Anti-Oedipus* 307). Oedipus, as a mechanism that dictates the organization of psychic and social life, places identity under the threat of castration through an intervening law of the father. In the imaginary order, Oedipus intervenes in the dual relationship between the child and the mother, provoking, through the threat of castration, a separation of the child from its mother and its formation into a distinct person. In replacement for its lost unity, the child acquires language to articulate its loss, which, however, is forever out of its reach. Identity is

symbolically castrated in the sense that it suffers from its extreme lack of the imaginary and its (unattainable) plenitude. Oedipus haunts the symbolic in so far as its very absence augments this lack. William panics in the face of the inevitability of lack and emptiness posed by the symbolic order, as this lack threatens to annihilate his self. He fears a loss of his identity in regards to Violet's projection of his self onto the full stature of an adult personhood engulfed by extreme lack. Additionally, his tremendous fear in regards to this annihilation of his self is augmented by the empty space of the Pennsylvania hills, and puts him into contact with the turbines of DeleuzeGuattarian "desiring-machines." These, according to Deleuze and Guattari, render life a continuous process and flow of production within material space, in spite of the Oedipal co-ordinates fitted over his self (55). This event, then, constitutes William's first fall into schizophrenia.

William's fear of adult personhood, with its delimitations by and pressures from outer, "empty" space threatening to engulf the self, makes him seek comfort by withdrawing into his interior self. Oedipus thus provokes William to turn inward and to adopt an interiorized self. His zoning in on his self, however, results in his discovery of indeterminate spaces that connect to those without. William's *Playboy* collage is particularly expressive of such insights. As Violet reports to Lateef, William "had taken a Magic Marker and blackened the water . . . and filled the sky with . . . hundreds of tiny rings or bubbles [which] were degrees" (Wray 184). He further pasted "a hand with bright blue fingernails" over the woman's genitalia that was not "covering her sex so much as growing out of it" (184). William termed this condition "the problem" (184). William's "solution" was the woman's face that was "just a ball of cuts—deep, heavy gouges—spreading out from the middle like an asterisk. . . . He'd made it into a kind of opening. . . . Wavy lines were coming out of the opening like spokes, or like the light behind a saint's head" (185, 184).

Rather than lending itself to an Oedipal interpretation (one may read this passage as indicative of William's sexual entrapment within an Oedipal scenario where the woman is being read as a symbol for his mother, whose cut face signals William's identification with the law of the father; or a latent homosexual?), this passage addresses the complexity of an interior space that escapes any totalizing interpretation. What William terms "the problem"—his illustration of a vagina giving birth to a hand—shows the subordination of identity-production, as symbolized by the creativity of the hand, to re-productive goals (of somebody else, that is one's child) that arrive at the age of genital maturity. William's "solution"—the woman's cut face on radiating waves—signals the cut of ego-based identities²⁰ with safely demarcated boundaries in favour of an opening from an inner radiation into an outer space, with the asterisk representing (mathematical) multiplicity in connection to one's (continuous, renewing) date of birth. Instead of portraying an empty space surrounding the woman, William's collage places bubbles within the outer realm to indicate the potential harboured by each of these "degree" signs, to connect the woman's identity to a generic process. To this end, identity is placed against and within a darkened background of intensive conditions whose forces and flows—within and without the self—resist their exclusion from or containment within fixed contours of the self. The blackness of the collage may point to the common spatial metaphoricity for one's inner self—the black hole—which is not, as Freud may have it, to be filled, but to be metabolized. David Jarraway, in a related context, speaks of trading in the notion of an "empty" void for an "abyss," which is described (quoting Emerson), as a "wilderness radically strange, in which has been planted the other radical strangeness of one's self" ("Future Interior" 55).

²⁰ Both Freud and Lacan's Oedipal complex posits subjectivity to be formed and determined by pressures from without, which then produce the guilt-ridden interiority of the ego. See Freud, "Three Essays"; Lacan, "The Mirror Stage." See also West-Pavlov 227.

Thus, identity emerges spatially out of a field of intensities and forces in form of a transitional territorial habituation, or a psychic space, which is born through a dynamic interplay between its interior and exterior space. Russell West-Pavlov summarizes this dynamic spatial relation between inner and outer realms as found in Deleuze's theory of space:

Deleuze's interiority dictates the outside world. It is the welling up of a sector of becoming-being into a zone of subjective intensity which establishes a field of force, a field of magnetic attraction, which then configures the social space around it. We must imagine this interiority as an unruly, contestatory space which focuses the flows of becoming-being. This is an interiority which in reality evinces the contours of a massive and undisciplined exteriority. (*Space in Theory* 227)

Following Deleuze's postulation on space, William's withdrawal into his inner self results in a welling up and (re)organization of inner and outer "abysmal" forces into a "zone of intensity" that then organizes the outside. Thus, William's zoning in on himself results in a zoning out that has not only reconfigured his inner space, but also his world without. To this end, William's self moves along transitional territories that become the defining parameters of his "cartographic" selfhood, which uses the potentialities of the self to give the world and itself new relations: the radiating waves of the woman's face.

William, however, is unable to engage in his self's relation to the outside as his identity continues to be sequestered from the emptiness surrounding it. His frequent withdrawals into his inner self result in a form of terror in face of this inner abyss—a fear of his interiority, which William nevertheless appears to prefer to the pressures from without.²¹ Fearing his

²¹ Jarraway refers to this terror as a realization that one's life is not the life of others but precisely one's own, and that one's indeterminacy encountered through the scary inner

outside and his inside, William's squelched identity experiences a narrowing of space, which finally erupts in his schizophrenic lapse. Reports Violet, "I found him lying facedown in the grass. . . . Will was an unusual boy, always off in some corner, but this was nothing like that. He barely seemed to recognize the house" (Wray 52). William's hiding in corners shows the reduction of space for him. His reclusion in the garden further signals his distance from the claustrophobic house with its inner rooms—contained empty spaces—that augment his fear. Furthermore, William's holding on to a "little patch of lawn" (50) illustrates his attempt to hold on to his adolescent self, under threat of dissolution by the pressures from outside and the unruly forces inside. These spatial confinements ultimately trigger William's schizophrenic lapses as if spatially to produce another self.

William's lapses cause his institutionalization in a mental asylum. Here, his identity is formed into the clinical entity of schizophrenic personhood, understood as a separate identity split off from the rational and sane world, which continues the interiorization of his identity. William is therefore given medication that is to produce a state of equilibrium, and he is further exposed to disciplinary measures reminiscent of the practice of Foucauldian panopticism, by which the "delinquent" is surveyed and coerced into obedience fitted to societal structures (*Discipline & Punish* 195-228). For instance, William notes that his doctors frequently act upon their "interest in [William's] penis" (Wray 147). Their privileged focus on William's penis, in particular Dr. Fleisig's,²² demonstrates their interest in restoring William to society, and, by definition, a "phallogocentric" symbolic order.²³ William,

spaces of one's own otherness cancels out any adamant essences ("Future Interior" 51).

²² His name is German for "to be studious" and "well-behaved"—a command that I often heard from my grandparents as a child.

²³ Jacques Lacan defines the symbolic order as being phallogocentric: that is, structured by a transcendental phallus which represents the punishing law of the father, under whose threat of castration the child comes to renounce its mother and identify with the power and

however, fears this medical restoration that is to put him back onto a steep path to the destination of adulthood, which is also implied by the clinic's programmatic name: "Buenavista" (172). As William observes, "I don't want to be up high I whispered. I don't want to see everything. I can't" (172). William rejects being "up high" and looking down upon an inert and lifeless world from which his "upper" self is set apart. By implication, William refuses to approach the world from top-down perspectives and their a-priori formed mental concepts that leave little room for variation.²⁴ In the end, William's sojourn at the clinic results in his ministrations as a schizophrenic person, with an interiorized self; this restores his stable identity and, by consequence, places him onto a path to adult personhood.

William experiences the clinic's ministrations as a capturing of his self within a claustrophobic enclosure of schizophrenic personhood. He remarks on his stay at the asylum as the beginning of "*the flat time*" (147; emphasis original); this perceived "flatness" connects to the spatial constrictions—in the form of the "emptiness" from without and within—that caused his first lapse. William's medication and his doctors' ministrations assist in confining him within these "flat" demarcated bounds of his selfhood, essentially entrapping him within himself. William's arrest is further shown in his forging of a plan that constitutes an agglomeration of his ideas and thoughts: he believes that since the world is inside of him, and he is inside of the world, he can fulfil what he takes to be his divine calling to stop the world from ending by cooling down his body by having sex (48).

William's plan constitutes a mixture of his belief in the finality of the world provoked by the apocalyptic visions in regard to global warming, the pressure and urge to have sex at the age of adolescence, and a heroic form of individualism that can rescue the world through divine

language of the father (*Écrits* 75-81).

²⁴ For top-down mental processes, see Michael McCarthy. *Discourse Analysis for Language Teachers*. Cambridge: CUP, 1991. Print.

intervention. To execute his plan, William runs away from the asylum and hides in New York's subway system. His decision to stay underground stems from his wish to "remain low" and to take refuge from an upper-ground world that denies him space. As he confides in Violet, "*I've seen terrible things Violet. Somebody had to see them. Somebody low*" (144; emphasis original). William here refers to his doctors' ministrations as well as his exposure to his own "schizo-flows," which Deleuze and Guattari describe as an "experience of intensive quantities in their pure state, to a point that is almost unbearable" (*Anti-Oedipus* 18). He remains "low" to fulfil his plan, along with his hopes of unfolding his knot of identity and to "open like a flower" (Wray 48).²⁵

William-Lowboy enters New York's underground as a schizophrenic person. He hides from the upper world and its constrictions of space that he finds particularly when he interacts with people. Reports Lowboy, "That was how you managed in the tunnel. That was how you got by. You came and sat in a row and touched arms and knees and shoes and held your breath and after a few minutes, half an hour at most, you separated again from each other for all time" (11). Lowboy holding his breath illustrates the spatial restrictions experienced for the duration of his exposure to people, which he consequently minimizes to ephemeral, anonymous ones. Lowboy's underground environment then offers him an anonymous space where he can be "alone" and distant from the ministrations of his doctors and the influence of his mother. Lowboy's isolation and solitude down below further allow him to reflect on his subway encounters and experiences.

Lowboy conceives of subjective space as being rigidly demarcated. This becomes

²⁵ William's plan should be read not so much in terms of its content but as an important part of his imagination that lifts his focus from the present and onto the future. Quoting Lacan, Jarraway names this a "future anterior" of what the self shall have been, with all its involved becomings ("Future Interior" 48).

evident in his encounter with a subway seat neighbour, the Sikh, whom Lowboy views as an “other” to his own self. Lowboy puts the Sikh in his place through stereotyping, an exclusionary measure which hints to his own enclosed and interiorized identity dreading the encounter of any form of dissidence or otherness.²⁶ He imposes his school knowledge about the Sikh religion onto his neighbour upon which the Sikh remarks, “That is not so. I’m sorry” (10). Lowboy is startled by the Sikh’s refusal to hold up to Lowboy’s limited knowledge in regards to the other’s religious experiences. Lowboy’s confusion leads to a quest for signification behind this encounter with the Sikh. Reports the narrator, “The fact that he’d met the Sikh first, out of everyone in the tunnel, signified something without question but its meaning refused to come clear to him. I’ll think about him when we stop, Lowboy said to himself. In a little while I’ll think about him. Then I’ll know” (9). Lowboy’s inability to account for the signification of his meeting with the Sikh demonstrates that meaning is applied retroactively upon a network of signs, which, perhaps, may not signify anything. The meaning of his encounter with the Sikh therefore probably lies in Lowboy’s simple introduction to his own otherness, rendering his placement of “self” and “other” null. Indeed, this encounter resonates throughout the novel, adding to Lowboy’s altering perception of space.

Lowboy’s next encounter is with Heather Covington, another schizophrenic living in New York’s underground. She takes Lowboy further underground, and his interaction with her provokes his realization of spatial “emptiness” to be an effect of the symbolic. Lowboy understands Heather’s entanglement in language when he notes her strong identification with the pages of her passport. Lowboy observes that except “for a faint yellow stamp from Fort Erie, Canada, all of its pages were blank. The issue date was 4/2007. ‘Heather Dakota

²⁶ See Jarraway, “Future Interior” 51.

Covington,’ he read out. ‘Hair Auburn. Eyes Green. Weight eighty-seven pounds.’ He paused. ‘Born Vienna, Virginia, 11/13/1998’” (45). Heather’s identity is given to her within a few words on the pages of her passport. Her passport further indicates a child-identity, which keeps her longing for a past forever lost—or, in Lacanian terms, for the imaginary plenitude of the child’s pre-Oedipal relation and spatial unity with its mother.²⁷ Heather, as it turns out, is a fake identity for the “forty-year-old homeless woman named Rafa Ramirez” (109), illustrating her adhesion to passport pages, which linguistically determine her identification with a mere few words (and thereby startling the reader, who may have associated “Heather” with a white woman via pre-formed mental connections). When Lowboy beholds Rafa’s “gray forearm,” which, according to her, is the result of the operations by doctors, he is reminded of his own treatments at the clinic as well as his *Playboy* collage, both of which suggest to him Rafa’s inhibition about identity formation and her entrapment within clinical schizophrenia (74). Rafa’s wanderings with her blue suitcase throughout New York’s subway system therefore constitute an aimless form of disorientation, circling between the pages of her passport and New York’s underground.

Lowboy leaves Rafa, “slid[ing] out between her spread legs like a baby” (75), which, in reference to his collage, signals his separation and distance from Rafa in terms of her linguistically determined and delimited space of selfhood. And yet, Rafa has taken Lowboy deeper into the underground’s material spaces; he thus becomes, as Deleuze and Guattari write, “grounded” in an almost “overwhelming experience, which brings the schizo as close as possible to matter, to a burning, living centre of matter” (*Anti-Oedipus* 9). This experience alters Lowboy’s conception of space. The narrator remarks upon Lowboy leaving Rafa: “He [Lowboy] felt clearheaded and relieved to be alone. He was hidden again, as safe as he’d

²⁷ See Lacan, “The Mirror Stage.”

ever be, down in the lightless, airless bowels of the world. The hum all around was a sweet thing to hear, gathering as the wind gathered, and it seemed as though it had something to tell him. He laid his head against the tunnel wall and listened” (75). Lowboy’s safe reclusion into loneliness, in order to organize his experience, no longer results in his terror in regard to his inner selfhood, but he begins—cautiously—to listen to the walls (outside his self).

Lowboy begins to alter his perception of space as he begins to open himself to the outside. His underground wanderings as a schizophrenic further pulverize his perceptions and sensations to such a minuscule degree that entities achieve their distinction only by virtue of their qualities, intensities, hues, and temperatures. Lowboy’s micro-perceptions convert people into shades and voices, platforms into shapes and colours, trains into light and sound, opening them onto a continuous spatial plane (Wray 42, 65). Lowboy dismantles actual states of affairs and strips them of their organized form by perceiving them in their molecularity. He approaches what Deleuze and Guattari term the “plane of immanence”: a pure, smooth space on whose infinite transversality constitutive or substantial divisions collapse to an even consistency within a continuum of space (“Immanence: A Life” 389). According to Deleuze and Guattari, it is from this plane where actual states of affairs are born and where new possibilities arise, where, in the narrator’s words, “the kingdom of the impossible stood glittering over his [Lowboy’s] left shoulder, waiting quietly to admit him” (Wray 72). To this end, Lowboy’s micro-perceptions do not so much constitute hallucinations, but rather perceptions that occur at a frequency different from ordinary human perception, thereby exposing the denomination of what is termed “human” to be merely one possible form of actualization.

Lowboy’s perception of space thus alters, as he notices that “emptiness” is an effect of the symbolic order—of what it means to be human (as language is considered the default

designation of the human). Lowboy perceives that matter has no empty spaces but that the condition of ordinary human perception provokes certain substances to appear as if empty. Remarks the narrator, “[Today,] he [Lowboy] was seeing the world with different eyes. The walls of the car, for example, which had always seemed so solid, were actually as hollow as an egg. A hole had been cut into the bottom of his seat and behind it was a dusky fibrous vacuum. The pencaps and candywrappers stuffed into the opening only made the hole seem emptier” (93). Lowboy sees the apparent solid walls of the car at a level of resolution that renders them riddled with tiny cavities, while he sees that the apparent emptiness of the hole in the seat is filled with matter. This connects to Deleuze’s vision of a porous materiality, with its flows and waves rendering emptiness an effect of human perception and language in their endeavour to keep castrating Oedipus in circulation. As he writes,

Matter thus offers an infinitely porous, spongy, or cavernous texture *without emptiness*, caverns endlessly contained in other caverns: no matter how small, each body contains a world pierced with irregular passages, surrounded and penetrated by an increasingly vaporous fluid, the totality of the universe resembling a “pond of matter in which there exist different flows and waves.” (*The Fold* 5)

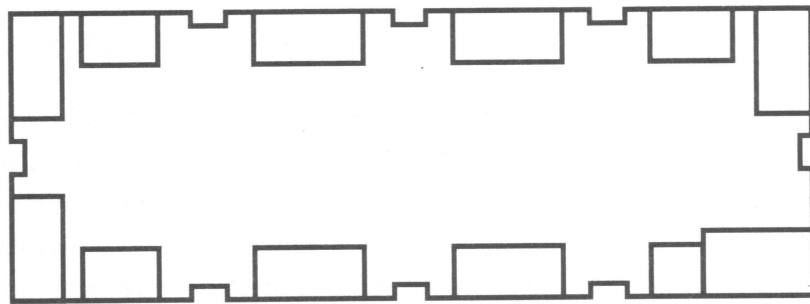
The self, then, is not surrounded by an empty space that threatens to dissolve it should it leave or lose its safely demarcated contours. Rather, the self finds itself within a material space where fullness and emptiness are determined by flows and waves travelling at different speeds and intensities.²⁸ As such, Lowboy’s perception of a continuum of space allows him to lose the contours of his self and let himself be carried away by his traversing schizo-flows. As the narrator describes, “Unreality broke over him again, stronger and more emphatic than

²⁸ On Deleuze’s concept of porous materiality and perception, see also West-Pavlov 228-233.

before, but this time he was able to endure it. It's a wave, that's all he told himself. A wave like any other. You can ride it like a surfer if you want to" (Wray 93-94). Rather than being captured within his schizophrenic and interiorized personhood, Lowboy's "schizo-flows" flow right through him like a wave, carrying his identity away towards new possibilities within space.

Lowboy's fear of symbolic castration further falters when he perceives identity not to be constituted by some transcendental law and ideological undertakings, but by desire. The narrator remarks upon Lowboy's "neutrality" of vision as follows:

In the furrows between crests of the wave he [Lowboy] saw things very sharply, the way the air comes clear after the rain. He saw the inside of the car for what it was: a controlled environment. . . . No surprises in here, Lowboy said to himself. No accidents. He studied each element of the car with his new eyes, imagining it as a kind of blueprint:



(94)

Lowboy's comments on the controlled interior space of the car and its prevention of accidents, incidents, and interactions amongst people reveal an appeal to safety and security harboured by control. His perception of the car as a blueprint, however, also discloses its design as being the perhaps intentional creation of its designer, as his or her blueprint constitutes merely one possible actualization among many others. In this regard, Lowboy

exposes the interiority of the car to be controlled and pressured from without, which, upon reading the car as a symbol for identity, then exposes the dominant focus on one's inner self to be regulated by the design of Oedipus. This symbolic organization of space by a transcendental law from without and above is further critiqued by Lowboy's portrayal of the blueprint as a graphic design in addition to describing it in mere words. Its sketch as a "trompe-l'œil" allows it to be viewed from above as well as below, playing on top-down and bottom-up perspectives as elucidated in the discussion of the novel's "Buena Vista" scene. Moreover, however, Lowboy's expression of his insights through a graphic design rather than words illustrates his departure from symbolic language. His pulverisation of states of affairs has separated graph and voice from their linguistic entanglement. Rather than having his perceptions and thoughts dictated by a transcendental signifier, uniting graph and voice, Lowboy opens up this linguistic space of subjectivity by putting the voice and the graph alongside each other. This disentanglement, simply for its possibility, further reveals the constitution of the car's safely demarcated interior space to be the result of a desire to have it designed this way and, by extension, to adhere to transcendental laws. Reports the narrator,

He [Lowboy] would never meet the people, who'd drawn the blueprint, never have a chance of questioning them, but you could learn things just by looking at the car. You could see, for example, that they were fearful men. The pattern on the walls, which he'd always taken to be meaningless, was actually made up of thousands of miniature coats of arms, symbols of the authority of the state. The interior of the car was waterproof, the better to be hosed down in case of bloodshed. And the seats were arranged not for a maximum of efficiency, not to seat the greatest number of people comfortably and safely, but to express the designer's fear with perfect clarity. No one sat with their back turned to anyone else. (94)

Lowboy's inability to meet the designers gives way to his observation of and inferences from the design as it is. He perceives fear to be the main cause of the car's design and ideological thinking to be an integral part of the car's design, built into its walls.

The car's symbols of the authority of the state here may refer to Louis Althusser's ideological state apparatus, by which he describes a set of social institutions and practices (e.g. schools, parents, religions, governments) that produce states of knowledge that express all features of reality in language and are thus inseparable from their production of consciousness (*Lenin and Philosophy* 135-137, 152-154). According to Althusser, subjective agency, properties, and desires are mere illusions as they are produced and inculcated by ideological practice, in particular through the process of interpellation, by which identity receives its subjective space (160-163).²⁹ This symbolic allocation of space places the self within spatial demarcations whose limits provoke the self to focus inward, to remain interiorized. Lowboy's observation of the car's waterproof interior then points to the frictions, phobias, and violence harboured by this delimiting allocation of subjective space and a debilitating interiority where accidents result in accusations of guilt rather than alterations of the self. The car's seat arrangement further explicates the phobic-paranoid policing of its passengers' subjective spaces. Lowboy's remarks on the designer's fear then reveals his or her design to be the result of a longing for stability, security, and, perhaps, leadership. To this end, the car's design—and, by symbolism, identity's—presents ideological thinking as a mode of living that derives from an underlying fear and fascist desire to organize life that way. The car, then, is a manifestation of a desire for stability rather than the result of an ideological operation to which the self is helplessly exposed.

²⁹ Althusser uses the example of a police officer "hailing" one's name, upon which one turns around, recognizes, and adopts one's position as a subject within the social (*Lenin* 163).

Lowboy concludes that by transforming his mode of desire, he can welcome life in less fearful and more affirmative ways.

Lowboy-William's perception of spatial constraints as an effect of the symbolic lessens his fear of the "upper" world to which he returns, carrying forward his pulverisations of matter. Reports the narrator:

The city was new looking, glistening in the daylight, an onion with its outer skin sloughed off. He [William] saw dimes in the pavement and vinecovered housefronts and useless flagpoles and shopping bags hanging like vampire bats from trees. He saw awnings and bellpulls and limos and dogs dressed in parkas. There were so many things to see that he got dizzy. Babies see the world this way, he thought. Then they forget. (Wray 125-126)

William's perceptions of and within the "upper" world unfold along discernments of and minute attentions to abundant variations and details that display the richness, plurality, and dizziness of his vision. His visual abundance unfolds within an all-encompassing space, which blurs the linguistic distinction between "upper" and "lower" world. This is most evident in his city metaphor of an onion, whose sloughed off outer skin reveals layers or strata glistening with a "molecular" freshness, as promised by its newly exposed layers. The peeling of the onion's rough outer skin, read as a symbol for identity, releases the self's protective walls and spatial enclosure in favour of an opening within space. Life thus becomes multi-layered and ambiguously fruitful. William's reference to babies places identity within such a spatial milieu of molecular percepts and affects from which identity emerges. To this end, his "schizophrenia," understood as the separation of an individual unit from the world, receives a reversal, by which identity emerges from schizophrenic flows and processes. It is the arrest of these processes, along with the appeal to form stable selves in an

interiorized form, that produces schizophrenia in its clinical form.³⁰ Furthermore, William's placement of the baby within spatial coordinates undercuts Western culture's teleological itinerary of locating the beginning of identity within childhood space and finding its end in the formation of adult personhood. William's passage advances a cartographic notion of selfhood where growing consists of the continuous—"rhizomatic"—movements along transitional territorializations of the self within a continuum of space that progresses along new formations, reconfigurations, and new connections along open paths.³¹

William's discovery about the symbolic placement of space now kindles his desire to reconnect with his love-interest: Emily. However, his invitation to take Emily with him underground in order to help her overcome her impasses proves problematic for Emily, as her subjectivity is engrained within a Lacanian notion of the symbolic (103). Emily is a teenage "freedom fighter," who rebels against her family—particularly her father—and who wishes to run away with William to find freedom elsewhere outside her oppressive family structures (127). Emily's understanding of freedom follows the definitions of the symbolic, in so far as freedom is always located elsewhere but never in the here and now.³² According to Lacan, a child is given language to articulate its desires and a sense of self. While language thus enables the self to confirm who it is on the one hand, it is also disabling on the other, as language fails to give a complete and satisfied account of the self. Desire within language is namely propelled by a sense of lack and the hopeless pursuit of the fixed signified, which becomes another signifier along an "incessant sliding of the signified under

³⁰ See Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus* 130.

³¹ Jarraway notes that "consciousness accedes to self-consciousness only through a recognition of a certain distance within (and from) itself, 'an other'" (*Going the Distance* 5). Put within spatial parameters, this form of self-consciousness never fully materializes into a stable territory of the self but is already and always placed in relation to an indeterminate space of alterity.

³² On language and escapism, see also West-Pavlov 212-218.

the signifier” (170). There is thus always a surplus, leaving language inefficient to articulate desire. Emily’s desire to find freedom elsewhere attests to this futile and anxious pursuit of this lack. Her travels become the ones of a signifier in search of its signified. Furthermore, Emily depends on William to take her away and to “make [her] someone else . . . a different kind of person” (Wray 140). Her terror of not being somebody else but being herself further leads to her feelings of being trapped in her own skin, which underlines Emily’s tendency to seek liberty elsewhere. Her plan to run away with William and, above all, from herself, however, begins to work against her, as her geographical flight remains bound to the symbolic definition of elsewhere. Note Deleuze and Guattari, “Flight is challenged when it is useless movement in space, a movement of false liberty; but in contrast, flight is affirmed when it is a stationary flight, a flight of intensity” (*Kafka* 13).³³ Emily’s pursuit of an elsewhere clashes with William’s pursuit of lines of flight through his immersion within a continuum of space. Her consequent journey underground with William-Lowboy thus becomes futile.

Emily takes her symbolic parameters of space with her underground which she conceives of as a place of refuge. Asks Emily of Lowboy, “‘We should stay down here forever, Heller. We should build ourselves a house.’ She caught her breath. ‘I feel like I’m seven years old’” (Wray 190). Emily attempts to lock herself permanently within space. Her childhood feelings attest to her glancing back in time, imagining a moment of plenitude before she succumbed to lack.³⁴ Her desire to build a house signals her longing to hold on to

³³ Deleuze and Guattari encourage a kind of “active escaping,” which does not aim at tracing a distal end point where liberty is to be found, but at discovering a “line of flight” by way of carefully putting identity in “limit-connection” with its territorial boundaries to allow for new configurations of the self (*Kafka* xxviii, 11). On limits, see Chapter Two.

³⁴ Lacan describes this moment as the imaginary, pre-Oedipal unity between the child and its mother before the intervention of symbolic (“Mirror Stage” 75).

this moment of fulfillment and completion with Lowboy. Emily's definition of love as the ultimate solution to her problems then exemplifies her endless search, in so far as her love of Lowboy is to make her being whole and complete, as in her pre-Oedipal union of bliss with her mother.³⁵ Emily's "love manipulation" of Lowboy explains Violet's immediate dislike and distrust of Emily. Reports the narrator, "Violet had said that Emily would confuse him, that she would keep him from improving. . . ." (102). Lowboy finally comes to understand Violet's remark and decides to refine an earlier drawing of Emily, "A circle with two lines on top of it. A house with a hairy roof. . . . I'm sorry Emily," he says, "Next time I'll do my best to draw you better" (256). Lowboy's earlier drawing of Emily, read as a symbol of her identity, shows a circular territorialisation flanked by two lines to imply her "roofed" spatial constraint by the symbolic form from which Lowboy had intended to free her. His remark that he will draw her better carries sarcastic overtones, suggesting that he may draw her as a squared house, or, alternatively, not at all. Furthermore, Lowboy's expression of his insights into Emily in linguistic terms, as opposed to a graph, suggests his deliberate placement of her back into language.

Lowboy-William's disappointment with Emily now causes him to have sex with a random woman from the street in order to fulfill his plan to stop the world from ending. The energies exchanged in this sexual experience untie the knot of his identity. Reports the narrator, "He seeped out of his body like the yolk out of an egg. The world was outside his body now, which meant he was alone. His body was on the outside of the world" (221). William turns inside/out. He unfolds his interior self onto the continuous surface of the world, and he distances himself from his previous perception of possessing an enclosed interior consciousness set off against an empty space. His "unfolding" can be explained by

³⁵ See also West-Pavlov 220.

Deleuze's metaphor of the fold, by which he imagines identity as a surface that can be folded inward and outward, blurring the distinction between exterior and interior space (*The Fold* 4-6).³⁶ William's unfolding of his self along an extension in space relaxes him. Remarks the narrator, "Nothing took him [William] by surprise or made him worry. He was moving through a world transfigured and redeemed by sacrifice and it was only right that what he saw seemed foreign. He saw the world the way a headless saint would see it" (Wray 232). William's anxious self unwinds upon his unfolding. His reference to a decapitation signals his unwillingness to have his identity organized by the tyranny of the signifier commanding an enclosed interiority; instead, he seeks to participate in the folding and re-folding of space without any higher coordinating principle. His feeling of foreignness stems from this malleability of space, which continuously reorganizes the boundaries between the self and the world, opening his identity to its own otherness, essentially turning his self into a foreigner to itself. Attuned to Emerson, Julia Kristeva describes the self as "a strange land of borders and othernesses ceaselessly constructed and deconstructed" (*Strangers to Ourselves* 191). Kristeva, Emerson, and Deleuze seem to have something strangely in common in their mutual unsettling of the binary distribution of space into placements of "low" and "high," "interior" and "exterior," "self" and "other." These binaries are generated out of the same spatial fabric as linguistic placements, as a combination of each entity's own qualities and those of its own other. William beholds this bustling and contagious multiplicity in the letters and ciphers on his underground train: "They weren't words at all but pictures. Each letter its own heaving organism. They shuddered together like bees in a hive, dancing out messages and swallowing one another and making a history and fucking. When he [William] opened his eyes he understood them perfectly" (Wray 234). William observes the pregnancy of each

³⁶ On Deleuze's concept of the fold, see also West-Pavlov 233-239.

letter along with the “folded” coexistence of phonetic and graphic elements, whose mutual “fucking” bears a richness and variation in their ever-new relations among each other. Rather than having a dictating voice subordinate “graphism” to the function of writing, there emerges in the more territorialized sign a kind of

jumping from one element to another; radiating in all directions; emitting detachments wherever there are flows to be selected; including disjunctions; consuming remains; extracting surplus values; connecting words, bodies, and sufferings, formulas, things, and affects; connoting voices, graphic traces, and eyes, always in a polyvocal usage—a *way of jumping* that cannot be contained within an order of meaning, still less within a signifier. (Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus* 204; emphasis original)

William perceives a cartographic network of lateralized connections between voice and graph that continuously grow new meanings along territorialized configurations. His observation of a fluid, productive, and spatially configured kind of language takes away his fear of symbolic castration, resulting in his gasp: “Now it’s happened, he [William] thought. Now the world can stop ending” (Wray 222).

William’s accomplishments of his plan, however, result in his wish to retreat into Oedipal structures, an endeavour which the novel prevents. William feels lonely, as he thinks of himself as the only one who has made this experience with space. He remarks, ““My mother was a house. So was Emily. I was a piece of paper or a cigarette or a bed”” (250). William’s reflections on his mother’s and Emily’s identity as houses in comparison to his own, which takes on diverse spatial configurations, give way to his feeling of loneliness and his wish to retreat (in)to his mother.³⁷ Imagines William, “Would she [Violet] lay a palm

³⁷ Kathryn Bond Stockton in a related context further comments on the “house” as a symbol of territorial retreat for male subjectivity: “Like a woman’s body, in a fetishist sense, the

against his forehead to wake him. Would she give him a moment then tug gently on his ear. Would she laugh at him then. Would she call him Professor. Would she seem sorry to have woken him at all” (254). William projects his childhood memories onto the future: his reference to “professor” recalls the scene in the Pennsylvania hills at the very beginning of the novel when he was twelve, before his underground adventures started. Yet, he is not able to fall back onto Oedipal structures. Not only does his mother disappear at the end of the novel, preventing his retreat, William-Lowboy is furthermore overcome by instability and doubt, with “the old fear climbing saplike through his body from the soles of his feet where it had long been stockpiled and he opened his mouth and gave a little cough” (255). Lowboy’s re-emerging anxiety suddenly makes him aware of his Oedipalization, and the answer to his previous query at the beginning of the novel appears to him: “Why was I born, Lowboy thought. I know why” (258). Lowboy’s answer lies in the unanswerable (the novel does not provide an “answer”). To Lowboy, there is no meaning to life other than his engagement in the flux of life’s cartographic processes where meaning is contingent and open to consistent reconfiguration. In this respect, he embraces identity’s indeterminacy in his final jump off the platform into the unknown, open ending of the narrative. In short, he cancels his present territorialization of his self in favour of new ones. In this respect, Lowboy-William’s world—and the novel’s—ends in the intensities of an inferno, when the “world ended by fire” (258). Will-i-am Hell-er (where “heller” is German for “brighter, more intense”) experiences the welling up of intensities in re-configurative moments of loneliness to form new territorializations on the outside of the self, pointing to the unknown future.

house is a reflection of a man’s position: it’s a place he penetrates and thus it is his body—also his views, literally so—in an extended sense” (*The Queer Child* 197). William thus seeks to retreat into the spaces of his mother—a space that he claims as his own. On the house as a symbol of the self, see Jarraway “‘Ancestor of Narcissus’: Stevens and Psychoanalysis between Freud and Deleuze” 175-176.

Like William's name, Violet Heller symbolizes intensities. Throughout the novel, her identity remains ungraspable and uncategorizable as observed by Detective Lateef: "her [Violet Heller's] character refused to hold still, refused to fall into a pattern, not out of resentment or contrariness but for some reason yet unknown to him. There was nothing disingenuous about her, nothing studied, and that in and of itself was baffling. There might be nothing more to her than what he'd seen" (197). Violet's self is a mysterious one and appears as such to Detective Lateef, who himself struggles with his interiorized identity trapped within a hybrid identity (152). What Lateef notes to be the "nothing more" to her identity is the "something" of the molecular space in which Violet's identity is invested, and which escapes signification. And yet, Violet seeks to find stability from this nebulous space. As she reflects, "It was a good thing to know what was going to happen next. It made you feel that randomness was not the universal law: as if a thing you'd been taught to think of as hollow were suddenly shown to have substance. There was comfort in that belief, if you were willing to put reasonable doubt aside. She wondered whether Will took comfort there" (118). Violet seeks certainty and stability from doubt and from what she takes to be the universal randomness of life. Her remarks on the substantiality of seemingly hollow things connect to William's observations in the subway train. Her notion of spatial continuity, however, serves her as a means to build a stable and safe habituation of selfhood. Perhaps in this respect, Violet's marriage and motherhood have given her stability from the uncertain outcome of her university career and life's unpredictable manoeuvres (200). Unlike her son, William, who thrives in his indeterminate self within indeterminate space, Violet seeks to get out of it.

Violet Heller's awareness of a continuum of space, however, redefines her notion of motherhood. As she confesses to Detective Lateef, "I may have aggravated my son's illness—I won't deny that—but I didn't cause it" (85). Her assertion that she has contributed

to her son's condition takes us back to the scene in the Pennsylvania hills where William had his first mental upset at the age of twelve (as referenced in the beginning pages of this chapter). Violet's decision to take her son "someplace empty" (46) reveals intention on her part: she augments William's fear of symbolic castration and its production of spatial emptiness engulfing the self in order to prevent a painful "infolding" and enclosure of William's self, which is threatened by the painful loss of his father that has provoked his identity crisis. Violet Heller's "unmotherly" actions can be explained by Deleuze and Guattari when they note that "to augment and expand Oedipus by adding to it and making a paranoid and perverse use of it is already an escape from submission, to lift one's head up, and see passing above the shoulders of the father what had really been the question all along: an entire micropolitics of desire, of impasses and escapes, of submissions and rectifications" (*Kafka* 10). By exaggerating Oedipus, Violet Heller paradoxically unblocks William's impasse of an enclosed subjectivity, harbouring pain, in order to boost the intensity of his "schizo-flows," and, in consequence, his immersion within space in order to help him through his fear of facing his inner self. Perhaps William's mother's definition of parenthood is in line with Deleuze's ruminations that "parents as persons simply play the roles of openers or closers of doors, guardians of thresholds, connectors or disconnectors of zones" (*Essays Critical and Clinical* 62). Violet, then, disconnects William from an enclosure of his self and connects him onto his "schizo-flows," in hopes of opening William's self onto a continuum outside his enclosure. Violet, in her role as a "guardian of thresholds," places William in medical care rather than prison when social concern for his condition arises (Wray 176). Her affirmation in the presence of Detective Lateef that she did "ask the state of New York to hold on to [her] boy" (30) indicates her trust in the *medical* and psychoanalytic

professions to help her son's condition—by altering their clinic conceptualization of schizophrenia (as noted earlier on in this chapter).

In this respect, Violet's understanding of parenting does not consist of an indefinite protection of William—a definition of caring that stifles her son—but of allowing William to make his own (sometimes painful) experiences that are outside of parental control. William's escape into New York City's underground also escapes Violet's premonitions. Though Violet is overcome with unbearable fear and concern for her son's life, she marks the distance that she needs to go to her child. States the narrator, "For a moment she [Violet] stood at a remove from herself, saw the barrenness of a life lived to one end alone, the bitterness and futility of such a life; but the feeling soon passed. You don't live only for him [William], she thought. Not anymore. And he doesn't live for you at all" (116). Violet learns to go the distance to her son William and to her motherhood, which has defined her life up to this moment. Her distancing from William and her role as mother, however, does not imply that she is about to desert him. Rather, it means that her role as a guardian has come to end. For Violet, motherhood comes to mean a detour—a fruitful outgrowth—on her own path throughout life. She finally realizes that there is more to life than being a mother— a perspective which is nevertheless unsettling for her.

Violet also dreads the imminent indeterminacy of her life. This becomes evident in her remark to Detective Lateef: "'I hate trains.' She took a breath and held it. 'I hate them'" (236). Violet is averse to the movements without and within herself, as symbolized by the trains, which disturb her guarded selfhood. And yet, to Detective Lateef's surprise, she experiences a break upon the platform of the underground when Lateef observes, "She [Violet] was in much the same position as before, perhaps drawn farther back into the dark, perhaps been bent slightly to the floor . . . but she quieted when he said her name and drew

her toward him” (247). Violet is sliding into a darkness or what Deleuze and Guattari term a “swirl of micro-black holes” that designate collapsed spaces that are difficult to come out of once drawn into (*ATP* 224). Her selfhood collapses into these spaces of “nothingness” on the platform of New York City’s underground. Detective Lateef’s call to William’s psychiatrist earns him the explanation that ““Miss Heller is a paranoid schizophrenic”” (Wray 246). Violet is unable to shield herself from her own “schizo-flows” and her own indeterminate otherness. Perhaps her sought after protection signals the violence of these flows and intensities and their sheer unbearable magnitude, which can annihilate the self completely and efface any form of identity.³⁸ Violet’s name itself symbolizes these dangers harboured by one’s exposure to life’s unruly forces. And yet, the disappearance of both Violet and William at the end of Wray’s novel illustrates the inevitable workings of these unruly forces and their rattling at identity’s closed—interiorized—form. To this end, the novel leaves Detective Lateef, along with its readers, in bafflement as to what to do (with the novel).³⁹

To answer this question partly, *Lowboy* lends itself to Oedipal interpretation. Wray’s novel emits Oedipal signs, such as blaming William’s stern grandfather, whose firmness towards William may signal sexual child-abuse, or symbolize the inevitability of the law of the father to which William’s self must concede (55, 57). Alternatively, in a quest for what went wrong in his childhood, William’s mother, Violet Heller, could also be blamed, as her “mother fixation” and genetic transmission of schizophrenia configures the mother as the eternally blame-worthy one (85-86). These signs are partially emitted by Violet in her disavowal of the symbolic in order to assist William in his underground adventures. Notes Detective Lateef, “I saw what she told me to see” (243). As such, Violet misleads the

³⁸ In a conversation, a psychiatrist once suggested to me that the clinical schizophrenic can drift off into spaces where he or she can no longer be reached.

³⁹ For my cautionary words on *caution* when dismantling identity, see Chapter Four.

detective—and the reader—but not so much as an unreliable narrator, who cannot be trusted at all, but as a narrator who *shifts* meaning into a contingent direction. It is Oedipus that proves problematic for William after all, but not within a context of nuclear family structures, but rather within a context of space. Wray's novel, therefore, does not offer a (Oedipal) solution to the interiorized psychology of its characters, but rather constitutes an indeterminate narrative space where meaning emerges momentarily within a territorial assemblage, only to fall back again onto indeterminacy in order to produce new meanings. To this end, characters constitute openings or impasses to each other's movements in space: Lateef's search is blocked by Violet while Lateef himself undergoes an opening transformation of his interiorized self (152); Violet's function as mother and guardian dissolves and opens to an indeterminate future; and William's fear is unblocked by Violet, who opens him to the spatial configurations of his identity, while his own Oedipal retreat into Violet is blocked by the novel's open ending. Wray's characters, and by extension his readership, move on unstable territory which dissolves any totalizing interpretation (perhaps also including mine, though I have been at pains to gesture away from an universalizing interpretation by offering contingency itself as the novel's message). The text's elusive movements continue to destabilize meaning and leave the reader with a strange feeling of curtailment upon arriving at any sense of having captured the full meaning of the novel. Wray's work is a network, like the anonymous platforms and trains of New York's underground itself, moving at different speeds, rushing, whirling, and allowing for accidents and interactions among people to happen. The finite space of the book, like the containment of the underground, is perhaps another illusion of space to distract from its openness.

Within the context of childhood studies then, Wray's text moves across the predominant discourses on the child at the beginning of the twenty-first century. William

Heller's flipping through magazines that headline the issues of sex, plastic surgery, and abortion exposes these discourses to centre on the notion of childhood as an inferior space subjected to the reproduction of adult normative structures, a lost space that promises eternal youth, and as a space of adult fantasies and projections founded on the view that the child is a fully-fledged human subject even before it is born (99-100). Rather than establish another discourse that (mis)uses the child for adult projections, or that attempts to discover who or what the child consciously is, Wray's novel constitutes an invitation to embrace the indeterminacy of the child's identity, who, perhaps, is the most enigmatic thing to be found in a cradle. Instead of nudging identity and text towards coherent signification, *Lowboy* maps identity cartographically along an indeterminate spatial territory of experimentation. Herein lies the magnificent potential of William Heller: saviour of the world.

Wray's novel thus puts forward a cartographic subjectivity that moves continuously and multi-directionally through life. Its spatial manoeuvres support my claim concerning identity's "rhizomatic movements," opened up in this initial chapter on "space." The issue that this first unit now invites is a closer glance at "boundaries" as connecting factors to the "rhizome." For this purpose, Chapter Two turns to Todd Field's film *Little Children* (2006) to remark on identity's limits not as sites of exclusions but as sites of fruitful encounters.

—Chapter Two—

Strange Encounters: Identity and its Limits in Todd Field's *Little Children*

Even at such a tiny playground as this, Lucy didn't interact much with the other children. Sarah didn't really know why they'd even bothered coming here except that she'd probably go crazy trapped in the house all day with this unknowable little person.

—Todd Field, *Little Children*

I have tried to explore how we may relate to others and even become intimately engaged with them without needing to know or identify with them.

—Tim Dean, *Unlimited Intimacy*

Relations between human beings are really established before one gets to the domain of consciousness.

—Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book II: The Ego in Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis*

Now that I have demonstrated the importance of the “rhizome” in Chapter One, I now take up the question of “boundaries” in this second unit. Elaborating on the issue of identity and its limits, in particular in relation to Deleuze's child, who moves rhizomatically, requires me to talk about paedophilia, sexuality, and knowledge, as well as the image of the child connected to these issues. For this purpose, I now move to Todd Field's film *Little Children*

(2006) to exemplify each of these important facets of the topic of “boundaries” and to continue my critique of a Freudian psychoanalysis and pursue Lowboy’s “perceptions” in cinematic form.

Little Children follows three intertwining plotlines. The movie begins with the return of a rehabilitated “paedophile” named Ronnie McGorvey to his hometown of East Wyndham, Massachusetts. Ronnie’s homecoming, however, is met with utmost hostility and ostracism by the newly formed “Committee of Concerned Parents” (Field).⁴⁰ In order to help Ronnie with his diagnosed psychosexual disorder, his mother sets him up with a date, Sheila, who herself has been suffering from a series of psychological breakdowns. Sheila and Ronnie’s date ends with him masturbating in her car before the film closes the plotline of Ronnie McGorvey with his act of self-castration in fulfilment of his mother’s deathbed wish for him to “be a good boy.”

Field’s second plotline follows Sarah Pierce, frustrated mother of Lucy and wife of Richard Pierce, whom she catches masturbating to his obsession with online pornography. To escape what she perceives to be her entrapment in domesticity, Sarah begins an affair with Brad Adamson. Brad’s story forms Field’s third plotline. As a stay-at-home father of his son, Aaron, and as an unsuccessful law student, Brad enters into the affair with Sarah to get away from his wife Kathy, a documentary filmmaker and the breadwinner of the family. On his way to the local playground where he is supposed to meet Sarah and Lucy in order to run away with them, Brad gets sidetracked by teenage skateboarders. Trying to skate, Brad ends up injuring himself and changes his plans to elope with Sarah; instead, he utters his wish to

⁴⁰ *Little Children*’s setting of suburbia augments the violation of its peace through a paedophile, as suburbia may be conceived of as the paradisiacal piece of earth in which children are to flourish and grow up. Ronnie’s disturbance, quite ironically, brings out the gothic of suburban child-rearing.

return home to his family. Sarah also returns to her house after her encounter with the now castrated Ronnie at the local playground. Field's final images show Sarah and Lucy sleeping alongside each other in their home before his last shot returns to a darkened playground with an empty swing set.

To advance the argument about identity and its boundaries, Field's film *Little Children* questions the establishment of boundaries as rigid and adamant and unyielding separations that create binary frameworks and thus modes of exclusion, phobia, and resentment. His film critiques mainly two kinds of rigid boundaries within the context of the child: personal and generational. The child is beleaguered by personal boundaries that separate its self from others and by generational boundaries that separate childhood from adulthood, setting apart the superior adult realm (rational, sexual, knowledgeable) from childhood (naïve, asexual, innocent). To question these formations of boundaries, *Little Children* introduces a notion of boundaries not as sites of exclusions but of fruitful encounters. Furthermore, Field's film—predominantly via its form—places its characters and its viewers in limit-connection to the outside, a radical and unassimilable space, to illustrate how this outside informs subjectivity's most intimate spaces and opens identity to its own alterity. To this end, boundaries become what Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari term “zones of proximity,” whose vague and hazy contours involve elements of connection between the two entities they distinguish, a milieu of becoming therefore, spreading out in “rhizomatic” connectivity (*A Thousand Plateaus* 273-9). The political, sexual, and epistemological implications of these dynamic boundaries as sites of strange encounters, particularly in the context of the child and the adult, are now subject to investigation.

Field's *Little Children* introduces the discourse of paedophilia to reveal the personal and generational boundaries that surround the child, and which structure the relations between children and adults. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, these limits pursue one common goal: to keep the child from harm. It therefore comes with little surprise that the return of rehabilitated "paedophile" Ronnie McGorvey (we only know that he had exposed himself to children) to the town of East Wyndham, Massachusetts, USA, is met with utmost hostility by the newly formed "Committee of Concerned Parents" (Field 00:01:14-00:02:25). The committee's plethora of fliers—"Are Your Children SAFE?"—plaster the township. Furthermore, the committee's mobilization of other resources such as Larry's use of gramophones to warn the neighbourhood against Ronnie as well as their (or Larry's?) chalk writings of the word "EVIL" on Ronnie's driveway all aim to protect "our" children from this "dangerous predator in our midst" (00:01:45-47). The committee's exclusionary and ostracizing measures against Ronnie demonstrate the policing of personal and generational boundaries set around the child, who is deemed innocent and in need of protection particularly from the dangers of an adult world.

This intense focus on the innocent child is further seen in the severity of Ronnie's prison sentence. His two-year incarceration for indecent exposure reveals the harshness of US laws in regards to the issue of sexual child abuse, while perhaps more pressing issues such as child poverty, illiteracy, and neglect are largely ignored by US politics.⁴¹ In James Kincaid's *Erotic Innocence*, he explains Western culture's focus on sexual child abuse narratives by a certain fascination that emanates from these stories, which are officially objected to but then again welcomed with an eager ear and eye (6). And yet, Kincaid remarks

⁴¹ See Kincaid 13.

that the children of and behind these stories are not faring well, as “we’re protecting, denying, anesthetizing, and scaring them nearly to death” (24). The consequence of these sexual child-abuse stories for the child, then, is a form of paedophobia among adults—a fear of touching the child—as anyone who comes too close to the child automatically enters the danger zone of being cast as a paedophile him- or herself (which may concern in particular persons of the male gender [or gay people] and of social workers working in close proximity to children such as teachers, caregivers, doctors, and nurses). The child, by consequence, experiences a form of isolation from an adult world that is too afraid to touch the child (both in its literal and metaphorical sense) in regards to the default discourse on children—paedophilia—which then feeds into a kind of postmodern witch-hunt.⁴² Western culture’s intent to play it safe for their children then may backfire by producing more harm than protection in regard to the children’s seclusion and alienation from an adult world.⁴³

Western culture’s establishment of boundaries around the child, however, is not so much driven by an interest in protecting the material child but by a libidinal investment in the *figure* of innocence under which the child is set to perform. Field’s film reveals this devotion to the image of the innocent child when, after having portrayed a TV documentary about concerned parents in regard to Ronnie’s return (a report that clearly sets the boundaries between victims [the innocent children and their parents] and perpetrator [the paedophile]),

⁴² I would like to share my experience as regards this chapter and academic conferences. While other chapters were accepted for conferences right away, this one has only made it beyond the call for papers in a second attempt and after downplaying the issue of paedophilia. I presume there still exists a fear of “touching” the child—literally and metaphorically.

⁴³ I am not suggesting here that children do not need attention, care, and love—on the contrary. I am rather concerned about the paranoid protection and enshrinement of children that appear to suffocate them, as these forms of perhaps “torturous” caring aim to sanitize childhood from any contacts with life’s (oftentimes hurtful) experiences.

the camera slowly zooms out of a TV set and shows a solitary child figurine standing underneath a brightly lit table lamp.

Aside from visually showing the isolating consequences for the child posed by the discourse of paedophilia through a solitary *figurine*, this shot reveals the intense—“hot”—focus on the child to be an investment in the *figure* of the child. Lee Edelman makes note of this devotion to the figure of the child in his idea of “reproductive futurism” by which he means that “the image of the Child, not to be confused with the lived experiences of any historical children, serves to regulate political discourse—to prescribe what will *count* as political discourse—by compelling such discourse to accede in advance to the reality of a collective future whose figurative status we are never permitted to acknowledge or address” (*No Future* 11). Edelman bases the making of politics on the worship and enshrinement of innocent children, whose future is seamlessly to repeat the present workings of the adult world. According to Edelman, then, making things better for “our” children only serves the adult purpose of extending their viewpoints into a better future nonetheless defined by adults. The discourse of paedophilia helps this endeavour in so far as the figure of the innocent child remains untouchable and secluded from any *queer* interventions, establishing a boundary between the child and queer adult identities: long live the innocence of childhood.

At the same time that *Little Children* shows the establishment and policing of boundaries set between parents and children, between perpetrator and victims, between actors and viewers, it also disrupts these rigidly set demarcations of subjective positions in favour of indeterminate ones. As the camera slowly zooms out of the TV set, it reveals a living room with shut curtains, signalling a rather claustrophobic environment that may reflect the viewer’s interiorized identity. The eyes of the viewer are nevertheless given

leeway to roam in this unfamiliar setting, and he or she may begin to identify with the victims of the TV documentary (the parents and their children, and perhaps the ostracized paedophile himself) before the camera settles next to an armchair. As the camera halts aside the armchair (as opposed to directly behind it), it creates a visual field for the viewer that blurs the distinctions between inside/outside, placing the viewer both inside and outside the film (*Little Children* maintains this blurring of boundaries throughout the film through similar camera techniques, *aside* angles, and out-of-focus shots that shift the focus of the camera past actors and thus playing with the visual field of the viewer). Field's prelude thus draws the viewer into the film and suddenly disrupts his or her identificatory processes and his or her subjective boundaries through the sudden movement of an arm of someone sitting in the armchair, consuming a drink. This movement generates a startling effect upon the viewer, who now *assumes* the person sitting in the armchair to be the paedophile himself (though we never get to see and know who is sitting in the chair). This assumption is based on a sudden cognitive connection of the drink with the word "predator" of the TV documentary: consuming children. The viewer is thus cast as a *potential* victim him- or herself. These states of potentiality and assumptions bear with them an element of doubt, which is not settled in this prelude. To this end, Field's prelude distances its viewers from identifications and clearly defined demarcations of subject positions as promoted by the TV documentation, opening them onto a stream of conscious and unconscious images from which cognitive connections and ontological boundaries emerge.⁴⁴ The question posed by

⁴⁴ Field's prelude plays with what Deleuze and Guattari term pure percepts and affects that are independent of personalized experiences of perceptions or affections; rather, there are first neutral percepts and affects before a level of consciousness is reached, and before these percepts and affects undergo a personalization into individual perceptions and affections (*What is Philosophy?* 168).

Field's prelude is no longer one of knowledge or identification, but one of ambiguity and indeterminacy, which connects to and engages the viewer. Perhaps in this manner, Field's prelude reveals the child not to be an entity that is not simply out there, but rather an image of what we perceive the child to be: innocent and cute.⁴⁵

Little Children continues to illustrate the organization of adult-child relations provoked by the boundaries drawn around the image of the innocent child. Field's film demonstrates the generational boundaries between the realm of children and the adult world and their hierarchical organization that sets off the superior adult against the inferior child. *Little Children* chronicles the lives of Theresa, Cheryl, and Mary Ann, regulars at the local playground, who have devoted their full attention to their offspring. Their relation to their children is characterized by an almost sadistic form of parent-child hierarchy such as the one practiced by "the regiment established and maintained by Mary Ann, who believed that a rigid adherence to a timetable was not only the key to a healthy marriage but to effective parenting as well" (Field 00:04:29-39). Mary Ann's adhesion to clock time makes her schedule her sex life on Tuesday nights and the snack time for her children at 10:30 a.m. on the dot (00:03:53-57, 00:04:25-27). As Mary Ann summons her and her friends' children for their daily morning snack, Field's film portrays the children running in slow motion to signal their different experience of time as more open and fluid and yet subjected to the chronological timeline created by Mary Ann.⁴⁶ As these children's understanding of time, by virtue of the film's technique of slow motion, is opened to the (adult) viewer, this scene suggests the existence of a different notion of time, a more fluid one, alongside the chronological framework adhered to by Mary Ann.

⁴⁵ See Kincaid 19.

⁴⁶ For a distinction between chronological time and aionic time, see Chapter Three.

Little Children further reveals a generational boundary that sets off the innocent, asexual child from the sexual adult. Mary Ann requests the castration of the “sex offender” Ronnie, while Theresa remarks that her brother would expose himself to her on a regular basis when they were children (00:09:42-00:10:18). These two comments show a generational division between adults and children: whilst the same act of exposure is deemed unproblematic amongst children, it earns Ronnie a two-year prison sentence. From the reaction to Ronnie’s cross-generational intervention, it follows that children are assumed to be innocent and asexual and therefore endangered by a (corrupt) sexual adult world.⁴⁷ Here, Field’s film shows that children, by virtue of their innocence, are differentiated from adults along a generational boundary that sets off the inferior realm of childhood to the superior realm of adulthood within a hierarchical, binary framework that renders children in need of protection, as observed by Edelman previously.

Along with revealing the generational boundary that separates children from adults, *Little Children* also demonstrates the constitution of the sexed subject with distinctly drawn boundaries that render the self a rigidly demarcated unit in opposition to others. This formation of individual and sexed personhood is exposed when Sara Pierce—an anthropologist studying the behaviour of suburban women (00:03:22-00:03:38)—sarcastically interjects their conversation with the comment that one should also castrate Theresa’s brother and “nail his [Theresa’s brother’s] penis over the entrance door of the elementary school” (00:09:52-00:10:17). Sarah’s comments here reveal the organization of sexed identity to centre on the isolation of the penis, and its elevation to the position of the phallus as a complete and mythic object in the symbolic dimension that will determine

⁴⁷ Freud describes the child as both sexual active and latent by which the child’s sexuality is rendered void through its innocence. See “Three Essays” 261-262.

sexual identity. Jacques Lacan posits the child to come into being as a sexually differentiated social subject through linguistic operations of sexual difference by which the child must either identify as masculine or feminine to gain access to the symbolic order.⁴⁸ Deleuze and Guattari comment on this organization of sexed identity and its boundaries when they write that

It is this conversion [of penis into symbolic phallus] that makes the whole of sexuality shift into the Oedipal framework: this projection of all the break-flows onto the same mythical locale, and all the nonsignifying signs into the same major signifier. . . . This passage implies a subject, defined as a fixed ego of one sex or the other, who necessarily experiences as a lack his subordination to the tyrannical complete object. (*Anti-Oedipus* 81, 67)

Sarah's comments imply the formation of the sexed subject with its integrity of an ego and distinctly drawn boundaries.⁴⁹ This distinction among the sexes becomes evident in Mary Ann's son's refusal to share his goldfish with the girl Lucy and his sister (Field 00:05:25-00:05:32). *Little Children* suggests here that children are sexed before they are born, or finally at the moment when the doctor proclaims, to most parents' joy and relief, that it is a

⁴⁸ In his move away from a biologist and essentialist determination of sex, Jacques Lacan turns to the symbolic dimension as imposing sexual identity. According to Lacan, the child enters the symbolic through processes of differentiations, exclusions, taboos, and lack whereby the phallus is common to both sexes, as both come to suffer from its lack in the form of castration. Lacan regards the relations between the sexes as being structured by the masculine position of having the phallus and the feminine position of being the phallus (for the boy). See Lacan, "The Signification of the Phallus" 575-585, and Hook, "Lacan" 61, 67-68, 83.

⁴⁹ One may argue that Lacan's shift of the constitution of sexual identity from biology to the symbolic allows both sexes to switch their sexed positions in a liberating way. These transsexual identifications, however, still remain captured within a sexed binary frame of masculine and feminine poles.

boy.⁵⁰ Though children's characters are deemed pliable since innocent, their sex is not. This perspective differentiates and categorizes children as distinct "little" persons, boys and girls—a sexed distinction, which, as seen in Field's film, even children are fond of policing.

In addition to demonstrating the establishment and policing of personal and generational boundaries between adults and children, motored by the image of childhood innocence, Field's film investigates what it means to "grow up" under this image through its character Ronnie McGorvey. Ronnie grows up in a house filled with German Hummel porcelain figurines of children, which attest to the dominance of the image of the innocent child in the McGorvey house. This image of purity has come to stand in conflict with Ronnie's own sexuality, earning him, at the age of forty-eight, the diagnosis of a psychosexual disorder. Ronnie's problem, however, does not lie in his alleged desire to have sex with children (in fact, none of the film's characters are shown to have an interest in having sex with children. Even in the pool scene that shows Ronnie swimming and diving next to children, he does not touch them (00:48:00-00:48:55)). Rather, Ronnie's problem lies in the conflicting nature between his upbringing under the image of childhood innocence and his transition to sexual adulthood, leaving him trapped between the realm of childhood and adulthood (perhaps one could call Ronnie a "hybrid" identity). Ronnie's assertion that he wished he desired a girl closer to his age (00:56:40-00:56:55) does not reveal a perhaps closeted gay identity or his desire to have sex with children; rather, Ronnie's comments suggest his difficulty in coping with the boundary that separates childhood from adulthood.

⁵⁰ Sex in this regard is performatively constructed. As Judith Butler writes, "[t]he process of that sedimentation or what we might call *materialization* will be a kind of citationality, the acquisition of being through the citing of power, a citing that establishes an originary complicity with power in the formation of the [sexed] 'I'" (*Bodies That Matter* 15; emphasis original).

His masturbation in Sheila's car attests to his desperate attempts to direct his libido onto a heterosexual object-choice—a woman—in order to advance his Oedipal development towards a “healthy,” sexually mature adult (01:30:00-01:31:00).⁵¹ But Ronnie fails.

Ronnie's conflict between the image of innocence and his sexuality is augmented by his mother, May. May believes her son Ronnie to be “a miracle ... we're all miracles ... [because] as humans, every day we go about our business, and all that time we know – we all know – that the things we love, the people we love – at any time can all be taken away.... We live knowing that, and we keep on going anyway. Animals don't do that” (00:59:50-01:00:46). May defines what it means to be “human” as a form of fetishized awareness of painful loss,⁵² which contributes to Ronnie's conflict by emphasizing his distinct personhood. As a result of his interiorized psychological problems, his intimate contacts with others are rendered purposeless because any form of connectivity is foreclosed by the anticipation of such loss. May thus installs fear in Ronnie, who is suddenly concerned about losing his mother. Furthermore, May's comments on simultaneous conscious awareness and disregard of loss are reminiscent of what Karl Marx would term “false consciousness,” by which he means that one's mental framework obscures the realities of existence (Eagleton 89). Since, according to May, the reality of the human being fundamentally consists of pain and loss, the human miracle then conjures the ability to disbelieve and deny this loss; instead, one adopts

⁵¹ Ronnie's struggle can be explained by his failure to follow the stages of an Oedipal psychosexual development towards a sexual adult, which, according to Freud, consists of the resolution of the Oedipal complex when the boy-child redirects his libido from an investment in his mother onto a female mother-substitute (“Three Essays” 286). Ronnie's “failed” date with Sheila, however, suggests that a resolution of the Oedipus complex as imagined by Freud is not the desired outcome that will bring happiness to Ronnie. Rather, Field's film shows Ronnie trapped within Oedipal structures, offering him no way out.

⁵² Freud defines the fetish as a form of make-believe. The boy-child pretends that his mother has a penis to disregard her castration. Freud sees sexually fetishized items such as shoes or leather gear as replays of this original Oedipal fetish. See “Three Essays” 249-50.

a mental state that allows for the pursuit of the tasks of everyday life. The latter, if we follow May's ideological thinking, is determined by ideological structures and institutions that define what it means to be human; as such, the human individual's limits, properties, and characteristics become (pre)determined by the imposition of institutionalized images, which, according to May, can substitute our fear of loss. As Ronnie's socially constituted image is the one of childhood innocence, his internalization of this image stands in conflict with his sexuality and produces feelings of guilt, primarily about being sexual.⁵³ Ronnie's conflict then does not consist in his sexual desire *for* children, but in his persistent identification *with* children (to him, his indecent exposure does not signify as such, as he does not identify as a sexual adult distinct from children), fuelled by the image of childhood innocence that dominates the McGorvey house, and which stands in conflict with his sexuality that defines him as an adult.

Ronnie's solution to his crisis is not a second date with Sheila, following the path to the resolution of his Oedipus complexes, but a final act of self-castration to fulfil May's deathbed wish to "please be a good boy" (Field 01:57:00-01:57:16). Ronnie undergoes an anxiety attack, which is shown by his hyperventilation and his agitated pacing up and down his living room, accompanied by the deafening ticking of clocks (01:57:38-01:58:28). Ronnie's hyperventilation demonstrates the claustrophobic enclosure of his self and his conflict with the image of innocence. Writes Kincaid, children are evacuations whose "purity, of course, [is] another empty figure that allows the admirer to read just about anything into its vacancy" (16). According to Kincaid, the innocent child constitutes a blank

⁵³ I could also here invoke Freud's tripartite model of the human psyche: superego, ego, and id. Following Freud, Ronnie's internalization of innocence in his superego stands in tension with the sexual impulses of his id, which ultimately produces feelings of guilt. See Freud "The Ego and the Id" 652-654.

page that offers itself to adult inscriptions, such as those present in Ronnie's mother's letter, instructing him "please be a good boy." Ronnie feels these linguistic inscriptions on his body, which, paradoxically, are placed in order to maintain its vacancy and availability for adult inscription: be obedient and well-behaved. Ronnie's subjection to his mother's command to remain innocent and to fashion his body and behaviour accordingly increases his guilty feelings in regards to his own sexuality, which then erupt in an anxiety attack leading to his act of self-castration. His actions can be explained in Kristevian terms, which define anxiety attacks as being a return of the repressed ("Strangers to Ourselves" 184). According to Julia Kristeva, this return manifests itself in the reification and weakening of the value of signs in so far as the symbolic ceases to be symbolic and "takes over the full functions of the thing it symbolizes" (186). Ronnie witnesses the return of his repressed Oedipal castration anxiety, triggered by his mother's command to be good, and he slips from the domain of "speaking castration" to "committing castration." Ronnie thus reifies his mother's plea to "please be a good boy" (Field 01:57:00-01:57:16) and relieves his guilty feelings about his sexuality through his act of self-castration.

Through the example of Ronnie McGorvey, Field's film demonstrates the psychological costs that may ensue by growing up along an Oedipal psychosexual development. Field's *Little Children* shows Ronnie's struggle with the generational boundary that separates childhood from adulthood and in which he is entangled. Ronnie's act of self-castration, to relieve his guilty feelings, further reveals a Freudian notion of his psyche and the enclosure of his guilt inside the domain of his personhood. Ronnie's demarcation as a distinct individual is further promoted by his mother's comments on the underlying fear of loss that renders any emotional connections in vain. Ronnie's paedophilia, then, is not tied to

his desire to have sex with children, but results from his persistent and aberrant identification with children. To this end, through the character of Ronnie, Field's film shows the boundaries drawn and established by the discourse of paedophilia that aim to protect and maintain the image Ronnie has been living under: pure innocence.

To conclude my discussion of paedophilia in connection to boundaries, I would like to turn to Ronnie's date, Sheila. Sheila's personhood is demarcated by an unconscious defined as a personal container, filled with childhood memories. Though Sheila's series of breakdowns begin during the time of her adolescence when she left for college (01:27:00-01:28:44)—which may suggest that, like Ronnie, Sheila has similar issues adjusting to Oedipal development and the transition from childhood to adulthood—her psychiatrists insist on child abuse as an explanation for her adult neurosis. Reports Sheila, ““This one guy, Dr. Ferris, he said I must have been sexually abused as a child. When I told him I wasn't, he said I must be repressing the memory”” (01:27:50-01:28:06). Dr. Ferris probes into the recesses of Sheila's memory to produce a story of sexual child abuse in order to clarify her crises. Though Sheila attests to the contrary, Dr. Ferris insists on the validity of his diagnosis (which actually constitutes a retroactive construction of a narrative of abuse, where the identification of the perpetrator is supposed to bring the cure) by turning to the process of repression: however you revolve the case, there is always a child-abuse narrative in store—guaranteed.⁵⁴ Dr. Ferris's proposed solution that Sheila get married and have children attests to an Oedipal resolution of her Electra Complex,⁵⁵ a response that seems implausible to

⁵⁴ The implication of Dr. Ferris's seeking an explanation of adult mishaps in the latter's childhood ties identity to the past, and, moreover, necessitates a careful tending and supervision of one's childhood to secure the outcome of a “healthy” adult, as any childhood disturbances may cause adult mishaps.

⁵⁵ According to Freud, the resolution of the Oedipus Complex for the female child consists in

Sheila: “I can barely take care of myself, so how am I supposed to take care of kids?” (01:28:14-01:28:40). An Oedipal resolution to Sheila’s crises is therefore not likely to help her. Nor are her crises to be resolved by an identification of a child-abuse perpetrator (who is probably an uncle, or, as Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick terms him, an “avunculate”—a strange, sexually unclassifiable uncle, both inside and outside family structures (*Tendencies* 59-60)). Neither are Ronnie’s problems located in sexual child-abuse, which would close the circle of child-abuse narratives with the perpetrator having been a victim of child-abuse himself. Rather, Ronnie and Sheila are two characters who, in their own ways, struggle with their impossible transition from childhood to adulthood as they try to follow an Oedipal development along personal, interpersonal, and generational boundaries, along with their promotion of a notion of selfhood distinct from others.⁵⁶

To offer a way out of Western culture’s focus on paedophilia—the master narrative when it comes to children—*Little Children* introduces a notion of boundaries as what Deleuze and Guattari term “zones of proximity” (*ATP* 273-9). These indeterminate zones involve an element of connection between two elements, a milieu of becoming, which is spreading out in a network of continuous, heterogeneous, multiple, horizontal—“rhizomatic”—connections. Boundaries are thus not sites of exclusions but sites of fruitful

her marriage to a man who is to substitute her desire for her father, and the birth of a boy-child, whose penis substitutes for the lack of her own penis and her consequent penis envy, which was also the cause of the child’s separation from and hatred of her mother. See “The Dissolution of the Oedipus Complex” 661-666.

⁵⁶ I hasten to point out that Freud liberated sexuality from procreation and genitivity and that even his Oedipus complex points to the construction of sexualities. Yet, Oedipus promotes the formation of distinct individuals where desire always flows between two persons. It is this notion of a distinct self with stable boundaries that proves to be problematic for Ronnie (in terms of his interiorized, enclosed guilty feelings) as well as Sheila (in terms of her unconscious that marks the boundary of her personhood and that ties her to her past via her childhood memories).

encounters where the self meets its own otherness. This relation of the self with (its own) alterity is, therefore, key in its relation to and with others. Notes Tim Dean in his recent book *Unlimited Intimacy*, “every relation to other persons is mediated by a prior relation to one’s own internal otherness” (177); or, as Kristeva has argued before him, “we are foreigners to ourselves, and it is with the help of that sole support that we can attempt to live with others” (*Strangers to Ourselves* 170).

Little Children seeks to open its characters and, above all, its viewers to (their own) otherness (as noted previously in the discussion of the film’s prelude). Through this opening, Field’s film aims at altering adult-child relations from a hierarchical, binary framework (with all its parameters of opposition, exclusion, and phobia) onto more horizontally oriented relations and connections within the child and adult’s contemporaneity. To this end, *Little Children* is predominantly a film about adult characters (it is even rated “R”). Field’s film seeks to change the relations between adults and children *without* idealizing children (when child characters appear they can be as demanding, selfish, and crude as their adult counterparts). Rather, the film establishes a form of connectivity with its viewers on both a conscious and an unconscious level that opens its audience to this strange space of alterity, which may account for the “strange” and unsettling feeling that viewers may have upon leaving the cinema because they have been placed in connection to their own otherness. *Little Children*’s political message, then, is not to shun encounters and to protect children from potential dangers from an adult world in a paranoid and phobic way (as seen in the film’s portrayal of the discourse of paedophilia). This endeavour of protection is rather futile: continues Dean in his *Unlimited Intimacy*, “[i]t is a mistake to devote so many resources to protecting children from strangers, because we cannot protect them from ourselves [i.e. our

own unconscious]. Rather than protection from strangers, adults and children need to learn how to live with them” (208). In this respect, Field’s film trades in the rhetoric of safety for the rhetoric of *caution*, which, instead of completely shutting down the self within its guarded boundaries, opens up the self for the exciting and liberating promise of encounter with (its own) alterity.⁵⁷

To continue its work on otherness, *Little Children* advances a notion of sexuality that is not restricted within the bounds of individual personhood that has sexual desire flow between two (adult) persons, or the binary construction of the couple, but one that is depersonalizing and places sexuality within the unconscious. To this end, Field’s *Little Children* mocks the division and allocation of identity into the binary frame of hetero- and homosexual identities, which ties and reduces sexuality to an ontological typology. This

⁵⁷ Tim Dean argues that the figure of the stranger carries both dangers and potentials, since this figure of alterity may be encountered in various forms, that is, in “the otherness of the foreigner, the dangerousness of the enemy, the ambiguity of the neighbour, and the erotic potential of the lover” (*Unlimited Intimacy* 178-9). Rather than strictly avoiding strangers, adopting a position of caution prevents the foreclosure of identity’s encounter with the unfamiliar.

At this point, I would also like to assert that none of this chapter’s paragraphs intend to diminish, deny or disavow the painful experience of abuse. However, I do wish to point to the difficulty of raising the subject of child-abuse without getting trapped within the discourse of paedophilia. Any question as to whether or not it is legitimate to have sex with children (in spite of the argument that cross-generational sex was common practice in Ancient Rome or Greece as sexualities were constructed around notions of activity/passivity) immediately requires a “No” for an answer, lest the inquirer (in this case, me) risks being cast as a paedophile him/herself—for once cast, one is stuck. Even the argument of mutual consent between the adult and child leads one back to the discourse of paedophilia in so far as the child does not know yet, and hence cannot possibly give its consent, thus requiring its protection. Perhaps, if we borrow a relational ethic (along with a different view on sexuality) as put forward by Tim Dean, namely a “distinctive ethic of openness to alterity” as elucidated above (*Unlimited Intimacy* 176), we may arrive at a code of conduct that refrains from inflicting pain on others in the form of acts of harassment, bashing, and even rape, since these actions close off any experiences of remaining open to identity’s alteration and change. To this end, genital relations between the adult and child then become less prevalent perhaps due to the simple anatomical incongruence that may harbour pain.

fusion of sexuality and identity becomes evident in the film's American football scene. Brad Adamson has joined the football team of the "Guardians," a team of all-male police officers and members of "The Committee of Concerned Parents" (00:21:40-00:22:02). Before a match, Brad earns stern glances from his team members and his teammate's warning that "he'd [Brad] better be no pussy" when Brad offers to shake hands with the players from the opposite team (00:22:00-00:22:02). The teammate's policing for any signs of effeminacy or homosexual possibilities chronicles what Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick terms "homosexual panic": that is, the potentially homophobic anxiety that accompanies same-sex relations among heterosexual men (*Epistemology of the Closet* 19). Here, identity's boundaries become sites of exclusions and protections that further imply a "core gender identity" where sexual desire flows between distinct and opposite genders (with same-sex relations being mimetic of this heterosexual model of desire or enforcing masculinity⁵⁸). The amount of energy that goes into this safeguarding of identity's boundaries is well-illustrated by the hampered, exhausted movements of a wheelchair driving up and down the tracks bordering the playfield (Field 00:21:40-00:21:49, 01:05:40-01:05:50). The wheelchair can thus be read as a means to protect the more conscious formations of sexual identity as represented by the brightly lit playfield against any unconscious intrusions as represented by the darkness that surrounds it. Indeed, as the film progresses, there is an increasing amount of darkness permeating individual shots and engulfing the screen in the form of shadows, darkened background colours, and night shots. This intruding darkness blurs distinctions of inside/outside⁵⁹ (as briefly mentioned at the beginning of this chapter) and shows, as Tim

⁵⁸ See *Tendencies* 157-61.

⁵⁹ In her prologue to her essay collection *Inside/Out*, Diana Fuss argues that the inside/outside binary underlies sexual identities, marking homosexuality as "an indispensable

Dean writes in *Beyond Sexuality*, “how the outside—an alien alterity—inhabits the subject’s most intimate inwardness . . . [and] how the ‘outside’ functions as the subject’s most intimate inwardness” (53). Here, “outside” is not to be conceived as the linguistic opposition to inside, but rather as Deleuze defines it: as a force of life existing in non-human, non-known, non-said, non-subjective, present absence mode (*Foucault* 81). *Little Children* places identity in limit-connection with the outside, a course of action from which the film derives its name. *Little Children* belittles identity in face of the vastness of creative potential for identity’s continuous becoming-other offered by the outside. To this end, Field’s film promotes a notion of desire and sexuality that is no longer based on the ego or individual, but is situated outside the bounds of personhood, making erotic desire also available to and within children.⁶⁰

Little Children further critiques the centering of Western culture’s sexual politics on the image of the innocent child, as evident in Richard Pierce’s obsession with online porn star Slutty Kay, culminating in her “dressing up like a little girl and playing with balloons” (Field 00:30:36-39). The image of the child here receives a form of eroticization that kindles Richard’s desire. His arousal can be explained by Kincaid, who posits that the image of the pure and innocent child informs our sexual politics in so far as “the instructions we receive

interior exclusion—an outside which is inside interiority making the articulation of [heterosexuality] possible” (3). Furthermore, she argues that the position of the outsider is marked in terms of a lack (less masculinity, homelessness, powerlessness) whereby “[t]o protect against the recognition of the lack within the self, the self erects and defends its borders against an other which is made to represent or to become that selfsame lack” (3). It is this absence internal to the self, however, that *Little Children* works on, through, and with.

⁶⁰ This disarticulation of erotic desire from personhood, as I see it, bears liberating consequences as it promotes a notion of the sexual that is neither essentialist, that is, grounded in the natural and the body, nor discursively constructed, as even constructivist accounts of LGBTI identities run the danger of providing normative categories. See also Tim Dean, *Beyond Sexuality* 6.

on what to regard as sexually arousing tell us to look for (and often create) this emptiness, to discover the erotic in that which is most susceptible to inscription, the blank page” (*Erotic Innocence* 16). Slutty Kay’s dressing up as a girl, together with her smooth skin and face, adopts the image of the innocent child that arouses Richard’s desire—one upon which he can inscribe and act out his fantasies. In this respect, *Little Children* shows how the child is desired and forbidden at once, which perhaps additionally explains Western culture’s simultaneous attraction to and disavowal of child-abuse narratives. Sexual desire is furthermore put under the law of transgression where desire is in pursuit of that which is forbidden to begin with: the child. The child is therefore set up to be sexually luring and forbidden at once, while its image of innocence travels across the generational boundary among an adult world, enticing Richard’s desire.

Field’s film illustrates the workings of an unconscious form of sexual desire primarily through its form. This is shown in Sarah and Brad’s first kiss, which is accompanied by the circular movement of the camera, demonstrating the mobility of desire that flows through Brad and Sarah (Field 00:15:00-00:16:44). Later in the pool scene, which chronicles Sarah’s desire for Brad—a form of sexual desire that is still captured within the bounds of Sarah’s personhood, provoking “her longing to touch”⁶¹—the camera does not follow what one would expect to be alternating, sequential shots of characters or scenery (00:44:15-00:44:20). Instead, the camera falls into an incessant, continuous movement that connects characters, scenery, and viewers: now the camera is following Sarah and then connecting to the running children, now showing Brad diving in the pool, now moving up to the leaves rustling in the wind (00:42:52-00:44:52). This ceaseless mobility among these

⁶¹ On the subject of “touching” and “being touched” through images, please see Chapter Five.

elements connects to what Deleuze and Guattari term a machinic and material unconscious that is productive and creative, forging ever-new connections and proliferating flows from which distinct bodies and their boundaries are produced (*Anti-Oedipus* 4-5). *Little Children* shows this secondary formation of personal and socio-cultural boundaries in two consecutive shots that juxtapose Sarah and Ronnie's close-ups. The latter's close-up may be experienced as a disturbance within the general flow of desire, raising the viewer's awareness of the boundaries set around the child and policed by the discourse of paedophilia (this may crystallize as a moment when the viewer feels sorry for Ronnie). The awareness of the viewer is further raised in terms of the boundaries separating the adult world from the realm of children and the sexualisation of desire within the bounds of personhood.

Field's film further exposes its characters and viewers to a "machinic" notion of desire, as demonstrated by the first sex scene between Sarah and Brad in her basement. The couple is depicted having sex on her washing machine, with Brad's thrusts being accompanied by the rhythmic sounds and movements of her drier (Field 00:56:29-00:57:46). This scene, through its technical gadgets and the distantiated camera shot from without, defines sexual desire not in terms of a flow between two sexes but of a machinic confluence of forces that carries the potential to depersonalize identity within a flow of creative becoming-other. Deleuze and Guattari note that sexuality is "badly explained by the binary organization of the sexes, and just as badly by a bisexual organization within each sex. Sexuality brings into play too great a diversity of conjugated becomings; these are like *n* sexes, an entire *war machine* through which love passes" (*ATP* 278; emphasis added). "Sexuality," Deleuze and Guattari continue, "is the production of a thousand sexes, which are so many uncontrollable becomings" (278). This insight suggests that sexuality is not

linked to identity in a categorizing and essentializing way but, as illustrated by the camera's distanced angle, becomes a productive force that traverses identity in a dismantling and depersonalizing manner.

This notion of desire further bears a connection to the outside. Field's film illustrates this connectivity through a shot that follows Sarah and Brad's orgasms in the basement. This shot shows an empty perambulator standing outside, exposed to the elements. Sarah and Brad's sexual act is thus visually connected to the outside, where the empty perambulator does not so much signal the absence of children (needing protection from Sarah and Brad's adultery), but its dark centre constitutes an uncanny encounter with an "absence at the heart of all subjectivity," to borrow Diana Fuss's phrase.⁶² This shot may generate a strange feeling in the viewer, who has been part of the unconscious connectivity of the film and the flow of (unrepresentable) outside forces captured by the shot's dark centre in the perambulator. Field's film uses a perambulator to sensitize and place viewers in the liminal space between opening themselves to their own strangeness, or using the protection of children to shield themselves from encountering their inner absence. To this end, this scene advances a machinic notion of desire connected to the outside, where the sexual act between Sarah and Brad becomes one avenue to engage in a becoming-other by way of the affective intensities released in sex, rather than remaining restricted within the bounds of the two sexes.

Field's film continues to disarticulate erotic desire from personhood throughout the sex scenes between Sarah and Brad. One scene shows a hand gently gliding alongside a sweaty body without the viewer knowing which hand and which body belongs to whom (Field 01:15:02-01:15:20). This scene comes after shots that show astonishing similarities

⁶² See Fuss, *Sense of an Interior* 178. Her phrase will inform the other chapters that follow and appear without further referencing to her.

between Brad and Sarah's bodies. Rather than showing their bodies in their gendered and sexed distinction, this shot portrays their bodies as characterized by their differences in intensities, colours, hues, temperatures, and the pulsation of their breath and blood through their bodies. Field's shot shows the effects of what Deleuze and Guattari term the "Body without Organs" (BwO), by which they describe a germinal field of intensities adjacent to the body (*ATP* 153). Deleuze and Guattari's BwO is not to be understood as being directed against organs. Instead, it rather targets modes of organizations and normatizations that capture the body within binary allocations of sex: the BwO, they write, "is already under way the moment the body has had enough of organs and wants to slough them off" (150). The sexual act between Sarah and Brad is an avenue to construct this BwO as their transpersonal germinal field, or, as Dean observes, "erotic intimacy also can serve as a means for encountering something wonderfully strange to the self – something that neither the self nor the other properly possesses but that emerges in the contact between them" (*Unlimited Intimacy* 181). It is this "strange" (*transpersonal*) BwO, underway in Sarah's and Brad's sexual relations, that makes Sarah scream out to Brad: "You're alive!" (Field 01:03:00-01:03:30). To this end, Field's film employs a de-personalizing notion of sexuality that places identity in limit-connection with the outside. Unlike alterable socio-culturally and psychologically set limits, the BwO constitutes an illimitable limit that puts identity within a process of continuous construction: "[y]ou never reach the Body without Organs, you can't reach it, you are forever attaining it, it is a limit" (*ATP* 150). Field's film does not fuse sexuality and identity in a categorizing manner, but rather uses the sexual act of adults as one possible avenue to place identity in connection with becoming-other.

As *Little Children* puts forward an unconscious and impersonal notion of sexuality that frees erotic desire from genital relations, it makes the erotic available to and within children. The erotic intimacy between Lucy and Aaron, as they lie giggling, caressing, laughing, touching, on the floor, may then illustrate their engagement in an unconscious sexuality. Dean makes note of sexuality's unconscious manifestations with particular regard to children when he alludes to the biphasic emergence of sexuality, which occurs when it appears *before* the body of the child is ready for it:

In the case of children it seems relatively clear what being physically unprepared for sex means; psychically it means that the human infant encounters sexual impulses—its own as well as other people's—as alien, unmasterable, unassimilable to its fledgling ego, and hence ultimately traumatic. As a consequence of this capacity to disorganize the ego or coherent self, sexuality becomes a part of the unconscious. . . .

(*Beyond Sexuality* 232)

Sexuality then, according to Dean, is an unconscious formation with the capacity to dismantle the integrity of a stable ego. In regards to these *unassimilable* impulses, Lucy and Aaron may be privy to something that the adults—with their sexual categorizations and policing of boundaries, as elucidated in the film's football match of the "Guardians" and portrayal of the discourse of paedophilia—seem to have forgotten in their attempt to establish a coherent adult personality, by fighting against their policing of boundaries, thereby avoiding an encounter with (their own) otherness.

With sexuality being a function of the unconscious, any stable identity founded upon sexual manifestations is shown to be unstable, and Western culture's way of understanding the self through sexuality falters. The epistemology of the self is theorized by Michel

Foucault in his *History of Sexuality*: his contestation of the “repressive hypothesis” critiques the belief that one gains self-knowledge through uncovering one’s repressed sexuality installed somewhere deep inside the self (“I am a heterosexual/(closeted) homosexual!”), while disclosing knowledge to regulatory and disciplinary regimes and institutions that can henceforth operate on the individual through exclusions and pathological diagnoses (164-9). This epistemology of the self receives new parameters in so far as knowledge and sexuality are wedded in their more unconscious manifestations. For following the logic of Foucault’s hypothesis, knowledge about the self arrives sometime during adolescence when one’s genital functions are fully in place and one’s “true” self can finally be known. This generates the view of children as being naïve, non-knowing, and unaware in regards to the adult world, drawing an epistemological boundary between childhood and adulthood. Yet, *Little Children* puts forward a perspective of children as quite knowledgeable. Their knowledge of the world, however, is not tied to linguistic manifestations and discursive relations as Foucault illustrates in his *The Archeology of Knowledge*, but related to the unconscious and the outside, showing knowledge in its permissive facets.

This permissiveness of knowledge is shown in Aaron and Brad’s conversation. Brad attempts to explain to his son why he hugged and kissed Sarah in front of the other women on the playground: “Sometimes it’s a game that adults play to show they’re friends,” Brad says, hugging a clown-shaped punching bag. Aaron responds by shaking his head sceptically (Field 00:18:25-00:18:37). Aaron thus discloses Brad’s lie and shakes off his alleged naivety. Though Aaron may know what denotes “friendship” and his father’s conduct with Sarah may fail to fall into his known pattern, he nevertheless mistrusts his father’s new definition of friendship because he picks up on the unconscious sexual tension between Sarah and Brad.

Sexuality in its unconscious facets thus gives way to a form of awareness in Aaron that renders him privy to the adult world. Knowledge is thus not derived from his father's language, but arises from Aaron's own unconscious in the form of a vague awareness, intuition, or receptiveness: I do not know what it is, but what you are telling me is wrong.

Little Children further reveals this vague and strange notion of knowledge to apply to selfhood. This is shown in Brad constantly wondering why he is suddenly attracted to Sarah, who is not his type at all (00:18:15-00:18:25). Sarah's boyish looks, thick eyebrows, and sturdy figure do not converge with the image of his wife Cathy, who, according to Brad, is "a knock-out" (00:18:54-00:19:20). Though Brad keeps on re-enacting the kiss between him and Sarah, he has no idea why he falls for this woman. Similarly, Sarah does not "feel shame or guilt, only a sense of profound disorientation as if she had been kidnapped by aliens and then released unharmed a few hours later" (00:17:25-00:17:52). Both characters are strangely attracted to each other without knowing why, while noting the forms of displacements offered by erotic possibilities. This inability to know about one's attractions, and, moreover, one's inability fully to know the person one falls in love with—or, by extension, to know anyone—is explained by Deleuze when he writes:

[t]he beloved appears as a sign, a "soul"; the beloved expresses a possible world unknown to us, implying, enveloping, imprisoning a world that must be deciphered, that is, interpreted. What is involved, here, is a plurality of worlds; the pluralism of love does not concern only the multiplicity of loved beings, but the multiplicity of souls or worlds in each of them. To love is to try to *explicate*, to *develop* these unknown worlds that remain enveloped within the beloved. This is why it is so easy

for us to fall in love with women who are not of our “world” nor even our type.

(*Proust & Signs* 7)

Deleuze offers the beloved—and the self per se—as a sign containing infinite potential worlds. Rather than knowing the beloved or the self in a holistic way, knowledge emerges momentarily and vanishes again to give way to new forms of knowledge. Attempts fully to know the beloved fail, as they merely produce jealousy because the beloved’s multiplicities automatically exclude the lover from these worlds.⁶³ Such exclusions, perhaps, explain the failure of Brad and Sarah’s relationship at the end of the film, as Sarah begins to grow jealous of Brad’s wife. Sarah spies on the Adamsons from inside her hidden car, and it is from this moment on that Sarah begins to control and “mother” Brad, talking him into running away with her (Field 01:21:00-01:22:10). Sarah and Brad’s “getting to know each other” should have accounted for this inability to know the other completely—as perhaps practiced by Lucy and Aaron’s “fragile friendship”—and for the ability to maintain the otherness of the beloved (00:43:25-00:42-29). This impasse is perhaps why Tim Dean suggests that strangers should be lovers, while remaining strangers: “[m]y ‘getting to know him [the lover]’—my genial effort to make the stranger more familiar—is partly what this otherness needs protection from” (*Unlimited Intimacy* 179). To this end, *Little Children* advances a permissive notion of knowledge whose vague contours allow for the unfamiliar to be familiarized in order to account for new facets of the self.

Little Children offers the child as a sign whose encounter reveals an epistemological limit that confronts the adult with his or her own limitations of knowledge and thought. Field’s film exposes these limits in Kathy Adamson’s interview with a boy, whose father has

⁶³ For more details on the beloved and love, see Chapter Five.

been killed in Iraq. Kathy shares a perception of the child as innocent, as revealed by her denomination of her son Aaron as “perfect” and her spelling out of the word “k-i-l-l-e-d” when she talks about her upcoming documentary with the boy in front of her own son, Aaron (Field 00:45:17-00:45:21). At the interview, she asks whether the boy is comfortable talking about the death of his father as if this question, fuelled by the image of innocence, implies that children are more vulnerable to loss and grief than adults. To her surprise, the boy nods willingly and replies that he cried upon hearing the news of his father’s death as opposed to his mother, who silently went up to her bedroom and cut the pillows. The boy explains his mother’s behaviour when he says that “[t]here were feathers everywhere. . . . She was trying to find the crown. . . . The crown you leave on your pillow when you’ve slept on it for a while. My father had two crowns” (01:13:08-01:13:50). Upon the boy’s startling words, Kathy stops the documentary that she has been editing. Kathy encounters the limits of her thought system. She fails to make sense of the boy’s words in particular, as her knowledge about children and grief is likely invested in the image of innocence (she reads a book entitled *Children and Grief* while caressing her “perfect” son Aaron, who is lying next to her [00:24:37-00:25:47, 00:26:00-00:26:24]), sparking her astonishment at the boy’s unexpected words and provoking her to ponder, while her gaze is transfixed by the documentary.

Deleuze, in his book *Foucault*, explains the emerging of knowledge as a form of the visible and the articulable: to see and to speak is to know (51). Moreover, he observes that knowledge emerges at the interstices between perception and language, since, according to Deleuze, we never see what we are speaking of and never speak of what we are seeing. The instances of perception and language are thus kept apart and independent of an intending subject as seer and speaker, and a gap emerges that converts phenomenology into

epistemology (108-13).⁶⁴ In this respect, the boy's utterances constitute an irrational break in Kathy's accustomed pattern of perceiving and thinking—a break that re-links her ways of seeing and thinking, particularly about the child. This re-linkage is shown in Field's neglect in depicting visual images of Kathy's streams of thought and flashbacks. Nor is there a voice-over whose comments would link images and speech. Rather, Field's film shows Kathy's transfixed gaze on the screen before turning to a close-up of her face to illustrate her encounter with this blind spot, "the common limit that links one to the other [images and language], a limit with two irregular faces, a blind word and a mute vision" (65). *Little Children* shows Kathy in deep thought, which occurs at the permissive limit between perception and language:

To think is to reach the non-stratified. Seeing is thinking, and speaking is thinking, but thinking occurs in the interstice, or the disjunction between seeing and speaking.... Thinking does not depend on a beautiful interiority that would reunite the visible and the articulable elements, but is carried under the intrusion of the outside that eats into the interval and forces or dismembers the internal. (87)

Kathy experiences the intrusion of the outside into her modes of perception and thinking, which opens up the possibility for her to think and to perceive otherwise. Field's scene offers a moment that disrupts Kathy's (and Western culture's) default perception of the child as innocent in favour of an unconscious, immanent stream of images that allow her to perceive and, by extension, to know the child differently.⁶⁵ Instead of prescribing a newly coined, demarcated vision of the child, Field's film leaves this vision open. In such terms, innocence will not denote a blank, naïve, and morally clean denomination of the child but rather an

⁶⁴ See also Parr 111.

⁶⁵ On perception and the unconscious, see Chapter Five.

immanent stream of images from which new knowledge emerges with the freshness of a new beginning, and to which only the child, in its non-solidified use of language, may be privy.⁶⁶

Little Children illustrates the child's exposure to and engagement with the outside in the boy-child's comments on his father's two crowns. The loss of his father hits the boy as hard as it hits his mother. Her way of relieving the impact of her loss, through tearing open the pillows, makes sense to the boy, in so far as his mother appears to him to be engaging in a process that Deleuze terms "doubling" (98). By this, he means the turning back of impacting forces on themselves through opening the self to its own otherness. Deleuze writes that the double

is never a projection of the interior; on the contrary, it is an interiorization of the outside. It is not a doubling of the One, but a redoubling of the Other. . . . It is the emanation of an 'I,' but something that places in immanence an always other or a Non-self. It is never the other who is double in the doubling process, it is a self that lives me as the double of the other: I do not encounter myself on the outside, I find the other in me. (98)

By positing that his father had two crowns, the boy alludes to this doubling of identity that places it in relation to the outside. The boy transforms the impacting forces of painful loss by allowing them to alter his sense of self through a becoming-other. This transformation, however, is only achieved by virtue of a notion of boundaries of the self that are not rigidly set and demarcated, which would only internalize loss and produce a Freudian melancholia,⁶⁷

⁶⁶ For language and the child, see Chapter Four.

⁶⁷ Freud distinguishes between mourning and melancholy. While one is able to let go of one's loss in mourning, the lost object is internalized in melancholy, as the individual tries to live up to his or her internalization while feeling guilty for the loss of the object, resulting in self-punishment. See Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia" 584-589.

but that form “zones of proximity,” whose permissiveness allows the self to open to its own alterity.

To this end, the narrating voice of the film does not form an omniscient, God-like authority that possesses knowledge about all characters’ motivations and inner lives, but it rather forms what Deleuze and Guattari term an “assemblage of enunciation.” In *Dialogues II*, Deleuze writes that

[t]he minimum real unit is not the word, the idea, the concept or the signifier, but the *assemblage*. It is always an assemblage which produces utterances. Utterances do not have as their cause a subject which would act as a subject of enunciation, any more than they are related to subjects as subjects of utterance. The utterance is the product of an assemblage—which is always collective, which brings into play within us and outside us populations, multiplicities, territories, becomings, affects, events. (38; emphasis original)

The anonymous voice-over of the film, then, forms an utterance born of assemblages that have invented the narrator as a result of encounters and interactions with the characters, scenery, and life of the film in general. The voice-over thus becomes a voice in-between: “This is assembling, being in the middle, on the line of encounter between an internal world and the external world” (39). Knowledge, once again, is actively born from dynamic interstices and does not simply lie out there to be discovered.

Field’s *Little Children* shows the importance of these dynamic boundaries in its final scene when Sarah and Lucy return home after their encounter with castrated Ronnie at the playground and after Brad has deserted Sarah (02:01:00-02:13:30). Field shows Sarah and Lucy in an embrace on a bed. While their retreat into their house shows the necessity of

boundaries on the one hand—the need to shut oneself off from the world by creating a distanced space—their withdrawal is pregnant with potentialities for re-configurations of the self. Field’s final scene dismantles both identities, the child and the adult, and opens them onto the germinal plane of the BwO as perhaps best explained by Deleuze and Guattari when they write

[t]he BwO is a childhood block, a becoming, the opposite of a childhood memory. It is not the child “before” the adult, or the mother “before” the child: it is the strict contemporaneity of the adult, of the adult and the child, their map of comparative densities and intensities, and all of the variations on that map. The BwO is precisely this intense germen where there are not and cannot be either parents or children. (*ATP* 165)

Rather than having Sarah fall back onto a childhood memory in her moment of pain, or showing Lucy traumatized (there are no visual images showing their mental states), Field’s scene shows Sarah embracing Lucy, this “unknowable little person” (Field 00:04:10-00:04:18), which precisely implies a refusal of knowledge and a binary opposition of their selves. Field’s shot opens Sarah and Lucy to the outside as signalled by the camera’s final movements out of the bedroom window and out onto the cosmic sky (02:13:30-02:14:00). The house’s apparent stability, read as a symbol for the self,⁶⁸ is shown to possess porous openings that refuse to remain shut—dynamic boundaries—that turn toward the future by virtue of encountering the otherness of selfhood.

⁶⁸ Jarraway develops this notion of the house as a symbol of the self, namely as “quasi-extensions or figurations of human personality,” in detail in his essay “‘Ancestor of Narcissus’: Stevens and Psychoanalysis between Freud and Deleuze” 175. Also see his seminar “‘No Place Like Home’: House H(a)unting in Modernist American Fiction” held at the University of Ottawa in Fall 2006. Also see William Heller’s fear of the house (viewed as a symbol of a fixed adult self) and his subsequent fall into “schizophrenia” in Chapter One.

To this end, Field's final shot portrays this strange space of alterity. It depicts the local playground, darkened with the squeaking sounds of the swing sets,⁶⁹ which has just been vacated by the just self-castrated Ronnie. The local playground—a public space where strangers meet—is offered here as a liminal space that can either become a Freudian “anderer Schauplatz”⁷⁰ (another scene), a psychical locality filled with childhood memories open to Oedipal analysis, interpretation, and wish fulfilment,⁷¹ or a space of alterity, which David Jarraway must have in mind when he defines the Schauplatz as “a constitutive space, at once dark, mysterious, unspeakable . . . a radical locus of misrecognition[,] . . . a space inveterately and omnivorously and indefatigably about the cultural work of distancing texts, . . . even people themselves, from essences, origins, ends, and ultimate truths . . . a space that has been kept and guarded in American literature for a very long time” (*Distance* 4). Field's *Little Children* ends in indeterminacy—on a threshold—which leaves the viewer with a decision: whether to return to the safety and comfort of the familiar, or to swing with this opened space of alterity.

Perhaps it is for these reasons that Todd Field has adapted Tom Perrotta's novel for the cinematic screen: to emphasize a permissive notion of boundaries. *Little Children* draws its viewers out of the realm of their egos and places them in an in-between zone between film and cinema seat. While a novel also draws the reader into such an indeterminate space,

⁶⁹ Freud observes and interprets the “to” and “fro” game (“fort-da” Spiel) of a boy as a way of overcoming Oedipal loss of the boy's mother, which would explain Ronnie's withdrawal to the swing set (“Beyond the Pleasure Principle” 599). From a Deleuzian perspective, however, the swing-set represents movement in-“to” the beyond—a form of experimentation rather than an Oedipal explanation.

⁷⁰ Freud notes that ““scene of action of dreams is different from waking life,”” that ““der Schauplatz der Träume ein anderer Schauplatz sei als der des wachen Vorstellungslebens”” (qtd. in Nicholls, *Thinking the Unconscious* 272).

⁷¹ Refer to Chapter One for a similar issue on “oedipalized readings” that Wray's novel proffers and resists at the same time.

Field's filmic narrative avails itself of cinematic techniques that augment its play on boundaries. Through its *queer* camera movements, angles, shots, and lighting, Field's film creates a form of connectivity with its audience on both the conscious and the unconscious levels. His film targets the subjective boundaries of its viewers and opens them onto a stream of immanent images from which new visibilities and new perceptions are born, generating novel modes of knowledge.⁷² To this end, the viewer may leave the cinema with an uncomfortable and alienated feeling, as he or she has all the while encountered his or her own strange otherness.

Ultimately, Field's *Little Children* critiques Western culture's socio-historically and psychologically set boundaries that separate childhood and adulthood into mutually exclusive, hierarchically organized binary realms. His film turns to the discourse of paedophilia to illustrate the (de)limitations surrounding the material child, who is bartered against an adult libidinal investment in the image of childhood innocence. Through the example of Ronnie McGorvey, *Little Children* illustrates the harm entailed in an Oedipal psychosexual development that leaves Ronnie ripped open on the boundary between childhood innocence and adult sexuality. Field's character Sheila further demonstrates the personal limits marked by a conceptualization of the unconscious as a personal container, filled with childhood memories that yield sexual child-abuse narratives to explain the cause of adult neuroses along this rather long temporal stretch across generational boundaries. To distance itself from these Freudian modes of the human psyche and distinct personhood, Field's film advances a DeleuzeGuattarian notion of the unconscious as a "machinic" and *transpersonal* process that is creative and productive of flows, destabilizing any attempts at

⁷² See Chapter Five on the birth of newly libidinally invested images.

stable or coherent ego formations. To this end, *Little Children* puts forward a notion of unconscious sexuality freed from genital relations and personhood, opening the erotic even towards and within children. Rather than fusing sexuality and identity in an essentializing manner at the border to adulthood, Field's film points to the potential of sexuality to dismantle the self and to open it to Deleuzian "becomings." Adult genital intercourse thus lends itself to constituting another avenue, another pathway to engage in the unconscious, affective—erotic—intensities of "becomings" to which the child has already been privy. In regard to this unconscious notion of sexuality, knowledge about the self is no longer wedded to a stable sexual identity but it receives vague, uncertain contours, emerging at the permissive interstices between visibility and language/thought. *Little Children* thus trades in the rigid (sexual) boundaries of the self along with their phobic policing for placing the self in limit-connection with the outside, allowing for new perceptions and new ways of thinking to occur—a space of alterity where the self meets its own strange otherness.

As I have demonstrated in my reading of the film, by depicting an America in its postmodern witch hunt of the paedophile, Field reveals the (de)limitations surrounding a Freudian notion of identity while arguably at the same time operating on and through a Deleuze/Guattarian philosophy that critiques Western culture's "arborescent" notion of "growing up" along generational boundaries and that promotes the notion of children living in tandem with the adult. Now that I have discussed the issue of "boundaries," a related topic of "difference" comes to mind. To explore and elucidate on the topic of "difference" by means of the example of a queer child, I shall now turn to Peter Cameron's *Someday This Pain Will Be Useful to You* to continue to trace further the compelling manoeuvres of the "rhizome."

—Chapter Three—

“In any event!”: Rhizomes in Peter Cameron’s *Someday This Pain Will Be Useful to You*

I had always thought, or hoped, that adults weren’t necessarily as hobbled by mindless conformity as so many of my peers seem to be. I always looked forward to being an adult, because, I thought the adult world was, well— adult. . . . [But] I was beginning to realize that the adult world was as nonsensically brutal and socially perilous as the kingdom of childhood.

—Peter Cameron, *Someday This Pain Will Be Useful to You*

A rhizome may be broken, shattered at a given spot, but it will start up again on one of its old lines, or on new lines.

—Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*

Now that I have demonstrated the importance of “space” in Chapter One and explored the problematic issue of “boundaries” in Chapter Two with respect to identity’s continuous movements, I turn to the question of “difference” in this unit, into which the previous chapter has prompted me to inquire. Elaborating on the issue of “difference,” I resort to a discussion of gay identities and language, particularly in relation to the child. For this purpose, I turn to Peter Cameron’s novel *Someday This Pain Will Be Useful to You*, which raises key issues on the topic of “difference.”

Peter Cameron’s novel *Someday This Pain Will Be Useful to You* takes place over a few days and months in the summer of 2003. Cameron’s first-person narrative follows the

diary-like entries of its protagonist, eighteen-year-old James Sveck, as he struggles with his identity within a world that has never made sense to him. James lives with his divorced mother and his sister in New York City, where he works in his mother's art gallery. He has a crush on John, his mother's assistant, and a deep emotional connection to his grandmother in whom he confides his wish not to go to college, but rather to withdraw to an old house in the Midwest, in order to live a life in isolation and solitude.

To continue my thesis on the movements of the "rhizome," Cameron's novel questions Western culture's imperative of "growing up" to adult completion and personhood along categorizations and stigmatizations that demarcate adulthood as the final destination of growth. His novel uses the example of a queer child to focus on these processes and introduces a notion of movement that is not teleological, vertical, and end-driven, but "rhizomatic." This notion of growth (or rather, movement), primarily inspired by the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, is continuous, connective, heterogeneous, and spreads out into horizontal directions, where identity emerges in momentary configurations and continues its movements beyond the finality of adult personhood. To this end, this third chapter of my thesis on "moving rhizomatically" falls into two major movements. The first section demonstrates the delimitations and shortcomings surrounding the conventional notion of "growing up" towards adulthood through the example of a queer child. The second section follows the DeleuzeGuattarian "rhizome," as it makes its way through the novel and sweeps up James's identity along an open and continuous, less resentful, and more life-affirming manner of movement.

Narrated retrospectively in first person, Cameron's novel does not offer a complete account of James's childhood, but merely James's ruminations at the threshold of adulthood. As such, the novel does not present a more or less fictionalized (and perhaps idealized)

report of James's childhood, but presents snippets of memory, or *defining moments* (perhaps retrospectively defined as such by James), as illuminating lenses into his childhood days. One of these defining moments occurs with James's second grade teacher, who, as James reports, "had written in the comment section of my report card: *James sometimes has a tendency to be too clever for his own good*. It seemed like some sort of riddle to me [James], like black and white and red all over, and I asked my mother what it meant. She said it meant I talked too much" (Cameron 179). James is a child who asks too many questions, and who wonders why the world functions the way it does—a quite disturbing and nerve-wracking endeavour to his teacher and his mother. He appears to those around him as a child who does not quite fit in, and who is asked to remain silent once in a while. For James, this instance teaches him to accept silently the world as it is.

Another defining childhood moment is James's fascination in grade eight with Thomas Cole's four paintings entitled *The Voyage of Life*, which depict the four conventional stages of humankind (childhood, adolescence, adulthood, and old age). James's interest, however, is curtailed by his peer, Andrew Mooney. Reports James,

They're formulaic, but I liked that, I liked to see how the elements changed from one to another. How the clouds were castles in one and thunderheads in the next. How the fertile valley became a rocky wasteland. And then one day this kid named Andrew Mooney came over after school and he saw the paintings and told me they were stupid and faggy, so I took them down. I think I threw them away. (130)

James's formulaic understanding of the paintings constitutes an acceptance of the conventional division of life into four stages, even though his interest is less informed by the symbolic representation of each stage (e.g. childhood innocence, adult depravity) and more by the movement and transformation of the elements that are productive and creative from

within the material world, leading to ever-new formations. James's fascination with the paintings, however, ends with Mooney's language, which labels James's interest dissident through the negatively occupied linguistic markers "stupid" and "faggy." The effect of this interpellation on James, who already feels queer—understood as odd, strange, and attracted to same-sex peers⁷³—is one of alienation and a-synchronicity. Kathryn Bond Stockton ascribes this feeling to the establishment of the category of homosexual identities, a rubric, which the queer child is merely approaching, as these destinations are deemed both adult and sexual ("Growing Sideways" 283). Thus, even though James fails to identify with a homosexual identity, he is nevertheless exposed to a negative image of sexual difference that assigns queer identities a disruptive and unnatural function within the widespread assumption of a natural and positive heterosexual order. James attempts to escape his unsettling feelings by removing the paintings. This act, however, does not remove his attraction to same-sex peers and his a-synchronous feelings of being queer, but rather leaves him with an impression of what is to come once he reaches adulthood.

James's queerness is further exposed to "straightening" measures at the Zephyr sailing camp, which his parents sent him to shortly after their divorce, and which, as James later finds out, is "one of those camps advertised in the back of *The New York Times Magazine* (along with the military prep schools) that supposedly reforms seriously troubled adolescents through the wonders of hard physical labour and the glories of nature. Even the motto of Camp Zephyr is sinister: "Be Patient and Tough; Someday This Pain Will Be Useful To You" (47). Perhaps an unintentional decision on behalf of his parents, James's sojourn at the camp exposes him to the camp's disciplining mandate to "untrouble" disturbed teenagers by way of enforcing masculinity through physical work in order, or, as Eve

⁷³ I follow Stockton's definition of "queer" here. See *The Queer Child* 6.

Kosofsky Sedgwick sees it, to maximize the possibility of the heterosexual—and non-gay—outcome of the child (*Tendencies* 161-3).⁷⁴ James’s pain at the camp consists of correcting his non-conformist behaviour in favour of a healthy heterosexuality: a measure which augments his alienating feelings about himself, but which informs him that his pain will be useful to him in adulthood—a promise that James trusts.

James’s childhood experiences within a world he fails to understand and which produce his a-synchronous feelings of being a queer child gradually turn James into a loner figure, and, as he later confesses to his therapist, gradually give way to his feelings of sadness that are not directly related to his parents’ divorce, but have persisted for quite a while: “I couldn’t say how many days or months or years. It wasn’t like I woke up one morning and had a fever. . . . ‘Years,’ I said” (Cameron 87). To counter his alienating and sad feelings, James relies on a form of optimism in a better world that he thinks will materialize with adulthood. He builds a trust that allows him to endure his childhood, in particular his peer culture, and to look forward to adulthood:

I had always thought, or hoped, that adults weren’t necessarily as hobbled by mindless conformity as so many of my peers seem to be. I always looked forward to being an adult, because I thought the adult world was, well—adult. That adults weren’t cliquy or nasty, that the whole notion of being cool, or in, or popular would cease to be the arbiter of all things social, but I was beginning to realize that the adult world was as nonsensically brutal and socially perilous as the kingdom of childhood. (214-215)

James fails to understand his peer culture, with its appeal to be insiders by adhering to socially set identity markers (e.g. the smoker, the fashionista, the technology geek, perhaps

⁷⁴ Sedgwick discusses this process of enforcement of gender assignment of the proto-gay child in “How To Bring Your Kids Up Gay” in *Tendencies* 161-3.

even the gay teenager)—groupings that altogether cast James as an outsider due to his feelings of a-synchronicity. James's final realization at the threshold of adulthood, that there is no better world, throws him into severe depression; his disillusionment leaves him with a world he fails to understand, and in which he has no idea how to live.

James's solution consists of his relocation to an old house in the Midwest where he can live a life in isolation and solitude that is to bring him the "lamb-y" world he has hoped to find in his mother's art gallery. Reports James, "I thought people in the art world might be lamb-y, but they're not. John's definitely a shark in his groovy, laid-back way and my mother can get very vulture-y at times. So this was another compelling reason to move away . . . and find means of supporting myself that did not involve savage instinctual behavior" (167). James casts the social as morally evil in opposition to his own "lamby-ness," which he nevertheless seeks in others. His wish to live in a "lamb-y" world derives from his childhood where the image of innocence, projected on him by adults, offers him the possibility to create a self that is distinct from his peers. James perceives of himself as being the only one to live up to the image of childhood innocence. He fails to identify with his peers, and the image of "lamby-ness" serves him as refuge. Furthermore, he believes that the adult world will be different and will offer him new opportunities to develop a stronger and fiercer self: "I thought maybe I'd become more aggressive as I aged, but that hasn't been the case, so actually this is a problem I'm still dealing with" (167). James's sought for strength, however, does not materialize with adulthood. As he grows older, he reframes his previous hopes for a different and more mature adult world and casts it as being just as morally depraved as the alleged "kingdom of childhood" (215), in which he was, nevertheless, a king. James's way out of his failed expectations is to retreat back into "lamby-ness," by seeking to purchase an old house in the Midwest where he can fulfil his wish to be alone: "[All] I wanted was a

place to be alone. Being alone is a basic need of mine like food and water. . . . I only feel like myself when I am alone” (46). James seeks to disconnect himself from society completely, and support himself by “being a librarian . . . [where he is] working in a place where people only had to whisper and only speak when necessary. If only the world were like that!” (81).

James’s wish to relocate becomes all the more pressing when his identity is read into homosexual representation. His father attempts to classify his son’s sexuality once James has reached the age of genital maturity. Observes Mr. Sveck, ““It’s just that we’ve never talked about your sexuality, and if you are gay I want to be properly supportive. It’s fine with me if you’re gay, I just want to know”” (31). Mr. Sveck’s inquiry into his son’s sexuality fails to make sense to James: ““So, what, if you’re gay you have the moral obligation to inform your parents and if you’re straight you don’t?”” (32). In addition to this paradoxical practice of “coming out,” which is actually a coming in-to society, Mr. Sveck’s practice of gay acceptance positions gay identities as secondary and deviant in relation to straight identities, and hence as being in need of support. Mr. Sveck’s imperative to know about his son’s sexuality further seeks to recognize gay identities as such, and to stabilize sexual difference among a group of male bodies that would otherwise account for the same.⁷⁵ Lee Edelman argues that the homosexual emerges into cultural view through the “necessity of ‘reading’ the body as a signifier of sexual orientation” (*Homographesis* 4), which posits the homosexual as a codified and legible entity in opposition to an unmarked and natural heterosexual order. This reading produces the necessity to recognize and expose sexual difference “precisely to the extent that it threatens to remain unmarked and undetected, and thereby to threaten to disturb the stability of the paradigms through which sexual difference can be interpreted and gender difference can be enforced” (11-12). To this end, Mr. Sveck’s

⁷⁵ On stabilizing sexual difference, see Lee Edelman, *Homographesis* 4, 7, 12-13.

need to know about his son's sexual orientation and his practice of gay acceptance aim at assigning his son a fixed sexual identity at the threshold of adulthood, in order to stabilize sexual difference.

In line with Mr. Sveck's need to know about his son's sexuality, James's identity is being read into homosexual representation. When James asks, "Why might you think I was gay?" his father replies, "I don't know. You just seem – well, let's put it this way: you don't seem interested in girls. You're eighteen, and as far as I know you've never been on a date. . . . James, both of us know you have never been normal" (Cameron 32-33). Mr. Sveck partakes of a reading practice whereby James's present uninterest in heterosexual object-choice, along with his unruly and odd childhood behaviour, now serve as sexual signs that are being read and interpreted in light of homosexuality—all in order to be placed within the hetero/homosexual binary frame. Edelman, following Foucault, continues to note that homosexual identity is fixed through the proper arrangement and retrospective ascription of sexual meaning to otherwise unintelligible and random signifiers, which then results in a metaphoric conceptualization of sexuality that attributes essential meaning to anatomical consistencies in the service of constructing a person's "true" sexual identity (*Homographesis* 8). Mr. Sveck thus retroactively constructs James's sexual identity, reading James's odd—queer—childhood behaviour in light of homosexuality.⁷⁶

Mr. Sveck's retroactive birthing of James's childhood identity assists in his reading of James's identity as gay, a materialization at the threshold of adulthood, which, according to Stockton, is possible "only later in life as a recognition of a road not taken. 'I was a gay child': This is the only grammatical formulation allowed to gay childhood. That is to say, in one's teens or twenties, when (parental) plans for one's straight destination can be seen to

⁷⁶ For a discussion of sexuality, please see Chapter Two.

have died, the designation ‘homosexual child’ . . . may finally, retrospectively, be applied” (“Eve’s Queer Child” 185). For, to deem a child gay uncovers a paradox about childhood sexual orientation, namely “the general cultural and political tendency to officially treat *all* children as straight, while continuing to deem them asexual” (185). From Mr. Sveck’s perspective, James’s abnormal childhood behaviour, under the banner of asexuality and innocence, may have given way to mere suspicions of a latent homosexual, which can either be erased and “straightened” towards heteronormative ends, or be confirmed and labelled as homosexual for Mr. Sveck’s own comfort within his zone of unknowing.

Mr. Sveck’s practice of gay acceptance further reveals a camouflaged restriction in terms of gender assignment. He is willing to accept his son’s sexuality only on the condition that James’s masculinity be securely in place—hence his discomfort about his son’s choice of penne as dinner: “‘You should have ordered a steak or something,’ my father said. ‘You should never order pasta as a main course. It isn’t manly’” (Cameron 30). Mr. Sveck’s concern can be explained by Sedgwick when she writes that in 1973, homosexuality was dropped as a pathological diagnosis from the American Psychiatric Association’s Diagnostic and Statistic Manual only to enter, largely unnoticed, a new pathology: Gender Identity Disorder of Childhood (*Tendencies* 155-156). In other words, the homosexual was freed only on the condition of introducing a new form of restriction that polices the gender non-conformity of children. This pathologization of the effeminate child aims at “correcting” the child’s gender, in hopes of maximizing the possibility of a heterosexual—and non-gay—outcome of the child in line with Western culture’s endemic wish that gay people do not

exist (161). Mr. Sveck's concern about his son's choice of a pasta dish thus connects to the disciplining measures of the Zephyr Camp: if you cannot be straight, then at least be manly.⁷⁷

Despite James's parents' willingness to "support" his sexual orientation, even though their acceptance comes with the conditions outlined above, their enterprise of constructing and allocating a homosexual identity to James proves problematic for him. Notes James, "I knew I was gay, but I hadn't done anything gay and I didn't know if I ever would. I couldn't imagine it, I couldn't imagine doing anything intimate and sexual with another person, I could barely talk to other people, so how was I supposed to have sex with them? So I was only theoretically, potentially homosexual" (Cameron 192). James does not need a rainbow flag to celebrate his homosexuality and to end his depression; on the contrary, James displays a shyness and disconnection from society that prevents any intimate contact with men, rendering him only a "potential" homosexual. James's inability to talk to people further reveals his fear of the symbolic that so eagerly organizes his body into a homosexual identity according to Edelman's theorization. He fears this ontological classification in so far as it crystallizes his feelings of alienation and a-synchronicity. Admits James, "I suppose most people would think that it was wonderful, that the world is so varied, that there is something for everyone, and I don't know why I felt so closed and bitter and threatened by things I did not like. I knew I was fucked up and I thought: *misfit, misfit*" (128). James's childhood ends with the assignment of a homosexual identity, which is not liberating, but constraining for James. His feelings of a-synchronicity have resulted in an internalized homophobia, a self-

⁷⁷ Sedgwick ascribes this re-naturalization of gender assignment to a shift in desire politics from viewing gender and sexuality as continuous categories, whereby anyone who desires a man must by definition be feminine, to a separatist model that permits same-sex object choice only on the condition that the "typical" gender is in place. This enforcement takes place in childhood in order to maximize the possibility of a non-gay outcome of the child. See *Tendencies* 157-61.

hatred, which results in self-definition as a “fucked up misfit.” In other words, his gendered stance does not change with the possibility of identifying with a homosexual identity at the threshold of adulthood.

This self-identification as a misfit complicates James’s relationship with his peers. His shame-induced experience with Andrew Mooney is carried forward to his general contact with his peers, where his “difference” crystallizes in negative terms. James’s troubling relation with people of his own age becomes especially evident at a linguistic peer seminar in the summer of 2003. James attempts to gather strength and courage before his presentation, which he does not want to undertake to begin with:

I said to myself, There are things in your life that you don’t want to do that you will have to do. You cannot always do and go what and where you please. That is not how life works. . . . I was nervously fingering my name tag inside my jacket pocket, flipping the needlelike prong in and out of its catch. And then I stuck my finger hard against it, hard enough so that I knew it would draw blood, because I wanted to bleed.

If I had to do this, I wanted to bleed doing this. (43)

James’s nervousness and resistance to put on his nametag constitutes a resistance to enter the realm of representation amongst a group of peers that all account for the same. James’s encounter with his peers makes him aware of his difference, of which he feels ashamed; in fact, entering the arena of his peers allows shame to strike in its most painful and individuating ways. Eve Sedgwick describes shame as an affect, whose suffusiveness delineates “precise, individual outlines in the most isolating way possible” (*Touching Feeling* 37). It makes the shamed individual wish to “be anywhere else, yet conscious of the inexorable fate of being exactly there, inside the individual skin of which [he or she is] burningly aware. . .” (37). James’s wish to draw blood illustrates shame’s toxicity and

painful individuation, which results in James's wish to vanish and to run away from his seminar. This encounter with his peers makes him feel his difference in such shameful and painful terms, that it borders on a desire for suicide: “. . . I thought if I stayed there I would kill myself” (Cameron 102).

James's fear of shame is heightened by the attempted linguistic inscriptions on his body as a homosexual, as well as their claustrophobic enclosure, as theorized by Edelman. James fears to inhabit a body confined by language, which augments shame's painful individuation.⁷⁸ His wish to run away is particularly present among people of his own age, where he emerges as a subject whose position within society is demarcated in negative terms. This response results in an anxiety to attend college: “I can't bear the idea of spending four years in close proximity with college students. I dread it. . . . I don't like people in general and people my age in particular, and people my age are the ones who go to college. I would consider going to college if it were a college of older people” (34-9). James is not so much averse to the idea of going to college, as to the idea of spending his college years with people of his own age, for this socialization mirrors his difference in negative terms and provokes shame-inducing encounters. Being among older people, who already are different from James in age (being among children would also result in shame-prone encounters as children represent a realm James has no longer access to and cast him as an outsider), forecloses upon shame's impact. James's resistance to go to college can also be explained by Silvan Tomkins when he writes that the shame-prone self guards itself by avoiding shame-provoking encounters (qtd. in Sedgwick, *Touching* 134). This practice of protecting one's self from these painful confrontations, however, has the opposite effect, as it “enables more and more

⁷⁸ See the example of Ronnie in Chapter Two on a similar notion of language's inscriptions on the body.

experiences to be accounted for as instances of humiliating experiences on the one hand, or to the extent to which it enables more and more anticipation of such contingencies before they actually happen” (134). James anxiously anticipates shame-prone encounters in paranoid ways, which results in his avoidance of society altogether and his sheltering withdrawal into interiority: he displays a practice and wish to remain “focused inward, and not yet ready to engage with the world” (Cameron 106)—a form of interiority in whose enclosure, however, the toxicity of shame takes the form of James’s internalized homophobia, working toward his demise.

Perhaps in order to avoid shame-prone encounters among his peers, James builds an intense emotional bond with his grandmother, Nanette. James reports that Nanette seems “to accept [him] in a way no one else did, [with] the safe summer Sunday occurring outside, all around [them], the world not yet totally violated by stupidity and intolerance and hate” (80). His grandmother serves for James as a sanctuary from his painful experiences. Her house, built in the Tudor-style, becomes a place of nostalgia for James, where he “gets this nice (and rare) feeling that whoever built the house loved building it, and was not in a hurry” (74). James’s nostalgia offers him the temporalities of a different world from the past (James believes that his grandmother lives in a separate world [206]) in opposition to his perceived shortcomings of the present world. Through his bond with his grandmother, James escapes into this other, timely world of nostalgia. James suddenly has the epiphany that his grandmother’s world offers him the opportunity not to interact with the world: “. . . it was suddenly clear to me, for a second or two, that part of this not wanting to go to college was simply a desire not to move forward, for I loved where I was at the moment, . . . sitting here,

in my grandmother's kitchen" (80). James falls into nostalgia—a temporal escape from and arrest in a world where he has (and wants) no place.⁷⁹

James's desire not to move forward is reflected in his concern about language. He believes in the proper use of language: "I just don't like it when language is misused. I think people should speak correctly and clearly. Accurately" (94). If one does not heed linguistic correctness, James believes, one is

failing the world. That it's the little things like that, like using the language correctly, that keep the world functioning. I mean functioning well. That if we let go of those things, everything will collapse into chaos. Mistakes like that are like little chinks in the dam, and you think they don't matter, but they accumulate, your mistakes and everyone else's, and then they do matter. (177)

The proper use of language gives James the stability and protection he seeks from the unpredictable and unaccountable—shame-prone—interaction of and with people. James flees onto the linguistic level, as opposed to the level of interacting bodies, where his control over language compensates for his inability to control people. James's apocalyptic vision of accumulating mistakes reveals his fear of a collapse of language into the chaos of intermingling bodies that would erase any form of control or stability.

James's concern about the accuracy of language carries forward into his worry about his thoughts and their relation to language. James observes that

the act of thinking and the act of articulating those thoughts were not synchronous to me, or even necessarily consecutive. I knew that I thought and spoke in the same language and that theoretically there should be no reason why I could not express my thoughts as they occurred or soon thereafter, but the language in which I thought and

⁷⁹ On the issue of Oedipal restriction of space, see Chapter One.

the language in which I spoke, though both English, often seem divided by a gap that could not be simultaneously, or even retrospectively, bridged. (97)

For James, the impossibility to replicate his thoughts in language identically and simultaneously causes frustration because he is keen to produce exact meanings and significations. His appeal to give accurate accounts (according to universally existing signifieds) in order to produce universal signification, requires a bridging of his thoughts and language in a way that makes them identical—to match signifiers and signifieds. However, James notes the impossibility of his endeavour and observes his ability only to approximate meaning, which results in his preferred silence.⁸⁰ James reports the following about translations: “Translations are mere subjective approximations and that is how I feel about everything I say: it is not what I am thinking but merely the closest I can get to it using the faulty reductive constraints of language. And so I often think it is better to say nothing than to express myself inexactly” (98). James prefers keeping his thoughts to himself rather than express them in language that fails to reflect them accurately. He insists on proper signification, which gives him a form of stability and protection in a world that can use language as a form of injurious speech that distributes shame, as seen in James’s childhood encounter with Andrew Mooney, or his father’s reading of his identity into homosexual representation.

James’s self-protection through seeking proper meaning results in his guardianship over language and his dismissive view of people. James displays a narcissistic bossiness according to which people never have anything interesting to say. Remarks James, ““Most of what people say seems obvious to me. And then they repeat it about thirteen times”” (92). James is bored by the obviousness, predictability, and ordinariness of everything (89). He

⁸⁰ For the incongruousness of thought, language, and perception, please see Chapter One.

sees through societal and psychological structures (except for his own), which to him are paradoxical and make no sense: his father, who complains about penne as not being manly, while he himself is undergoing plastic surgery (30-38); gay identities that are required to “come out” while straight identities have no obligation to announce their sexuality publicly (31); teens, who want to be cool but fail to admit it and act uncool (105); a psychiatrist, whose individual diagnosis follows common patterns and categorizations (89); Mother Theresa, who wants to be a saint but who is just as ambitious in her endeavour as anyone else (116); a teen who is able to sell her memoirs for \$600,000, because ““she had all the best things wrong with her”” (184); and a mother who does not give up on marriage, though each one of them is a failure (14). For James, these paradoxes cast the world as predictable, obvious, and nonsensical. James’s cynicism reveals his distance from and mistrust of the motives of others, as well as a form of jaded negativity towards a world which, to him, resembles a farce.

James’s pessimism and disappointed outlook on life becomes evident when he re-encounters Thomas Cole’s paintings at the D.C. National Gallery. This confrontation—or event—strikes at the foundation of his existence, producing an experience of panic:

I was shocked when I saw them again. . . . I got upset because I realized I wanted to be in the last painting, Old Age. I wanted to be in the boat floating to darkness. I wanted to skip the Manhood boat. The man in the boat looked terrified, and I couldn’t understand what the point was: why crash through those rapids along a river that only flowed into darkness, death? I wanted to be in the boat with the old man, with all the danger behind, with the angel near me, guiding me toward death. I wanted to die.

(130-1)

James no longer perceives the paintings as an expression of movement and change, as was the case before his encounter with Andrew Mooney. The paintings have become reflections of “reality” that affirm his outlook on adulthood as depraved, and on life as pointless and futile, giving way to his wish to live in old age. James’s yearning for angelic protection and safety aims at bypassing adulthood, from which there is no escape but in isolation or death. James inadvertently slides into what Gilles Deleuze and Félix Gattari term the “black hole of subjectivity” (*A Thousand Plateaus* 187), an abyss,⁸¹ which “may produce an effect of closure, as if the aggregate had fallen and continues to spin in a kind of black hole” (333-4). James spins in a black hole of depression, within a world that offers him no alternatives. His kicking of a hole in the museum wall (Cameron 131) reflects his sense of being captured within a world that leaves him with a “this-is-as-good-as-it-gets” perspective, as well as his realization that there is no where else to run: “the black star [is even] gleaming through the hole” of the museum wall against which he has kicked (*ATP* 187). James spins in an abyss, which paralyzes him. The paintings do not offer him salvation. James is “stuck on a point” (186). Art, for James, has become an end in itself; however, as Deleuze and Guattari continue, art “is only a tool for blazing life lines, in other words, all of those real becomings that are not produced only *in* art, and all of those active escapes that do not consist in fleeing *into* art, taking refuge in art, and all of those positive deterritorializations that never reterritorialize on art, but instead sweep it away with them towards the reals of the asignifying, asubjective, and faceless” (187). Following representational art, James, similar

⁸¹ In *Logic of Sense*, Deleuze defines the abyss as a differentiated, impersonal, bottomless being that “leaps from one singularity to another, casting always the dice belonging to the same cast, always fragmented and formed again in each throw. It is a Dionysian sense-producing machine, in which nonsense and sense are no longer found in simple opposition, but are rather co-present to one another within a new discourse” (107). In other terms, the abyss is a groundless territory, consisting of free, unbound energy, moving in circles beneath a surface, which allows for new semiotics through changes of sense in discourse.

to his childhood optimism in a better adult world, continues to project his hopes onto the next stage of life: old age, including death.

To offer a way out of James's depression, Cameron's novel introduces what Deleuze in his single-authored *Logic of Sense* terms an "event"—not a planned situation or a sudden occurrence to an individual conscious mind, or a clear, single moment of epiphany, but a set of multiple interactions that run along a series through bodies, languages, and virtual structures while introducing change and novelty: "[a]s an event, a beginning must be understood as a novel selection in ongoing and continually altering series" (Williams 2; emphasis original). Series, according to Deleuze, are not to be understood as inert and passive receivers of stimuli, or as sequences subjected to a prior ordering (first, second, third series); rather, they transform themselves with the event that runs through them, while also transforming the event (37-40). This process is referred to by Deleuze as "counter-actualization," by which he means the potential offered by the event to be affirmed and replayed differently in all series, in open and reviving, wave-like alterations which find expression through variations in the intensity of sense (149). Since the event allows for alterations and change of the self rather than resentful stasis, Cameron's novel has James's identity run along series and events in their queer, discontinuous—"rhizomatic"—interactions, alterations, and emergences. In Deleuzian terms, James's life runs along events and series, which subvert the command of "growing up" to adult personhood by promoting a notion of queer identity that is moving along the lines of a rhizome: horizontal, connective, altering, changing. Queerness is thus a natural result of this notion of movement.

Cameron's novel offers moments of shock, mental absence, non-thought, and random, unexpected encounters as events that introduce change and variation into James's identity. One of these instances is James's shock upon re-encountering the Cole paintings. This

experience exposes James to a dynamic, immeasurable, and discontinuous notion of time that carries the potential for different and various lines of actuality:

I was shocked when I saw them again, exactly as they had been. I couldn't believe that such hokey paintings would be on permanent view at the National Gallery. And then I had the irrational feeling that they had not been, that somehow someone knew I was coming back and had just rehung them. That this was some sort of trap or something. But I knew that wasn't true. I knew that they had hung there—I guess that was only five years, but it seems like a very long time. You can't go backward in time, I know that. But that's what I felt I had done. Everything else sort of dropped away, those five years and the entire world, and I felt like I was two people. Seriously. I could feel what I felt when I was thirteen looking at the paintings, and I could feel what I felt then. I stayed in the room for a very long time. I kept thinking, I should go now, but I didn't.

(Cameron 131)

James's re-encounter with the Cole paintings dislodges his understanding of time as linear and chronological. James's recorded time frame of five years is subverted by what Deleuze terms the "Aion" (*Logic of Sense* 162-8). Instead of an extensive present that absorbs the past and future, James experiences a notion of time where "a future and past divide the present at every instant and subdivide it ad infinitum into past and future, in both directions at once" (164). James's experience of this instant breaks apart his chronological conception of time, which ultimately appears schizophrenic to him—making him feel like he felt when he was thirteen. James witnesses the "*pure empty form of time*, which has freed itself of its present corporeal content and has thereby unwound its own circle, stretching itself out in a straight line" (165). A pure and empty form of time, or the Aion, is not a present that absorbs both past and future, but a present, or an instant, that is always dividing into future and past (168).

In this respect, the Cole paintings become not just a depiction of linear time, but a record of confluences and forces in which past, present, and future are captured in one instant, which allows the notion of the present to have several meanings: “but there is perhaps yet another present” (168). This moment breaks apart James’s intense focus and lodging on his present situation of despair, pain, and depression along with its extension into what James perceives to be a dark future; instead, James’s shocking experience with the Cole paintings opens him onto different temporal conceptions that pursue alternative possibilities or presents. This notion of time as discontinuous, and as interrupting linear time, allows James to move forward into a different and open future, which is already happening in the present.⁸² James’s re-encounter with the paintings therefore constitutes an event that connects the virtual series of the “Aion” with the actual series of chronological time, while transforming each of them through the production of alternate presents.

Another “event” is James’s unexpected and shocking encounter with a Down’s syndrome child, an instant which transforms James’s sense of being different from negative and deviant towards a more positive understanding of what Deleuze defines as a pure “difference-in-itself” (*Logic of Sense* 299). In this form of difference, each individual is unique (as in, just different) and continuously becoming further differentiated at all times. Before James’s encounter with the Down’s syndrome child, he describes his sense of self as follows:

I was, perhaps, genetically altered in some way, some tiny modification of DNA that separated me from the species in some slight but essential way. . . . It seemed that . . . some almost indistinguishable difference in my anatomy and psyche set me slightly,

⁸² Compare this moment to Ruby Reese’s experience of recursive futurity in Chapter Four where moving back turns into a movement forward.

yet irrevocably, apart. It was a troubling thing to feel, and it made me sad. It made me cry in the men's room of the Russell Senate Office Building. It made me not want to be alive. (Cameron 107-108)

James's self-definition as a genetically-altered misfit illustrates his inhabitation of a body that is being regulated by the injurious language of a social order that marks difference in negative and exclusive terms. This conceptualization of himself as a "misfit" is finally broken by his shocking encounter with a Down's syndrome child, which takes place immediately after his encounter with the peers who make him feel like a misfit.

Having run away from his linguistic peer seminar, James ends up in front of a row of houses where he decides to peep into one of the lit windows. He sees what he takes to be a married couple, playing a board game. James's peeping is suddenly interrupted when "the man turned around and looked at me, and I saw that it wasn't a man. It was a teenage boy with Down syndrome. He stared at me for a moment with his odd disturbing eyes, looking right at me, but I don't think he could see me standing outside in the darkness" (121-2).

James experiences this encounter as disturbing, since he faces a perception of himself that is actualized in his peer: one with a slight point of difference, thereby also categorizing the boy as a "misfit." At the same time, however, this encounter is also identificatory: James's finding of an actual genetically modified human being allows him, in turn, to cast himself as normative, and thus as inclusive. This realization is evident by how the Down's syndrome child's frontal return gaze fails to recognize James as a "misfit" by way of seeing right through him. James's seeing-without-being-seen further disrupts his sense of others' recognizing and identifying him as deviant. To this end, this central scene in the novel decentres James's understanding of difference as something negative in favour of a notion of "difference-in-itself" that renders the genetic mutation of the Down's syndrome child as

indicative of life's power to create differences. In *Difference & Repetition*, Deleuze writes of processes of differentiation (with a "t") and differenciation (with a "c"). The first ones are virtual differences "of a pure positivity" that are being actualized into species in the second process:

Forms of the negative do indeed appear in actual terms and real relations, but only in so far as these are cut off from the virtuality which they actualize, and from the movement of their actualisation. . . . [T]he negative is always derived and represented, never original or present: the process of difference and differenciation is primary in relation to that of the negative and opposition. . . . (207)

In other terms, Cameron's novel in the scene with the Down's Syndrome child affirms the processes of different/ciation by which identity is in a continuous and excessive flux of multiple differences to the point of exhaustion. Intersecting with the temporal series of James's encounter with the Cole paintings, these series of differences produce a world that is no longer varied in terms of what it already has to offer (a perspective, which, as previously mentioned, adds to James's frustrations), but in terms of what differences there are yet to come.

A third transformative instant is James's confrontation with his love object John, which breaks James's shame-induced habituation. James posts a fake internet profile on a gay dating website that matches John's ideal vision of a partner. John responds to this profile, thinking he has met the man of his dreams. John is supposed to meet this person at a reception, where James suddenly appears. John's realization that James has posted a fake internet profile results in a shaming confrontation: "'Excuse me, James, but you're seriously fucked up. Fuck you'" (143). John's words provoke a shameful response in James:

He had spoken his final words so loudly that people standing nearby turned and looked at me. I didn't know what to do. I sipped my champagne, but my hand was shaking and I dribbled a little down the front of my shirt. . . . I felt very stupid standing there in my dribbled-on untucked shirt, which I realized looked stupid, not sophisticated, watched by all these elegant and successful people. (143)

His reaction displays the blazon of shame: the physical impact, the downcast face, the felt embarrassment in front of other people, which materializes in him as a feeling of stupidity. At the same time that James is feeling the impact of shame, so does John (and the reader who shares James's experience through Cameron's first person narrative). John reprimands James: "You obviously have no idea what it means for me to think I've met a smart and interesting man who is interested in me. It means a lot to me. There is nothing I want more than that. Nothing." (144). John's disappointment reveals his low self-esteem and inferiority complex where the possibility to meet somebody—however idealized—assumes a dream-like fascination. Likewise, James reveals a torturous feeling of being entrapped in his own personhood. Confesses James, "I guess I was thinking that if I could create a person you liked, you would see that I am that person. . . . I guess I don't like who I am. I want to be that person. I wish I were that person" (145). James's utter wish to be somebody else demonstrates his willingness to escape his identity through the act of creating a self according to idealized images. His understanding of identity formation as a conscious act of shaping one's identity according to ideal models and images merely puts him under pressure to attain perfection and, by implication, to hate his self. James's—and John's—adhesion to idealist images, however, is broken by shame's enabling response. Sedgwick explains that in the moment when shame hits, when one feels one's individual outlines in the most isolating and painful ways imaginable, identifications with shame-bringing and identity-forming

models are broken (*Touching* 36-7). According to her, this moment of shame may turn into a moment of pride, of aborting one's relations to shame-bringing institutions and people (37). Following her thinking, shame disrupts James and John's attachment to the conventional image of Mr. Right (handsome, rich, intelligent, muscular, well-endowed) that keeps their own identities in shamed positions of imperfection and unworthiness. Perhaps their experience also breaks their idealization of love and relationships as bringing eternal happiness and bliss—a trait that the concept of love, interestingly, shares with childhood innocence.⁸³ Moreover, however, James's experience with John exposes him to the dynamism of shame where James acts as both the shaming and the shamed individual. James learns that he also can have a shame-inducing impact on other people, and that he is not the only one who has been suffering from shame.

James's experiences with the Cole paintings, the Down's syndrome child, and John resonate in his experience with his grandmother Nanette. In Deleuzian terms, these events run along severed series, whereby James's sojourn with Nanette brings these series together and ultimately transforms them through a change in the realm of sense. James's shock upon finding Nanette on her bed constitutes an instant that shatters his nostalgic perception of her. Upon discovering his grandmother's body, James reports that “[e]verything stopped for a moment, as if someone had hit PAUSE. And then I heard her snore, and I knew she was not dead” (Cameron 199). James's moment of pause, an interruption of his perceptions, triggers a shift: his perceptions are now less dominated by nostalgia, and more by the sheer overwhelming abundance of present perceptions—the visual, acoustic, tactile, and sensational perceptions of the here and now—which condition him to lose his sense of self.

⁸³ For a discussion of “love” versus “passion,” see Chapter Five.

Sitting down after his shock on a chair in his grandmother's bedroom, James perceives the following:

The soft summer evening light seeped through the trees around the house and fell in golden swaths through the bedroom window. I could hear the clackety rhythm of the sprinkler next door. And a bee trapped inside the screen window, buzzing and hurling itself softly against the mesh, again and again, as if it has all the time in the world, as if it might, at some moment, find a hole in the screen and fly away. I thought how patient and trusting so many lower forms of life are, how they had faith in something beyond human comprehension.... I sat there for an hour. I might have fallen asleep myself, but I don't think I did. I just kind of zoned out, forgot who and where and what I was. I just let everything go, turned the net of myself inside out and let all the worried fish swim away. (200)

James's myriad of different perceptions form what Deleuze terms a compound of sensations or "pure percepts," which are perceptions "independent of a state of those who experience them" (*What Is Philosophy* 164). These pure percepts draw James out of his ego and his perceptions of himself as a subject that is distinct from the external world; rather, they remind him that he is nothing but a part of these compounds of sensations, making his identity merge with the world "beyond human comprehension" (Cameron 200). James drifts off into this beyond of what it means to be human and into non-thought, where he enters into contact with the virtual series of immanent and creative forces, as indicated by the gap in the text, signifying James's inability to cognitively and linguistically describe what has happened.

Deleuze describes the brain as a sieve or membrane in contact with the virtual plane of immanence whose intensities, movements, and speeds break through ready-made neuronal

circuits and connections in favour of new ones: “lightning bolts, the life of the mind” (*Two Regimes of Madness* 283-4). James experiences such a re-configurative moment as his return from his mental absence to the actual world displays a transformation whereby he has stopped worrying about the world. James’s emergence in language reveals a metaphorical self-description that is not an amalgamation in the sense of Edelman’s theorization of essentialized homosexual identities, but an outward-oriented emanation. Here, metaphorical language is not to be taken as an abstraction, where the vehicles “net” and “fish” replace the tenor “James” or in its figurative sense; rather, James’s metaphor is to be taken quite literally in light of what Deleuze terms “metamorphosis.” This alteration is “contrary to metaphors. There is no longer any proper sense or figurative sense, but only a distribution of states that is a part of the range of the world” (*Kafka* 22). Read as a distribution of states, James’s metaphor then becomes expressive from the virtual realm of creative forces as well as descriptive in terms of the actualized form of language. Here, tenor and vehicle are placed side by side as if extended along a geographical, spatial line, where meaning emerges across the two concepts of “James” and “fisher net”—a practice that Stockton observes in children, who “‘grow’ meanings . . . by putting people and things oddly beside themselves” (“Growing Sideways” 279). James *is* a fisher net. To this end, James’s moment of non-thought—upon his shock about his grandmother—opens him to the virtual series of creative forces that replay in the realm of language by turning his metaphorical, conglomerated sense of self inside/out into a more liberating, horizontal, open—“rhizomatic”—orientation of his self within language.

James’s return to the actual world further results in the shattering of his nostalgic perception of his grandmother. Nannette suddenly calls out James’s name with her “eyes open, watching [him] . . . for a moment with no expression, as if [he was] always there when

she woke from a nap” (Cameron 200-1). Nanette’s wide open eyes and expressionless face refuse to lend themselves to James’s recognition of himself in her face as well as his habitual reading of his grandmother’s identity as a nostalgic one. Write Deleuze and Guattari, “language is always embedded in the faces that announce its statements and ballast them in relation to the signifiers in progress and subjects concerned” (*ATP* 179).⁸⁴ Nanette’s interpellation of James fails to match up with its embedment in her face and thus breaks James’s self-recognition, which also shatters his habitual perception of his grandmother. This scene then connects to James’s encounter with the Down’s syndrome child, whose flat face and transparent return gaze break James’s mirroring recognition as a “misfit.” This repetition with a difference, which connects both series, shatters James’s understanding of his grandmother as living in a separate world of nostalgia, and instead casts her as being simply different from James’s identity, but while remaining a part of the multiplicity of the same world.

The series triggered by the event of James’s encounter with the Down’s syndrome child continues to connect with the series of his failed recognition of his grandmother. James reports that he beholds his grandmother standing in the garden with

her back to me, so I could not see her face. It appeared as though she was studying something in the neighbor’s yard, or perhaps she could see into their lighted windows. I remembered watching the spooky family through the window ... and for a moment, I felt a little disoriented, like when you look into two facing mirrors, and the world collapses at either end. I was looking through a window at my grandmother, and she was looking through a window (maybe) at her neighbors, and maybe they were looking out their front windows at someone in the house across the

⁸⁴ For the importance of the face in regards to the paranoid regime of signs, see Chapter Six.

street or in a car parked in front of their house, and on and on all the way around the world. As I watched, my grandmother raised her arm, brought the cigarette to her mouth, inhaled, and then released the smoke in a long exhalation. (Cameron 210)

James's inability to see his grandmother's face builds a distance to mirroring processes that take the face as a reflecting surface. Instead, his vision of his grandmother's contours from behind forms a *Gestalt*, a figure that is yet unidentifiable and de-familiarizes his grandmother. James's return of his memory to the Down's syndrome child further provokes a disorientation that ultimately collapses his enclosed series of identificatory processes as expressed by his simile of the two mirrors. According to Jacques Lacan, the mirror stage postulates that the self emerges into language through a (mis)recognition of his or her perfect image in a mirroring surface. Through consecutive identificatory stages with images, the self attempts (but fails) to bring about and recover its lost unity and stability.⁸⁵ This formation and sustenance of the ego is shattered through James's glance through windows. Rather than insisting on the static and claustrophobic reflection of mirrors that throw back images that already exist and can thus be recognized, James's glance through windows opens his self to what is not yet seen, still to be discovered, still to come. The trope of windows here allows James's self to reflect itself partially, while at the same time, it permits his glances to turn outward onto the world. In this respect, this scene brings together the serializations of James's experience in temporality (the Cole paintings), difference (the Down's syndrome

⁸⁵ Lacan argues that the constitution of identity depends on an illusionary sense of original unity between the ego and its mirror image. The image hereby provides the ego with a sense of wholeness that stands in contrast with its experienced fragmentation. In order to achieve this unity and to fill this ontological gap, the ego inaugurates a series of metonymic identifications with images that are to bring the sought for completion. See "Mirror Stage," 75-81.

child), and perceptions (his grandmother), which, as expressed by James's speculative "maybe," open his identity onto the realm of potentialities of what is yet to come.

James's experience with his grandmother thus connects various series in the virtual, which ultimately alter James's conceptualization of himself as a "misfit" and affirm his feelings of a-synchronicity in positive terms. His transformation is ultimately achieved through a change in the realm of sense that alters his linguistic constraints along with his frustrated outlook on life in favour of a more affirmative one. At first, James fails to find the language to express what is wrong with him. As he reports, "I didn't know where to start. Maybe it was the rye—I had already finished my drink—but suddenly I felt warm and happy. I still believed that everything was wrong, but I didn't really care. It was like I was looking down on myself from the moon and could see how tiny I was and how tiny and stupid my problems were" (205). James's inebriation here serves as a catalyst that distances him from what he takes to be a nonsensical world where, according to him, everything is wrong. James's miniaturization of himself allows him to let go his attempts to make sense of the world by finding proper meaning and signification and by aligning the act of thinking with the act of articulating his thoughts in language. James seems to accept a world that appears nonsensical to him, as he exhibits an inability to use language properly in order to make sense of the world.

Not being worried about anything, James finally discloses his fall-out with John to his grandmother, who evaluates her grandson's story in her own personal—and, to James, quite surprising—way: "I was shocked. She had said 'love,' had mentioned love as if it was an element of the story. I thought for a moment that I had misheard her. I've never talked about being gay or being straight or anything remotely connected to that with my grandmother. It was like she lived in this other world . . . where those things didn't exist" (206). Nanette's

choice of the word “love” ignores any differentiation between straight and gay identity, rather than characterize the latter as a deviant and unnatural one. Her understanding of love focuses on what love does to the self, through its mobilization of passions and energies, regardless of the self’s sexual orientation.⁸⁶ Nanette’s sense of love, perhaps altered through her own personal life experiences, surprises James in so far as she does not thematize his sexual orientation or his “coming out” at all—as opposed to James’s parents. Nanette does not chastise James’s fallout with John, either, but instead praises her grandson’s activity: “You *acted*. You acted stupidly, but you acted, and that’s the important part” (206). Her focus on James’s activity throws a different light on shame, in so far as this affect mobilizes James’s body, “living, as it does, on and in the muscles and capillaries of the face” (Sedgwick, *Touching* 64). Shame’s power to *affect* sensitizes James to the physicality and movements of his body; as Nanette puts it, “We’re alive” (Cameron 202). Nanette’s definition of love thus stands less under a romanticised and idealized conceptualization, but bears transformative potential to produce a new sense of self, by way of the power to be affected. In this respect, Cameron’s novel does not see shame’s enabling response as a production of pride to counter shame-bringing institutions (as mentioned previously, gay pride parades would not alter James’s feelings of a-synchronicity), but as a mobilization of physical forces that open the self to achieve a new bodily and psychological awareness, independent of the hetero/homosexual binary frame.

James’s grandmother continues her non-thematization of James’s attraction to the same sex when she summarizes the unusual events of the day in a quite telling phrase: “I’ve felt queer today” (211). Nanette’s choice of words—“queer”—does not denote a sexual identity, but rather expresses a sense of queerness that is not reducible to her identity,

⁸⁶ For a further discussion of Deleuzian love or “passion,” see Chapter Five.

comprising as it does a myriad of “strange” things that have occurred that day. In this respect, Nanette’s language captures the virtual series that have come together for her, and expresses their interaction through the sense of the word “queer.” Here, “sense” is not defined in terms of meaning or a linguistic logic that would reduce the word “queer” to the already existing denotation of being sexually queer, but rather, as Deleuze writes in *The Logic of Sense*, in terms of

both the expressible or the expressed of the proposition, and the attribute of the state of affairs. It [sense] turns one side toward things and one side toward propositions.

But it does not merge with the proposition which expresses it any more than with the state of affairs or the quality which the proposition denotes. It is exactly the boundary between propositions and things. It is this *aliquid* at once extra-Being and inherence. .

. . (22; emphasis original)

Sense, according to Deleuze, constitutes the intermediate level between bodies or states of affairs and language. It inheres in language and, in its simultaneous function as the expressible, remains virtual alongside its actualized expression. Deleuze demonstrates this process through infinitives, which receive their differentiation as they actualize in manifold expressions or propositions (21). The sense of Nanette’s infinitive “to feel queer” thus lends itself to manifold actualizations of which her proposition “I’ve felt queer today” constitutes only one present form of actualization of this sense of queerness. Since Nanette’s words carry with them their virtual relations beyond their actualized situation, they never manifest fully in crystallizations of stable or coherent identities. It is this frontier of sense between what Nanette’s words express and their attribute of her identity that allows language to be distinguished from physical bodies. In connection to Edelman’s theory about the linguistic inscriptions on the gay or queer body, the intermediate realm of sense opens up the self to

momentary actualizations that do not so much constitute an agglomeration of identity, but rather form a varying “re-scription” of identity within and through language.

James’s exposure to his grandmother’s expression of queerness outside the bounds of gay or sexually queer identities alters his notion of queerness as relating to identities that are deemed negative, unnatural, and deviant. Hearing his grandmother use the word “queer” startles James, in so far as the word “queer” loses its meaning as denoting ill-fit sexual identities. Instead, the word “queer” assumes expressive qualities that are related to the queer interplay of his grandmother’s—and his own—virtual series. Stockton shows an implicit awareness of this relation when she writes that the “phrase ‘gay child’—as backward birthing mechanism—can not only birth a child retrospectively form-fitted to the marker ‘gay’ but also release, like spirits from a box, the metaphors by means of which . . . children grow themselves” (“Growing Sideways” 284). These spirits, “cherished alongside the words *gay* and *homosexual* as an *ill fit* . . .” (284; last emphasis added), form various possible actualizations of identity outside the bounds of homosexuality. In this respect, Stockton’s metaphors do not follow an Edelmanian agglomeration of homosexual meaning and signification, but receive a lateralization through which words can change their relation of sense. While Stockton merely ascribes this lateralization to children, Deleuze posits that the realm of sense alters through a shift in the intensity with which sense invests the relation between infinitives and the value or significance that sense introduces into a neutral system (*LoS* 19-21). James changes the sense of “to be queer” by placing it in constant variation and new connections with other virtual sense-events (to be queer, to affect, to love, to differ, to change). He decreases the intensity of the relations of the infinitives with which he surrounds his sense “to be queer” (“to be deviant,” “to be a misfit,” “to be abject”) and increases the intensity of “to be queer” and its relation to the infinitives “to vary,” “to differ,” “to change.”

In light of this shift, James's felt a-synchronicity gradually changes from having a negative connotation to a positive one.

This shift in James becomes further evident when he does not inherit his grandmother's house, but everything that is in it (Cameron 211). Read as a symbol for stable and coherent identities, his grandmother's house represents the nostalgic identity of old age in which James wants to find refuge. Nanette's refusal to bestow James her house, but to give him objects without a fixed habitat, carries the imperative for James not to withdraw into nostalgia, but to create his own identity by way of changing notions of sense.⁸⁷ Rather than partaking in what Sedgwick calls a reparative action of the (shamed) self that attempts to fill the inner void through objects,⁸⁸ James is to pursue a creative action that bestows objects with new relations and new meanings. As he states, "I felt in some stupid way that if I kept those things near me, perhaps my life wouldn't be miserable. But I knew they didn't have that power, or any power at all. They were only things. Objects" (212). Instead of accruing to objects, which may yield a form of paranoia about losing them, James uses the neutrality of his inherited objects to invest them with an altering new sense of attachment, detachment, and reattachment.

James's a-synchronicity continues to maintain its connection to the virtual. This becomes evident when James takes a virtual tour through his grandmother's house:

⁸⁷ Compare to Lowboy's withdrawal into his mother(ly house) in Chapter One, and also Sarah in Chapter Two.

⁸⁸ Sedgwick defines reparative desire as "additive and accretive. Its fear, a realistic one, is that the culture surrounding it is inadequate or inimical to its nurture; it wants to assemble and confer plenitude on an object that will then have resources to offer to an inchoate self" (*Touching* 149). In other words, the wounded self secures a place within the social by clinging to objects that are to make its world beautiful. See further Christian Lassen's description of camp in Chapter Five.

It's like you're standing in the centre of each room and turning slowly around, and you can turn around and around as many times as you like, the room continually spinning around you. The floor and walls are like photographic negatives: squares of unfaded wallpaper where paintings once hung, the hardwood floors still burnished and brown where they were covered by rugs. The rooms are all empty, everything is gone: all that's left of her are these ghostly remnants. (228-9)

Rather than locking himself into past memories and nostalgia to alleviate his pain regarding the loss of his grandmother, James's dizzy spin speaks to an opening of the virtual from which new actualizations can be born, as expressed through the photographic negatives that lend themselves to the creation of various and different actual prints. In order to prevent the closure of James's identity upon the loss of his grandmother, her house is dispensed with and only her objects are kept. The ghostliness of her remnants hereby marks the coexistence of the virtual and the actual—the enfolded virtual possibilities alongside their actualizations, which, once created by James's grandmother, now lend themselves to new actualizations through James. Nanette's last will thus offers James the possibility of finding meaning in the world through altering notions of sense.

This opportunity of varying sense frees James from his previous attempts to meet rational ends through notions of common sense. Reports James: “My parents thought I was crazy. Be reasonable, they said: Why pay good money to keep back issues of magazines in storage? Keep the things you may want, the things you could use, but sell the rest. Get rid of the junk. Liquidate it” (229). Rather than “liquidating” his inheritance in the sense of departing with the objects that are of no use to him, James considers his inheritance in terms of the Deleuzian “aliquid.” As noted previously, his “aliquid” refers to the realm of sense that slips away from being accurately pinned down to the “mental activity of the person who

expresses herself in the proposition, nor with concepts or even signified essences” (LoS 19). Sense remains open to variations, both present and absent—virtually enfolded and waiting for new actualizations. It is in the sense of these variations that James declares his readiness to move forward in the novel’s final sentence: “But it seems reasonable to me. I’m only eighteen. How do I know what I will want in my life? How do I know what things I will need” (229)? James moves into a future that holds the potential for new actualizations, different presents, different identities—different sense. In this respect, James’s pain is useful to him in so far as it has allowed him to reconfigure his self along changing notions of sense, or, as Deleuze and Guattari write, it “may be necessary for the release of innovative processes [to] first fall into a catastrophic black hole: stases of inhibition are associated with the release of crossroad behaviors” (*ATP* 334). James heeds his grandmother’s advice that “[t]he difficult thing [in life] is not to be overwhelmed by the bad patches. You mustn’t let them defeat you. You must see them as a gift—a cruel gift, but a gift nonetheless” (Cameron 211). James overcomes his “gifted” depression through the release of the crossroad behaviours of the Deleuzian event that runs along virtual series and counter-actualizes through changed relations in the realm of sense. These lines allow James to use his a-synchronicity to tap into the virtual realm and to move beyond the finality of adult parameters and their fixation of homosexual identities. James’s identity seeks ever-new actualizations in a world that welcomes homosexual possibilities, without necessarily reducing them to the identity of “the homosexual.”

The structure of the novel itself defies linearity. Rather than following the chronological order of events, James’s narrative constitutes an amalgamation of memories, flashbacks, and present instances, as he attempts to make sense of what has been happening to him. Instead of being able to identify one significant “event” in terms of a cause-effect

relation—what is conventionally regarded as one defining childhood moment (most possibly child-abuse)—James is confronted with various encounters and instances that all constitute causes with a series of virtual events that find expression in effects and new and different actualizations throughout the novel. For instance, James’s sudden correction of his sister’s proposition that her boyfriend, a language professor, dumped her is one of these effects: “‘He didn’t dump you. He may be leaving you, but he isn’t dumping you. There’s a big difference’” (219). Rather than the vertical sense of “to dump,” James proposes a different expression of sense by using the infinitive “to leave,” which bears more horizontal, more liberating connotations. It is moments like these where the novel actualizes the events in the virtual series that James has experienced (such as his changed notion of sense in the example above). In light of these momentary configurations, childhood, according to Cameron’s novel, does not serve as an anchored causal point that needs to be uncovered in order to heal James’s depressions, but remains a mystic territory, subjected to the fragility of James’s memory, whose influences upon the present narrator receive an alteration of sense throughout the novel. James’s memories of his shame-inducing childhood are replaced by memories of his grandmother, who protected him from a crashing window when he was about four years old (226). This shift from painful memories at the beginning of the novel to memories of love and protection at the end of his narrative signals a change of signification—of sense—for the narrating James where he lets go of his resentment and welcomes affirmation and love instead.

On the whole, Peter Cameron’s novel *Someday This Pain Will Be Useful to You* critiques Western culture’s imperative of “growing up” to adult completion as a harmful and reductionist way of movement. It turns its protagonist James into a queer adolescent, who, in retrospect, sees his childhood growth to have occurred under the “straightening” command of

a social order that views the child as either asexual or straight, but as never gay, as it exposes the queer child to queer-eradicating impulses to guarantee a heterosexual outcome of the child. James develops the a-synchronous feelings of a “misfit” as he grows towards the category of a homosexual identity that is both marked as adult and sexual. To endure his childhood, James relies on his optimism in a better adult world, which, however, never comes; on the contrary, James’s identity undergoes a classification *into* a homosexual identity, which, far from carrying liberating notions, constrains his abject feelings about himself. Fuelled by the image of childhood innocence, James seeks to live in a “lamb-y” world, which he believes he can find in a nostalgic house in the Midwest where he might live a life in isolation and withdrawal. James thus grows up under stigmatizations and classifications that make no sense to him, and that make him defer his hopes for difference onto the next stage in life.

To break James’s depression, Cameron’s novel introduces Deleuzian events that run through virtual series and allow for counter-actualizations through changes in the realm of sense. James experiences encounters, shocks, and absent-mindedness that open his identity onto a different sense of time, difference, and language. These experiences replay in the realm of sense and gradually transform James’s notion of a nonsensical world towards a notion of world that lies open, waiting to create significances that matter to him. James refrains from passively enduring his shame-induced state and begins to live actively, by allowing for change and transformation. It is in this sense that Cameron’s novel opens James’s identity onto the “rhizome” that permits for a notion of growth that is not teleological, or end-driven to adult finality, but that spreads out in more horizontal and forward-oriented directions along changing notions of sense. Having grown out of childhood, James’s identity launches onto the “rhizome,” thereby converting his negative feelings of a-

synchronicity into a gap between virtual potentialities and their actualizations, whose interactions continuously produce new presents, new sense. James's attempts to render his growth linear are thus undermined through the multiple, discontinuous, non-linear—"queer"—serial lines that run through his life, which ultimately allow him to let go of his depression and to welcome life in more affirmative ways.

Such a reading of James's "growth" suggests the necessity of re-examining Western culture's teleological command of "growing up" to adult completion in regards to "space" (as discussed in Chapter One), by means of pursuing the "rhizome" in terms of the issue of "boundaries" (Chapter Two) and of "language" (Chapter Four), "love" (Chapter Five), and "trauma" (Chapter Six). I therefore aim to pursue the identity's "rhizomatic movements" in my fourth unit by taking a closer look at language: its shortcomings as well as its potentials, and the question of memory and imagination as connecting factors to the "rhizome." For this purpose, Chapter Four turns to Sara Pritchard's novel *Crackpots*, which questions the binary of signifier and signified in order to entertain the notion a triadic semiotics at the heart of the text, to which the child may already be privy.

—Chapter Four—

Fissures in Discourse: Language, Memory, and Imagination in Sara Pritchard's *Crackpots*

*The baby is looking in amazement, too, in wide-eyed wonder at the beauty of this
fairy-tale apparition. She stretches out her arm and points, too, into the
darkness, into the night, into the twinkling, whispering, grasses—the glittering
cusp of midnight—her tiny fingers pointing, taut and firm. She opens her mouth,
but she has no words to say it.*

—Sara Pritchard, *Crackpots*

Life does not speak; it listens and waits.

—Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*

*Then the new molecular philosophy shows astronomical interspaces betwixt
atom and atom, shows that the world is all outside; it has no inside.*

—Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Experience*

My thesis began with establishing the importance of the “rhizome” in relation to “space” (Chapter One), and further elaborated on the relevance of “boundaries” (Chapter Two), “difference” (Chapter Three) to my argument on identity’s continuous movements beyond the finality of adult parameters. I now turn to the issue of “language,” which the previous chapters have prompted me further to investigate. To develop the topic of language, particularly in regard to Deleuze’s child and its “rhizomatic movements,” requires me to

speak of language acquisition, memory, and imagination; Sara Pritchard's novel *Crackpots* (2003) well exemplifies each of these important facets of language and selfhood.

Crackpots follows its protagonist Ruby Reese along the text's diary-style entries that chronicle her growth into adulthood. Ruby's adult life is dominated by a series of disappointing love relationships causing her existence to bear an air of monotony and depression, until an event on the threshold to the new Millennium offers potential to reconfigure her life. The novel further follows Ruby's brother Mason Reese, who struggles with his own life as he grows into adulthood. This chapter will explore how these two characters share a growth within language that has both the power to confine and to injure, as well as the power to nourish and to invigorate, therefore assisting in identity's "rhizomatic" wanderings through life.

Pritchard's *Crackpots* exposes language to be a source of illusions. Her poetic novel critiques the view of language as a closed-off and abstract system of signifier and signified that represents the inert world mimetically; instead, this structuralist perspective of a representational language in which subjectivity is intricately bound up is cracked open in favour of a distance to a tyrant signifier and signification—ones which require our submission to a closed-in semiotics that structures our social reality and delimits our ways of thinking. To open (its own) language to the "outside," to render it other than itself, and to expose the constraints of a transcendental signifier that reduces a multi-dimensional network of signs to the illusion of the two-dimensional flatness of the signifier, Pritchard's *Crackpots* turns to a triadic semiotics that breaks the binary signification of signifier and signified by virtue of an a-signifying rupture—a fruitful in-between space of intensity and alterity and potentiality—that forms a transitional passage between what Deleuze and Guattari term the "form of expression" and the "form of content," in order to allow for a distribution of planes

and a continued creation of subjectivity (*ATP* 89).⁸⁹ Her text seeks to restore a multiplicity that connects language and selfhood to the world within an overall metamorphic and continuous and creative process by way of turning to memory, imagination, and the sublime. Language, according to Pritchard, has more to offer than being constrained by the signifier—a perspective to which the child may already be privy.

To elucidate the topic of language acquisition, *Crackpots* begins with various diary-style entries of its protagonist, Ruby Reese, which switch between first and second person narration at the beginning of the novel. These alternations of narrative point of views, along with the text's changes in tenses between past and (historic) present, evince a distinction between the narrating and the experiencing "I," which makes the text adopt a mode of reflection *and* one of immediacy. The novel's employment of second person narration further places the reader in an intimate proximity to the narrating Ruby, and thus in an in-between position inside and outside the text, as if the reader resembled the character him- or herself. The overall effect generated by these narratological techniques is one of a play on spatial and temporal distances, which evinces the contours of Ruby Reese's narratorship and which pulls the reader inside, around, and out of the narrative text while complicating identificatory processes underwriting the text's characters. The dates of the novel's diary-style entries, then, do not serve to reconstruct a determinate location and age of the narrator Ruby, relating past events to others and to the present; instead, these dates situate an event within its coexisting and contemporaneous availability to others, making all events available to memory and detaching them from events in succession.⁹⁰ The novel thus situates its readers

⁸⁹ On Deleuze and language, see also Colebrook 103-123; Lecercle, *Deleuze and Language*.

⁹⁰ See also Jay Lampert's comment on Deleuzian "dates" when he writes that "[v]irtual events, and not just factual states of changes, are 'dated.'" Indeed while factual changes of course occur at determinate points in chronological time, they do not really have dates until

within a realm of memory, which, rather than being set off against the present, interacts and takes new shape with the present. In terms of language acquisition, the novel does not record the chronological stages of its protagonist's attainment of language as put forward by seminal linguistic theories on language acquisition,⁹¹ but places Ruby within a field of language where her linguistic expressions progress along a series of formative events where events make language possible. Language is therefore wrested from personal or innate ownership and given virtual dimensions by virtue of events.⁹²

Ruby's utterances, then, concern less the realm of the signifier and signified, but more a play with the materiality and movements of language before it approaches the realm of signification. Ruby, who cannot yet write, notes the multiple variations inherent in speech when she experiments with the polyphonies and complexity of the sonorous qualities of her voice. Thus, Ruby has been

repeating endlessly [her] favorite phrase in many different voices, pronunciations, variations, accents, and volumes:

Yellow Velvet

YEL-LOH VEL-VET!

they are extracted from chronological succession and reoriented on a virtual plane where all events coexist" (71).

⁹¹ Though there has been a shift from competence-oriented theories such as Noam Chomsky's mentalist theory, which argues that the child has an inborn "Language Acquisition Device," a blueprint model and deep structure of rules that the child learns to apply in language (36-37), to performance-oriented theories such as Kohn's monitoring theory, which argues that language (in particular second language) is acquired through actions of performative self-monitoring and censorship (161), these accounts define linguistic expression in terms of a communicative model where language serves the means to express an inner content along the signifier-signified divide. *Crackpots*, however, posits that one's expression in language is being provoked by virtual events that make language possible. The child then acquires language not to express an inner, hidden content, but to express an underlying series of virtual events.

⁹² For a discussion on the "event," see Chapter Three.

yel-LOW vel-VET.

YEL-low **VEL**-vet.

YEL-low vel-**VET**

VELVET YELLOW

Vellow Yelvet

VellowyYellowysmellowyVELVET

yellowvelvetyellowvelvetyellowvelvet.

YALLLOUGH VALL-VETTTT! (12)

Ruby strips down language to its smallest components, the phonemes and the breath, which emanate from the vocal cords in her body. This materialism of language is not yet contained by signification but plays with the generative potentiality of language. Though one may argue that this passage may be read through the lens of Judith Butler’s discursive model of “performativity” (*Bodies That Matter 2*), by which she argues that things are brought to life through the repeated employment of language, whose temporality opens up the possibility for different repetitions and re-significations as perhaps best illustrated by Ruby’s word “Velvet Yellow,” this passage evades the realm of (re)signification altogether through its focus on the generative dimensions of language. Rather than being concerned with meaning, Ruby’s language adopts a life of its own that is dominated by its polyphonic and multidimensional dimensions.

Ruby’s phonemes and words constitute what Deleuze and Guattari term “form of expression” and “form of content” (*ATP 85*). This binary is not to be confused with signifier and signified, but is distinguished functionally as part of a triadic semiotics that is opened by an a-signifying rupture—an in-between space of particles and degrees and variables—that

allows for an intermingling passage from one term into the other (88). Ruby's phoneme /e/ then envelops a whole world of forces such as its intensities, variations, and physical productions of its past and future actualizations—a generic potential, which, from the perspective of the word “yellow,” the phoneme /e/ expresses. The phoneme /e/ then becomes a form of content for the word “yellow,” as it takes its place in the formal organization of the word “yellow.” “Yellow,” in turn, expresses the forces that went into its making as its content. Form of expression and form of content then receive a determination in their struggle with each other where the content in one situation forms the expression in another according to a (reversible) power struggle between the overpowered and the overpowering. Ruby's experiment with the sonorous qualities of her voice demonstrates this dynamic interchange of language.

Ruby's language carries forward these dynamics in her observations of and attention to details such as the “ceramic doorknob and a shiny silver lock that goes click-click click-click ... when you turn it back and forth, back and forth, back and forth, back and forth ...” (Pritchard 11), her accumulative descriptions of Aunt Izzy's odd looks (5), and her engagement in activities such as getting a manicure and lighting Aunt Izzy's cigarettes (7). Ruby's language and actions form what Deleuze and Guattari term a two-sided assemblage: on the one side, there is the function of the “*collective assemblages of enunciation*” that are occupied with and organize form-substances of expressions, and, on the other side, there is the function of the “*machinic assemblages*” that organize the form-substance of content (ATP 7; emphasis original). These bipolar assemblages do not speak “of” things in a representational manner—neither are they spoken “by” an individual subject; rather, they speak at the same time on the level of things and on the level of content. They are made up of bodies, things, forces, affects, becomings, and events from which the self is born: “My name

is Ruby Jean,” calls out Ruby suddenly and passionately while playing cowboys and Indians (Pritchard 8). Her assertion of an “I” is not the statement of a subject of enunciation, but an effect of language as it is caught up in the “machinic” process of an assemblage.⁹³

Ruby carries forward this pliability and productivity of her voice onto the graph when she begins to learn how to write. Reports Ruby,

Now you’re a little older and learning to read and write. There are many wonderful words to say and write and spell, but the most glorious, wonderful word of all is SQUIRREL. SQUIRREL, with its big, squirrelly-tail S, its magnificent squirrelly-footed Q, its dog-barking RR. SQUIRREL is a word to be written in the dirt in the alley with a stick, to be written with your finger on the side of your father’s DeSoto and on steamed-up windows in the kitchen and in the dust on the coffee table and the television screen. With one of your father’s mechanical pencils, SQUIRREL can be written very small on the wallpaper going up the stairs or low to the floor, just above the molding, or longwise, marching up the corner of Mason’s room.... One night in bed you think of SQUIRREL backwards, and the magical word LERRIUQS, pronounced Larry Ukus (the Mighty Mouse of squirrels), appears in blue ink on your sheets. Brushing your teeth one morning, looking in the mirror, the even *more* magical word **squirrel** [printed in mirror image font in the original text] appears on one of the white horizontal stripes on your pajama top where the word **squirrel** had once been. Life is beautiful. (12-13)

Ruby is thrilled by the manifold facets offered by graphism, as she writes the word “squirrel” in a range of forms across various surfaces (probably to the dismay of her parents). Her reference to the magical quality of the word “squirrel” attests to the machinic assemblage at

⁹³ See also my discussion of the narrator in Chapter Two.

work within language, which turns Ruby into a writer in a Deleuze-Guattarian sense when they observe that “[t]he writer uses words, but by creating a syntax that makes them pass into sensation that makes the standard language stammer, tremble, cry, or even sing. . . . The writer twists language, makes it vibrate, seizes hold of it, and rends it in order to wrest the percept from perceptions, the affect from affections, the sensation from opinion . . .” (*What is Philosophy?* 176). Ruby’s writing is less concerned about representing the animal; rather, it turns to the intensities, forces, and sensations that make up language. Ruby takes language to its frontier where it becomes impersonal and indiscernible, and where it takes the writer along lines of flight that render her affirmative of life.

Her observation of the magical and prickly qualities of language makes Ruby write the poem “The Very Beautiful Sad Elegy for Bambi’s Dead Mother” (Pritchard 22). Her virtuosity, however, is curtailed by her teacher, Miss Barrett, to whom she shows her poem. Narrates Ruby,

On the first page in red ink, Miss Barrett has printed in her big, neat handwriting: *A stag is a male deer!!!* Three exclamation marks and a thick red underline like a bad cut. A little ways down the page and running right over a particular poignant fawn (possibly even Bambi herself) in the margin, Miss Barrett has drawn a thick red circle around the word *lay* and written: *Only chickens lay!!!* Three more big red exclamation marks like war paint and, again, the thick red underscore like an open wound. (22)

Miss Barrett favours signification and correct information and representation over the expressive qualities of language. Her corrections are akin to the transmission of what Deleuze and Guattari term “order-words,” which are an intrinsic part of language. By “order-words,” they do not mean a “particular category of explicit statements (for example, in the

imperative), but the relation of every word or every statement to implicit presuppositions, in other words, to speech acts that are, and can only be, accomplished in the statement. Order-words do not concern commands only, but every act that is linked to statements by a ‘social obligation’” (*ATP* 79). Order-words compel obedience and give life-orders (chickens are to lay eggs, though this activity constitutes perhaps only two per cent of their daily lives).⁹⁴ They arrest the flow of language by forming constants—an impact, which is felt by Ruby when she comments on words wounding her body. Language thus also distributes affects that hurt and injure Ruby: “You are overcome with shame and humiliation and tears ... and [you] strike the matches and set that stupid poem that goddamn stupid holey shit Christian goddamn very beautiful sad piss-on-it damn elegy on fire” (Pritchard 23). Ruby’s short-held exclamations and curses reveal the affective impact of language on her body. Her pain and disappointment can be explained by Butler, who notes that language “has within it its own possibilities for violence and for world-shattering” (*Excitable Speech* 6).⁹⁵ Order-words are one of those possibilities in so far as they establish an ordered stagnancy of language and Ruby’s subjectivity. This arrest gradually shows in Ruby’s subsequent entries, which are all narrated in first-person, and which indicate the formation of a subject of enunciation.

Ruby’s brother Mason shares her frustrations with language. Mason’s “growing up” in the symbolic order is different from Ruby’s, as his gender places him in a central position of having the phallus. Mason privileges the signification and meaning of words over his sister’s fascination with the sonorous and graphic dimensions of language. This contrast

⁹⁴ On the “order-word,” see also Parr 193-194.

⁹⁵ Butler argues that violence is within language and critiques Elaine Scarry’s argument in *The Body In Pain* that violence is happening to language and its world-making. Scarry also sees the body as anterior to language and the body’s pain as inexpressible in language, as something that escapes language (*Excitable Speech* 6). Though Scarry’s argument is convincing in that pain can only be felt and not put into language, violence as an affect is nevertheless part of the Deleuzian machinic assemblage.

becomes evident in his mocking of Ruby's ignorance of the meaning of the word "decapitated" in regards to her imaginary friend. Remarks Mason, "No, stupid, he's been DE-CAP-I-TATED. You don't even know what DE-CAP-I-TATED means. It's too big of a word for you. . . . DE-CAP-I-TATED means he got his head cut off" (15). For Mason, language forms a self-contained system of propositions made up of denotation, manifestation, and signification. Signifiers are explained through other signifiers or what Jacques Lacan terms the chain of signification in which he views subjectivity to be intricately caught up.⁹⁶ However, it is this closing in of language, its abstraction to representation, and its exhaustion of all the potentialities for expression, as they have already been realized and frozen into words along this chain of signification, which becomes problematic for Mason.

The word "decapitated" has further significance for Mason, who boasts with his intelligent articulateness. Writes Stephen Bruhm, "the standard marker of adulthood—the development of sophisticated intelligence—may itself be a cause of horror . . . [with] characters most susceptible [to this articulateness being] males on the threshold of some crisis with the world of language[,] . . . boys on the cusp of full emergence into the symbolic order" (75, 76). Bruhm continues to remark that the presence of one word, and to figure out meaning not so much as signified but as signifier, proceeds "from a castration of verbal acuity" and the inability to figure out meaning "granted by one's deployment of language to define or represent one's self": "DE-CAP-I-TATED" (79-80). In short, Mason's problem is a linguistic one, where the word "decapitated" continues to occupy his mind, and where, therefore, symbolic castration appears at his entrance into the symbolic order: "That trauma,

⁹⁶ Lacan's chain of signification is a sliding from signifier to signified, which becomes another signifier. The subject of the signifier moves along this chain until signification is reached. See "Seminar on 'The Purloined Letter'" 29-30.

moreover, is often ‘reduced down to a word whose meaning and significance for the child we are not even able to define, but which nonetheless ties him to the community of mankind’” (83).

Ruby comments on Mason’s withdrawal into music and literature in his teenage years, which paradoxically constitutes an escape from language that does not hold long, as literature is also language and becomes part of his abandonment. Before Mason gets arrested and is sent to a private school, consequent to an incident that involves him, a fourteen-year-old girl, and his “thug” friend Chantz Phillips (the novel does not further illuminate this incident), Ruby reports that

Mason spent most of his time in his room, reading J.D. Salinger and listening to 78s of George Shearing, Erroll Garner, Art Tatum, Bill Evans, and Dave Brubeck. When he was twelve, Mason won a national piano competition. That was in 1952 – two years after I was born – and Mason played “Stardust.” One day my mother would say that the piano was what saved him, but she was wrong. (Pritchard 24)

Mason’s withdrawal into his room and his dedication to the arts, primarily literature and music, constitute an abandonment of language and a turn to different forms of expressions, which does not hold for long. His preference for literature over language can be explained by Deleuze, who claims that the task of literature is not merely to take up linguistics, but to put language to flight, that is to turn language into a minor or intensive use of it and away from the domination of the signifier (*Kafka* 26-27). Music, according to Deleuze, brings language to its limits where it changes into another medium of expression (26). Deleuze further ascribes music’s regenerative potentials when it surrounds the self within a sonorous wall, a “calm and stable centre at the heart of chaos” (*ATP* 311), only to allow the self to crack open

again to the world. Mason's mother's comment that the piano was what saved him, then, speaks to his invigoration of his self in music with his escape from language.⁹⁷

These healing powers of music become particularly evident the night when the family dog, Go-Jeff, dies. Ruby narrates that Mason has been playing "the same three pieces on the piano over and over again: 'Beautiful Dreamer' by Stephen Foster, Beethoven's 'Für Elise,' and David Raksin's 'Laura'" (Pritchard 50). He keeps on playing "'Old Dog Tray,' another Stephen Foster piece, but woven all through it and wrapped around it were the teardrops of 'Für Elise,' and the long, ethereal strands of 'Beautiful Dreamer,' and the heartbreaking cadence of 'Laura,' . . . all mixed together in a syncopated slow jazz tempo" (50). Mason's interweaving composition of songs produces the intertwined movements of the form of content and the form of expression: one expressive song becomes the content of the next one in a continuous strand of music, whose expressive dimensions lie beyond the grasp of language. Music is Mason's language. His jazz syncopations constitute what Deleuze and Guattari term "rhythm," by which they do not mean the measured movements of already-organized musical metre but the incommensurable in-between spaces that operate "between two milieus, or between two intermilieus, on the fence, between night and day . . . twilight" (*ATP* 313-314), allowing for a change of directions between form of content and form of expression in ever new compositions where strands of music lead to refrains to open up again to new strands within an ever continued and varied creation of a piece of music-subjectivity.⁹⁸

⁹⁷ *Crackpots* is peppered with references to music. Music plays a significant role in the life of other characters, and many of the novel's chapters and subchapters are titled after songs or melodies. To this end, Pritchard's text itself constitutes a musical composition of refrains, adding a different form of expression to its language.

⁹⁸ On Deleuze and music, see also Bogue, *Deleuze on Music, Painting, and the Arts* 13-76.

Mason's music further establishes a connection with the outside in music's proximity with nature and the cosmos, connecting Mason and the world. Continues Ruby's narrative, as the last note drifted out through the open window and down Cherry Street and across Elysian Avenue, across the railroad tracks and over the old iron suspension bridge, out past Buck Run and down River Road to the Susquehanna River . . . and off into the black and starry night sky, and we stole back to our beds—my mother, my father, Albertine, and me—*without so much as a word*, and outside our windows the billions of crickets and peepers sang their two-note songs. (Pritchard 50, 51; emphasis added)

Mason's music opens out onto the cosmos and connects with the rhythms in and of nature, as expressed by the two-note songs. To this end, music allows Mason to engage in a dynamic and re-configurative process to transform his pain into Deleuzian "becomings." Ruby's remark that the piano did not end up saving him, however, demonstrates language's overpowering of music.

As the novel progresses, Mason falls silent. His friendship with "thug" Chantz Phillips may perhaps be explained as a sanctuary that gives him acceptance and recognition, as he forms a stable subject of enunciation in line with sexual adult personhood. His flight into the imaginary dimension of language is a flight from the symbolic order. Chantz mirrors to Mason the socio-cultural image of a young man: masculine, strong, and virile. Mason's ego formation then extends into the symbolic where it is to counter his fear of language. Steven Bruhm comments on this male-male bonding when he notes that the friendship with "losers" exposes the latter as "an empty box" that reveals certainty to be uncertain and "that the law is an imposture . . . despite its imposture" (86) and investment in power figures such as Chantz Phillips. This emptiness of "losers" becomes evident in Mason's scarce, profane,

and impoverished use of language limited to curse words and brief statements (Pritchard 35-36). Furthermore, Bruhm regards such male-male bonding between Chantz and Mason as a “pining for the phallus” and a question of gender panic in terms of effeminacy (87-88).

Bruhm argues for the horror of bringing the phallus “out of the closet in terrifying ways”—a closet, which is “the phallic signifier itself,” where the phallus lives veiled (89-90).

Continues Bruhm,

male heterosexuality does not look all that different from male homosexuality, and precisely because of the elusiveness of the ever-reified, ever-desired phallus. For Lacan, male heterosexuality is distinguished from homosexuality “by reference to the function of the phallus” (Écrits 289). Straight men see in the woman the mirror image of their own phallus, for it is the original desire of the boy to be the phallus his mother lacks, and so to want the woman is to want to be that phallus, the phallus she can never be because she can never have it. The gay man, conversely, identifies with the mother’s lack of the phallus and contends himself with being the phallus/woman that the straight man desires. (91).

In other terms, Mason’s and Chantz’s pinning for the phallus, their crisis in heterosexual masculinity, is that “the man both has the phallus (-as-penis) and desires the phallus (-as-woman) in a display that risks effeminizing him” (92). Hence, Mason’s and Chantz’s incident with a girl that is to affirm their juvenile masculinity set up by the symbolic order. Though Mason’s father blames the peer-pressure to “act cool” and to rebel against tradition for Mason’s derailment in adolescence (Pritchard 44), the novel may thus hint at language as conditioning Mason’s relation with Chantz and his retreat into silence.

Mason’s masculine subjectivity is further accompanied by anxiety. He ends up as the owner of a pharmacy with a Porsche, a person valued by the local police, and in a marriage

with two children (29, 43-45). Yet, it is his patriarchal position within the context of the nuclear American family that causes his unease as shown in his absence from home, his avoidance of the family Thanksgiving Dinner, and his frequent alcoholic inebriety (29, 44). Mason's household is one with reified gender dichotomies, one that put his wife, Lynette, into the house and Mason both outside and inside it (29). Mason perceives his domestic space as a masculine subject, husband, and father as constraining and delimiting, as further illustrated by the symbolism of his name ("*la maison*" is French for house). His frequent interpellations as "Doc" by his friends and town people (29, 43) further constitute him as a patriarchal subject within the symbolic order that he perceives as confining. Judith Butler views this mode of address and constitution of the subject as enabling vulnerability, and as being part of injurious speech that has derogative and demeaning consequences, as it fixes and paralyzes the one it hails (*Excitable Speech* 2). Mason is thus hailed into masculine subjectivity, husbandship, and fatherhood, which merely increases his feelings of suffocation and anxiety. Joan Copjec, in her reading of Lacan, regards anxiety as "a feeling of suffocation that accompanies the encounter with being as well as the felt need to escape it" ("May '68, the Emotional Month" 104). Copjec continues to define being as

the forced company of our own being, whose "brutality" consists in the fact that it is impossible either to assume it *or* to disown it.... We do not comprehend or choose it, but neither can we get rid of it.... The sentiment of being doubled by an inhuman, impersonal partner, who is at the same time me and disquietingly alien. This sense of being overburdened or doubled by *jouissance*,⁹⁹ ... of being "enclosed in a tight

⁹⁹ Lacan defines *jouissance* as an excess of enjoyment—a painful pleasure—the access to which one has become barred from through one's existence in the symbolic and to which the drive aims, becoming a death drive. He argues that the signifying chain grounds and articulates itself upon some Thing outside itself which is located beyond the pleasure

circle that smothers,” is the automatic result of the encounter with our own
jouissance.... (102-103)

Mason’s being squeezed into male subjectivity makes him encounter his inner self to which he reacts in terror, as it manifests itself in his claustrophobic feelings of *jouissance*. His being overburdened by *jouissance*, then, explains his driving around aimlessly, his wreckage of his marriage, his sleepless disposition, and his final sojourn at a trashy, seedy hotel (Prichard 29, 48). The last time Ruby sees her brother, he leaves Ruby with the anxious words, “Listen, Ruby, I gotta run. It was nice seein’ ya, but I gotta go. I gotta . . .” (49)—upon which he leaves the plot of the novel.

Crackpots thus follows two characters, Ruby and Mason, as they acquire language and ascend into the symbolic order. Through its protagonist Ruby, the novel begins with a machinic notion of language and expression caused by events rather than a Chomskyian model of mental competence. *Crackpots* shows Ruby as being thrilled by language before the graph begins to dominate her voice, exposing her to the dominance of order-words that freeze language and highlight language’s injurious possibilities. Language ceases to be alive as it begins to capture and to encapsulate Ruby’s life and events, gradually enfolding her into a subject of enunciation. Her brother, Mason Reese, who “grows up” as a masculine subject within the phallogocentrism of the symbolic order, witnesses a similar closing-in of language into propositions as he privileges the signification and meaning of language. Mason’s existence as a terminal subject of sexual identity is thus driven by suffocation and language’s frozen modes of expression. Language, for both characters, has lost its vitality—which, perhaps, has never existed for Mason.

principle that marks the limits of bearable, civilized comforts. See “Seminar” 36, 38-40.

Ruby's life continues with her earning a master's degree in English from the University of West Virginia, where she falls in love with Etienne, one of her students. After Etienne suddenly disappears, Ruby marries Boo, with whom she moves to Jackson Tract, a newly opened housing district near the ocean. After experiencing domestic violence, Ruby tries to run away and to kill herself. She divorces Boo and marries Oscar, a Swede. After their divorce, Ruby marries Miles, a poetry professor whom she has met at his seminar. At the end of their marriage, Ruby begins an affair with married Tony Fellini, who leaves her. At the age of fifty, Ruby looks back upon a life dominated by a series of disappointing relationships, the demise of her brother, the death of her parents as well as the imminent death of her sister Albertine's son Owen. Ruby's only close friend is Viv, a neighbour from Jackson Tract, to whom she writes Christmas cards each year.

These occurrences, however, are not narrated in a chronological order. Rather, they filter through the individual passages or mini-chapters that make up the novel. These passing narrative segments, recounted in present as well as past tense, demonstrate the complex working of memory and recollection. Memory is not conceived of as a static past or present (now past) that can now be summoned and represented as the same original experience. Rather, memory has a productive potential in so far as it is brought into association with the present, revitalizing the past so that it can be relived anew and differently. The past is thus approached differently from the present moment and different aspects of it become the focus. For instance, in her entry in 1985, Ruby states, while on an airplane, that "the statue is complete. I'm one hundred percent ice, except for my eyes. I don't want to be like this. I want to speak, but I can't" (91) – a remark, which resurfaces in her entry on December 31, 1999, contextualized differently and given further insights that link her frozen identity with her failed love relationships (184-6). Thus, the reader gains more and more insights into

Ruby's life, from different perspectives, associations, and timely overlaps that weigh the significance of past events differently in relation to a changing present. An interweaving temporal web emerges with the full breadth of memory, showing the richness of life in which memory has been gained rather than lost.

To add to the richness of life, *Crackpots* continues to connect language to the outside in order to free Ruby from her illusions of being constrained by language, and to open her to the creativity of language. The novel does this through its form; however, the text's form is not to be understood as being opposed to its content within a binary framework, as in a communication model where hidden content is the cause to be expressed through language. Rather, the text aims to destabilize language as a homogeneous state of equilibrium by continually opening it to its third element—an in-between space of intensity and potentiality—that vitalizes language, turning it into a matter of mediation between subjectivity and extra-linguistic forces.

Ruby has adopted a communicational model of language that assumes a world of already defined things that are then mirrored in language.¹⁰⁰ Informs the narrator, “All she [Ruby] wants to know is this: *Is she right or is she wrong?*” (40; emphasis original). Ruby is concerned about the faithfulness of her expression and whether it corresponds to the particular state of affairs it refers to correctly. This conformity of language and the world is governed by signification and its universal concepts that determine the conditions of truth and falsehood. Unsurprisingly, Ruby keeps a dictionary close-by:

One day, Ruby set her parents' house on fire, trying to destroy the Bambi manuscript. . . . All this because of some unfortunate word choices. Perhaps because of this incident—fire and humiliation—Ruby became obsessed with words and developed a

¹⁰⁰ On communicational and expressive models, see also Massumi xiii-xvii.

compulsion for looking up words in the dictionary and keeping track of them in tiny memo pads. She carries a pocket dictionary in her purse, another under the seat of her car. There's another dictionary by her bed, yet another one on her kitchen table, another in the living room, and a big blue one for thumbing through on her desk. You can never be too sure about words. (118)

Ruby's incident with her teacher constitutes a defining moment for Ruby;¹⁰¹ it makes her place expression's potential within a "straight-jacket" of propositions and signification. Her obsession with words shows her concern for proper meaning, which she locates within language. For Ruby, language is steeped within common sense and judgments that approach and organize the world through usage in its already constituted form. However, she also notices that words are quite a dubious affair and cannot be trusted, implying a need for caution.

Furthermore, language's connection to the "order-word" has come to dominate Ruby's life. This becomes evident especially in regards to her love relationships when Ruby mentions to Tony that "'A stag is a MALE deer,' she [Ruby] muttered. 'Only chickens lay'" (125).¹⁰² In the context of love relations, the order-word transforms Ruby and Tony into lover and beloved and makes them obey the dictionary definition of love: "on page 264, she [Ruby] reads: love (luv) 1. a deep, tender, ineffable feeling of affection and solicitude toward a person, such as that arising from kinship, recognition of attractive qualities, or a sense of underlying oneness. 2. a feeling of intense desire and attraction toward a person with whom one is disposed to make a pair . . ." (120). The affective intensities released in love are soon

¹⁰¹ Similarly, Cameron's novel gives snippets of memory as defining insights. See Chapter Three.

¹⁰² Similar to Mason, it is words that resonate throughout Ruby's life, leaving her pondering on their meaning.

channelled into an underlying Platonic conception of love as the meeting of two twin-souls fusing into one.¹⁰³ The ensuing monotony of the speech act's transformation of persons into lovers and beloveds and their fusion into oneness is signalled in the following passage, which gives an impression of Ruby's marriage with Oscar:

Now Ruby's married to a nice Swedish man.

He pats her on the head and serves her nippon soppa.

They sit at the table and talk about El Niño.

At six and twelve a train goes by.

Lately, Ruby notices, though, he's *burning* things, too. He waits till Ruby's in the shower, her hair dripping suds, then pokes his head inside the curtain: "Ruby, I think I'll run on out to Wal-Mart for a little while now, dear." (126; emphasis added)

The monotone ordering, rhythm, and phrases of these sentences produce an effect of boredom. Perhaps for reasons of the order-word, Oscar is committing adultery, as Ruby is suggesting in this passage. Her expression of "burning" connects to the fire of her poem and her experience of the order-word that made her turn to language as a representational model. The order-word has come to be a death-sentence, freezing language and, by consequence, Ruby.

Crackpots introduces moments of stuttering into its modes of narration, in order to make language fall into a state of disequilibrium, thereby disclosing its virtual and intense potential for creation. One of these moments is when Ruby is plotting to leave her violent husband, Boo:

To pass the time, she recited silently her favorite parts of the Lutheran service and bits of *Alice in Wonderland*. *May the peace of God, which passeth all understanding,*

¹⁰³ See Chapter Five.

keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, Amen. . . . The keys to the Beemer are in Boo's short pocket, on the floor by the bed. . . . "*The time has come,*" *the Walrus said, "to talk of many things"* . . . I have to find the other set of keys . . . abscond with both sets so he can't come after me in the truck. "*Of shoes and ships and sealing wax"* . . . The big jar of tips is on the kitchen counter. "*Of cabbages and kings"* . . . My clothes are on the living room floor . . . "*And why the sea is boiling hot"* . . . I'll go out the back door where there aren't any steps yet. Jump down . . . wake up Phinny [Ruby's dog] from under the deck, lead him by his collar . . . (47; emphasis original)

Ruby's stuttering is not a tripping of the tongue or a vibration of her speech, but a stuttering of language in its affective and intensive dimensions. Writes Deleuze,

Everything depends on the way we consider language. If we extract it like a homogeneous system in equilibrium, or close to equilibrium, defined by constant terms and relations, it is obvious that the disequilibriums and variations can only affect speech (nonpertinent variations of the intonation type). But if the system appears in perpetual disequilibrium or bifurcation, if each of its terms in turn passes through a zone of continuous variation, then the language itself will begin to vibrate and stutter, but without being confused with speech. . . . If language merges with speech, it is only with a very particular kind of speech, a poetic speech that actualizes these powers of bifurcation and variation, of heterogenesis and modulation, that are proper to language. ("He Stuttered" 108)

Stuttering opens up a triadic space—"a zone of continuous variation"—that actualizes language. Ruby's citation of Lewis Carroll's nonsense poetry in-between her thought processes literally opens out onto the virtual realm of (non)sense from which sense is born,

investing language with meaning.¹⁰⁴ Ruby's stuttering introduces states of potential into her language as illustrated by the dotted gaps, which makes her realize the possibility of leaving Boo and his violence toward her. It no longer makes sense to her to live with Boo, and Ruby turns to different possibilities.

The novel further dismantles Ruby's ownership of language as a subject of enunciation by switching to third person narrative mode and free indirect discourse.¹⁰⁵ These techniques free language from Ruby's intentions, and demonstrate how her subjectivity is produced by language beyond any conscious and intended decisions. Ruby is described thus, from the point of view of a received and anonymous language:

A woman is playing the piano but not very well. She plays the same piece – one of Bach's four-part inventions – over and over again Directly above the room where the woman is playing the same Bach four-part invention over and over again, a man is putting on a roof. The hammering is what's messing up the woman's concentration. Sort of. Not really. . . . Every time the woman begins taking piano lessons, she starts out with the John Schaum violet book: "Deep River," "Tales of Hoffman," "Für Elise," "Kinderszenen." These she can play well The Bach interventions are what she's been dreading, waiting for. The Bach inventions are the edge of the plateau she's been playing on. Now, she's at a precipice. She'll quit taking piano lessons, and then she'll start taking a correspondence math course "Goddammit, Ruby, I'm warning you," Boo shouts. "I'm sick of your fuckin' shit." He knocks Ruby off the piano bench (Pritchard 38-41)

¹⁰⁴ For a discussion on sense, see Deleuze, *Logic of Sense* 19-22, and Chapter Three.

¹⁰⁵ On Deleuze and "free indirect discourse," see also Colebrook, *Gilles Deleuze* 112-114.

This passage begins with an anonymous voice that cannot be clearly attributed to a narrator or a character. This distanced point of view on a woman playing the piano demonstrates that the origins of language do not lie in an “I” but in an anonymous “It is said.” Slowly, the reader comes to understand that the woman is Ruby, first by associating the songs with previous scenes in the novel and then through the explicit naming of her character. This zooming in on Ruby via her playing of the piano further shows the flow of language itself and its affective powers as they are expressed in the music. Just as the sonorous dimensions of language fuse with Ruby’s played melodies, so free indirect discourse becomes a stream of consciousness. The latter further wrests language from meaning and saying. “Language,” Claire Colebrook writes, “becomes a flow, . . . [a] series of affects that . . . *produce* a passage from noise to word, from sound to sense” (114; emphasis original): the edge of the plateau. For Ruby, this edge produces a new form of sense and new future possibilities: a math course. In contrast to showing how Ruby’s sensed perceptions intertwine with her feelings in a productive way, this passage diagnoses Boo’s limited way of speaking, consisting of curses and swear words, that produces a person averse to alteration and change.

Crackpots further produces surrealist elements that break the symmetry between “things” and expressions as they already are. Expression, in its conventional understanding, is seen as a model of mirroring that faithfully reflects a state of things. This notion of mirroring is perverted in the following surrealist passage:

So the man with the refrigerator-size hole in his wall writes this all down – two or three pages – folds it in thirds, tucks it in a business-size envelope, . . . and hurries off to an Indian café. There he sits in a blue vinyl booth, his leather jacket beside him, a Nubian thumb ring for good luck in his pocket, sipping sweet Masala tea and

contemplating his own reflection, the size of Jiminy Cricket and upside down in a spoon. (133-4)

The man's lettered subjectivity is enfolded in an envelope, hidden away, while he contemplates his perverted reflection in a spoon. This process constitutes a DeleuzeGuattarian "involution" by which they mean an enfolding of the self towards its own intensive milieu (*ATP* 238-9). The man's distorted reflection in the spoon perverts Lacan's imaginary dimension of language of the signified, twisting its connection to signifiers. Furthermore, this distortion breaks the illusion of a two-dimensional space of the signifier in favour of a multi-dimensional space of language when "right then along comes a woman wearing a cloche adorned with Bing cherries . . . and she sits down across from this man. . . . The woman, it so happens, has an envelope, too, and in her envelope is a story about her mother who played the violin and couldn't sleep at night. . . . Many people like black cut-paper figures, some in hats, hurry into the Café" (Pritchard 134). The man is now accompanied by a woman who has placed a story in an envelope. Her tugging away signals that this story is now a form of content that is about to enter into a new form of expression. In contrast to the three-dimensional appearance of the woman with the cherries, the "black cut-paper figures" illustrate the two-dimensional flatness of the (subjects of the) signifier written in black ink. To further move away from this flat space, the anonymous man and woman exchange their letters: "when everyone is gone and the restaurant is empty, . . . the man and woman with the refrigerator-size holes in their hearts place their fingertips on their envelopes and turn them on edge and guide them carefully across their table like longboats navigating around islands shaped like cups and saucers, bowls, and *perilous* spoons" (133-4; emphasis added). The empty space of the restaurant signals the empty realm of the imaginary. The man's and the woman's *careful* guiding of their respective envelopes on their

edges illustrates the transformative potential of language via navigations through in-between spaces alongside dangerous spoons. The spoon's danger, then, hints at the potential risk of involution and the in-between space that may harbour a veering toward abolition and destruction. Caution, then, is the message of this passage as one begins to untangle language from its investment in signification.

Crackpots ends with Ruby writing a letter to her friend Viv. Her letter, written on the eve of the new Millennium and filled with nostalgic memories, soon takes on a life of its own, as memory and imagination begin to take the letter out of its language. Ruby begins to lose her authorship and narrative control and becomes the anonymous woman in her narrative/letter. These intense and overpowering dimensions crack open the anonymous woman's life:

Inside, everyone is counting, almost shouting the seconds to midnight, and it's in this suspended animation, in one of the space *between* seconds, that some curious revelation comes to her. She begins to think for a moment that she's not really human. She's lived her life, it seems to her now, in some not entirely human way, always on the outside, always on the rim of human emotion, the dusty rim, but never really in the hub, the core of humanness. She's lived only as an adjunct to life, to someone or something – a lover, a spouse, a fear – an auxiliary, a helping verb, being but never acting. Having chosen to remain childless, she's unbound, unentangled, unencumbered, unembraced, free falling – a broken link in the great chain of being. She's an observer only of some spiraling [sic] movement through this brief and twinkling moment of life, a person turning quickly, a person alarmed, startled by something flashing in her peripheral vision, which turns out to be nothing more than her own reflection in a shop window. (Pritchard 185; emphasis added)

The woman's revelation to have lived outside the core of humanness speaks to the notion of woman as an "empty construction" or what Jacques-Allain Miller terms "semblances." Jarraway quotes Miller when he defines semblances as "something whose function is to mask nothingness . . . [only] because we cannot discover Woman, we can only invent her" ("Future Interior" 53). Instead of "filling the hole in the lack," Jarraway (via Miller) suggests that one should engage in "metabolizing it, *dialectizing* it . . . making oneself a being with nothingness. This opens up a whole new clinic of the feminine, a clinic of the lack of identity . . . [that is to say,] of being the hole in the Other by giving it a positive form" (53, 54; emphasis added). The woman's referred to asymmetry and brokenness and periphery, then, bear positive connotations in that they allow her carefully to open onto "nothingness" or the element of thirdness in language.

Miller's masking semblance, then, explains the woman's frozen feelings about herself and her static life: "She's done the right things, it seems, but as if under glass, and now she sees her life more clearly, spread out before her, pinned and sterile and frozen like a mounted butterfly in a glass exhibit case" (Pritchard 185). *Crackpots* continues by breaking the woman's ice, which is not to be taken as an abstract metaphor, but taken quite literally as an expression of her condition. Slowly, the woman's frozen surface of ice cracks open:

Beyond the fieldstone railing, the ice on the lake is shifting, a large block that has been straining to do so finally breaks free. *Whhhhyyyyyyyyyyy?* The lake roars as the ice slowly breaks away, and the wind moans through the creaky oaks and sycamores, playing them like double basses. Above the lake's low groan, a sweet, bell-like harmonic – like the eerie sound of a theremin – rings high above it through the thin air . . . "Hello," the woman calls out weakly across the lake, "Hello Echo . . ." *Echo-echo-echo* . . . "Echo, am I dying?" . . . "Echo, am I living?" (186; emphasis original)

The breaking of the ice generates sounds and celestial music as in the Renaissance concept of the music of the spheres. Rather than forming a universal harmony, these sounds form a disharmony and a phase of disequilibrium when the woman's voice interferes and creates resonances through the thin air. Her voice adopts the dimension of pure sounds that connect with the roaring sounds of the ice, turning the metaphysical question "Why?" into indiscernible phonemes. The result is the woman's confusion as to whether these dismantling, spiralling movements are moments of death or life. Writes Deleuze,

"Of course all life is a process of breaking down." . . . Everything noisy happens at the edge of the crack [which] pursues its silent course, changes direction following the lines of least resistance, and extends its web only under the immediate influence of what happens, until sound and silence wed each other intimately and continuously in the shattering and bursting of the end. (*Logic of Sense* 154-155)

According to Deleuze, the trick is not to let the crack become introjected into depths, but to follow its imperceptible, silent course "at the frontier" (155-156), meaning that one should not reflect on what could have happened but rather focus on what effectively occurs: "to double the actualization with a counter-actualization, the identification with a distance . . . is to give the crack the chance of flying over its own incorporeal surface area, without stopping at the bursting within each body . . . [and] to give us the chance to go farther than we would have believed possible" (161)—the double sound playing "*above* the lake's low groan."

By consequence, the woman ponders the mystery of life, "'What is life?' she whispers, her brain whirring, head spinning. ' . . . a series of anecdotes . . . saints and sinners, crackpots, curmudgeons . . .'" (Pritchard 186). To prevent any further deep penetration of the woman into the mystery of life, the novel quickly re-emerges onto the surface in a distancing manner by virtue of prosopopeia, when "[t]oward her [the woman], gliding closer on the

ice, a figure is approaching—a man. . . . And there's another figure—a woman—from out of nowhere—gliding along now beside the man . . . spinning and twirling on the ice. . . . [And where] [*b*]eyond the field, a stand of aspens is rustling and swaying” (187; emphasis added). The distance introduced here keeps the woman from pondering deeper by allowing her to let the mystery unfold itself on the surface, coming from elsewhere in the form of two *Gestalten*. To this end, the text continues to dismantle itself into flows of images, colours, perceptions, and sensations which move *across* the text—in and out—and which cannot be clearly attributed to an external narrator or to the woman or Ruby as internal characters and narrators. The text takes articulation away from speaking subjects and adopts a pre-personal and anonymous quality as a kind of language coming from elsewhere.

The narrative thus produces a collective assemblage where language no longer *represents* but *discloses* its virtual dimensions and creative powers. Language dissolves into noises, music, sounds, affects, sensations, and the free-floating images of memory and imagination. In regards to the latter, *Crackpots* forms what Deleuze and Guattari term an undefined “childhood block of becoming”¹⁰⁶ that moves towards designating a world. Continues *Crackpots*, “Suddenly the woman is a little child again, a baby, and her father is standing in a field, holding her against his chest” (187). Rather than constituting a nostalgic regression to bygone times, this passage dips into memory as a form of what Brian Massumi terms “recursive futurity” (xxiii).¹⁰⁷ It is recursive in the sense that this passage constitutes an intensive visiting of the transitive element of thirdness—a zone of potentiality—that captures expression at the moment of its emergence. It is a momentum where expressions in

¹⁰⁶ Deleuze and Guattari define “blocks” as modes of becoming (*ATP* 305). Childhood, then, does not constitute a lost realm, but merges with the present as it melds on the plane of consistency from which new temporalities can be born (*ATP* 298). Colebrook defines these “blocks” as tendencies moving towards the production of differences—a new world (115).

¹⁰⁷ See also Deleuze and Guattari, *ATP* 99.

memory get into contact with expressions in imagination to form modes of expressions yet to come. Writes Rosi Braidotti, “Memories need the imagination to empower the actualization of virtual possibilities in the subject. They allow the subject to differ from itself as much as possible while remaining faithful to oneself, i.e., while enduring” (400). Recursive futurity, then, rolls up prior events by way of accessing virtual forces to form novel modes of expressions. Language thus gets in contact with its own futurity, as shown in the a-grammatical expression of Ruby’s father, which emits the potential for an unlimited series of expressions yet to come: “‘Edrych a!’ the father says, pointing, his lips brushing the baby’s hot forehead, her soft, fine curls. He speaks the word in a beautiful, sing-songy language the baby understands. ‘Edrych a! Look! Look, Ruby,’ he whispers against the baby’s temple, ‘look at the millions of fireflies! All the world’s full of fireflies for little Albertine and baby Ruby!’” (Pritchard 188). Beyond the conventional use of it, language in this passage has coincided with its own intensities and, following Brian Masumi, has folded “back on its own unfolding. Wrapped up in itself, language falls into a state of utter tension: intensity” (xxiii), producing the intense and a-grammatical, sing-songy, expression that renders the world at Ruby’s fingertips, “Edrych a!”

Crackpot’s final passages further move language away from propositions by continuing to withhold its a-typical expression and thus to allow it to form a node of self-creative or autopoietic subjectification, that is a process without a fully determinate agent or product that occurs at the limits of language.¹⁰⁸ Therefore, *Crackpots* turns to the sublime to continue to connect language to forces outside itself, constituting a textual sublimity, which, as Hugh Silverman argues, forms a degree of sublimity where “[t]he sublime is that which

¹⁰⁸ On a-grammatical and a-typical expressions, see Masumi xviii-xx, xxiii; Deleuze and Guattari, *ATP* 99, 305.

marginalizes the literary text, takes it out of what it literally says and gives it another dimension, renders it more than ‘literary.’ The sublime opens the text to what is other than itself. . . . The textual sublime is the text protecting itself from the actions and attempts at closing it off, clarifying its meanings, reifying its vitality” (xii) by way of connecting language to extra-linguistic forces, relating the workings of language to a problematic of power. To this end, Pritchard’s text ends in silence—beyond words—when “[t]he baby is looking in amazement, too, in wide-eyed wonder at the beauty of this fairy-tale apparition. She stretches out her arm and points, too, into the darkness, into the night, into the twinkling, whispering, grasses—the glittering cusp of midnight—her tiny fingers pointing, taut and firm. She opens her mouth, but she has no words to say it” (188). The baby’s silence, then, informs us that the event as it emerges is best welcomed without language—without words—where “the world itself is speaking [to us], addressing us” (Lecerle 14) in a sublime manner that depersonalizes the fixed and categorical “expressions” of such identity-formation while leaving the tremendous potential of language untapped¹⁰⁹—what could she possibly have said?

In sum, Pritchard’s novel reveals language to be an intricate issue. On the one hand, it possesses the capability to nourish and to vivify; on the other hand, language is apt to injure and to freeze. *Caution*, then, becomes imperative as rehearsed throughout this chapter, and as demonstrated in the novel in passim. Pritchard’s *Crackpots* shows the closing-in of language into propositions and speech acts whose order-words require its characters’ submission to language. This enfolding of the self into a subject of enunciation and a subject of the statement, as perhaps best illustrated through Mason, produces modes of anxiety and a fear

¹⁰⁹ On speaking despite the absence of speakers, see also Lecerle, *Deleuze and Language* 14.

of language, which has exhausted and frozen all possibilities of expression. To crack open this binary framework of representational language divided into signifier and signified, *Crackpots* introduces a triadic semiotics such as posited by Deleuze and Guattari. Their third element—a zone of intensity and potentiality—mediates an asymmetric passage of form of content into form of expression and vice versa. Language, then, becomes a fluid and dynamic and transformative system that bears manifold possibilities for expressions for the cracked subject. *Crackpots* ultimately depersonalizes language and brings language to its limits, the outside, in order to guarantee a continuous creativity of and for subjectivity. The novel thus employs techniques of free indirect discourse, stream of consciousness, surrealism, and the textual sublime to indicate that language and subjectivity are brought to us from the outside.

That identity may come from without is perhaps already known by the child Ruby. To this end, *Crackpots* exposes the psychoanalytic notion of a pre-Oedipal and pre-symbolic realm of heavenly bliss from which the child is torn by threats of castration and then given language to articulate its loss as an adult projection. Language is already there by virtue of the sonorous dimensions of the baby's birth cry. Rather than following a Chomskyan communicational model of deep mental structure, language unfolds along events and expressive potentials, which surface through a process of capture that renders language possible. Learning how to speak properly, then, is not governed by the need for grammatical correctness defined by communication and signification, but by the need to render visible the enfolded intensities of each word and to allow each to connect to its neighbours. Aside from language carrying a certain performative force, as it presupposes a conventional context of intelligibility, language passes into a mutational gap-state, falling free from its previous rational or cognitive implantations. Language, according to *Crackpots*, cracks open to a state

of potential without any determinate functioning so that it can perpetually and cautiously emerge contingently anew.

Having thus elaborated on the prickly issue of language, I now turn to the topic of love about which this unit and the previous ones have prompted me to inquire. And for this purpose, I will turn to Michael Cunningham's recent novel *By Nightfall* (2010), which attests to the discrepancy between loving on a "selfish" Platonic model and a more "selfless" Deleuzian notion of "passion." In respect to the child, the issue of love via "child-rearing" comes to mind.

—Chapter Five—

Beautiful Beloved: Child-Rearing, Aesthetics, and Love in Michael Cunningham's *By*

Nightfall

Who would survive having been so desperately loved?

—Michael Cunningham, *By Nightfall*

“Does psychoanalysis have a theory of love?”

—Kaja Silverman, *The Threshold of the Visible World*

I have become capable of loving, not with an abstract, universal love, but a love I shall choose, and that shall choose me, blindly my double, just as selfless as I. . . . To become imperceptible oneself, to have dismantled love to become capable of loving . . . finally to be alone and meet the true double at the other end of the line.

—Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*

Now that I have established the importance of a “rhizomatic semiosis” in Chapter One (“space”), and have further followed the rhizome’s manoeuvres in Chapter Two (“boundaries”), Three (“difference”), Four (“language”), I now turn to the topic of “love” in this fifth unit, about which the previous units have prompted me to inquire. Elaborating on this issue of “love,” requires me to talk about “child-rearing” and “aesthetics” in particular. Michael Cunningham’s novel *By Nightfall* exemplifies well each of these important facets of the topic of “love.”

By Nightfall is a third person narrative that follows its urban protagonist Peter Harris, who is in his mid-forties and, like his wife, Rebecca, has a successful career in the arts: he is an art dealer, and she is an editor of a magazine. With a loft in Manhattan, a college-age daughter, Bea, in Boston, and plenty of socialite and upper-class friends, they seem to have everything that is required to be happy until one day Rebecca's younger brother Ethan, called Mizzy for "mistake," shows up for a visit and causes Peter to question the world he lives in, in particular the place of love in it.¹¹⁰

The novel follows the conundrums of adults rather than those of children. Similar to Todd Field's *Little Children* (Chapter Two), it is a text mostly about the adults—namely an adult trio of self-absorption consisting of Peter, Rebecca, and Ethan—from which Peter and Rebecca's daughter, Bea, distances herself (the text barely mentions her). The novel thus critiques an adult agenda of love that rests on an essentialist Platonic idealism and its pursuit of a selfish kind of love where the self incorporates the beloved other within the parameters of its own egoistic self. To undermine this Platonic project of love, the novel, at several points, advances a "selfless" kind of love such as argued for by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari where the subject steps outside the confines of selfhood and engages with the other *as* an other to imagine what life is like for this other. Love, then, is defined as the love of an other *as* other where "to love [is] the recognition of the [becoming]-other of the other and the derivation of pleasure from that otherness" (Bal 63). Instead of reducing love to an impoverished form of desire within notions of libido and sex drive,¹¹¹ leading to the binary of the couple that defines relationships as the intertwining of two persons in an integer

¹¹⁰ See also publisher's summary.

¹¹¹ Freud distinguishes between two drives, or psychic energies and motivations that relieve psychic tension by moving toward states of relaxation and stasis: Eros and Thanatos, object-aimed drives toward life and death. See "Civilization and its Discontents" 754-756.

unison shut off from the world, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari dismantle the self (and the interlocked couple) in favour of moving toward a selfhood in perpetual approximation in line with the movements of the “rhizome.”

To begin with the issue of “child-rearing” with respect to the topic of “love,” Cunningham’s text exposes love via child-rearing to be a selfish rather than a selfless project. The love of the child as practiced by Peter and Rebecca Harris is foremost a love of the idiopathic self, incorporating the child within the parameters of its own self rather than about a heteropathic identity that identifies with the child as an other.¹¹² This form of intertwining of selves makes the child prone to images set by adults and places the latter in wishful positions they attempt to achieve through their children. Thus, Peter and, by inclusion, Rebecca have set expectations of a conventional lifestyle for their daughter Bea, who, however, fails to correspond to this image of a successful, educated, and rich adult. Remarks Peter,

Bea, love of my goddamned life. How did you get to be a sad, lonely girl working at a hotel bar in Boston, making martinis for tourists and conventioners? Did we commit our first mistake in uterus, was the name Beatrice too much for you to bear? Why did you leave school to take a job like this? If I drove you there, I’m sorry with my whole heart. With whatever’s left of my heart. I loved you. I love you. I have no idea how or when I fucked it up. If I were a better person, I suppose I’d know.

(Cunningham 64-65)

¹¹² Kaja Silverman defines idiopathic identification as the tendency to absorb the other within the self, and heteropathic identification as a form of identification with the other *as* other whereby the self steps outside the confines of personhood to embrace its own alterity. See Bal 61.

Though Bea appears to be perfectly happy with her choice of working at a hotel bar and having a roommate, Peter punishes himself for his daughter's wayward life by way of blaming himself for everything and by trying to find out what possibly went wrong in his child's development. These punitive operations of his psyche are further shown in the passage's twist from a third person to a first person narrative where the text begins to teem with "I's," as if the text itself infolded into the integrity of an ego. This passage, then, suggests a shift in Peter from being highly concerned about his daughter to blaming himself for her "mishaps," which gains its provenance in the "I" that additionally enfolds Bea in its own egoistic structures. Bea's comment that "[y]ou [Peter] can see awfully well, but I'm not sure how well you can hear" (138) further reveals Peter's Platonic "eye/I" to dominate his other senses.¹¹³ In other terms, Peter's supervision of his daughter along with his set goals for her ignores the idea to listen to his daughter to find out what she may want in her life. For once, she seems to be happy with her female roommate (perhaps, a lesbian possibility?) and her job at the hotel bar—all occurrences that go against the expectations of a lifestyle supposedly mimicking the one of her parents.

That Peter's self-blame reveals a form of incorporative "love" is further shown in his and his wife Rebecca's alleged support of their daughter despite her apparent "failure" to correspond to her parents' expectations. Reports the narrator,

[t]hey [Peter and Rebecca] have faith in her [Bea], they've elected to have faith in her, though faith can be thin and unsustaining over time. Worry, of course, they worry, but worse than that, they've begun to wonder what mistake they made, how they infected their daughter with some virus of the spirit that's taken twenty-one years to bloom. . . . No, she's *always* on your mind. (132; emphasis original)

¹¹³ See Chapter Six on additional comments on the Platonic "I/eye."

Peter and Rebecca's "election" of faith shows the fragility of faith that is to gloss over their constant worry and anxiety about their daughter. Their wondering about their daughter's "mistakes"—a virus that now affects their daughter—is reminiscent of a punitive Freudian superego that has incorporated the self of the living daughter and ultimately penalizes the parent for any "mistake" of the daughter. That Peter and Rebecca's preoccupation with their daughter is foremost a concern about themselves is reflected in the narrator's comment that

Peter knows: any accident, any reminder of the world's capability to cause harm, makes her [Rebecca], makes both of them, panic briefly about Bea. . . . Parenthood, it seems, makes you nervous for the rest of your life. Even when your daughter is twenty and full of cheerful, impenetrable rage and not doing all that well in Boston, 240 miles away. Especially then. . . . How monstrous it is, to go about your business anyway? (7)

Peter displays an anxiety about his daughter that causes panic attacks whenever something harmful or lethal happens in his vicinity that colours his and his wife's survival in negative, monstrous ways. Surviving the trauma of others "unharmed" henceforth results in feelings of guilt that dominate Peter and Rebecca's lives. Their anxiety about everything that can happen to their daughter further connects to trauma in so far as anxiety, as a response to a traumatic event, purposes to gloss over absence to which trauma exposes the self—an absence, which, as we shall see, Peter interprets in light of loss.¹¹⁴ Parental anxiety about things that may happen to the child, at worst a loss of the child that seems unbearable to cope with (as opposed to the loss of any other person in one's life), then, is foremost an anxiety about the self in so far as this self is intimately tied up with "our" children. In such terms,

¹¹⁴ For trauma and the distinction between "loss" and "absence" or existential lack to which trauma exposes the self and where there is nothing there in the first place to lose, see Chapter Six.

harm to the child is really harmful to the adult self—an incorporative one—that shields itself against absence and promotes the highest possible form of safety, security, and stability for oneself and for others. In this sense, Peter’s “love” for his daughter has perhaps nothing to do with love but more to do with selfishness.

Similarly, Rebecca reveals a concern about her little brother Ethan that is foremost a concern about herself. Charged with Ethan’s upbringing, since his mother “‘could barely manage the maternal bit the first time around’” (47), she reports that she “‘thought that if I [Rebecca] could make Mizzy happy, something magic would happen. . . . That I’d be happy, too’” (231). That her sought for happiness is dependent upon Ethan’s happiness shows Rebecca’s intertwined self with Ethan’s. In fact, Rebecca wants to escape who she is by “being” Ethan. Notes Rebecca,

“I was envious, I didn’t want to be myself. I didn’t want to be some mature, level-headed person who could cut him a check. I wanted to be young and fucked up and, I don’t know. Free. . . . I always thought I was building a place Mizzy could come to,” she says. “Since he was a lost little boy. I know our family couldn’t handle him, I mean they look romantic from a certain distance but they can’t really manage much of anything. And now it seems that’s not really what I wanted at all. I wanted to *be* Mizzy. I wanted to be the troubled one. I wanted to be the one somebody has to take care of. . . . I am a rotten mother. To everybody. I couldn’t help Bea. I couldn’t help Mizzy. I’m just a child who’s learned to impersonate an adult.” (232-234; emphasis added)

That Rebecca’s terror of being herself, a motherly sister and later a sisterly mother, results in her wish to be somebody else, wayward Ethan, that is, reveals not only her gendered roles she has taken on to be confining, but, moreover, shows her identifications with Ethan and,

alternatively, Bea that all aim to render her free by taking her out of her self. Rebecca's project of building a haven for Mizzy is nothing but an attempt to build a protective haven for herself where somebody takes care of her. Her blameful commentary about her failure to build and sustain such a haven for Bea and Mizzy results in her self-proclamation as a child that still needs to grow up and that merely adopts adult and parental roles of guardianship and protectorship. To this end, Rebecca's concern about Mizzy and Bea is foremost a concern about herself in so far as her identifications with her brother and her daughter are to take her out of the confines of her ego from which she wishes to escape by trying to be somebody else.¹¹⁵

In sum, love via child-rearing in Cunningham's *By Nightfall* is exposed to be a selfish rather than a selfless project where the "loving" self is primarily preoccupied with incorporating the other within its own egoistic parameters. Love of the child, then, is foremost a love of the self that perhaps has nothing to do with love but more with coerced expectations that adults have set for themselves and that they attempt to live out through their children. The narrator thus sarcastically comments on this scenario: "Isn't it the way? We build palaces so that younger people can break them up, pillage the wine cellars and pee off the tapestry-draped balconies" (234). This passage suggests that children do not need palaces to "grow up" in with a parental "love" that stifles and later complains about the rebellion of the child striving for its own selfhood. Love, it seems, needs a redefinition away from such identification and idealization, and towards a more selfless project to which Ethan introduces Peter and, by extension, Rebecca and the reader.

¹¹⁵ Rebecca's wish to be somebody else is reminiscent of Emily's terror of being herself and that it be *her* life and not somebody else's taken up in Chapter One.

By Nightfall engenders a series of changes throughout its course, which, however, fail to transform either of its self-absorbed characters and their selfish relationships among each other. Peter's encounter with Ethan provokes changes in Peter, which, however, he fails to embrace, as he continues to love on a Platonic model. Furthermore, Ethan's blackmailing of Peter at the end of the narrative also casts Ethan as a manipulator and trickster despite the Deleuzian underpinnings of his character. Both characters, then, can indeed be targeted as failed Deleuzians and as being invested in self-absorption rather than what Deleuze would call "love" or rather "passion" (I shall define this term later on in this chapter). To demonstrate Peter's misguided devotion to a Platonic model of love by virtue of a Platonic aesthetics, I will now investigate the connection of "beauty" and "love."

To begin with the issue of "aesthetics" in relation to the topic of "love," the novel shows Peter Harris to be a devotee of a Platonic aesthetics where love and beauty are intimately connected in so far as the beautiful beloved rests on a beloved beauty that explains Peter's attraction to Ethan:

Beauty—the beauty Peter craves—is this then: a human bundle of accidental grace and doom and hope. Mizzy must have hope, he must, he wouldn't shine like this if he were in true despair, and of course he's young, who in this world despairs more exquisitely than the young, it's something the old tend to forget. Here he is, Ethan aka the Mistake, shameless and wanton, addicted, unable to want whatever it is he believes he's supposed to want. This would be the moment to do him in bronze, to try to capture the aching raw nerves of him, the all-but-unbearable final stages of his youth shimmer, as he begins to understand that his condition, like everybody's, is serious, but before he begins to take the necessary step to live semipeacably in the actual world. In the meantime, he needs not to die. (196-197)

Aside from revealing a cultural investment in young age as beautiful as opposed to old age, for Peter, Ethan is a Platonic art object, whose beautiful form needs to be eternalized before its child-like youthfulness disappears. According to Plato, beauty is not relative since true beauty is divine and all earthly forms are mere replicas of this ideal godly beauty, which renders the beautiful beloved affianced to the realm of God (*The Republic* 153, 158, 181-182).¹¹⁶ Ethan's "despair" hints to his child-like and youthful beauty as being freshly separated from God before its disappearance results in a life lived "semipeacably" from the divine realm to which he would strive to gain access again throughout his life: a life filled with doom and hope. Ethan's characterization as a beautiful youngster and as a regal child (Cunningham 46) renders him an object of adoration, for the child, following Plato's definition of beauty, is viewed as being closest to the divine realm in contrast to the adult. For Peter, then, beauty rests in earthly forms, whose ideal "truth," however, lies in the divine that for Peter only becomes accessible *through* the beauty of "youthful" Ethan.

Peter thus strives to gain access to the Platonic divine realm through Ethan—an access that his own age and body-image deny him. While Peter is concerned about his own and his wife Rebecca's aging looks, Ethan, by contrast, is depicted as a youth shimmering with the divine that Peter and Rebecca's own aging bodies no longer appear to possess. Rebecca therefore comments on Mizzy's shimmer as being a form of aura: "Mizzy's always had this sort of air about him when he's about to do something he thinks is a good idea and everybody else knows is a really, really bad idea. It's hard to describe. It's almost like those auras people with migraines see. I can see one around him'" (162). What Rebecca beholds as Mizzy's aura, however, constitutes what Kaja Silverman in *Threshold of the Visible World*

¹¹⁶ It is here where love receives its idealization. Socrates defines aesthetics as a kind of purity that evokes pleasure and thus beauty. See *The Republic* 153, 158, 181-182.

describes as an illumination of images on the level of the unconscious instigated by the look.

Writes Silverman,

To look is to embed an image within a constantly shifting matrix of unconscious memories, which can render a culturally significant object libidinally resonant, or a culturally significant object worthless. When a new perception is brought into the vicinity of those memories which matter most to us at an unconscious level, it too is “lit up” or *irradiated*, regardless of its status within normative representation.

Excluded from that privileged field, value will drain out of it. (3-4; emphasis added)

Ethan’s “aura,” then, is a perceptual illumination that occurs when an image from the outside connects with a stream of inner images or memories that are in turn libidinally invested *as* new, other, and wonderfully strange. It is here where love for something *new* emerges.¹¹⁷

While others see in this “something”—the emplacement of a libidinally invested new image within the vicinity of the familiar and its consequent illumination (which can often be seen in an illuminating flash in people’s eyes)—the value of a bad thing (because their desire does not invest this something as new but either as ordinarily common or “bad”), Ethan beholds in this “something” something that further kindles his desire because he libidinally invests these images *as* new or anew. Ethan’s aura, then, is not so much a divine halo, but the result of a libidinal investment in what matters most to him, which is mostly Ethan’s waywardness in regard to the values of others.

For Rebecca and Peter, however, Ethan’s shimmer and his perception of the world in its constantly new and altering facets remains more akin to what Walter Benjamin in his essay “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” describes as the aura of an

¹¹⁷ It is here where the German idiom “durch Kinderaugen sehen” (to see anew through children’s eyes) may gain its provenance.

art object, one that invests “the scene of representation with ideality” (*Threshold* 93) reminiscent of a Platonic aesthetics. Thus, Peter “wants to touch Mizzy’s face. . . . He wants to touch this slumbering perfection that won’t last, can’t last, but is here, right now on his couch. Just to make contact with it, the way the faithful want to touch the robe of a saint. Of course, he doesn’t” (Cunningham 93). Peter’s inability to touch Ethan’s face constitutes his unwillingness to destroy the aura that surrounds Ethan. Peter’s reluctance demonstrates that, for him, Ethan bears an aura that renders him untouchable and bestows upon him the divinity of a “saint” through which Peter will gain access to the divine realm. Rather than possessing a lit up shimmer as noted by Silverman, Peter and Rebecca see Ethan as Walter Benjamin describes the aura of the art object whose ideality stems from a Platonic aesthetics where beauty renders one closer to God.¹¹⁸ Loving Ethan, then, once again, is to bring the self closer to the divine realm by virtue of using Ethan as a means to reach one’s (selfish) goals.

That Peter’s attachment to beauty predominantly stems from his experience of loss (for instance, his brother dies of Aids at the age of twenty-two) becomes evident in the following passage:

Though he can’t quite live in the present; he can’t stop himself from mourning some lost world, he couldn’t say which world exactly but someplace that isn’t this, isn’t streetside piles of black garbage bags and shrill little boutiques that come and go. It’s corny, it’s sentimental, he doesn’t talk to people about it, but it feels at certain times—now, for instance—like his most essential aspect: his conviction in the face of all evidence to the contrary, that some terrible, blinding beauty is about to descend

¹¹⁸ This youthful perfection is reminiscent of Kathy’s adoration of her “perfect” son Aaron in *Little Children* (Chapter Two) as if children possess a divine aura that is untouchable.

and, like the wrath of God, suck it all away, orphan us, deliver us, leave us wondering how exactly we're going to start it all over again. (22)

Peter's hope for deliverance attests to a paradisiacal beauty that is to descend to earth in an apocalyptic moment as if to restore the Platonic divine realm explicated above.¹¹⁹ Peter's loss is thus a loss of the divine realm to which he strives to gain access again. Peter thus uses beauty to make his life beautiful and to overcome the loss of others and, above all, his own existential lack interpreted as a form of loss—an endeavour that is reminiscent of the political function of “camp.” According to critic Christian Lassen, “camp” is an aesthetically “uplifting” response of an injured and wounded self that renders a violent, insufficient world worthwhile within a niche rendered beautiful: if you cannot give me beauty, then I render my own world beautiful (*Camp Comforts* 12-13). Peter's devotion to art, therefore, is to overcome an insufficient world that is filled with loss and his own existential absence.

Indeed, the novel is shot through with passages of saturated camp images such as the following:

He [Peter] can *feel* something, roiling at the edges of the world. Some skittery attentiveness, a dark golden nimbus studded with living lights like fish in the deep black ocean; a hybrid of galaxy and sultan's treasure and chaotic, inscrutable deity. Although he isn't religious, he adores those pre-Renaissance icons, those gilded saints and jewelled reliquaries, not to mention Bellini's Madonnas and Michelangelo's hottie angels. . . . He can *feel* it sometimes—he can *feel* it tonight—that medieval world of sinners and the occasional saint conducting their travels under a painted celestial infinitude. (Cunningham 21; emphasis added)

¹¹⁹ For a further discussion of such an apocalyptic moment see Chapter Six.

The colourful and rich word-images of this passage bestow upon Peter the “uplifting” feeling of camp as theorized by Lassen. Moreover, his feelings attest to bodily sensations where the body is a medium of perception and language along with its image-words serving to give voice to these bodily sensations “at the edges of the world.” Language thus attests to a productive energy flowing through its words, producing the uplifting response of this passage’s rich, excessive—camp—images. It is this flow of energy through language that may account for the erotics of language. For Peter, then, Ethan forms the epitome of camp as “[a] wounded patron saint, whose pale, glassy-eyed effigy is paraded annually through the streets and into the central square” (Cunningham 43). Ethan as a saturated (w)holy image paraded as a spectacle through the streets for everyone to see and admire serves as an ideal, culturally sanctified image in which others can mirror/see themselves. Once again, camp is being reduced to Platonism and allows Peter to heal himself personally while overcoming loss. Perhaps Peter’s recline into art is another reason why his daughter Bea prefers to work at a hotel bar rather than following her father’s footsteps to get a university degree.

In sum, Peter’s devotion to art stems from a Platonic aesthetics that aims to gloss over a loss of the divine realm and, moreover, Peter’s existential lack interpreted as loss. States the narrator,

This is what Peter wants from art. Isn’t it? This soul sickness; this sense of himself in the presence of something gorgeous and evanescent, something (someone) that shines through the frailty of flesh, yes, like Manet’s whore-goddess, a beauty cleansed of sentimentality because Mizzy is (isn’t he?) a whore-god in his own way, he’d be less compelling if he were the benign, brilliant, spiritual entity he says he’d like to be.

(196)

Peter's attraction to Mizzy stems from the latter's youthful shimmer affined to the divine realm—a whore-god that mixes the earthly and the spiritual realm. Through Peter's perception of art objects, he gains an “uplifting” feeling that is reminiscent of a Platonic divine splendour, as rehearsed previously. Love, then, bears Platonic overtones that may have further impacted the love of Ethan, the one “so desperately loved” by his family (12), and that thus posits the child as an entity closer to the Platonic realm to which the adult may gain access again via childrearing.

To advance my argument on “love,” I wish to elaborate on Peter's queer attraction to Mizzy, which releases him onto a Deleuzian notion of “love” or rather “passion.” Peter, however fails to embrace this alteration of his desire but continues to love on the Platonic model. Ethan's comment that “I [Ethan] think I am gay for you [Peter]” (193) gives Peter labels and categories with which he can label his attraction and desire, which, however, bears rather de-essentialising tendencies such as in his memory of a scene at the seaside:

Time fails. Out of Joanna and Matthew and the lake and sky emanates a sense of memory of the bathing suit Joanna is wearing right now, along with the smell of balsam pine that's currently in Peter's nose; their father's helpless ardor and their mother's ravenous attention and how they will both age and fade (he embittered, she gentled, liberated by having less and less to lose); Emily making Peter come under the bleachers and his flirtations with sly, red-haired Carol, who will be his girlfriend until just before graduation; the school clock lit like a harvest moon under a twilight sky and powder-scented air-conditioning at Hendrix Pharmacy *and more and more and more*. (110; emphasis added)

Peter experiences desire in its assemblage of various instances: experiences, memories, scents, images, and impressions that are far away from being reduced to and contained by the

instalment of desire into personhood and the couple: “and more and more and more” (110). Peter’s reduction of desire to the realm of personhood connects to his Platonism mentioned earlier, namely his wish to access the divine realm through the person of Mizzy. Meanwhile, as this passage also suggests, the divine is not a separate realm cut off from life; rather, it is life in its liberating, engulfing, and out-spreading tendencies. Peter’s feelings at the lake proposes a distinction between the Platonic model of love and a Deleuzian one. Writes Deleuze,

It’s a distinction between two kinds of individuation: one, love, through persons, and the other through intensity, as though passion dissolved persons into something undifferentiated but into a field of various persisting and mutually interdependent intensities (“a constantly shifting state, but not tending toward any given point, with strong phases and weak phases, phases when it becomes incandescent and everything wavers for an unstable moment we cling to for obscure reasons, perhaps through inertia; it seeks, ultimately, to persist and to disappear . . . being oneself no longer makes any sense . . .”). Love’s state of, and relation between persons, subjects. But passion is a subpersonal event that may last as long as a lifetime (“I’ve been living for eighteen years in a state of passion about someone, for someone”), a field of intensities that individuates independently of any subject. Tristan and Isolde, that may be love. But someone . . . said to me: Cathrine and Heathcliff, in *Wuthering Heights*, is passion, pure passion, not love. (*Negotiations* 116)

Love, as Deleuze suggests here, is not to be found in the static confines of the couple but in the intensities to which Ethan releases Peter. Passion, for Deleuze, is superior to love in so far as its intensities bear more liberating, de-categorizing and de-subjectifying tendencies independent of personhood. Passion henceforth allows one to love more selflessly rather than

selfishly. Though Peter is thus exposed to these intensities that he experiences at the lake scene, he curtails their potential, as he continues to love on the Platonic model: “A fantasy, unbidden: he and Mizzy in a house somewhere, maybe it’s Greece (oh, humble little imagination), reading together, just that, no sex, they’d manage sex with whomever, they’d be platonic lovers, faux father and son, without the rancor of love or the fury of family” (Cunningham 206). Peter’s fantasy about his Platonic relation with Ethan cancels out any alteration of his desire but merely expands its provenance on the Platonic level. Furthermore, Peter curtails any potential for change due to his normalizing tendencies that performatively bring back stasis and with it labels and categories such as provided by Ethan earlier: “Normal normal normal” (199).

Peter further searches for an explanation for his homoerotic feelings for Ethan and resorts to psychoanalysis with its Oedipal investment in personhood, stasis, and non-change, which still leaves his reasoning wanting:

He has learned this from years of psychoanalysis. Okay. You can be overbearing because you feel insecure, and you feel insecure because your parents preferred your older brother. You love your wife for many reasons, among them her resemblance (which you exaggerate in your own mind) to the unattainable girl of your adolescence, who preferred your older brother, and you (fuck you) love her ever so slightly less now that she’s not that girl any longer. You’re drawn (erotically?) to her little brother because on the one hand he reminds you of Matthew and, on the other, allows you for the first time in your life to *be* Matthew. All this useful information. Now what? (111-112; emphasis original)

Psychoanalysis offers an Oedipal explanation for Peter’s desire: his wife is a replacement for his earlier longing for a girl that he could not have, and his attraction to Mizzy is a stand-in

for his own brother Matthew, in whose shadow he grew up and who has produced Peter's insecurities and ultimate wish to be Matthew. This psychoanalytic model, then, becomes a betrayal of Deleuzian "passion" and a reinforcement of Platonic love. With its promulgation of the fusion of souls in the figure of the couple and its consequent replacement of one person for the other, it is incapable of enlisting passion as a series of intensities where each relation with someone is unique and provokes relationships that engage in the potential of becoming-different. In short, Peter falls back onto his Platonic model of love though Ethan has released him to non-subjective "intensities" along passionate lines.

Furthermore, Peter fears separation and divorce from Rebecca as well as shame since "no one, not one single person he knows will sympathize" (214)—consequences from which Peter recoils. And yet, Peter continues to have moments that relate to the intensities to which Ethan has released him in particular when he and his wife agree to give their relationship another try:

Something rises in Peter, more like a plant being uprooted by an invisible hand than a levitation of the soul. He can feel the hairlike roots extracting themselves from flesh. He is being lifted out of himself, shedding the husk of self, that sad hungry man, the action figure with the indifferently painted eyes and the dashed-off polyester suit. But if he's been a clownish figure he has also been (please God) an acolyte, a lover of love, and his little earthly cavortings were meant to appease a deity, however silly and inadequate his offering. He can see the snow falling and he can see the room from outside the window, a modest chamber worried by weather but fast for now, home for now, to him and his wife, until others take their place. If he died or if he just walked out into the dark, would Rebecca feel his ongoing presence? She would. They

have come too far together. They have tried and failed and tried and failed and there's probably, in the final analysis nothing left for them to do but try again. (237)

Peter's out-of-body experience shows him his Platonic adorations and conundrums. He further witnesses a change in perspective—a look at himself from outside—that additionally shows him the ephemerality of life. However, this moment of being lifted outside his sense of self to gain a different perspective on himself and life is again curtailed by his command to presence: a lover of (Platonic) love. On Peter's falling back onto the Platonic model of love and life, the narrator comments: "Peter glances out at the falling snow. Oh, little man. You have brought down your house not through passion but by neglect. You who dared to think of yourself as dangerous. You are guilty not of the epic transgressions but the tiny crimes. You have failed in the most base and human of ways—you have not imagined the life of others" (236). Peter is not worthy of epic transgressions such as a shift from Platonic love to Deleuzian "passion" in so far as he fails to imagine what life is like for others.

Continues the narrator,

Is it this, then? Is it compassion for another, is this all that actually matters? To love, to forgive, to abide? It isn't that simple. The ability to care for another being, to imagine what it is like to *be* another person, is part of the tumble. It's essential to the odd saint or two (if such creatures as saints exist) but it's only one aspect of a life, a big ambiguous motherfucking heartbreaking life. Still. It isn't nothing. (235; emphasis original)

To attend to the wounds of others and to imagine what life is like for others, then, is the most fundamental of human tasks in order to work through a life that is indeed heartbreaking in its self-centredness. Those momentums of despair, however, are part of the human experience, an ambiguous one, and call for attentiveness and solidarity.

Perhaps, in this respect, the novel ends on a promising note when the narrator, once again, presents Peter with the de-subjectifying intensities of a Deleuzian love where there is no couple but only change and alteration of both entities that brings out the highest pleasure:

Here is Peter's art then. Here is his life (though his wife may leave him, though he's faltered in so many ways). Here is a woman who keeps changing and changing, impossible to cast in metal because she's already not who she was when he walked through the door, not who she'll be in ten minutes from now. Maybe it isn't too late. Maybe all of Peter's chances are not yet squandered. He kisses Rebecca, lightly, on her chapped lips. "Yes," he says. "I think we could try. I do. Yes." He begins to tell her everything that has happened. (238)

The narrator presents to Peter a woman who is perpetually changing, thus opening the potential for change once more. The last sentence signals Peter's honesty and openness with Rebecca in so far as he calls a spade a spade: Ethan is a blackmailer, drug addict, and homosexual; Peter is a cheater and a potential homosexual; and Rebecca is a cheated woman, who is now probably once again concerned with Ethan. It is this laying of the cards on the table where, as Uta names it, "[a] kiss is something" (223), that speaks to a reassessment of their relationship. Whether they embrace the potential for change or not is a different story and left open by the text; however, change remains doubtful with all the Platonic conundrums elucidated throughout this chapter and particularly in light of their unchanged relationship with their daughter. What remains is this: potentiality.

In sum, far from constituting a novel on the mid-life-crisis of Peter Harris, who discovers his hidden homosexuality, *By Nightfall* turns off the light on Western culture's politics of love, resting on an aesthetics that leaves the self in punitive positions. Rather, this be-nightedness of an essentialist idealism turns up the light on an inner abyss, whose

darkness allows the self to go the distance to its own selfhood and to allow itself as well as the other to become-other. The novel then contrasts two kinds of love: one that is Platonic, devoted to the soul and the couple, as well as being and completion, and the other one that is Deleuzian, devoted to the double and becoming, distance as well as otherness, as revealed in my opening epigraph:

I have become capable of loving, not with an abstract, universal love, but a love I shall choose, and that shall choose me, blindly my double, just as selfless as I. One has been saved by and for love, by abandoning love and self. . . . To become imperceptible oneself, to have dismantled love to become capable of loving . . . finally to be alone and meet the true double at the other end of the line. (*ATP 199, 197*)

By Nightfall connects love and beauty in order to demonstrate the shortcomings of a Platonic aesthetics that attempts to heal the wounded self through camp rather than allowing the self to engage in its own alterity to find transformation and change. To this end, love is foremost a selfish endeavour that allows identity to extend itself through an incorporation of others, as seen in the example of Peter Harris and as exorbitantly discussed in the section on “child-rearing.” As the example of Peter Harris shows, (Platonic) love needs to be dismantled in order to leave the self and life open to become selflessly capable of loving the other “and” rather than “as” one’s self.

Now that I have elaborated on the issue of “love” and its Platonic facets, the question that arises is how further a Platonic metaphysics needs to be dismantled in regards to the structure of the family. And for this reason, I shall now investigate the concept of “trauma” its relation to the child and its family context in Cormac McCarthy’s *The Road*—a novel set

in a post-apocalyptic America, where Plato's ghost comes to haunt in particular the father, as he and his son hunt down the absence of a bygone world.

—Chapter Six—

Apocalypse Americana: Family H(a)untings¹²⁰ in Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*

You're not the one who has to worry about everything.

Yes I am, he [the boy] said, I am the one.

—Cormac McCarthy, *The Road*

Father, don't you see I'm burning?

—Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*

A son is a symbolic mirror; in him a father sees reflected the trauma of masculine identity.

—David Lee Miller, *Dreams of the Burning Child*

Having established the importance of the “rhizome” for my claim on identity’s continuous creation in regards to the topic of “space” in Chapter One and “boundaries” in Chapter Two, and having further elaborated on the issue of “difference” in Chapter Three, “language” in Chapter Four, and “love” in Chapter Five, I now turn to the issue of “trauma,” which these chapters have prompted me to interrogate. To elaborate on the topic of trauma, in particular in connection to Deleuze’s child, requires me to talk about the American family, especially the father-son relationship (my previous texts predominantly turn to male

¹²⁰ This word-play is borrowed from David Jarraway’s graduate seminar English 7311: “‘No Place Like Home’: House H(a)unting in Modernist American Fiction” held at the University of Ottawa, Canada, in Fall 2006, which kindled my interest in Deleuze studies and my ruminations about “the child.” My lingo on hunting and haunting is therefore indebted to his seminar in which this project was conceived.

adolescent-child protagonists¹²¹) in McCarthy's novel, as well as the "traumatic" implications of language. The end of my dissertation thus constitutes a return to its beginnings, namely a reprise of the family structures hinted at in John Wray's *Lowboy* and Todd Field's *Little Children*. Rather than coming full circle in a kind of textual closure and a finite solution and answer to my thesis on "the child," however, my return closes out on a cyclical departure of an open-ended "rhizome." This return with a difference allows each chapter to be visited again, adding new insights from other textual analyses and opening out onto a fresh textuality that may continue with new chapters. My final focus on trauma therefore is to elaborate the *absence* (to which trauma sensitizes the subject) at the very origin of subjectivity, and its possibility for producing new subjectivities. I now turn to Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* to elucidate each of these important issues by means of the topic of "trauma," thereby ending my project with an "intermezzo,"¹²² thus inviting a return to my point of departure.

McCarthy's novel depicts a post-apocalyptic America through which a father and his son travel toward the sea in the south in hopes of finding warmth, food, and more "good" guys like themselves. Their arduous journey takes them through an ashen and devastated landscape with almost no living vegetation and animals. Most remaining humans have become cannibals, hunting or harvesting other humans as food. Under these conditions, the man and the boy only rely on each other for their survival, as they make their journey through a desolate and ruined landscape, with a cart filled with their belongings and a pistol with only one bullet left, past cannibalistic tribes, thieves and murderers, all the while under

¹²¹ David Lee Miller elaborates on the *puer senex* motif in which the child and the mature male meet in the figure of an elderly child to stress adult appropriations of the child. See *Dreams of the Burning Child*, especially Chapter One.

¹²² As defined in Deleuze and Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus*, and discussed in this chapter at a later point.

the threat of looming starvation. As they finally reach the ocean, the father dies of his unnamed chronic illness and the after-effects of an arrow wound he has received, leaving his son to fend for himself. Upon mourning the loss of his father, the boy encounters a man and his wife along with their son and daughter, who promise to take care of him, convincing him that they, too, are the “good” guys.

McCarthy’s novel turns to trauma to disrupt identity’s conscious formations in favour of new ones. His text reveals life as consisting of a series of traumatic events that expose the self to forces greater than itself, taking over agency. Trauma, then, exposes identity to what resists full knowledge about the event and about selfhood. Rather than closing in on this absence at the heart of subjectivity in a controlling way, McCarthy’s text invites the reader to define identity as embracing absence and expanding continuously outward onto new modes of otherness in a generative, productive way. This oscillation of self-reflexive return and departure at the centre of trauma renders identity what Deleuze and Guattari term an “intermezzo” (*A Thousand Plateaus* 22)—an in-between zone of indeterminacy between modes of reflexion and turning out onto the world of experience. Thus, rather than forming a mere allegory of metaphysical confrontations with trauma’s absence(s), *The Road* constitutes a text of many trails and trials that, working through its gaps and ellipses—its present absences and absent presences in reality, to borrow David Jarraway’s phrasing (*Going the Distance* 17)—cannot be bridged, but rather form an abyss, and therefore advance a cyclical notion of subjectivity in-between whose core is always missing. The novel’s aim, therefore, is not to overcome trauma in order to heal holistically, but instead to *positivize* trauma’s movements by taking the pain out of them and engaging in *different* returns and departures, wherein lies subjectivity’s very survival. That being said, I shall now turn to my first point of departure: the American Family.

With the cause of the cataclysm remaining hidden—the reader only learns that “the clocks stopped at 1:17. A long shear of light and then a series of low concussions” (McCarthy 54)—the novel adopts the narrative of trauma, which, according to Cathy Caruth, is defined by a breach in consciousness due to an event either experienced too soon, too fast, or too unexpectedly. Trauma therefore does not lie in a locatable, violent event but in this event’s very inaccessibility and unassimilability to consciousness. This “unclaimed experience,” as Caruth puts it, comes to haunt its survivor belatedly through an autonomous return to and address by the event, provoking its survivor to attempt to comprehend it and subsequently to depart from the event, as it remains unavailable to its survivor’s consciousness, meanwhile having exposed him or her to a reality or “truth” that cannot be fully known (*Unclaimed Experience* 4). This exposure to an unclaimable absence at the centre of trauma punctures the Oedipal fantasy that has sustained the construction of the American family at the heart of the novel.

For McCarthy’s mother-persona, the family’s survival of the cataclysm has turned the family into “the walking dead in a horror film” (McCarthy 57). This revelation exposes the Oedipal family picture of mommy, daddy, and the child as no longer having substance; it therefore crumbles, in McCarthy’s America, in the dark. The mother’s comment that she is done with her “whorish heart . . . [that] has been ripped out of [her] the night [her son] was born” (59) reveals an exorbitant emotional pain in regards to a love that has now turned cold. Her remark on her whoring heart reveals the Oedipal constellation of mothers as a source of perpetual love that is unconditionally there to nurture and cherish the child (but also delicately, as too much love provokes a mother-fixation of the child, which may result in a

homosexual outcome for the child) and, by inclusion, the husband.¹²³ The Oedipal mother thus serves as a haven of security for both man and child as further revealed in her clichéd comment that “they say that women dream of danger to those in their care and men of danger to themselves. But I dont [sic] dream at all” (59). That the mother’s gendered notion of dreams, where women care selflessly and men selfishly, reveals another Oedipal configuration that does not fall short of her husband becomes evident in her reproach of her spouse not to “ask for sorrow now. There is none. Maybe you’ll [the father] be good at this. I doubt it, but who knows. The one thing I can tell you is that you wont survive for yourself. I know because I would never have come this far” (59). Her request to her husband not to ask for sorrow further casts him as an Oedipal persona, trying to find security in his wife. The mother’s admonition, that one does not survive for oneself, further shows care-giving to be gendered female rather than male and perhaps reveals an intrusion of the (jealous) father into the mother-child dyad of the Oedipal Family.

However, with “nothing left to talk about[,]” her “only hope is for eternal nothingness” (58, 59) at which point she leaves the family home and the plot of the novel, reducing the triadic family to the dyad of father and son within a punctured Oedipal structure. While she abandons her husband and her son within Oedipus, she is done with Oedipus. For her, the absence of love, as it has been surrendered to an Oedipal emotional network of care, pity, and sorrow, is too hard for her to bear and gives her with no choice but death. She therefore leaves the storyline with her final advice that a “person who had no one would be well advised to cobble together some passable ghost. Breathe it into being and coax

¹²³ For the mother’s role in the Oedipus situation, see Freud, “A Special Type of Choice of Object Made by Men” 392-393; “Leonardo Da Vinci and a Memory of His Childhood” 461-463. Also see Chodorow, esp. Chapter Four and Five. For a discussion on the topic of love as being invested in an incorporative self, see Chapter Five.

it along with words of love. Offer it some phantom crumb and shield it from harm with your body” (59). The mother’s focus on herself now results in her feeling that love only bears a ghostly, narcissistic existence without any substantiality as if a remnant tricked into being.

The father’s very *survival* of the traumatic cataclysm constitutes his crisis, as he suffers from his wife’s sudden desertion and his being expelled from his house. His traumatic dislocation comes to haunt him particularly in his various dreams throughout the novel, in one of which “she was sick and he cared for her. The dream bore the look of sacrifice but he thought differently. He did not care of her and she died alone somewhere in the dark and there is no other dream nor other waking world and there is no other tale to tell” (32). Despite its redemptive message that perhaps he did everything he could and that it was his wife’s *own* decision to leave him, the dream haunts the father through a memory of his wife that results in his paralysis and an assertion of reality. His guilty self-reflections harden with his view of dreams as being reflective of reality:

he [the father] said the right dreams for a man in peril were dreams of peril and all else was the call of languor and death. He slept little and he slept poorly. He dreamt of walking in a flowering wood where birds flew before them he and the child and the sky was aching blue but he was learning how to wake himself from just such siren worlds. Lying there in the dark with the uncanny taste of a peach from some phantom orchard fading in his mouth. He thought if he lived long enough the world at last would all be lost. Like the dying world the newly blind inhabit, all of it slowly fading from memory. (17)

That the father’s dreams are to reflect a masculine reality mimetically, a dangerous one, that is, shows his aversion to trauma that renders his self a victim to forces beyond itself, and a position that is gendered female. The father’s sleep deprivation further attests not to a deep

sleep, but rather to a waking sleep on the surface of consciousness, fearing any disruptions of his “masculine reality.” His pastoral dream of an aching blue sky, a colour, which for Gilles Deleuze is “grasped in a *movement of intensification* . . . blue as lightened black, yellow as darkened white” (*Cinema I* 53; emphasis original) therefore does not form an emergence from his dreams “out of the blue” into an uncertain light of day, but is repressed in favour of their “real” journey south toward the zenith of the sun or a Platonic metaphoricity of absolute light and certainty. The father’s active repression of his dreams further manifests itself in the return of the “uncanny tastes of a peach,” another relic from the past that the father assigns to memory immediately upon awakening in an America in the dark; hence, a repression of time in favour of a transcendent spatialization of temporality, as seen in the phantom-*form* of the orchard.¹²⁴ The father-persona’s simile of a world inhabited by the blind further constitutes a paradoxical *perversion* (rather than a *subversion*) in so far as he and his insights, focused on a reality of presence, turn him into the blind one—a blindness at the height of (Platonic) insight, as symbolized by the sun toward which the father and his son wander on their journey south.¹²⁵

¹²⁴ Freud defines the “uncanny” [“*unheimlich*” in German, literally meaning “un-home-ly,” “not at home,” or “ghostly,” “scary” in its figurative sense; its base word “*heimlich*” meaning “homely” as well as “secretive”] as a discomfoting, strange feeling where something can be familiar and yet unfamiliar at the same time. In his study of E.T.A. Hoffmann’s gothic tale “*Der Sandmann*,” published in 1817, in which a wandering sandman tears out children’s eyes, Freud ascribes the feeling of uncanniness to the repeated return of the repressed, of that which is pushed *out of sight* due to social taboos and its threat to the super-ego, fearing symbolic castration when deviating from social norms. Uncanny monsters are thus scapegoating projections of our own repressions (“The ‘Uncanny’” especially 220-225, 241-243). The father’s uncanny remnants, then, demonstrate his repression of dreams demanded by his rhetoric of presence, which comes to haunt him through the phantoms he creates. His blindness literally pushes out of sight that which is uncomfortable to the presence of his ego.

¹²⁵ For a discussion on the rhetoric of blindness, see De Man, *Blindness & Insight*, esp. Chapter Seven.

That the father is a devotee of Platonic forms becomes evident in his initial dream “where the child led him by the hand” and where he finds themselves confronted with a giant creature, “pale and naked and translucent, its alabaster bones cast up in shadow on the rocks behind it[,]” on a distant lakeshore staring “into [their] light with eyes dead white and sightless as the eggs of spiders” before the creature vanishes “into the dark” (McCarthy 1-2). As a perversion of Plato’s cave where a group of chained people face a blank wall on which they give form to mere shadows that are being produced from passing figures in front of a fire behind them, and where the true form of reality is only understood by the philosopher and select escapees from the cave, who behold the “goodness” and “beauty” of eternal form (*The Republic* 227-233, 250, 259), the white, unidentifiable giant, penned down as possessing an enormous bodily agility and as bearing enlargements and dimensions that remain hidden, merely intuited, suggests a presence beyond human comprehension, which rather becomes a force of absence. Though Plato’s shadows of reality have turned translucent—crystal clear—however, this transparency only appears and appeals to the eye/I of the Platonic observer to whom the creature’s eyes resemble spider eggs, pregnant with flimsy, groundless webs of self-spun and entangled realities. That the omnipresent white suggests a blindness staring back at the illuminating light of the father and the child turn this moment of intense (Platonic) insight into a moment of blindness in regards to what is (not) seen and what may further be intuited through senses, if heeded at all, quite apart from the metaphysically privileged, omnipotent eye. The father therefore awakens “to touch the child” (McCarthy 1), another “blind spot” of Western culture, to reassure himself of presence rather than absence.

That this dream at the beginning of the novel paradoxically reveals the creature not to be the monster to be feared but rather the monstrosity of a metaphysical, patriarchal

nightmare in its appeal to presence turns its form of hunting of *absence* into a *haunting*.

Though the father's dreams differ in content and force of expression, the father cuts short their potential for a different (a)wakening due to his holding onto his metaphysics. Although the father attempts to let go of his painful memories of his wife—he discards her photograph (53)—and doubts his faith in god, he nevertheless falls back onto presence:

He woke before dawn and watched the gray day break. Slow and half opaque. He rose while the boy slept and pulled on his shoes and wrapped in his blanket he walked out through the trees. He descended into a gryke . . . he just knelt in the ashes. He raised his face to the paling day. Are you there, he whispered. Will I see you at last? Have you a neck by which to throttle you? Have you a heart? Damn you eternally have you a soul? Oh God, he whispered. Oh God. (10)

That the father confuses the rays of sunlight of an immanent reality with the rays of God makes him blind to the ever-changing appearances of the environment around him and further provokes his return to theocentrism. Rather than acknowledging the absent presence of God, the father-persona yearns for his presence—a longing for stability that manifests itself in his protection of his son.

The father's protection of his son combines his theocentrism with logocentrism: "He [the father] only knew that the child was his warrant. He said: If he is not the word of God God never spoke" (3). The father's guardianship to which he "was appointed . . . by God" (80) takes the child as an expression of God's creation and further as a reference point in a world that no longer has meaning for the father:

He tried to think of something to say but he could not. He'd had this feeling before beyond the numbness and the dull despair. The world shrinking down about a raw core of parsible entities. The names of things slowly following those things into

oblivion. Colors. The names of birds. Things to eat. Finally the names of things one believed to be true. More fragile than he would have thought. How much was gone already? *The sacred idiom shorn of its referents and so of its reality*. Drawing down like something trying to preserve heat. In time to wink out forever. (93; emphasis added)

That the father too easily confuses words with things stems from his linguistic classification of Platonic forms where words fuse with their referents. To the father, the extended world is represented to his ego or Cartesian cogito by language. The disappearance of the material world is thus followed by a disappearance of language, and, by consequence, subjectivity, leaving the father with a feeling of despair in face of the annihilation of his selfhood and his ghostly existence in a relic world, which he fears has been vanishing along with its vocabulary.¹²⁶

And yet, despite the father's fear, there remains the father's unnameable feeling "beyond" and a "raw core of parsible entities" that allow for new configurations of subjectivity beyond metaphysics; however, the father ignores these potentialities as he remains focused on the downward movement of his transcendent cogito, which he is trying to prevent from spiralling into oblivion. To this end, he constantly reassures himself of presence:

He lay listening to the water drip in the woods. Bedrock this. The cold and the silence. The ashes of the late world carried on the bleak and temporal winds to and fro in the *void*. Carried forth and scattered and carried forth again. Everything

¹²⁶ The child as a beautiful beloved and a beloved beauty is subject to investigation in Chapter Five.

uncoupled from its shoring. Unsupported in the ashen air. Sustained by a breath,
trembling and brief. If only my heart were stone. (10; emphasis added)

That the father-persona perceives his environment in terms of forms rather than movement is due to his Platonic devotion to forms. In *The Republic*, Plato's allegory of the cave reports of chained people who merely perceive partial shadows of forms projected on a wall through a fire behind them past which the complete and real forms wander unlike the philosopher, who is able to perceive the entirety of "real objects" just like those people who have escaped from the cave and who have gained eternal knowledge of permanent forms in order to be trustworthy leaders (227-232). To this end, the father affirms the certainty of form as he labels the stone bedrock and his heart stone. His spatialization of "this" and "that" firmly divides and structures his environment linguistically.¹²⁷ That which escapes form, and, by extension, language, he names "void"—an emptiness in which the ashes of the past travel "to and fro" with the winds, as if contained. Their alternating movements of being scattered and being carried forth again constitute a repetition of the same just as in the passage cited above. To shield his own subjectivity from disappearance, he anchors his transcendentalism in his child whom he sees as a "[g]olden chalice, good to house a god" (78).

McCarthy's father figure continues to approach the world in symbolic terms, as he holds on to his logocentrism, being "scared enough to be on the lookout in the first place. To be cautious. Watchful. . . . [and afraid that] sometimes [he] might forget to be on the lookout" (160-161). The father's being on the watch entails a guarding of what Deleuze and Guattari term the "signifying regime," that is a unified semiology in which the signifier dominates statements and expressions "in a regime of circularity" (*ATP* 135). This "perpetual referral from sign to sign" becomes evident in the father's desire to be constantly on the

¹²⁷ See Chapter One.

lookout (135). Moreover, his making sure that his son and he are “wearing fresh masks cut from sheeting, the boy going ahead with a broom and clearing the way of sticks and branches and the man bent over the handle of the cart *watching* the road fall away before them” (McCarthy 165; emphasis added) indicates that the father adopts the “Center or the Signifier; the faciality of the god or despot” (ATP 135), sending out his son to clear the way into the unknown. Their masks, then, speak to a Deleuze-Guattarian notion of faciality by which they view language to be invested in the facial traits since while “the face [also] crystallizes all redundancies, it emits and receives, releases and recaptures signifying signs” (115). Paradoxically, as Deleuze and Guattari note, “the mask does not hide the face, it *is* the face” (115, emphasis original), meaning that the face is the most changing, enigmatic part of the human body, signalling an absence of identity to which trauma has sensitized the father and his child all along. The father’s and the son’s masks, then, do not shield their identity but rather signal an absence constitutive of their “mask-u-linity” and subjectivity at large: mask-you, patri-linity!

That this patrilineal regime of presence returns to haunt the father becomes evident in the scene when, visiting his childhood at home, the father falls into a kind of nostalgia in face of his birthplace, “an old frame house with chimneys and gables and a stone wall” where he is “expecting to find childhood things” (McCarthy 24, 27). As opposed to his father, the boy hesitates to enter and urges his father to leave this gigantic and static structure of a family home, in particular when “[t]he boy watched him [the father]. Watched shapes claiming him he could not see” (25, 26). By virtue of his act of witnessing, his act of being “tied up with the trauma of another, the way in which trauma may lead . . . to the encounter with another, through the very possibility and surprise of listening to another’s wound” (Caruth 8), the boy shares not so much his father’s nostalgia as his Oedipal trauma of castration, as expressed in

the father's longing for his "childhood things." His yearning for childhood things as Lacanian "petit object a" is to make up for the loss he encountered by entering adulthood. The father's castration, then, consists of a pre-Oedipal loss that language makes up for, the shapes perhaps alluding to the attained signifiers of which the first letter of the alphabet *a* (for *a*bsence) both signals and glosses over. His entrance into language then comes at a loss that he associates with childhood by implication. The boy's repulsive feelings in regards to the house, then, express a fear of Oedipus, whose shapes come to claim the father to repeat their threat of castration this time in the boy: "I'm really scared," the boy says (McCarthy 27). And scared indeed he may be, considering the father's later proclamation that "[a]ll *things* of grace and beauty have a common provenance in pain. Their birth in grief and ashes. So, he whispered to the sleeping boy, I have you" (56; emphasis added). The boy thus becomes another "petit object a" that is to shield the father from the disappearance of his world. To this end, the son constitutes what David Miller terms a symbolic mirror in which the father not only sees repeated the trauma of masculine identity, that is the trauma of castration and sacrifice (169), but in which the father passes on his own trauma onto others: *his* son.

That the father lures the boy to this masculine trauma and to the alter of sacrifice becomes evident in a dream, where the father sees "the boy . . . laid out upon a *coolingboard* and woke in horror. What he could bear in the waking world he could not by night and he sat awake for fear the dream would return" (McCarthy 137; emphasis added). The father's horror in regards to his dream reveals a crisis at the heart of masculine fatherhood. David Lee Miller in *Dreams of the Burning Child* writes that patriarchy is founded upon the motif of filial sacrifice in order to materialize an absent biological fatherhood and to construct socially an authority that "generates a demand for representations of an object that *does not*

exist and cannot be visualized: the body of fatherhood . . . *missing* only from patriarchal culture” (2-3; emphasis added). According to Miller, sacrificial sons are further “an index of the contradictions inherent in fatherhood under patriarchy. He is at once the father’s mirror and his undoing[,]” for on the one hand, the male son extends patriliney, but on the other hand destroys the very bond through the sacrifice that is to make representative what is invisible and uncertain: fatherhood (4). Following Miller, the father’s dream of the boy on a coolingboard then registers the biological absence and mere symbolic, metaphysical presence of fatherhood that demands filial sacrifice in order to continue patriliney.

The father’s horror, however, may not merely be a reaction to the horror of the unconscious practice of sacrifice but may further attest to a horror in regards to the absence of a witnessing community, which, according to Miller is one “that already in some sense ‘knows’ patrification to be what the sacrifice ‘means’” (7). To this end, the father is haunted by ancestral figures in his dreams: “They stood on the far shore of a river and called to him. Tattered gods slouching in their rags across the waste. Trekking the dried floor of a mineral sea where it lay cracked and broken like a fallen plate. Paths of feral fire in the coagulate sands. The figures faded in the distance. He woke and lay in the dark” (54). This biblical image of the parted sea demonstrates the deification of fatherhood through the traumatic feral fire that is to continue patriliney that begins with gods and is to continue with the father’s son. The underlying emotion of sorrow and pain, as rehearsed throughout this chapter, further attests to this sacrificial practice. Perhaps these passages show how masculine fatherhood fathers children as a substitute for this alleged sorrow of a borrowed existence. The boy-child, then, secures a patrilineal order and requires a substitute as well, thus manifesting the vicious circle of patriarchy in its attempt to bridge the generational gap as rehearsed

previously with the phallogocentrism of sons, that “[g]olden chalice, good to house a god” (78).

That the father dies of a chronic infection as well as an arrow wound that he has received furthermore sensitizes the father to his body rather than metaphysics. Kaja Silverman’s *Male Subjectivity at the Margins* reflects its message of male subjects not as a source of oppression but as victims of power structures in its book cover that depicts Saint Sebastian shot by ten arrows. This focus on physicality rather than metaphysics is to bring down patrilineal masculine structures in favour of an immanent body.¹²⁸ McCarthy’s father-persona, however, continues to practice filial sacrifice by making sure that the flame continues to burn inside his son: “You have to carry the fire . . . *It’s inside you*. It is always there. I can see it. . . . He lay watching the boy at the fire. He wanted to be able to see. Look around you, he said. There is no prophet in the earth’s long chronicle who’s not honored here today. Whatever form you spoke of you were right” (298, 297; emphasis added). Even on his deathbed, the father continues to hold on to metaphysical forms and a patrilineal heritage that promotes an internalization of the sacrificial flame. The father’s references to seeing further attests to the metaphysical eye/I in dominance over any other bodily senses that may have lured him away from the masculine focus on “presencing” absence.

In sum, then, McCarthy’s father-persona embodies a metaphysical notion of presence that prevents him from engaging in trauma’s absences particularly in the context of trauma as being uncontrollable and as therefore being gendered female, turning his hunting into a form of haunting. Though he struggles between letting go of his past and moving forward in his crisis of survival, his past comes to haunt him by virtue of his appeal to resist movement and

¹²⁸ See Chapter Three.

to presence absence. Moreover, the father is to pass on the torch of his metaphysical heritage to his son by way of a sacrificial fire that begins to burn inside the boy.

To continue with “the child” and the topic of “trauma,” the boy in McCarthy’s text is not traumatized by the apocalypse and its aftermath unlike his parents. Born amidst the cataclysm, he has never known a world different from the one he wanders in (61). His father’s bygone world exists for him largely through his father’s narrative and the remnants they find along their way. Hence, the boy is “strangely untroubled” (203) by all the human remains and corpses scattered throughout the landscape, which are cause for his father’s nausea, in particular when they behold “a charred human infant headless and gutted and blackened on the spit” (212). The father has issued the warning advice:

Just remember that the things you [the son] put into your head are there forever, he said. You might want to think about that.

You forget some things dont [sic] you? [the boy asks]

Yes. You forget what you want to remember and you remember what you want to forget. (11)

Active repression rules over the rather passive act of forgetting noted by the boy, which thus explains the father’s horror that the boy, after encountering this infant closer to his age, may be traumatized by encountering his mirror image: the father did not know “if he’d ever speak again” (212).

That the boy, however, finds this scene of the infant disturbing, but not as traumatizing as his father, becomes evident in resonance to a scene where the father and his son encounter their tracks in the snow upon which the boy asks about potential persecutors:

Will they know *what* we are?

What? [asks the father, startled]. (109; emphasis added)

The boy's comment exchanging the pronoun "what" for "who" is disturbing to the father, which reveals the latter's stable image of his self at the basis of his identity. This is furthermore shown when "they came upon themselves in a mirror and he [the father] almost raised the pistol. It's us, Papa, the boy whispered. It's us" (139). That the boy does not partake in a Lacanian mirroring of identifications becomes evident in his question about "what" their identity is rather than asking about the rounded off, enclosing "who" of identity. The father's failure to recognize himself in the mirror stems from his internalized self-image that fails to match up with its mirror image unlike the boy, who is open to new mirror images of his self. This passage, then, suggests that the boy's concept of selfhood differs from his father's, who, in regards to the earlier reference, retreats with the words that "We need to think about this. Let's go back to the fire" (109).

This difference of a self that embraces absence as opposed to a metaphysical self of presence, however, does not mean that the boy experiences no trauma at all. Upon his life-threatening encounter with a thug, the boy displays the blazon of trauma: "The boy by now was shuddering violently" (70). The father's dismay about his son's trauma results in his command for the boy to "talk to [him] . . . but he [the boy] would not" (70). The boy's refusal to talk reveals the very absence at the heart of trauma that forecloses an articulation of "what happened." The father's reiteration throughout the novel that "You [the boy] have to talk to me" (279), while stating the futility of talking about what specifically constituted the traumatic event, acknowledges the need for working through his trauma to avoid the boy's closing in on trauma's absence and shutting himself off from life. Rather than employing language, however, the boy uses music to work through trauma:

The boy took it [the flute] wordlessly. After a while he fell back and after a while the man could hear him playing. A formless music for the age to come. Or perhaps the

last music on earth called up from out the ashes of its ruin. The man turned and looked back at him. He was lost in deep concentration. The man thought he seemed some sad and solitary changeling child announcing the arrival of a traveling [sic] spectacle in shire and village who does not know that behind him the players have all been carried off by wolves. (81)

That the father comments on the boy's play as a nostalgic, solitary parade without participants paradoxically highlights the movement that music introduces into the boy's traumatized self. Rather than dwelling on the past like his father, the boy, through his play, finds a form of expression that helps him over his traumatic experience.¹²⁹ To this end, the boy also regains his speech and asks: "Are we still the good guys?" (81) by which he does not pass a moral judgment but rather foregrounds a "goodness" that is an assertion of life over death.

As opposed to the crisis of survival that is traumatic for the father, the boy's trauma consists of his father's inability and refusal to help other people. The incident where the boy encounters another boy amongst the debris continues to run through the novel through trauma's "belated address" (Caruth 4). Asks the boy of his dying father:

Do you remember that little boy, Papa?

Yes, I remember him. . . .

But who will find him if he's lost? Who will find the little boy?

Goodness will find the little boy. It always has. It will again. (McCarthy 300)

The question of the whereabouts of the little boy continues to intrude upon the boy's mind. While the father gets rid of his responsibility of neglecting the boy by alluding to fate, the boy is haunted by their refusal to help others. Writes Caruth: the wound is "not available to

¹²⁹ See Mason Reese's employment of music in Chapter Four.

consciousness until it imposes itself again, repeatedly, in the nightmares and repetitive actions of the survivor” (4). The boy’s repetitive question after the boy along with other incidents such as a stray dog and people harvested for food in a basement, and his vanished mother reveal a failure to understand, to fully know, and to assimilate to his consciousness his father’s refusal to help others.

To this end, the boy’s nightmares increase throughout the novel the more his father and he neglect others. After his father takes him to an “empty parking lot at the overlook [where] he’d stood once with his own father in a winter long ago. What is it, Papa? the boy said. It’s the gap. This is it” (McCarthy 34), the boy has a “scary dream” about “this penguin that you [the father] wound up and it would waddle and flap its flippers. And we were in that house that we used to live in and it came around the corner but nobody had wound it up and it was really scary. . . . The winder wasnt [sic] turning” (37). The scariness of the boy’s dream stems from the penguin as an automaton, as a figure that moves without anybody’s control as shown by the stuck winder and which therefore becomes a force of presence and may recall the metaphysics of a patrilineal order as symbolized by the family house. That this focus on presence becomes haunting for the boy is shown in his and his father’s negligence in helping others, foregrounding the presence of the father and the boy over others. While the boy cares for a stranded dog that follows the father and the son for a while, a boy whom the son sees in one of the town ruins, and a man that the boy spots in the ashen world, the reaction of the father and the boy are always the same:

Cant [sic] we help him Papa?

No. We can’t help him. There’s nothing to be done for him. . . .

They went on. The boy was crying. (McCarthy 52-53).

This goodness of the boy in these various contexts is less a moralizing obedience as if he were a “good boy”¹³⁰ but rather speaks to a reaching out provoked by trauma—a kind of bonding that Richard Rorty may have in mind when he writes that we need to “become less cruel” and attend to “the pain of another . . . person . . . [and] to the pain and humiliation we are causing” (141). To this end, trauma for the boy means a reaching out toward another by virtue of witnessing another’s trauma, as rehearsed previously, while for the father, trauma predominantly entails a closing in of identity and a mistrust of any others.

That this negligence becomes traumatizing for the boy is shown in his reiterated nightmares, which he stops talking about: “One night, the boy woke from a dream and would not tell him [the father] what it was” (McCarthy 201). The boy withdraws more and more from his father as if heeding his advice that “[w]hen your dreams are of some world that never was or of some world that never will be and you are happy again then you will have given up. Do you understand? And you cant [sic] give up. I wont [sic] let you” (202). Indeed, states the boy later: “I don’t want to talk about anything. . . . I don’t have good dreams anyway. They’re always about something bad happening. You said that was okay because good dreams are not a good sign” (288). The boy has taken his father’s advice that dreams for a man in peril have to be nightmares. That the perilous situation for the boy does not stem from an external danger but rather from an internal unwillingness to help others becomes evident in the increasing frequency of his nightmares and of their encounters with others whom father and son sparingly help or do not help at all.

The boy further heeds his father’s advice and cuts down his imagination as a response to trauma. The boy uses his imagination to depart from trauma’s absence in a novel way: “Do you think there might be crows somewhere? . . . Could they fly to Mars or someplace?”

¹³⁰ Compare to Ronnie McGorvey in Chapter Two.

(McCarthy 166). Though the father reveals his son's imagination as a fantasy to be far removed from reality, he nevertheless approves of his son's more realistic question that "If you were a crow could you fly up high enough to see the sun?" (168). That this later reference recalls the Greek mythology of Daedalus and Icarus, another sacrificial scene where the son flies too high to the sun, melting his wings, again produces a masculine, patrilineal view of reality that is a harsh, violent one. This perspective is furthermore sustained by the father's comment on his son's dreams that "when your dreams are of some world that never was or of some world that never will be and you are happy again then you will have given up. Do you understand? And you cant [sic] give up. I wont [sic] let you" (202). Any imaginative claim of the boy to find an alternative to the masculine reality advanced by this father is cut short. And yet, their finding of food, in particular the basement bunker filled with whatever the father dreamed of—"[t]he richness of a vanished world" (147), reveals that the father's dreams indeed can become true.

It is the father's appeal to presence that comes to impact the boy, who states: "I always believe you [the father] . . . I have to" (197). And yet, his refusal to talk to his father may suggest a refusal to follow his father's advice at the same time. The boy's complaint that

I was crying. But you [the father] didnt [sic] wake up.

I'm sorry. I [the father] was just so tired.

I [the boy] meant in the dream. (195)

recalls the accusing, blaming phrase of the burning child in Freud: "'*Father, don't you see I am burning?*'" (*Interpretation of Dreams* 509; emphasis original).¹³¹ While McCarthy's

¹³¹ Freud relates this dream as follows: A father attended to his sick child for days. After the child died, he hired a watchman to watch over the body of the child while the father went to bed in the adjacent room, leaving the door open. The father then had a dream in which the child was standing beside his bed, grabbed his arm, and asked him why he does not see that

father-persona relates to a Freudian response to the father's dream as a prolongation of sleep to avoid an external death, the child's accusation of the father may subscribe to a more Lacanian view of the dream as being "about the way in which, in his traumatic awakening, the very identity of the father, as subject, is bound up with, or founded upon the death he survives . . . [and] the shock of traumatic sight [that] reveals at the heart of human subjectivity not so much an epistemological, but rather what can be defined as an *ethical* relation to the real" (Caruth 92; emphasis original). In other terms, the father's prolonged sleep demonstrates his Freudian response, while the boy's accusation may lament the absence of such Lacanian ethical relations (the father never helps anyone). McCarthy's father persona is thus unconsciously more concerned about himself and his own sleep than the dream of the child—a form of non-care that would continue to watch Freud's child burn.

That the child's response to his father's query that "[y]ou're [the boy] not the one who has to worry about everything" with his phrasing "[y]es, I am. . . . I'm the one" (McCarthy 277) signals an awareness in the boy about the practice of filial sacrifice and further constitutes a creation of distance to his father, which becomes evident in the boy's refusal to talk to his father:

You [the boy] could tell me a story about yourself.

You [the father] already know all the stories about me. You were there.

You have stories inside that I dont [sic] know about. . . .

You dont [sic] have any happy ones?

They're more like real life. (287)

he was burning. Upon waking up, the father discovered that the watchman had fallen asleep and that the child had been partially burned by a fallen candle (*Interpretations of Dreams* 509).

The father's command for the boy to talk about himself results in silence as a refusal of the boy to share insights with his father on the one hand; on the other hand, the boy's revelation of his self may generate only a few sentences within which to describe his identity, exposing the insufficiency of language to give a full account of the self.

The boy begins to distance himself from his father and further mourns his father's death rather than falling into a melancholic depression, as was the case with his father.¹³² "If I'm not here you can still talk to me [says the dying father]. You can talk to me and I'll talk to you. You'll see . . . You have to make it like talk you imagine. And you'll hear me. You have to practice. Just don't give up. Okay" (298-299)? The boy heeds his father's advice; however, rather than falling into an internalization of his lost object, the boy "stayed three days and then he walked out on the road" (301), as if to attempt to let go of his painful loss. His encounter with an American Family at the end of the narrative further suggests the boy's moving on rather than his dwelling on his painful loss.

To continue with a re-visitation of the American family, the foreign woman's remark on the boy's talking to his father as an instance of "the breath of God [that] was his [the boy's] breath yet though it pass from man to man through all of time" (306) signals the absence of God and capitalized Faith in favour of a circulation of the breath. This focus on rhythmic breathing renders god an immanent force of absence pulsating through life rather than a metaphysical, removed entity. Furthermore, it is language that generates from this breath and that allows the boy to counter-actualize his loss. Moreover, the foreign man's comment on the question of the boy whether the man carried the fire as "kind of weirded

¹³² Freud contrasts mourning with melancholia where loss results in a redirection of one's libido onto a different object in the first instance whereas the lost object gets internalized in the latter instance with the melancholy subject falling guilty of the loss of the object. See "Mourning and Melancholia" 584-589.

out” (303) signals the man’s unfamiliarity with the sacrificial economy and thus a dismantling of patriarchal discursive structures. These instances, then, signal a return to the American Family that this time may not constitute an Oedipal return, but a departure from the father’s death that is a new beginning. This return as the novel’s second ending opens up the question pondered by Deleuze and Parnet: “What is it which tells us that, on a line of flight, we will not rediscover everything we were fleeing . . . all the Oedipal structures on the line of flight” (*Dialogues II* 28)? The answer lies in caution and in carefully assessing the situation but also in the ultimate unpredictability (and richness) of the future. Furthermore, the extension of the family into five personae and their anonymous naming in the novel as a man, a woman, a girl and a boy may signal a break up of the nuclear Oedipal family of father, mother, and son. This de-familial-ization of the Oedipal family may further be reminiscent of the anonymous encounter a child may have when being born into a “foreign” family. What remains, then, for the boy—and the family—is an inevitable risk “to take a shot” (303).¹³³

In sum, the boy witnesses trauma in particular in his life-threatening encounter with a thug. His resort to music, imagination, and language allows him to cope with trauma and to

¹³³ This ending of the novel has received a fair bit of critical attention, largely divided between two camps: those who read the ending as being redemptive and those who read it as an impossible redemption as the linguistic framework of theology no longer holds. See Kunsä 58, 59, 65; Rambo 101, 105-106. The boy, however, is read as a messianic figure of hope by both camps where blind parental love is shown as necessary to guarantee survival amidst trauma. Yet, seeing the boy as a messianic figure constitutes a reading that sustains filial sacrifice in so far as it promulgates the feeling of sorrow and returns to a sacrificial economy of an Oedipal family structure. *The Road*, I argue, forecloses upon such critical approaches of the text that sustain filial sacrifice through its narrative technique that like a breath moves in, out, and through the narrative by virtue of word resonances and the text’s absences. Rather than lending itself to an archaeological excavation of hidden layers, the text stays on the surface and consists of crossroads to be constructively travelled on, creating plateaus of various significations. See my section on language in this chapter for a further explication of this theme.

return and depart from it differently. His frequent return to his father's and his own neglect of others results in nightmares that speak to a belated address of trauma. His following of his father's appeal toward metaphysical presence, however, increases the frequency of his nightmares as well as his silence. The latter, however, also constitutes a distance that he creates to his father in his unwillingness—and inability—to mediate trauma and to tell everything about his subjectivity that shares trauma's absence.¹³⁴ To these ends, the boy in McCarthy's novel is traumatized by his father's, and, by extension, his own, inability to attend to the wound of others rather than by a single shocking catastrophe that constitutes the crisis of the father's survival.

To end my discussion on trauma, I now turn to the “traumatic” implications of language. *The Road* consists of a language that is accumulative and focused on action rather than pensive self-reflexion:

When he got back the boy was still asleep. He pulled the blue plastic tarp off of him and folded it and carried it out to the grocery cart and packed it and came back with their plates and some cornmeal cakes in a plastic bag and plastic bottle of syrup. He spread the small tarp they used for a table on the ground and laid everything out and he took the pistol from his belt and laid it on the cloth and then he just sat watching the boy sleep. He'd pulled away his mask in the night and it was buried somewhere in the blankets. He watched the boy and he looked out through the tress toward the road.

(3)

¹³⁴ The novel further does not reveal the child's inner thoughts as if in an interior monologue. The novel thus remains a distanced perspective on the child as an enigma without zooming in on the latter. For representations of the unrepresentable child in fiction through such an externalized narratology, see Honeyman esp. Chapter One.

This passage's frequent employment of verbs, the co-ordinating conjunction "and," free indirect discourse, and the historic present tense produces a language that remains on the surface rather than falling into an individualized language of direct speech or a stream of consciousness technique both introduced by single phrases. The effect generated is one of anonymity, advanced by the substitution of father and son by man and boy. Moreover, this kind of style produces a distanced effect to both, self-reflexion and reality, and it opens up a textual space in-between "into which any particle that enters the zone is drawn" (Deleuze and Guattari, *ATP* 273); a certain textual sobriety that maintains its distance to reality that can be overpowering and that is kept at a distance "toward the road," as well as to imagination that allows us to deal with experience in order to "make the absence of an origin the origin" and to create new realities (293). This triangle furthermore opens up a textual triad of reality/history, reader, and writer in order to create a liveable, mobile space and also to sustain the sheer abundance of the man's and the boy's experiences.

This way, McCarthy's text moves toward and pulls away from "reality," putting things *in other words* to allow for the potential of a "rhizomatic semiosis." McCarthy's father-persona approaches "reality" twice with a different wording in each instant:

He took great marching steps into the nothingness, counting them against his return. Eyes closed, arms oaring. Upright to what? Something nameless in the night, lode or matrix. To which he and the stars were common satellite. Like the great pendulum in its rotunda scribing through the long day movements on the universe through which you may say it knows nothing and yet know it must. (McCarthy 14)

The father's step into some-thing nameless, an absent "formedness" of things, which he and the universe circle around, shatters his metaphysical "uprightness." However, the father's (or narrator's) *simile* of the pendulum as a reaction to his noted no-thing-ness points to physicist

Léon Foucault's pendulum, argued by Anthony Warde, as being "emblematic of the Newtonian ideals of Absolute Movement and Absolute Space, and [as] thus [being] a metaphor for the human search for fixity and permanence" (130) gives way not to an embrace of absence but a search for closure and knowledge.

Later in the plot, the father
 walked out in the gray light and stood and he saw for a brief moment the absolute truth of the world. The cold relentless circling of the intestate earth. Darkness implacable. The blind dogs of the sun in their running. The crushing black vacuum of the universe. And somewhere two hunted animals trembling like ground-foxes in their cover. Borrowed time and borrowed world and borrowed eyes with which to sorrow it. (138)

This time, the father's (or narrator's) *metaphoric* response to his perception of "the absolute truth" creates a distance to this reality; however, this distance does not result in a form of creation but a form of paralysis as expressed through the simile of the hiding ground-foxes. The word "borrow" generates the word "sorrow" rather than "furrow" and once again attests to the father's shutting down of experience and withdrawal into metaphysical sorrow. Though these two approaches *toward* reality that cannot be fully grasped result in a different textuality—and, by implication, a different subjectivity—they generate the same responses by the father: withdrawal and closure.

These textual movements of the departure and return, as emblematic of trauma, are further generated through the text's own erasures, as shown by a roadside sign: "By the roadside stood another sign that warned of death, the letters faded with the years" (138). The fading of the letters literally fulfills the content of the sign: the warning of death. Taken together, then, form and content, rather than being opposed to one another, become enfolded.

In the context of trauma, then, survival does not mean the victory of life over death, but the latter's mutual enfolding: life in death and death in life. This overshooting of language across its absent spaces is further shown in the text's various gaps and ellipses between paragraphs and the blank spaces between the letters in the text, which allows the language of the novel to continue *ad infinitum*. Rather than constituting a metaphysical language such as the one of a first person narrative, privileging one person's thoughts and insights, the novel, once again, remains on the surface and therefore allows for a crossroads of various word echoes and resonances throughout the text, generating multiple levels of signification.

Due to this textual oozing out of its page, McCarthy's language becomes one of trauma that claims and yet defies our understanding. Asks the text suddenly:

Something imponderable shifting out there in the dark. The earth itself contracting with the cold. It did not come again. What time of year? What age the child? He walked out into the road and stood. The silence. The salitter drying from the earth. The mudstained shapes of flooded cities burned to the waterline. At a crossroads a ground set with dolmen stones where the spoken bones of oracles lay moldering. No sound but the wind. What will you say? A living man spoke these lines? He sharpened his quill with his small knife to scribe these things in sloe or lampblack? At some reckonable and entabled moment? He is coming to steal my eyes. To seal my mouth with dirt. (279-280)

That "the child" becomes a linguistic term stripped off its ageist, temporal category results in a generative moment of speechlessness and a wresting off language by any authorial voice where the wind is the only sound. And yet, even to talk about silence generates words on a meta-narrative level that registers Freud's Sandman who is about to steal the narrator's eyes and seal his mouth with dirt. This blindness and dirtiness once more attests to a form of

immanent humanism that is apparently all worth talking about. The moment that this passage refers to, however, is one that defies these meta-narrative constraints. Rather, meta-narrative becomes narrative that takes silent absence, the sound of the wind, as a generative principle: “always $n - 1$. . . write at $n - 1$ dimensions” (Deleuze and Guattari, *ATP* 6; emphasis original). Read as n for narrative, then, rather than philosophizing about human life, McCarthy’s text is another narrative that gestures toward grasping life’s experiences only to move away again and to generate further narratives,¹³⁵ or, as Paul de Man writes: “Consciousness does not result from the absence of something, but consists of the presence of a nothingness. Poetic language names this void with ever-renewed understanding . . . and it never tires of naming it again. This persistent naming is what we call literature” (18).

The Road’s bow to language as a generative source for a transformative subjectivity, then, allows language to invest its ancestral heritage with new meanings: “Do you think that your fathers are watching? That they weigh you in their ledgerbook? Against what? There is no book and your fathers are dead in the ground” (McCarthy 209). Though the fathers are dead, they are quite alive in language and in literature. Rather than forming a literary heritage and an anxiety of influence, as noted by Harold Bloom, which would record each text within a patriarchal heritage, McCarthy’s “rhizomatic semiosis” resists such textual hauntings of the past by advancing a renewed use of language, a borrowing that yields new usage.

To this end, the novel’s third ending does not move into a finalized vocabulary of textual closure but moves out to further narratives yet to come:

¹³⁵ It is for this reason of generating further narratives that do not necessarily have to be (critical) narratives beyond McCarthy’s text but which can indeed be found within his novel that I turn to McCarthy’s book rather than its film adaptation. Vice versa, I turned to *Little Children*’s film adaption rather than Perrotta’s novel in order to highlight its cinematic, visual techniques and their play on boundaries, which is not as easily depicted in a literary text.

Once there were brook trout in the streams in the mountains. You could see them standing in the amber current where the white edges of their fins wimpled softly in the flow. They smelled of moss in your hand. Polished and muscular and torsional [sic]. On their backs were vermiculate patterns that were maps of the world in its becoming. Maps and mazes. Of a thing which could not be put back. Not be made right again. In the deep glens where they lived all things were older than man and they hummed of mystery. (306-307)

To echo the father's "[fear] that something was gone that could not be put right again" (144), the novel's final lines of things that cannot be made right again form what Paul de Man would term a "[moment] of genuine humanity . . . at which all anteriority vanishes, annihilated by the *power of an absolute forgetting*. Although such a radical rejection of history may be illusory or unfair to the achievements of the past, it nevertheless remains justified as necessary to the fulfilment of our human destiny and as the *condition for action*" (147; emphases added). However, rather than rejecting the past, this final passage places the past alongside the present, as it introduces a more archaic, Latinate—extra-ordinary—vocabulary ("torsional," "vermiculate") together with more conventionally used words. Moreover, the word vermiculate suggests maps and mazes, layers of miraculous reality that glitteringly change appearances. The white edges of the fins in addition constitute a glistening surface in the sun, a speculum of "flashes," in Michel de Certeau's terms, "a prismatic flickering . . . 'at the extreme [of] **a blind dazzling of the eyes** of the body and of reason, in a point where the visible vanishes, [and where] it can be the object of a true telling identical to a non-seeing or to a believing'"—the trout's humming (qtd. in Conley 47; emphasis original). To this end, the passage's anonymous pronoun "you" does not so much constitute an Althusserian hailing but invitingly addresses the reader to see—to witness—to

reach out his or her own hand to the synergetic materiality of trout which addresses *all* human senses and which nevertheless escapes one's full grasp in face of the fish's (a)mazing maps¹³⁶ of Deleuze/Guattarian "becomings."

The trout's mazes, then, keep the spirits of the past from grippingly haunting the present and the text, though the image of the mysterious relic of trout runs throughout the novel: "He'd stood at the river once and watched the flash of trout deep in a pool, invisible to see in the teacolored water except as they turned on their sides to feed. Reflecting back the sun deep in the darkness like a flash of knives in a cave" (McCarthy 42). Unlike Plato's ghost, the trout form an image from the past turning present,¹³⁷ transforming a haunting of absence into a hunting of an absolute, as demonstrated by the reflection of the flash. By flashing mysteries, the trout continue to escape the father's complete phenomenological and epistemological grasp, and ours.

¹³⁶ For a reading on the novel's theme of "maps," see Anthony Warde's article "'Justified in the World': Spatial Values and Sensuous Geographies in Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*" in which he argues for the novel's spatial transition from metaphysics to immanence. I develop Warde's underpinnings of a Deleuzian "cartography" of selfhood in Chapter One. On McCarthy's "maps," see also Kunsu 68.

¹³⁷ For a discussion of this form of recursive futurity, see Chapter Four.

—Conclusion—

Childhood Studies Revisited

As I have argued in this dissertation, the concept of “growing up” to adult completion constitutes a rather reductionist itinerary of human movement. Indeed, the vocabulary of growing may be discarded to the extent that it implies a teleological movement forward and upward. In terms of the child, this form of growth entails a form of individualism that presupposes the child to be an entity that is simply out there and to learn and progress by virtue of mimesis, error, and re-presentation of adult behaviour, monitored by developmental psychoanalysis. This growth towards adult completion, then, allows one to judge each step of the child and to steer each side step, wayward movement, and nonconformist manoeuvre away from abnormality.

To critique this model of “growing up” to adult finalization, my project introduces ways of “moving rhizomatically” whose “growing up” is substituted by “motion,” and remains open in terms of space and time, thus allowing for re-configurations of a self anchored in a history of suffering and violence. Rather than having adult identities dwell in resentment on (a heavily idealized) childhood in such instances of pain, the “rhizome”—in contrast to deep tree-roots or an “arborescent” tree-structure, which would figuratively mirror a model of “growth” upward to the full stature of a tree—gives birth to an identity that is under continuous construction, and which springs forward in a transformative manner by way of forming a part of what Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari term “collective assemblages of enunciation”—multiplicities that fail to be reduced to a Saussurean and

Lacanian language of signifier and signified, but that make up a semiosis that is generative and transformative rather than reductive and sedimentary.

To this end, my selected literary and cinematic texts do not form what Deleuze and Guattari term a “major literature,” which is a writing that can be organized along a common denominator that is being traced in each chapter in a unifying manner, as this would turn my project into the very tree-structure it critiques. Rather, these works form a Deleuze/Guattarian “minor literature” that witnesses a form of dispersion rather than a hierarchical unification (*Kafka*16). Deleuze and Guattari define minor literature not as being representative of minorities (which would be another major literature) but as primarily machinic: that is, a writing that operates by virtue of the liberation and transmission of flows and intensities, forming an open multiplicity or “*collective assemblages of enunciation*” (18; emphasis original). Moreover, this kind of minor literature, or art in general, is immediately political and collective in so far as it is a literature that does not represent any major voices but “is rather that which a minority constructs within a major language . . . [where] language is affected with a high coefficient of deterritorialization” (16). In other terms, in order for “the child” to be represented in adult discourse, this discourse needs to be opened to a collective assemblage that includes the former, where the child constantly and indefatigably and fruitfully deterritorializes discourse beyond the familiar. It is this kind of literature and cinema as rehearsed by John Wray, Todd Field, Peter Cameron, Sara Pritchard, Michael Cunningham, and Cormac McCarthy where the child can speak, provided that the reader and viewer are willing to listen and participate in the creation of new ways of living in the world.

My project, then, contributes to the fairly recent and growing field of childhood studies by interrogating the very binary on which academic inquiries into this territory rest: childhood and adulthood, along with their respective binary ideological placements. In

response to current studies undertaken on the American child, my thesis exposes representational accounts of the child within the lettered space of Americana as copying the very European tradition they aim to critique, by inscribing themselves into the very discourse of “growing up” to adult completion. I wish to respond to the critical voices of Virginia Blum and Susan Honeyman, who advocate an elusive and enigmatic child at the heart of American letters, in tandem with Kathryn Bond Stockton’s ruminations on ways of human growth that do not pursue a vertical line “up” to adult completion, but rather follow sideways and wayward trajectories. In sum, my thesis claims to discover a cyclical mode of moving in the articulation of American literature and film at the beginning of the twenty-first century; this is a way of growing (or, rather movement) which avails itself of the full range of life’s experiences, and which also creates a distance from these experiences in order to reflect upon them and sustain their excess. In short, it defines identity as an open-ended, continuous process beyond the finalities of adulthood.

My selected literary and filmic texts jointly distance themselves from an Oedipal straightjacket that reduces, delimits, and squelches identity to the point of an unliveable terror. These texts, then, attempt to dismantle Oedipus from within, in order to articulate modes of movement that are generative, liberating, and open to life’s unruly course. To this end, my research is primarily framed within the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, whose works offer viable and fruitful tools to think beyond the shortcomings of conventional modes of human growth. Their concept of the “rhizome” as a continuous disruption of arborescent modes of thought particularly lends itself to an investigation into ways of growing that are myriad—that is, heterogeneous, metamorphic, nonlinear, and approximating rather than uniform, static, linear, and conclusive. This project, therefore, traces the varied manoeuvres of the rhizome as they make their trails through each chapter;

my thesis thus builds rhizomatically by way of opening questions to be answered at later points in the project and vice versa. Rather than establishing the “truth” about, or finding an ultimate solution to, the interiorized problems of the various characters in my selected texts, my thesis aims to promote the enigma of subjectivity, and thus assists its characters in their struggles between holding on and letting go, by moving with them toward the exciting promise of the future. Hence, my final chapter does not form a cumulative unit—which would structurally mimic Western culture’s command of “growing up” to completion—but functions as another point of departure that either allows for the previous chapters to be revisited, or encourages a leap forward onto new and fresh territory, inviting readers to pursue the rhizome as it sparks new research projects.

Revisiting childhood studies, therefore, my project invites its readers to pursue further research that redirects the current trajectory of inquiry into childhood away from its representational one-way street. The child is worth talking about; however, it cautions us to do so in a different language than we, as adults, have become used to. To this end, my thesis does not only speak to fields within childhood studies—such as children’s literature, child psychology, or child development—but may also prove worthwhile to other related interdisciplinary fields, such as linguistics (in terms of language acquisition, pragmatics, and semiotics); the social sciences, such as education (in regards to learning and teaching philosophies); the medical sciences (in terms of children as patients); or the political sciences (in regards to their policy-making for “our” children that are “our” future, but never their own). Of particular interest may be an investigation into children and disability studies: what, for instance, do autistic children have to tell us about each of these interdisciplinary fields and about our own understanding of these children?

Particularly in relation to trauma theory (as discussed in Chapter Six), the history of the American child needs to be rethought. Rather than view the American child as an imaginative foil against the European tradition, the American child should be seen as living and thriving—quite literally, rebelling—against any form of representation and metaphysics. It may particularly do so within the environment of the dark wilderness of the American continent, where the American child itself becomes the frontier to adult thought, and continually provokes the latter to find new ways of living. To this end, it may be worthwhile to revisit the child within the various contexts of the lettered spaces of Americana, to explore how the enigmatic child has been unfolding respectively—a lacuna in present research.¹³⁸

For instance, the enigmatic child seems to appear in Walt Whitman’s *Leaves of Grass*, Henry James’s *Turn of the Screw*, Kate Chopin’s *The Awakening*, J.D. Salinger’s *Catcher in the Rye*, and Toni Morrison’s *The Bluest Eye* in respectively different contextualizations that may be worth a re-visitation: do we have more enigmatic children or do we deal with different conceptualizations of “the child”? My turn to the work of twenty-first century director Todd Field, and writers John Wray, Peter Cameron, Sara Pritchard, Michael Cunningham, and Cormac McCarthy, presently articulates the necessity to find different, dynamic modes of growing—or, as I claim, movement. Perhaps, due to this very endeavour, my selected texts have not yet received any or very little literary acclaim, which is why I have not turned to canonical texts to bring attention to these writers.¹³⁹

¹³⁸ Thus, speculatively, the Puritans must have turned to the child at a very early age to secure its (their) covenant with God and to find out whether the child was amongst the chosen people; this paranoid turn to children must have left most Puritans in utter confusion as to what to do with “the child.” Later, the mystery of the child and identity at large was at the heart of the American Transcendentalists, amongst whom the crying shrieks of Nathaniel Hawthorne’s Pearl function as a haunting reminder of the reduction of identity at the threshold of adulthood.

¹³⁹ The only novel that has received literary attention is McCarthy’s *The Road*, which has

In regards to children's literature,¹⁴⁰ it may be interesting to investigate why certain authors on both sides of the Atlantic, in particular of the female gender, such as Louis May Alcott and Harriet Beecher Stowe, are categorized and permitted to write within an "inferior" genre that leaves the "real" literature to "serious" writers—namely, men. Indeed, David Russell's introduction to children's literature, entitled *Literature for Children*, published in its seventh edition in 2012, does not even list women, but advocates an exclusively male canon of authors writing and publishing for children, such as Jonathan Swift, Daniel Defoe, Mark Twain, Robert Louis Stevenson, Lewis Carroll, and J.M. Barrie.¹⁴¹ Is it not a question of censorship, however, that places these writers into the genre of children's literature and that has adults decide what their offspring should read, afraid of any illicit content (rather than having a child choose from the whole range of literature to which he or she may respond differently than we adults predict)? Does not many a colourful picture book eagerly reproduce the default image of childhood: a cute, innocent world of bliss along with graphic illustrations to calm the anxiety of the adult who "maintain[s] the illusion of accessibility [into childhood] by retreating to visualizations of small-scale, knowable spaces" (Honeyman 60)? I do not intend to dismiss the endeavour to craft literature for children; on the contrary, I welcome the undertaking to make children read and read about. What I criticise is the literary censorship unfair to authors as well as to their readership of children. Moreover, I deem it urgent to raise awareness of the very binary constructions of childhood and adulthood in which the present literary market participates, and ultimately determines the way we teach literature to children, as well as how we define "children's" literature.

won the Pulitzer Prize in 2007. See "2007 Winners and Finalists."

¹⁴⁰ Children's literature here is defined as age-coordinated literature written for children.

¹⁴¹ See Russell's "Time Line for the History of Children's Literature Europe and North America [sic]" in *Literature for Children* 16-17.

My thesis further adds to the field of childhood studies by stressing its value for literary criticism, and its potential for new conceptualizations through its being a self-reflexive field, where the adult meets its own boundaries. It also promotes the reputation of children's literature amongst literary scholars and, by extension, those teaching children's literature in ways yet to be configured. Beverly Clark reports of an "anxiety of immaturity" (151) amongst American scholars that stems from the image of America as a metaphoric child, as well as an academic wish to dissociate America and its literature from this very youthfulness (153).¹⁴² Against this trashing of "kiddie lit," as Clark sarcastically names it, my thesis attempts to establish an awareness of the seriousness and critical richness of the field of children's literature.

Ultimately, my project on "the child" in twenty-first century American Literature visits the field of childhood studies to show how the philosophy of Deleuze and Guattari offers tools to think beyond the straight line that connects childhood and adulthood by introducing ways of "moving rhizomatically" through a semiosis that ushers identity into a continuous process. My thesis explores the child (and identity at large) as an enigma; that is, a way of thinking that is largely overlooked in academic accounts of children, which deem to describe accurately who the child consciously is and what it experiences, or purports to research the various facets of representations of childhood. While Levander and Singley, for instance, in their 2003 book, *The American Child: A Cultural Studies Reader*, characterize the American child as a "force of resistance" on the one hand (4), they direct this force toward enlisted studies on "configurations of childhood across centuries, regions, and literary

¹⁴² See also Honeyman 31.

and historical movements” on the other hand (6).¹⁴³ Childhood studies, then, has found itself on a kind of academic one-way street toward constructivist representation. Rather, as I aim to show, children form a blind spot within Western society’s philosophy of American Pragmatism, in its pursuit and integration of the unknown into life’s continued wanderings. The texts I have considered, then, when taken together, press for a different notion of human growth (or rather, movement) from childhood representation to adult completion; rather than a growth upwards, I advocate a “rhizomatic” movement *sideways* that changes the ways we perceive “the child”: from a representational unit to a *machinic* assemblage thriving with the pulsations of life. This shift in perception frees the child from adult appropriations and, by “moving rhizomatically,” highlights the enigma of subjectivity for humanity at any age and in any era.

¹⁴³ Furthermore, a glance at the publication list of the Children’s Literature Association in 2011 reveals research in the field of childhood studies to focus primarily on representation and anthropology when it come to the child. See Xu Xu, Gillhouse, Cummins. A recently completed dissertation by Andrew Scahill at the University of Texas at Austin on the monster child regards this kind of child as a hyperbole in deviation from the normative image of innocence. See “It Takes a Child to Raze a Village: Demonizing Youth Rebellion.” Childhood studies, then, focuses primarily on the discursive construction of the child or tries to find out who the child is and what it experiences: two perspectives, which my study disrupts.

In regards to the canon of children’s literature, the Children’s Literature Association has invited articles that primarily re-visit literature conventionally viewed as being written for children, see Gruner, Jenkins, Dendle. My work attempts to open this canon to include more texts that further change the reputation of children’s literature toward being “serious” literature.

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