BECOMING OTHERWISE: THE QUEER AESTHETICS
OF CHILDHOOD

by

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Abstract

This dissertation examines the relationship between discourses of childhood, theories of sexuality and cultural production. The theoretical framework draws on the psychoanalytic theories of Sigmund Freud, Melanie Klein and D.W. Winnicott. I read literature published in the fields of education, queer theory and childhood studies to posit a theory of childhood that acknowledges the role of the unconscious in learning and in sexual development. I ask how theories of childhood create the material conditions amidst which children develop, and how the adult’s own history of dependence, individuation, and relationality informs their theory of what defines a normal childhood. Throughout the dissertation, I theorize queer childhood as that which exceeds the confines of normality and resists normative assessments of growth. In the scope of this project, queer childhood is that which transcends and troubles normative metrics of growth. Here, queer references both non-normative sexuality and childlike qualities, such as curiosity, creativity and the desire for play, which do not expire when adulthood is obtained.

In order to use the proposed framework, I test theories of childhood development as they relate to sexuality, learning and loss by applying them to representations of childhood in film. I suggest that the adult’s non-conscious dynamics operant in encounters with children and childhood instruct pedagogy and curriculum used to educate children. Methodologically, I examine aesthetic representations of childhood in four films in order to theorize the relationship between adult constructions of childhood and the experience of being a child.
My intent is to show how the viewing of these films forms an aesthetic experience that can assist in the symbolization of an unconscious constellation of affect, defense and desire. To this end, I privilege psychoanalytic theories of how aesthetic objects describe and clarify subjective experience, and narrate conflict, in order to contribute a theory of queer childhood attentive to both social and instinctual life.
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Introduction: A ‘Good Enough’ Education: Psychoanalysis, Cultural Production and Pedagogy

This dissertation takes childhood as its object of analysis, and is interested in positing a theory of childhood that privileges the adult’s unconscious attachments and conflicts made from a history of relationships to others. On behalf of children, many campaigns are won. Imagined as the securement of a better future, an object for which politics, the family and education are organized, in support of the children, most things can be justified. The governance of children is a site of conflict; calculating what the child should become is a way to undermine the strangeness or unpredictability of the future and solidify the adult’s knowledge and authority.\footnote{Paul Kelleher (2004) poignantly captures this dynamic in his essay on childhood, when he suggests that he is referring to “no child in particular, a figure whose lack of particularity enables a great deal of thinking and speaking—not to mention legislating and policy making—about matters of so-called general, national, or universal concern. Accordingly, when we encounter concepts such as “the general population,” “national security,” or the “universal human condition,” we find the child buckled into the logic of these abstract bodies, and, more often than not, this child is in danger” (p.151).} Thus, the discourse of childhood is an incitement to cultural criticism. The child is a promissory subject, typified by its openness to being reshaped.

For Hannah Arendt, the fact of natality is “the miracle that saves the world”\footnote{As described by Elizabeth Young-Bruehl (2004, p.495).}, ushering in the freedom to begin again. Natality offers the chance to build new worlds amongst the wreckage of the past. But, the “frailty” of the human community (1958:p.191), the volatility of transgenerational inheritance, tenders natality as both freedom and potential demise. Arendt proposes that infants are “newcomers who are born into a world of strangers” (1958: p.9). Freedom, Arendt suggests, is the effect of the
unique story that the newcomer will tell. Deborah Britzman explains that the fact of natality has to do with “the adult’s indebtedness to the child” (2003, p.23):

New events enter the world, and so natality consists of a promise. Second, natality also is a state of extreme dependency and vulnerability. This gives rise to its third feature, natality ushers in obligation. It requires something from those already in the world, just as those already in the world require something from the new. The fact of natality thus references the promised sociality for renewal and continuity, a promise easily broken (2003, p.23).

Arendt’s discussion of natality, a new beginning, is found in her writing on North American education. To educate children, suggests Arendt, is both to recognize the constraint of social conditions into which one is born and also to acknowledge the freedom that comes with renewal. “With word and deed”, she alleged, “we insert ourselves into the human world, and this insertion is like a second birth, in which we confirm and take upon ourselves the naked fact of our original physical appearance” (1958, p.176-177). Each new generation of children must struggle to establish itself within the human community, while bearing the weight of the adult’s expectation and anxiety. Arendt believed that the adult educator must recognize the difficult struggle that renewal becomes when it occurs amidst the ruins of the past. Childhood is, then, both the condition of existence under the tyranny of adult authority and an unruly field of potential, promising restitution for history’s mistakes. The felt experience of becoming a subject is heightened in childhood, characterized by both originality and insubordination.

3 As described by Britzman: 2003:23.
to the adult world. The child is heavy with meaning and with hope, across its body
sociality is organized and renewed.

This dissertation asks how childhood has been operant in discourses of what it
means to be human. Interrogating the structure of affective, libidinal, epistemological and
political attachments to childhood in contemporary culture, it is interested in the
psychological, unconscious and social phenomena circulating in definitions of childhood.
Drawing upon research and literature in the fields of education, sexuality studies, and
queer theory, I suggest a theory of childhood which acknowledges that the social must
pass through the unconscious’ dynamic play of affect, defense and identification.
Therefore, I read histories of childhood and theories of child development beside
psychoanalytic literatures that give primacy to the unconscious. Our ideas of what the
child should become, are, I think, refractions of our own history of building relationships
to the world and of being frustrated when reality impinges on phantasy. A question hangs
over this work: How are children held captive to adult’s phantasmatic attachments to and
remembering of childhood? I compile a series of renderings of the child and its
childhood, none of which are final motions towards what will make the world better for
children, but each ask: What surprises and reparations occur when investments in
children fail to make an expected return? This question is explored with a psychoanalytic
orientation to aesthetic feelings and considerations of the emotional impacts of cultural
production. Through close readings of representations of children and childhood in film,
this dissertation aims to better understand how aesthetic and visual culture engages and
reframes relationships to sexuality, gender and queer futurity.
The archive that I have compiled includes stories of childhoods which may not hastily ally with a classification of ‘queer’, but detail queer methods of growth that undermine normative measures of development. With film as my data, I partake in aesthetic and affective engagement with contemporary queer theory, childhood studies and psychoanalysis. Psychoanalysis is given tribute because it gives language to unconscious affiliations and investments, while being suspicious of language. Adam Phillip’s (1998) reflects on this point: Children “teach us what it is like not to be able to speak properly; and by showing us this they remind us not only of our inarticulate and virtually inarticulate selves, but also of our internal relationships with these buried, vestigial versions of ourselves” (p.53). “Children”, he continues, “take us back to that border in ourselves where we struggle or delight to articulate against powerful external and internal resistances. And the complimentary risk is that adults use young children unwitingly, to reinforce a sense of their own competence” (p.54). Involving childhood in a queer aesthetic project renews narrative potential for describing the social and emotional worlds of children and the childhood we, as adults, remember having. Central to this line of thinking is the belief that how we perceive the outside world is determined by internal psychic impressions (and vice versa).

While excavating queer childhoods from a small cinematic archive, an interdisciplinary mode of investigation causes my discussions of childhood to move back

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4 This relationship led Freud to distinguish between “historical reality” and “material reality” (1939). The latter refers to the actual event and the first, their psychic re-construction. Importantly, in their essay “Fantasy and the Origin of Sexuality” (1968) Jean LaPlanche and J.B. Pontalis will later revise Freud’s notion of psychical reality so that it does not emphasize a binary between fantasy and reality, but rather, opens-up fantasy as present in both the unconscious dream and waking life. They dissect Freud’s original thinking on fantasy and reality to suggest that fantasy can also be used to explain secondary elaborations that are conscious desires for fiction. See Andre Green (2000) for further discussion of the distinction between historical reality and material reality.
and forth between real children, embodied childhood, and references to childhood as cultural and phantasmatic figuration. On the one hand, there is the material child who calls upon the adult for support, and on the other there is the adult’s idea of what childhood should entail. In agreement with Gabrielle Owen (2010), I do not believe that cultural constructions of childhood and conversations about actual children are ever, really, separate, though they often emerge from different disciplinary traditions (255). Deborah Britzman (1998) writes of the discipline of education’s relationship to the child: “It is not only the child who dreams but the dream of the child, indeed, the child as a dream that interferes with the question of knowledge in education” (p.53). The discipline of education, Britzman suggests, has a “tendency to choose the empirical child over the dream, the child the adult can know and control” (p.53). This is not a tension I resolve here, because I am concerned both with the adult’s uses of childhood and with the impact of such uses on material children. To this end, my discussion of childhood is compelled by concern for the violences brought on children who hint at becoming something other than the culture’s ideal. I do give value to the child as dream, but also ask how cultural definitions of childhood reverberate in the treatment of children. In an effort to abstract the child he invokes from the weight of material experiences which might complicate a reading of his theorizing, Lee Edelman (2004) capitalizes the Child to whom he refers in an effort to distinguish it from real, embodied children. I find this schematic

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useful, though not sustainable. My reference to the child as a product of adult investments, anxieties and epistemologies, specifically a generalized, philosophical figuration of childhood often quickly blurs into discussions of real children.

In this dissertation, I have both a broad interest in the child as historical-discursive formation, and also a particular desire to amass representations of children that complicate assumptions about the formation of sexuality in childhood. These interests lead to a study of contemporary representations of childhood in four films: Shane Meadows’ *This is England* (2007), Philippe Falardeau’s *Monsieur Lazhar* (2012), Alain Berliner’s *Ma Vie en Rose* (1999), and Celine Sciamma’s *Tomboy* (2011). I call these representations of childhood ‘queer’ because they are non-normative renderings and narratives of childhood development. My queer theory of childhood explores how a history of sexuality is folded into the figure of the child and contemporary debates about how best to regulate or treat sexual difference. Homosexuals are often juxtaposed with children but as a result both “become central to each other’s meaning” (Stockton, 3; Kincaid, 1998). At the crux of my thesis is a paradox: The child is, generally, treated as being before or without sexuality, while also commonly addressed as a proto-heterosexual. I am interested in the possibility of a queer child and use this figure to open up a range of theoretical questions about the adult’s ideological investments in fantasies of childhood and the phantasmatic, affective imaginaries of childhood which operate at the level of the unconscious. My use of ‘queer’ does not simply register homosexuality’s nexus with childhood (though, as I will discuss, both are historically knotted, and an adult’s remembered non-normative childhood sexual experiences can endlessly and
productively undermine a rhetoric of childhood innocence). I employ queer childhood to illuminate growth that occurs outside of normative schematics of human development. This work relies heavily on Kathryn Bond Stockton’s 2009 *The Queer Child: Growing Sideways in the Twentieth Century*, in which she describes how queer children spill sideways, making rhizomatic growths through metaphors and animations of delay (“my dog is my wife”, “my dolly is my mommy”, are some examples). Stockton’s is the first book length manuscript to be written on the topic of the queer child. Steven Bruhm and Natasha Hurley’s anthology, *Curiouser: On the Queerness of Children*, appeared five years earlier and concludes with an essay written by Stockton. Integral to Stockton’s argument in *The Queer Child* is Derrida’s notion of delay, which she describes as:

[T]he inescapable effect of our reading along a chain of words (in a sentence, for example), where meaning is delayed, deferred, exactly because we read in sequence, go forward in a sentence…while we must take the words we have passed with us as we go, making meaning wide and hung in suspense (p.4).

Stockton likens Derrida’s theory of delay to the project of growing-up; one should not arrive too quickly to adulthood and thus must be held in a series of delays and deferrals until an adult self is revealed, like meaning in a sentence. With Stockton, I am not specifically equating queer with LGBTQ identity, but loosely using it to call forth children who, while “hung in suspense”, are involved in non-reproductive or non-normative forms of intimacy, loving and futurity. This will include adults who are playful or who exhibit some of the ways that the residues of childhood conflicts continue to
impress upon their subjective realities. It will also include children who are precocious in their development, and children who stray from assumptions of what is developmentally appropriate. Queerness, in this project, signals that which prompts detours in the relentless trajectory of development from infancy to reasoned adulthood. Adam Phillips (1998) makes the point that, “The child—unlike the adult—is not merely compensating for not being an adult, or for not being self-sufficient, because there is no purpose in the child’s life other than living it. In other words, it is not the child who believes in something called development” (p.17). Because dominant narratives of childhood development rely on an assumption of the child’s asexuality, producing a theory of the child via queer theory becomes a playful, generative and political project that redescribes human development. While negotiating with and resisting conceits to normative development theories in the immediacy of material violences inflicted on material children, I work towards a contribution to theories of queer childhood with assistance from psychoanalysis’ emphasis on the reparative potential of re-describing and creatively interpreting reality.⁶

From Sedgwick’s (1991) discerning work on the proto-gay child to Stockton’s (2009) and Halberstam’s (2011) more recent declarations that childhood is an essentially queer experience, theories of childhood have been made better by inclusion of queer theory’s difficult questions concerning normalizing procedures that govern sexuality. The introduction to Curiouser, Bruhm and Hurley’s anthologizing of essays which have reflected on the queerness of childhood, devotes a full page to outlining instances where its authors and allies were threatened with censorship and surveillance for sexualizing

⁶ Chapter 2, specifically, offers a more detailed engagement with this point.
children (2004 p.xxxiii). Thinking childhood and queer at once continues to make some people very nervous. My work owes debt to those who have done so: Sedgwick (1991), Edelman (2004), Stockton (2009), Halberstam (2011), Munoz (2009), Probyn (1995) and Berlant (2004), for example. To this body of work I add a Freudian theory of the unconscious, and, specifically, object relations theory, and an interest in theories of teaching and learning. My use of psychoanalysis expresses itself very differently than Lee Edelman’s reliance on Lacan’s social imaginary in what is perhaps the most controversial publication on queer culture and the uses of the Child (No Future: Queer Theory and The Death Drive, 2004). Edelman understands queerness as death, and asks that we accede to the death drive, opting out of reproductive futurism in an anti-social embrace of the radical potential of undermining the ubiquitous ‘cult of the Child’.

While influential to my thinking, the discontinuous temporalities that the queerness of childhood captures cannot be conjured within Edelman’s framework. Because, for Edelman, the child is a kind of ‘anti-queer’ that provides justification for the reproduction of straight culture, his work faces a limit in the context of this project. Taking a different route through psychoanalytic literature, of particular interest to this dissertation are the psychic processes of identification, loss, splitting, transference and affective attachment, as explained by Freud and re-worked by Object Relations theorists Melanie Klein and D.W. Winnicott. Complimented by post-colonial theory, specifically, modernity’s cataloguing of people as ‘things’, I engage in a discussion of how entanglements between sciences of childhood and sciences of race have justified colonial and imperial interventions. Reading Klein and Winnicott alongside (post)colonial
theories of childhood helps to quarry the complex affiliations between cultural
descriptions of human development and psychic interiority.

*Taking Care of Children: Aggression and Growth in the Warm Shadow of Another*

My associative belonging to this project is in part an attempt to work through
ambivalent feelings towards my experiences working in residential facilities (group
homes and shelters) which house children and youth. Prior to and concurrent with the
early stages of graduate work, I was employed as a ‘Child and Youth Worker’ (and have
more recently been employed to teach students in this field of study). Offering respite
from violence (defined in variant ways, including the violence of homelessness), inside of
the residential facilities where I worked, punitive measures of discipline and
uncompromising responses to aggression and anger occurred alongside revolutionary
circuits of care and devotions to alternative education. Many of the children and youth I
was employed to support identified as LGBTQ, and a part of my role was to facilitate a
confidential support group for them. While there, I began to notice how these children
and youth’s aggressions were often a cover for sadness made from a loss of belonging
(especially for those who voluntarily left or were apprehended from homes deemed too
violent to live in). Because so many of the children/youth who visit shelters and stay in
group homes have suffered from violence, it was necessary to acquire an ability to detect
symptoms of trauma. Many who inhabit and are employed by residential institutions that
provide care for children and youth recognize aggression as a yearning to be recognized.
At a psychical level, in psychoanalytic terms, aggression amounts to a struggle to
integrate love and hate, and to live in the world amongst others. I also began to think about how cultural stereotypes of what is developmentally appropriate for children and youth were incommensurate to the experiences of those I worked with.

My scholarship braids the tensions I felt doing this work, and general ambivalence towards the project of assuming care for children and youth, with psychoanalytic theories of the unconscious, to ask: How might the provision of care for marginalized children be bettered through a recognition that both adults and children express themselves beyond what they know? I am interested in how, through reconceptualizing psycho-educational support, practitioners and educators can assist children and youth in re-narrating themselves outside of trajectories of development that refuse the complexity of their emotional experience. An appreciation of what Freud deemed the irredeemable conflict between the child’s instincts and the demands that culture places on it, is vital to this inquiry. Theories of human development that do not attend to the marks that queerness can leave on a child’s orientation to the future cannot engage with the negative affects and aggression that form in children who struggle to become in a world that is hostile to difference.

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7 Freud contributes a theory of aggression as fundamental to human existence. In Civilization and its Discontents (1930), he probes the social injunction “Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself” (1973, p. 47) and proposes that, perhaps, the neighbor is not worthy of love and may have more “claim to my hostility and even my hatred” (p.47). He finds that civilization, in the service of Eros, “aims at binding the members of a community together in a libidinal way as well as employs every means to that end” (p.45). He then, though, asserts that “the element of truth behind all this, which people are so ready to disavow, is that men are not gentle creatures who want to be loved...they are, on the contrary, creatures among whose endowments is to be reckoned a powerful share of aggressiveness” (p.48). It is “this inclination to aggression” which is “the factor which disturbs our relations with our neighbor and which forces civilization into such a high expenditure of energy” (p.49).
Assessments of children’s development that are bereft of recognition that living in a world which “privileges that which [one] can never be” (Cheng, 2001, p.7), have a difficult time supporting children who refuse to or cannot cohere under the circumstances of becoming that are set out for them. Childhood innocence is not a privilege afforded to all in the same amounts: the overrepresentation of Aboriginal, queer, racialized and almost exclusively poor children and youth who rely on state support for housing, demonstrates this. The sites in which I worked add flesh to Lee Edelman’s polemic, a work I return to over and over again to make sense of how it is possible to entwine a child who might be found in such an institution with the Child he summons. Edelman, throughout this dissertation, helps me to question what kinds of violence inhere in the cult of the Child and to ask which kinds of childhood cannot be accounted for in his argument. Queer childhood, for example, fails to cohere in No Future because he places the Child in a binary relation with queerness. I am moved by Edelman’s description of how “the campaign towards ‘growing-up’” is one that “hastens us to stay away from too much pleasure, to avoid the violent passage beyond the bounds of identity, meaning and law” (p.25). I also wonder how homophobia produces a resiliency in queer childhoods which can, when nurtured, lend itself to a rich creativity. Therefore, I work towards an expansion of the term ‘queer’ to include creative re-workings of human development theory.

Neoliberal and conservative imperatives routinely neutralize child and youth shelters and group homes’ radical potential for creative responses to aggression, to homelessness, and to physical and sexual violence. Vexed by neoliberal policies which
ask for proof of their success in order to secure funding, to demonstrate a likelihood of empirically and quantitatively fixing aggression and pain, the creative potential of these institutions is often foreclosed. Neoliberal distaste for state welfare, alongside a desire to keep child/youth homelessness hidden and aggression at bay, often makes it difficult for these institutions to thrive as funding is distributed based on a program’s ability to show how their clients will be useful to the nation’s future. These programs must then address their subjects as capital in configuration, imagining business skills as opportunity for individual and national repair while suggesting that these skills can alter, in already knowable and measurable ways, the trajectory of their participant’s lives. Intriguingly, this logic hinges on measurable cures for individual aggression which suppress the violence of class and demand for a preemptive ability to determine what is important to know in the future.

Crafting a theory of childhood that uses psychoanalysis’ accounts of instinctual and affective life, and is inspired by the children and youth that I worked with helps to imagine a new world of child care. It is important to me that this imagining aspires to newness and innovation while being attentive to re-emergences and traces of contracts made in capitalist modernity, as they recur in prevalent notions of childhood innocence. Thinking of the emotional and affective life of shelters and group homes inside of the

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8 Margaret Little and Lynne Marks describe how “Neoliberalism is a popular philosophy with roots in classic liberalism that prioritizes economic growth over all other goals, emphasizing privatization, deregulation, marketization, decentralization, and fiscal austerity” (2010, p.192). Their concern is a reduction of welfare in Ontario and British Columbia. My concern, here, is the impact that reductions and resistances to state funding of social and arts programs for marginalized and at-risk children/youth have on the fostering of their creative capacities, generally, and providing housing and food security, specifically. In The Twilight of Equality? Neoliberalism, Cultural Politics, and the Attack on Democracy (2003), Lisa Duggan offers a useful discussion of how neoliberal economic policies make the reduction of poverty and homelessness an untenable mission.
University is not, for me, a conflict. Though attending University is rarely an option for these children and youth, I do think that partaking in the intellectual project of re-shaping definitions of childhood can help to provide better resources and care for children.

Pressing the University to think about the psychic impacts of class on a student’s encounter with education generates critical questions. There is so much to learn from the resiliency displayed by young residents of shelters and group homes, many of whom are ‘growing-up’ in the aftermath of personal trauma. One of my aims in this project is to develop conditions of learning that are attentive to the implications of trauma on the child’s relationship to education.

A second theme of associative belonging, and deeply related to the above: This is a reflection on the damage waged against those who grow-up queer in a culture that cannot, though it sometimes tries, creatively support such growth. Though I am less interested in recounting stories of ‘coming-out’ as a queer child or youth, than in rehabilitating all childhoods as potentially queer. Potentiality and innocence, the definitive signifiers of childhood, make childhood a queer experience because it comes before mastery and reason. The more innocent we make children, argues Stockton, the more strange they become. Stockton points out that many adults do not believe in the possibility of a queer child. But, “No one believes more firmly in ‘gay’ children than do other children—most especially children of a prejudicial sort, who ‘out’ any children they believe are acting strangely or any boy or girl who they happen to dislike” (p. 48). The act of believing in queer childhood, in a growth that resists heteronormativity, sustains this dissertation. Outside of advances towards marriage, reproduction, and ‘appropriate’
expressions of desire, children move and think in creative and inventive ways. To queer childhood means to disrupt kinship and progeny; it means to illuminate how heteronormative developmental theories and curriculum can make queerness intolerable. Queerness ruptures assumptions about the child’s future and undoes anticipated congruency. I use queerness here, also, as a means to reference the capacity for creative living. I work towards a definition of queerness that denotes something new, beyond what has been imagined. In this sense, my conversation in chapter 2 about the psychic drive towards creativity is a theoretical movement towards expanding the conceptual terrain of both childhood studies and queer theory.

*Klein, Winnicott and Learning*

In the 1930s, school psychologists Kenneth and Mamie Clark offered a foundational intervention into thought concerning children’s psychological constitutions. The Clarks, trained social psychologists, conducted the now infamous “Doll Tests”, a series of assessments and observations on children and their racial identifications (Cheng, 2001; Marriott, 1998). Attempting to measure “how racism and segregation damaged the self-esteem of black children, aged 3-7”, the Clarks presented children with four dolls, identical but two brown and two white (Marriott, 424-425). They proceeded to ask the children questions meant to test their preferences, identifications, and self-esteem. Consistently, black children identified with and chose the white dolls as preferable and good. David Marriott describes how some of the questions left children in tears and
inconsolable: “[T]hese children seemed to carry a burden of representation that they perceive but do not understand” (p. 425).

The “Doll Test” findings were used in *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), the historic legal case that found racial segregation in schools to be measurably harmful to children. In a decisive move, a judge found the psychological and emotional impact of racism to be judicial territory: school segregation, it was determined, affected the emotions and psychological constitutions of children and therefore needed abolishing. In the Brown case, a historic precedent was set as the “subjective impact at the site of racial injury” (Cheng, p. x) could be cause for a grievance appraised by the law.

This decision is momentous for many reasons, but one of those reasons must be the expansion in the notion of justice to accommodate the ‘intangible’ effects of racism. The original Brown ruling then may be said to be an unprecedented judgment about the necessity of examining the invisible but tenacious aspect of racism—of allowing racial grief to have its say even if it cannot definitely speak in the language of material grievance (Cheng, p. 5).

The ability to quantify psychological damage was shown possible. In her reading of the Clark’s study and its use in this judicial decision, Cheng (2001) believes that the question becomes “not why we *can* use psychoanalysis but why we *already* do. That is, as shown from Brown…the politics of race has always spoken in the language of psychology (p. 28).

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9 This supreme court ruling overturned a 1896 decision (*Plessy v. Ferguson*), which had upheld Jim Crow laws.
Settling injury in a court of law, though, raises a difficult question: “What kind of social claim can the psyche make at all?” (x).  

Psychical life can be extraneous to judicial order and educational policy, and grief more spirited and irrepressible than socialized narrative logics of grievances. In the Brown case, Cheng finds a crucial illustration of America’s exuberance for grievances and discomfort with grief. Her intention in examining the case is to suggest that we do not know enough about the “fraught network of ongoing psychical negotiation” that propels racism, and is thus interested in “the connection between subjectivity and social damage” (p. 7). Central in Cheng’s theorizing is Freud’s model of melancholic attachment, wherein the subject “sustains itself through the ghostly emptiness of a lost other” (Cheng, p. 10). She believes that North America’s attachment to grievances maintains the “elaborate structure of loss-but-not-loss” that characterizes melancholia as different from working through grief (p. 9). In The Melancholy of Race, Cheng makes a statement that becomes significant to my thinking: Rather than prescribing how we as a nation might go about “getting over” history, “it is useful to ask what it means for social, political, and subjective beings to grieve” (p. 7). In relation to Cheng’s insights, and her concentrated reflection on a test of children’s educational development, I raise inquiry

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10 Cheng insists that the “psychical experience cannot be reduced to a mere replication or a fully compliant repository for social injunction” (p. x).

11 In some people, Freud theorized, the loss of an ideal or object produces melancholia instead of mourning. Melancholia, like mourning, is a reaction to the loss of a loved object. But, here, “an attachment of the libido to a particular person, had at one time existed; then, owing to a real slight or disappointment coming from this loved person, the object-relationship was shattered. The result was not the normal one of a withdrawal of the libido from this object and a displacement of it on to a new one, but something different…[T]he free libido was not displaced on to another object; it was withdrawn into the ego (1955:249). The melancholic is stuck in the grieving process and cannot work-through the loss of the object. There is a descriptive quality in Freud’s writing on this dilemma that Cheng finds useful in an examination of the paradoxes of grief as it relates to racial formations in North America.
into how psychical life poses problems for education, and how psychoanalytic methods of analysis can uniquely extrapolate unconscious defenses against newness and attachments to lost objects. Because Cheng is so eloquently able to make the case that psychoanalysis is useful to cultural theory because it understands “private desires to be enmeshed in social relations” (p. 27), her work is inspirational to this project. In a “nation at ease with grievance but not with grief” (p. 9), psychoanalysis might help to craft a curricular grammar for grief and loss that is not melancholically stuck, but moves towards reparative futures.

Psychoanalysis, in its best form, resists standard measures of judgment and emphasizes the utility of curiosity and description. Psychoanalysis may also be understood as the leading theory of child development in the 20th Century. Infantile sexuality, for Freud, is paradigmatic for later relationships, interests and fantasies. Adam Phillips explains that “Freud found the passions and perplexities of the child exemplary; the child with her consuming interests, her inexhaustible questions, and her insisting body. The child who is learning to make mistakes, figuring out how to become a person…” (p. xiv). A Freudian, Phillips maintains that education is an impossible project. Because of the unconscious and the force of the dream, one “can never know in advance education’s outcome” (p. 56). “Instinctual passions”, Freud (1973) asserted, “are stronger than reasonable energy” (p. 49). Deborah Britzman’s theories of learning, pioneering experiments with lacing psychoanalysis into the discipline of Education, are also influential in this dissertation. For her, education is a constellation of “social relation”, a “quality of the psychical”, an “institution” and “a social imaginary” (2003, p. 8).
Britzman, like Phillips, asks how dream-work, so central to the unconscious, makes education a project fraught with unpredictable outcomes. In Britzman’s (2006) work, “care is given to the vicissitudes of curiosity and what stops it short” (p. 6).

Education, according to Britzman should be attentive to the student’s psychical growth, which she explains as: “Learning to give up magical and omnipotent thinking, noticing when the desire for mastery and absolute knowledge domesticates curiosity and our capacity to be surprised, having to enter into a law greater than oneself, and accepting our own fragility, dependence, and faults” (2003, p. 21). Britzman’s assertion that learning always involves conflict is formative to my assessment of the methods commonly used to consider children’s ability to acquire knowledge about sex and gender. Education hopes to make an interference into the student’s world so that he or she might grasp at new meanings. But with Britzman, we might note that there is not only interference from the outside, there is also an interference that occurs within the learner:

Learning is a problem, but it has to do with something other than the material of pedagogy. We might begin to pry apart the conditions of learning from that which conditions the desire to learn and the desire to ignore. We might wonder how one comes to be susceptible to the call of ideas… What seems lost in these very different discussions on pedagogy is the sense that learning is a relearning of one’s history of learning—new editions of old conflicts—and that it is precisely this unconscious force that renders the work of learning so difficult in intimacy and in public (1998, p.5).
Britzman’s theory that new editions of old conflicts appear as central to both our ability to learn and to our rejection of knowledge, gives us another way to think about the education of children. Many of the child’s emotional responses (and also resistances) to learning, and the adult’s insistence that it must teach the child what it must know, are partly the result of the work of the unconscious. The unconscious and its central tension between the pursuit of pleasure and unpleasure, interferes with the ability for education to straightforwardly ‘engineer development’. But, if education must interfere with both psychic and social development, Britzman asks: “then how does education decide which force of interference shall matter?” (p. 9). I suggest that in the context of the child’s education on gender and sexuality, particularly, the decision is premised on a series of conflicts and repressions that the adult has experienced.

From its inception, psychoanalysis has understood the formation of psychic devices in childhood as crucial to individuation and to one’s capacity for relationality (ability to deal with the cost of living amongst others). In this dissertation, the school of object relations figures centrally. This is because it premises the acquisition of subjectivity on a relationship to the Other, and thus is useful in thinking about how we build attachments in the social world. Object relations theorists emphasize the child’s struggle to adapt to a sometimes hostile world which refuses to actualize their psychic wishes and desire of omnipotent control. Object relations theory describes infants’ tendency to carry around the impressions left on their psyches by others, mostly parents,

12 Britzman (2004) writes: “In positing education as a question of interference (as opposed to an engineered development), we have a very different epistemology and ontology of actions and actors: on that insists that the inside of actors is as complicated as the outside, and that this combination is the grounds of education” (p. 6).
and turn people, events and impressions into objects which reappear throughout their lives. Emphasizing the matrix of mother-infant development, object relations is concerned with the provision of a ‘good enough’ environment in which the child can learn to manage its anxiety and resolve conflicts between inner desires and outer reality.

D. W. Winnicott’s concept of the ‘good enough’ mother helped to reshape popular approaches to parenting in Britain in the 1950s and 60s. Winnicott, a child pediatrician, analyst, and author, suggested that the natural mother naturally relates to her infant and that damage is waged when there is too much expert intervention made into their emotional dialogue. Winnicott’s ‘good enough’ mother is not perfect, she fails and miscalculates the amount of food and attention that the child requires. She is an ambivalent care provider, dedicated to her infant but exhausted by sacrifices she must make for its well being and subsequent resentments towards the child. She is not ideal, nor is she terrible; she often disappoints but learns to adapt to the emotional and physical needs of the child, providing comfort as it acclimatizes to external reality. Gradually, she should continue to fail to adapt to the child’s wants, helping the child to withstand disappointment and to tolerate frustrations. According to Winnicott (1971), the infant can “actually come to gain from the experience of frustration since incomplete adaptation to need makes objects real, that is to say hated as well as loved” (p. 11). Winnicott’s commentary on the emotional negotiations exchanged between the mother and baby bequeaths education with an important theoretical grammar. Importing Winnicott’s notion of ‘good enough’ parentage to the site of education offers an understanding of the
compromise made in the teacher’s and the student’s ability to relinquish control over knowledge, and to withstand the ways that they each frustrate the other.

A good enough education comforts the student while tolerating frustration which results when the collaborative project of teaching and learning requires relinquishing of omnipotent fantasies of ownership over knowledge. Winnicott’s philosophies on transitional objects and transitional space, his studies of the infant’s first ‘not-me’ possessions, also work in this dissertation to strengthen deliberations on the reciprocal relationship between inner and outer worlds. Cultural productions, specifically film, will be theorized as transitional objects, which exist in the relational space between the psyche and the social. Winnicott’s theory of play as a healthy pursuit for both child and adult, and creativity as necessary to human existence, will help me to build a method for interpreting aesthetic renderings of childhood.

With Winnicott, Melanie Klein, another leading figure in object relations theory, is vital to this project. Melanie Klein’s children, patients and progeny, are creative and monstrous figures in her writing. They are described as creatively at work, building a social world out of phantasy and imagination, while sometimes wanting to eat their mothers and younger siblings. Not faithful to history or fantasy, the inner world that Klein ascribes to infancy and childhood is remarkably complex. Klein believed that unconscious phantasy (spelled with a ph to distinguish itself from conscious life) is both damaging and constructive to the infant’s ability to build a self.¹³ Social life is underlain with unconscious phantasy, for Klein the child’s struggle is to manage orders from the inner world while adapting to the requirements of sociality. Klein told a story about the

¹³ In chapter two I elaborate on Klein’s theory of phantasy.
child’s creativity that provokes my interest in art’s capacity to facilitate teaching and learning. Her account of the psychic defense of ‘splitting’ good from bad, used by the infant in an effort to manage anxiety, is crucial to my theorizing of the pedagogical potentials of cultural production. In the ‘paranoid-schizoid position’, the infant can only understand an object as ‘good’ or ‘bad’, splitting objects into pieces so that they reify this binary division. When the object frustrates the infant’s desires, its inner world is populated with destructive phantasies, waging war against that which denies satisfaction. In the ‘depressive position’, Klein envisioned the child recognizing that an object could be both good and bad, able to satisfy and refuse their wishes. For example, to adapt to the social world, the infant must recognize the mother to be outside of itself, another, whose breast can satisfy when it offers a feeding and deprive when it does not.

Klein’s theory of psychic development, suggests Britzman, cannot be normatively developmental because “each of these positions requires the other, and there is no absolute boundary between them” (2003, p.144). In adulthood, the depressive position is not secured; still, we split bad from good in an attempt to defend against a world that is antagonistic to omnipotent mastery. Eve Sedgwick’s reanimation of Klein’s concept of the depressive position, at the site of reading, will be crucial to my statements on reparative processes at work in aesthetic and artistic representations of childhood.

Queer Aesthetic Practice

The archive that I gather includes children who ask questions about sexuality (and, in one case, defends against the adult’s questioning), mourn the arrival of puberty,
point out the adult’s tyranny, and learn to live with loss. Readings of *This is England, Ma Vie en Rose, Tomboy* and *Monsieur Lazhar* ask what provides a future for the queer child. Here, critical readings of films that use child characters are experiments in reparative reading (Sedgwick, 2003) which emphasize queerness as creativity. The medium of film is treated as a resource for symbolizing both conscious and unconscious fantasies. Film is isolated for its ability to offer the viewer both entertainment and an opportunity to confront what has previously been left unexamined on a conscious level. The films chosen have also been used repeatedly in my undergraduate teaching practice and have each shown the potential to shift student’s affective relationship to non-normative gendered and sexual practices, national belonging, and childhood development. Winnicott’s notion of transitional phenomena will help to explain film as transitional object that can provide a facilitating environment for learning, as it creates a psychological space where stereotypes and deeply held conceptual assumptions can be worked through.

Because I am interested in the psychic function of art, Sedgwick’s small essay, “Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading, or, You’re So Paranoid, You Probably think This Essay Is About You” (2003) provides relentless incentive for thinking about affective encounters with literary and cinematic children who confound what we think we know. In an effort to think other than dualistically, to recognize that good and bad are knotted at every turn, Sedgwick asks her reader what futures might be assembled when we read with an orientation to the unpredictable and hopeful instead of approaching a text or social problem already knowing what oppressive relations will be found.
[T]o read from a reparative position is to surrender the knowing, anxious paranoid determination that no horror, however apparently unthinkable, shall ever come to the reader as new; to a reparatively positioned reader, it can seem realistic and necessary to experience surprise. Because there can be terrible surprises, however, there can also be good ones. Hope, often a fracturing, even a traumatic thing to experience, is among the energies by which the reparatively positioned reader tries to organize the fragments and part-objects she encounters or creates. Because the reader has room to realize that the future may be different from the present, it is also possible for her to entertain such profoundly painful, profoundly relieving, ethically crucial possibilities as that the past, in turn, could have happened differently from the way it actually did (p. 146).

Sedgwick (2003) makes a queer reading practice out of Melanie Klein’s depressive position, in which the child acknowledges that the mother is both good and bad. Reparative reading and its aspiration for a new temporality, a queer possibility, is a response to “the dogged, defensive narrative stiffness of paranoid temporality” which assumes that “yesterday can’t be allowed to have differed from today and tomorrow must be even more so, takes its shape from a generational narrative that’s characterized by…regularity and repetitiveness” (p.147). Settling the child’s future before it has happened, in an attempt to pin onto the child what the adult remembers of its own past, is a paranoid move. Adopting a reparative orientation to reading representations of children and childhood, a never stable and always contingent endeavor, allows an opening into
dialogue about how to care for and to teach children while assuming the potential for their questions to undermine the adult’s knowledge.

Paying attention to how aesthetic renderings of childhood satisfy the emotional needs of adults, I locate this work in relation to a history of psychoanalytic theory that makes claims for aesthetic production as a site to work through and symbolize loss (Kofman, 1988; Hagman, 2005; Georgis, 2013). By reading this literature between and across critical histories of childhood, I hope to initiate a conversation that considers the play of the unconscious in relationships to our own childhoods and to aesthetic representations of childhood. Undertaking an aesthetic project is not an attempt to “escape from the social realm”, as Jose Munoz clarifies, because aesthetics can “map future social relations” (2009, p.1). Art, Munoz proposes, contains blueprints from future relations not yet realized (p. 1). Edward Said has put it this way: Cultural production cannot be understood as “antiseptically quarantined from…worldly affiliations” (1993, p. xiv). Art, as cultural production, cannot be discontinuous from inner life. The interpretive context in which I study films resists positing new ethical truths about children and childhood, rather, it uses psychoanalytic theory to dispose of surety of meaning and asks how individual feelings about children and childhood are tied to organizations of the social.

In my filmic archive I pay particular attention to children who wrestle with masculinity. I am interested in the narrative construction of injured masculinities and also masculinities that injure (sometimes, I think, they are the same thing). The boys and men that are presented in the films I interpret depict varied examples of how gender
presentation is determined by a complex network of libidinal ties, conscious desires, and unknown but deeply felt phantasies. This is a project concerned with gender violence, the violence of gender, and children who acquire an education in resiliency while negotiating constrictions of normative and assumed sexualities. The films I read portray children who are failing to learn and in so doing, hint at the uses of failure as a resource. When children’s education and care is preoccupied with return and anticipation of a knowable future, children are treated to masterful lessons on becoming, often in the place of ethical listening that is attentive to the difficult questions children may ask. These films provide a narrative description of growth that occurs because and despite of failure to master gender, race and sex.

Chapter Outlines

Each chapter reads a film that brings queer childhood to life, and animates a necessary intergenerational cast of characters which the child encounters (pedagogue, parent, peer). From these films, I excavate examples of children who make salient an education that renders queer growth thinkable. My readings of the films emphasize aesthetic negotiations with loss and learning. Tracing visual narrations of the ways these children grow, sometimes in resisting and fragmented ways, helps to explain aesthetic encounters with childhood as potentially reparative of what the adult has lost or traded for the opportunity to grow-up. However, what is hopeful about the films is not that they mimetically represent reality, but that they provide a new way to imagine relationships between the past and the future (both individual and social). The growths depicted in the
films are disturbances to linear, chronological journeys away from childhood and into adulthood. They find pleasure in blurring the borders between childhood and adulthood, with adolescence often hovering nearby.

Chapter one struggles with the task of bringing the child into history. It is difficult to write a generalized chronological beginning and end to childhood, both as stage of life and cultural idea: Legal, educational, sociological and psychological definitions of childhood and the boundaries they place between infancy, childhood and adolescence are full of contradictory and dissimilar ideas of when childhood begins and ends. Due to such complications, and the tortuous and serpentine movements childhood made in its route towards popular recognition as a life stage distinct from adulthood, telling the history of childhood is complicated. In this first chapter, I collect alternative histories of childhood, paying homage to Philippe Aries (1962), Jacqueline Rose (1984), and Carolyn Steedman (1995), each of who have left enduring marks on the discipline of childhood studies. Rather than telling an airtight history of childhood, I attempt to historicize a sentiment connected to childhood: Innocence. I find that the innocent child is instrumentalized in regulatory surveillance of sexual practice and racialized accounts of what it means to be human. Reducing the child to innocence, a “blank page”, explains James Kincaid, “does not interfere with our projections” (1998, p.10). Therefore, a rhetoric of childhood innocence does not impinge on the adult’s transference of inner conflict onto their idea of childhood. This chapter, in line with Bruhm and Hurley (2004), proposes that: “The very effort to flatten the narrative of the child into a story of innocence has some queer effect” (p.xiv).
I begin the chapter with a discussion of the United Nations Convention on The Rights of the Child (1989) in order to think through the complications of endowing the child with self-determination and human rights, while simultaneous attempts are made to preserve its innocence and lack of complexity. I suggest that to think children must be protected, the adult must have an active theory of childhood. And, I consider how sexuality is involved in the making of this theory. My research also shows how histories of race and colonial expansion have relied on the infantalization of some subjects in order to venerate others as archetypal humans. Anne McLeod (1995) helps to explore how the infantalization of racial others “gave to politics and economics a concept of natural time as familial” (p. 38). White masculinity, as telos of development, has ruled both the family and humanity, casting others as living archives of backwardness and irrationality. In reading backwards across colonial definitions of humanness, childhood comes to be understood as a regulatory mechanism of hierarchy. This chapter begins to contend with tensions between literature that favours the figural child and literature that privileges material children as research object. This is also, though, the beginning of my recognition of the usefulness of this tension to both theories of the child’s psycho-sexual development, and insight into how the vestiges of childhood events are condensed in the adult’s approach to children and childhood.

Chapter two continues a discussion of how child protagonists can be used to mend contemporary conflict surrounding personal and national history. Here I develop a critical method for interpreting representations of childhood in aesthetic production. Relying on psychoanalytic theories of aesthetic engagement, beginning with Freud and moving
through literatures which expand on his notions of what drives affective encounters with
art,\textsuperscript{14} I ask how film can be used to reconcile childhood with the adult’s epistemological
development and unconscious phantasy life. Though I discuss how films, as art objects,
might have their own unconscious life, operating as symptomatic disclosures of inner
struggles, emphasis is placed on the psychic function of creativity more generally.
Centering a reading of Shane Meadow’s \textit{This is England (2006)}, this chapter uses
psychoanalytic theories of aesthetic impulses to suggest that autobiographical returns to
childhood can reanimate and repair personal histories of the cost of learning to live in
relation to the other. \textit{This is England} tells the story of a boy left without a sense of
belonging after the death of his father, and illuminates how nationalism, racism and
violent masculinity inhibit his ability to mourn.

Eve Sedgwick’s stunning account of reparative practices helps to explain
Meadow’s film as attuned to psychic damage caused by violent and melancholic
masculinities. Fundamental to the work done in this chapter is engagement with
Winnicott’s notion of potential space (1971) and Melanie Klein’s descriptions of the
child’s creative urges. Winnicott and Klein each diverge, in their own way, from Freud’s
original thinking on what psychoanalysis can offer a consideration of the creative
impulse. From their theories and clinical observations I cull a reading practice that is
used in the following two chapters.

\textsuperscript{14} Andre Green’s describes affective encounters: “[O]ne may imagine the affective process as the
anticipation of a meeting between the subject’s body and another body. The affect would seem to
resemble both a preparation for such an eventuality and the effect of foreseeing it in an accelerated
way” (1999, p.312). His description may be useful in thinking about the meeting of the subject and the
art object.
Chapters three and four move more firmly into the territory of education and are concerned with learning, pedagogy and schooling. Chapter three, “Learning and the Work of Mourning in Philippe Falardeau’s Monsieur Lazhar” is concerned with how children learn to grieve, and learn to lose, when their educators are susceptible to tropes of childhood as naivety. Further, it unpacks the trope of childhood naivety as a psychic defense which guards against the adult’s instability of surety and histories of loss. Deborah Britzman tells us that,

Freud’s theory of the transference began with the puzzle of why as a student he viewed his teacher as so much…wiser. Why do students take teachers so seriously that they even fantasize the teacher’s life beyond the classroom? Freud’s answer was that he transferred the love of his parent onto other adults; the libidinal ties of his youth were now new editions of these old conflictive ties (1998, p.40).

Monsieur Lazhar (2011) tells a beautiful story of how individual psychical histories become operative in meetings between student and teacher. And how in the child’s imagining of the teacher’s life beyond the classroom, powerful things, as important as formal curricular exchanges, take place. Like This Is England, it tells of the horrors of nationalism and the psychic costs of national belonging. The film takes an elementary school classroom, in Montreal, Quebec, as the backdrop against which it narrates a teacher and his students’ mutual grieving. I use psychoanalytic theories of

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15 Britzman notes that the “terms of transference suggest something yet to be resolved, something that, perhaps by its very nature, resists resolution. What is transferred to the new encounter is not the content of the old relationship but the dynamical force of affects—including the resistance to the relation” (p. 34). In the transference, she explains, it is not only love or authority that is transferred, but also our first experiences with the need for “giving oneself over to the need for love” (p. 34).
trauma, an impression which later becomes energetically determinant in a subject’s relational life, to help explain why Monsieur Bachir Lazhar’s pedagogical convictions, including a belief that his young students will be grow by learning to grieve, are groundbreaking. Seeking refuge in Canada from political terror experienced in Algeria, in his classroom, this teacher and his students forge inventive and new relations to each other and to diaspora, which give credence to loss. Bachir arrives to replace a teacher who has committed suicide and though he cannot completely console the children’s grief, Monsieur Lazhar animates a reparative story of the emotional life of transgenerational conversation about subjectivities made through absences and arrivals.

Chapter four reads two films that dramatize children’s difficult relationships with schooling and education, and narrate queerness’ influence on biographies of learning. Alain Berliner’s Ma Vie en Rose (1997) depicts a mournful childhood which, no matter how hard it tries, cannot synchronize itself with heteronormative expectations of growth. Ludovic, the film’s child protagonist, is growing sideways and radically undermining expectations of how sexuality and gender should form in a child. Ludovic’s urgent question: “Am I a boy or a girl”, produces inquiry into how an adult can listen ethically to the difficult questions that children ask. My engagement with the film mobilizes psychoanalytic models of the unconscious which destabilize confidence in the subject’s ability to cognitively absorb knowledge which is abstracted from the demands of inner life. This child’s unintended though nonetheless salient political rebellion exasperates governing knowledges about what sorts of gendered and sexed futures children should fortify. I end this chapter in an encounter with Celine Sciamma’s 2011 film, Tomboy.
Schooling and gender are inextricably tied in this film. In the child’s enactment of a struggle to stave off the school year, and its obligatory disclosure of birth names, *Tomboy* captures a child’s resolute fight to determine its own future.

I conclude with a discussion on what queer theory can do for the disciplinary field of childhood education. Conversations about how queer and LGBTQ studies might enhance childhood studies have begun to emerge (Davies and Robinson, 2010; Janmohamed, 2010; Robinson, 2005, 2008; Ruffolo, 2009). Here I trace arguments made in the field of Childhood Education concerning children’s and teacher’s sexualities with an attention to tendencies to stabilize queerness as identity, instead of preserving something contingent, a "site of collective contestation" (Butler, 1993, p.228). Queer theory’s recent interests and disinvestments in futurity help to conceptualize an alternate, queer temporality which can support children who grow otherwise and awkwardly outside of heteronormative assumptions of development. Because children denote the future, a queer insistence on the contemporary instability of what lives in the past creatively usurps predetermined futures. When the child’s growth holds traces of resistance to paranoid orientations we might glimpse an indeterminate future made of contingency and affective encounters that don’t calibrate heteronormativity, but locate hope in the wreckage of homophobia. In a discussion of the *It Gets Better Campaign* (2010), I ask how attentiveness to the accretion of history, inner and outer, which produces subjectivity, might not secure a future but can clarify the persisting ways that homophobia impacts what it means to grow-up.
Chapter 1: The Child’s Right to Childhood: Innocence and Sexual Subjectivity

There will be anxious adults who fail the child as they worry over the failed child.
Deborah Britzman

In 1989 a transnational policy was created that cements childhood innocence in judicial terrain. The “United Nations Convention on the Rights of The Child” was written with the goal of protecting all children from harsh forms of punishment and is the first legally binding instrument that aims to protect children’s rights. The most ratified international treaty in history, the Convention aims to ensure that children are the “subject of their own rights” and that they may “grow-up in an environment of happiness”. Ratified by all nations save for two: Somalia and The United States, the Declaration emphasizes children’s exceptional need for protection from harm. Somalia’s lack of a stable government has made it difficult to effectively adopt transnational treaties. The requirement to restructure laws concerning incarceration is a likely reason for the U.S. to neglect ratification of the Declaration. Canada signed the declaration in 1990 and ratified it in 1991. Despite collective cultural fantasies of the child as innocent, both Canada and The United States use extraordinary measures of discipline and punishment against some children. The disproportionate number of black youth imprisoned in the U.S. demonstrates some of how ideals of ‘childhood innocence’ are unequally distributed. In Canada, child welfare agencies continue to apprehend a

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16 From preface to Michael O’Loughlin’s The Subject of Childhood (2009).
18 There are also organizations and individuals (such as those from parentalrights.org and “Focus on the Family” who oppose ratification of the Convention on the grounds that it could encroach on the sovereignty of individual parents and potentially allow children access to information on sexuality).
disproportionate number of Aboriginal children from their families.\textsuperscript{19} Such inequalities point to how difference is both concealed and reified in the notion of a universal, innocent child; the image of a universal child glosses over the assorted ways that the state treats children.

Through a psychoanalytic lens, Elisabeth Young-Bruehl (2012) develops a working definition of ‘childism’: “a prejudice against children on the ground of a belief that they are property and can (or even should) be controlled, enslaved, or removed to serve adult needs” (37). In \textit{Childism: Confronting Prejudice Against Children} (2012), Young-Bruehl is concerned with the issue of incarcerating children. An extension of previous work on the psychic life of prejudice (1996), in \textit{Childism} she studies reasons for and effects of child abuse. America, she established, incarcerates alarming amounts of children, many of whom commit a crime by being homeless, ill or unable to be controlled by authority.\textsuperscript{20} Removing anti-social and ‘troubled’ children from the public sphere assures that they do not, publicly, contaminate beliefs in the natural state of childhood innocence. Young-Bruehl’s cataloguing of the unequal terrains of childhood innocence demonstrate that the telos of development, adulthood, continues to be denied to some based on raced and class affiliations.

The ways that adults phantasize about children, Young-Bruehl suggests, can be better understood through elaborations on how children serve adult’s psychic operations


\textsuperscript{20} In 1997, The 13\textsuperscript{th} Report of the Standing Committee on Justice and Legal Affairs, produced by Parliament of Canada reported that Canada’s rate of youth incarceration was twice that of the United States Retrieved from http://www.parl.gc.ca/Content/HOC/Archives/Committee/352/jula/reports/13_1997-04/chap3-e.html.
(she provides examples such as fetishistic behavior, projection and narcissism). People treat children as toys, as property, she explains, as they “project onto children different aspects of themselves that they cannot tolerate or need to get rid of, and these aspects can be classified generally as burdensomeness or badness, wildness, or rebelliousness” (p. 41). Thus, the construction of childhood innocence may be a screen for adult desire. Within this framework of thinking, the incarceration of an excessive amount of children or youth (or apprehension with the intention of placement in severely punitive institutions) is an effect of projecting onto children parts of ourselves that we cannot bear to hold.

How do children survive, benefit, or become inhibited by adult theories of childhood? What is psychically and socially gained from suggesting that the child is in need of adult protection? These questions ask that we consider the material and embodied impact of theories of childhood. What is challenging, even threatening, about this inquiry is that it necessitates a curiosity about what is left of childhood in the adult and may destabilize assumed disparities between childhood and adulthood. In this chapter I am interested in both the adult’s representations and uses of childhood, and the impacts of such usages on actual children. Positing that discursive constructions of childhood create the conditions against which a child develops, I explore the social implications of some figural and phantasmatic accounts of childhood. I ground my inquiry in two sites: 1). Theories of childhood sexuality, and 2). Child rights. Considering how children are treated within the realm of human rights, alongside a discursive analysis of definitions of childhood, generates a new approach to the subjectivity of the child because their pairing
emphasizes potential divergences between the lived experience of being a child and normative developmental theories of childhood. To have a theory of childhood sexuality, I suggest, there is a requirement for both the consideration of how definitions of childhood are premised on a series of adult conflicts and the recognition of the child as a living, breathing materiality. I call childhood sexuality ‘queer’ because its appearance is, generally, treated as non-normative, strange and curious. A notion of childhood as queer offers a mode of critical inquiry into the relationship between childhood as idea and child as materiality. I historicize the emergence of childhood as ontology and trace some of its contemporary social discourses, in order to better understand the limits and potential achievements of contemporary appeals to grant human rights to children.

For the child to exist as a viable and integral member of a political community, it must be recognized as possessing what Hannah Arendt calls “the right to have rights”. In 1951 Arendt published *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, in which she posits that what was exposed during the world wars was the illusory and abstracted nature of the discourse of ‘rights’. After the damage waged, which rendered many people stateless and exposed the human potential for evil, Arendt wondered what it could mean to live as human outside of the recognition of a nation-state. In order to be granted rights, one must be recognized as both citizen and human, and this recognition, she thought, must be made by a nation-state so that it may administer such rights. In this essay, Arendt discovers and considers that without recognition from a nation-state, one’s humanity was not recognized under international law. Arendt, I am suggesting, helps to provoke consideration of what it means for children’s humanity to be recognized under international law and what
attributes are necessary for its recognition. Human rights, Arendt shows us, are contingent and fragile. The child’s wild agency and dependency on adults, makes their rights a complicated problem. Arendt’s discussion of the contingent nature of human rights helps to illustrate the fragile application of those rights to children. Endowing children with rights is a complex process because it is adults who decide how those rights are administered.

An abstracted and universal concept of childhood cannot account for the variant ways that children are granted the right to education, food security or housing, for example. My analytical approach here is to read histories of childhood that summarize the child as social construction beside and against the necessity of granting all children social and political recognitions. At the base of my inquiry are suppositions drawn from the fields of psychoanalysis and queer theory. Primarily, this is because both offer provocations to linear models of human development and time, and both place conflict and loss at the inauguration of subjectivity. Both psychoanalysis and queer theory are used for their interpretive potential to re-describe childhood as both a material struggle for recognition and a discursive field that places limits on and induces hopefulness about what it is possible to become. In the context of my interest in the material impact of concepts of childhood, this chapter asks how critical theories that position childhood as a screen for the adult’s desires, epistemologies and politics can better support children’s rights to participate in the world.

I am particularly interested in defenses against the child’s right to knowledge about sex and gender, and to sexual subjectivity. This interest results in an exploration of
the insidious effect of theories of childhood sexuality on the lived realities of children. My discussion of the child’s sexuality is not meant to explain how to provide education to children, but to insist on recognizing the child’s curiosities concerning sexuality. In relation to the child’s education, rather than discuss how a teacher or a parent can transfer knowledge about sexuality onto a child, I mean to ask how the adult might listen ethically to the questions asked and stories told by the child. Article 14 of the Convention, which asks that children’s right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion be protected, has been vehemently contested by adults concerned that children be exposed to knowledge about diverse sexualities and sexual practices. In the contemporary moment, if children are understood to have sexuality, they are just as often held back or away from that sexuality, explained as lacking the capacity for complexity. Tison Pugh (2011) suggests that regulating what a child knows of sexuality is also an act of regulating the adult: “for teaching lessons about sexuality to children reinforces these same lessons for the adults who must impart them” (p.7). The adult’s resistances and anxieties concerning the child’s acquisition of knowledge offer a glaring example of how romantic notions of childhood innocence hope to keep the child away from knowledge of sexuality.

Below I survey seminal literature in critical childhood studies, specifically critical histories of childhood (Aries 1962; Castaneda 2002; Rose 1984; Steedman 1995) to better comprehend how normative childhood is an adult construction that creates the child’s conditions for living. Recent studies of childhood in queer theory (Edelman 2004; Stockton 2009; Kincaid 1998) will help to describe queer culture’s disruptions and contributions to childhood studies. The queer child is a figure that has only recently been
theorized; the work done on this subject offers a lens through which to provoke thought concerning what it can mean to protect a child from harm. In the anthology, *Curioser: On the Queerness of Children* (2004), Steven Bruhm and Natasha Hurley explain their collection’s use of queer in relation to childhood: “The queer child is, generally, both defined by and outside of what is ‘normal.’ But the term queer derives also from its association with specifically sexual alterity” (p. x). David Halperin’s 1993, oft-cited summation of ‘queer’: “Whatever is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant” (p. 62), helps to suggest that the queerness of childhood is mostly a result of trenchant beliefs that the child is without sexuality. I wonder how the application of child rights is restricted when precocious exposure to sexual diversity is considered ‘harmful’ by many. Because a main impetus for the convention is the protection of children from harm, the adult’s definition of what is ‘harmful’ becomes a determining factor in how child rights are administered.  


Firmly positioned within the field of queer theory, both Edelman and Smith stake out a claim concerning children’s rights and membership to sexual subjectivity. Together, their work captures some of the dynamics and conflicts that surface between recognizing childhood

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21 The Convention identifies a child as a person under the age of 18. It is meant to establish international laws that secure children’s ‘protection’ (e.g., from abuse and exploitation), the ‘provision’ of education, health care, and standard of living’, and ‘participation’ (which includes respecting children’s ideas and desires for knowledge).

as something formulated to defend and advance what the adult desires, and acknowledging children as deserving of “the right to have rights”. Differently, they enter a conversation on the child’s material, embodied appearance and posit a critique of romantic constructions of childhood innocence.

**Learning between Childhood and Adulthood**

Jonathon Silin’s (1995) insistence that an adult’s theory of childhood implicitly determines how they address children is very much in accordance with my inquiry. Silin explains that as an early childhood educator, he was often confronted with the limits of his theories of childhood.

I realized that children, in their way, were asking the same questions about life that I was asking of myself as a young adult: Is it possible to make my way in the world, unaided by parent or family? Can I negotiate a social identity that is consistent with who I feel myself to be and what others deem acceptable? What is the connection between my inner life, which so easily runs amok with the most unimaginable emotions, and the orderly world of the school and the formal disciplines? (p. 14)

In *Sex, Death, and the Education of Children: Our Passion for Ignorance in the Age of Aids* (1995), Silin reflected on his experiences with education and activism in response to HIV/AIDS in the 1980s and early 1990s. An early childhood educator, Silin is interested in the educational implications for children when ideas of childhood innocence repel addresses of difficult topics in the children’s classroom, like HIV/AIDS. He recounts his
dismay in finding that LGBTQ communities, much like normative models of children’s education, don’t want to talk about death or dying. He contends that normative gay politics court the state and capital accumulation instead of taking care of vulnerable communities and working through difficult knowledges and histories. Silin wonders what it could mean to care for and to teach children, while also defying the cult of innocence that demands certain topics of conversation are out of bounds for children.

Silin does not imagine “children as a way to purchase immortality” (p. 40), and therefore works against protecting children from complication and a contemporary educational impulse to build a fortress around their innocence. Reflecting on how the child’s precocity can make the adult defensive, he writes: “Attending closely to the existing competencies of children may be threatening to adults…Having made adulthood a tenuous and difficult achievement, we are reluctant to accept the challenges posed by other perspectives” (p. 49). Silin makes clear how linear theories of human development condition theories of learning. Overconfident and overdetermined theories of child development that know where the child will end up before it has begun its own inquiries, may be an effect of a hardlined distinction between childhood and adulthood, which disavows the sites where childhood and adulthood coalesce.23

In relation to adolescence, Jen Gilbert (2007), Deborah Britzman (1998) and Nancy Lesko (1996) theorize development as a psychical relation which involves both adult and youth. Gilbert suggests that,

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While we are accustomed to seeing the adolescent as requiring an adult, both for its construction as a historical, social and psychological category, and in the ordinary sense that adults provide support for the social and psychological work of growing up through adolescence, we are less accustomed to considering how the adult needs the adolescent (p. 47).

She is interested in the dilemmas of sex education as it relates to theories of adolescent development. For her, both adolescence and adulthood are ‘psychical relations’ that cannot be thought in isolation from each other. Her orientation to the topic loosens distinctions between adolescence and adulthood in order to think about “sex education through the problem of relationality” (p. 48). In doing so, she moves outside of the limits debates and divisions between social constructivism and essentialism impose in order to make room for a theory of adolescent sexuality that does not aim to control or prescribe outcomes, but to offer a “facilitating environment” for youth to search for “an interpretive practice that might help to make sense of the upheavals of development and the tumultuousness of relationships” (p. 59).

Both Silin and Gilbert suggest that adulthood is a precarious achievement, reliant on at least some suppression of the young’s agentic potential to build knowledge concerning sex and loss. Drawing on Gilbert’s theory of adolescence as psychically related to adulthood (and vice versa), and Silin’s insistence that our theories of childhood determine how we treat children, I now survey a body of literature that reveals the

24 In Gilbert's words: “Thinking about sex education through the problem of relationality opens up the well-guarded distinction between adolescence as a social and historical construction and adolescence as a biological or physiological event. In the often dreary fights between social constructivism and essentialism, ‘development’ becomes either a description of adolescent experience or, more perniciously, a means to govern adolescent bodies” (48).
romantic construction of childhood innocence as an eviction of substance from the child in an attempt to make way for adult ideals. Claudia Castaneda (2002) has made this point, suggesting that most critical theories of childhood erase the child in order to venerate the adult. In even the most careful, progressive accounts and alternative histories of childhood, she suggests that “the child is simultaneously erased or occupied by the adult’s figuration of the child as a theoretical resource, as a space or form through which the (adult) subject reforms itself” (p. 142-143). Mining motivations and implications of rendering the child through sentiments of virtuosity helps to cohere how an adult might sort through psycho-social conflict and defend against unresolved sexual conflict, at the expense of the child. A close inspection of discursive movements surrounding childhood demonstrates some of how the adult’s desire, loss, epistemology and phantasy becomes impetus for insisting that the child is innocent and in need of protection.

_A Critical History of Childhood: Sex and Sentiment_

The idea of childhood as a time of innocence in need of protection is a relatively new concept and is not transhistorical. Contemporary thought suggests that adulthood is gained when innocence expires. Philippe Aries, in 1960, famously argued that contemporary favored metonymies for childhood (innocence, purity, futurity) did not exist in the Middle Ages (p. 196).²⁵ Below I provide a cursory study of some important theoretical conjectures made concerning histories of childhood innocence since Aries, and their legacy on contemporary treatment of children. While not intent on narrowing a

definition of the child, these descriptions survey some of the wide and tenuous deployments of sentiments of ‘innocence’ in normative definitions of the child, emphasizing the large variety of ways the figure of the child gets cast. The counter-narratives of childhood I read are especially significant in their exposition of how sexuality is implicated in the production of ideas about what the child must be protected from.

In the first treatise on the child as idea (not biology), Aries instructed his readers that the history of childhood is also a history of sentiment. A French cultural historian, Aries changed the course of childhood studies in proposing that just over 300 years ago, in part because parents could not rely on their offspring living (due to illness and disease), the child was free of sentimental attachment.26 Aries scrutinized European painting and portraiture, letters and personal compositions, alongside historical artifacts from schools and cultural festivals, in order to track the development of the idea of childhood as distinct from adulthood. Despite numerous critiques of his method and research practice27, Aries’ work continues to be a touchstone in histories and sociologies of childhood. His investigation found that pre-1700, the distinctions between infancy, youth and adulthood were weak: adults were likely to play games now deemed childish, children’s ears were not covered when an adult told a joke with sexual content, and children in France once labored in fields alongside adults. The rise of the nuclear family, of institutional education arranged by age, and disciplinary scenes of sexuality, reformed

26 Hugh Cunningham makes the crucial point that the English publication of Aries text translates “sentiment” to “idea”. Not only did ideas about childhood change, but so did feelings. Sentiment, Cunningham insists, “carries a sense of a feeling about childhood” (p. 30).

sentiments towards childhood. Prior to these historical inventions, without the cultural belief that children must stew in innocence, children were sooner ready for the adult world of labour, sexuality and reason. Aries proffered that it was not until the 18th Century and the rise of modern colonialism that sentimental attachments to children’s vulnerability and the panic of immoral influence on the child began to form.

Aries’ research suggests that the necessity of protecting children from knowledge about sexuality was, at this time, first braided together with beliefs that children born to families of wealth must be carefully protected from the influence of servants and the immoral nature of lower class subjects. In *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule* (2002), Ann Laura Stoler studies the colonial period in Java to better understand the pervasive belief that white, European children might have been at risk of contracting immorality from servants. She explores the case of Dutch colonists attempts to protect their innocent children from the immoral influence of Javanese servants employed to care for them. Caught between desiring Javanese labour and dreading their progeny’s miseducation in race, the Dutch colonists anxiously prescribed protocols for transactions exchanged between employer and childcare provider. Suggesting that affect and sentiment surrounding childhood was channeled as a technology of the Dutch colony, Stoler isolates prescriptions for bathing, cooking and nursing a child to sleep as important locations to observe anxieties over racialized encounters and the supposed transmission of immorality onto Dutch children.

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Prescriptions for Javanese servants to hold Dutch infants a measurable distance from their bodies, “were part of a wider set of child-rearing rules employed to ensure that European children in the colonies learned the right social cues and affiliations—and did not metamorphize into Javanese” (p. 6).

In order to make salient the position of whiteness as parent to the perpetual natality of colonized subjects, scientific and religious doctrines on humanness have instantiated developmental sequences riddled with asynchronistic movements towards and away from adulthood. Castaneda makes this point by studying transnational circulations of childhood as idea: “The relation between the normal developing child and the savage to which it is compared is that the normal child will grow-up, if all goes well to become an adult in its own lifetime, while the savage must wait eons to achieve a so-called civilized state, and so effectively remains in a state of development” (p. 26). The premature loss of childhood innocence for young black subjects during transatlantic slavery, for example, provides a study of how modernity has depended on discourses of childhood to create trajectories of development in which some get ‘stuck’ and cannot mature into full humans (Greta LeSuer, 1995; Wilma King, 1995).

Notions of childhood as innocence and virtuosity have been operative in maintaining hierarchies of humanness reliant on colonial and class divisions. Popular contemporary thought surrounding the treatment of children continues to find aspiration in the sentiments of innocence that first found themselves attached to children in the 18th and 19th Centuries. Historicizing contemporary iterations of these paradigms involves asking what legacies Victorian definitions of childhood continue to be felt in discourses
of normative childhood. A genealogy of the idea of childhood innocence helps to uncover how theories and philosophies of childhood have gained so much influence in contemporary culture, and what this has to do with the regulation of sexuality. James Kincaid (1998) warns of the damaging effects that a “Romantic heritage of the ‘child and its body’ and our current reckless expenditure of this dangerous nineteenth-century inheritance” has on contemporary culture (p. 7). Children, Kincaid asserts, continue to live in the wreckage of this definition.

Kincaid points out that the idea of the modern child and ideas about modern sexuality share an origin story, continuously reliant on each other for definition and explanation (p. 52). “Despite the loud official protestations about children’s innocence”, he writes, “our Victorian ancestors managed to make their concept of the erotic depend on the child, just as their idea of the child was based on their notions of sexual attraction” (p. 52). Kincaid’s concern is contemporary obsessions with stories about the transgression of children’s innocence, specifically molestation and sexual assault. He hypothesizes that assumptions of children’s innocence and incapability actually work to justify the child as weak and empty: in fact prone to sexual violation. Kincaid is worried about the amounts of excessive fear we induce in children when we continuously tell stories about the monsters waiting to kidnap and molest them. As if all the anxiety is an unconscious wish, he writes: “all the consuming talk about child molesting allow us to visit on the bodies and minds of our children” (p. 108). In order to impose surveillance on the adult’s sexuality, the innocent child is, then, always susceptible to losing its innocence.
Kincaid traces a historical shift from Victorian constructions of childhood to contemporary obsessions with gossiping about and circulating stories of pedophilia, child murders and perversions. One effect of children’s bodies being purged of sexuality is that adults can be excited by stories of child bodies being used in sexual ways. Imbuing the child with innocence, draining it of sexual agency makes them the perfect victims for sexual violence. Because the persistence of this frenzied narrative is so pervasive, he is sure that all American adults are implicated. In asking how we have arrived at a moment obsessed with gossip and scandal about child loving, he concludes (like Aries) that contemporary ideas about childhood are inheritances of the 18th Century’s Romantic child.

[T]his Romantic child was largely figured as an inversion of Enlightenment virtues and was thus strangely hollow right from the start: uncorrupted, unsophisticated, unenlightened. The child was without a lot of things, things it was better off without, presumably…As we slowly succumbed to the collective illusion that the child is a biological category, we have still managed to hold the category open so we can construe it any way we like (p. 53).

Kincaid here echoes Jonathon Silin’s worries about the damages that ‘innocence’ appoints to children, the terror and fear it coerces instead of abates. Both Silin and Kincaid take issue with how childhood innocence disturbs children’s ability to build and test knowledge concerning sexuality.
Freud's Theory of Interiority and its Influence on Childhood Studies

Sigmund Freud’s *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905/1962) first told a story of childhood as both a stage of aggressive curiosity surrounding sexuality, and an invention of adult emotional responses to their own history. He proposed that the neglect of the infant’s sexuality was most often a result of adults’ repression of his or her own childhood struggles with development. Freud was certain in the validity of his thesis and its innovative approach: “No author has to my knowledge recognized the lawfulness of the sexual impulse in childhood” (p. 2). Often, Freud assumed that the childhood memories his analysands shared with him never happened, were phantasmatic reconstruction, but nonetheless a psychic reality that formed conflict for the adult. At issue for Freud was not the validity of childhood memories, but how they persisted to structure the adult’s contemporary moment. Reflecting on clinical treatment of his analysands, Freud posited sexual conflict at the heart of human development; he speculated that “infantile origins of perversion” and “aberration” could be used to diagnose adult neurosis. The challenge to this would be lifting childhood memories out of the state of “infantile amnesia”, characterized by a repressive propulsion to forget childhood struggles with sexual objects and aims. Carolyn Steedman (1995) characterizes Freud’s invention of the unconscious as childhood moved inside, a place where imaginative uses of childhood temper conscious life. In *Strange Dislocations: Childhood*

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29 Freud wrote: “The extraordinary frequent discoveries of apparently abnormal and exceptional sexual manifestations in childhood, as well as the discovery of infantile reminiscences in neurotics, which were hitherto unconscious” (p. 8).
and the Idea of Human Interiority, 1780-1930, published in 1995, Steedman suggests that during the late 18th Century and the early 19th Century, philosophical questions and theories about the meaning of being and becoming a subject began to proliferate and were strengthened by notions of an interior space in the human subject. Prior to this period what was outside (community, the nation, infrastructure, religious institution) was of sole importance. The new idea of a self within, an ‘interiority’, contained remnants of one’s childhood.

The idea of the child was the figure that provided the largest number of people living in the recent past of Western societies with the means for thinking about and creating a self: Something grasped and understood: a shape, moving in the body…something inside: an interiority (p. 20).

Important to the advancement of theories of human interiority, as Steedman elucidates, was Freud’s nomination of the unconscious and its knotted reliance on the sciences of childhood being developed at this time. She suggests that childhood, for Freud, was manipulability, a backwards assignment of the adult’s present understanding of selfhood and purpose. But because representations of childhood memories must correspond to the adult’s contemporary epistemologies, new inscriptions and emotions are always added to the retelling of one’s development. Despite the difficulty of ‘truthfully’ recounting one’s childhood, adults often give into a reparative urge to sort through and depict events which characterized their childhood. Freud was insistent that no adult recollection of childhood memory be trusted as factual. To this end, Kofman asserts that all childhood memories might be screen memories. In psychoanalysis, screen
memories are characterized by their clarity and the banality of events which they capture. Unsure why seemingly insignificant events in the child’s life are remembered, when events that should be most important (a death, the birth of a sibling, a move) appear to have left no conscious impression, Freud suggested that screen memories cover over what cannot be made sense of or absorbed by the conscious. He explains: “We hear that the content of some people’s earliest memories consists of everyday impressions that are of no consequence…detailed, where others are not” (p. 534). Freud grew increasingly aware that there was no guarantee of accuracy in his patient’s descriptions of childhood events. Revisions made to memories were based on a powerful psychic need to reshape or replace childhood events that possessed difficult material. This child within, who under careful circumstances could be communicated with, tells the adult, via the analyst, how to repair conflict and loss. Here, childhood becomes that which is re-worked in hopes of redressing the depressed, anxious or neurotic adult. According to psychoanalytic thought, childhood persists, indefinitely, within the adult. Freud even locates childhood in the smallest part of the human, the cell. For him, the smallest unit of human existence carries “an individuals history laid down inside its body” (Steedman, p. 92). The cell, she explains, slowly released childhood events and memories into the adult’s present, complicating linear trajectories of human development in which adulthood could be severed from childhood.30

30 Charles Darwin’s influence was, in many ways, crucial to Freud’s development of a theory of civilization. From Darwin, Freud drew biological suppositions about human behaviour. But, for Freud, the cell and its relationship to memory brought divergences from Darwin’s thinking. Freud came to believe that the child carries memory in her cells and should the environment drastically change, traces of what came before would not be wholly exchanged for a trait that was more apt to help survival. Though she will grow and be altered by change, memory of the past environment is not deleted, and though it may be forgotten and repressed, it leaves imprints and traces on the world. Freud understood
Castaneda (2002) also inquires about how childhood gets positioned as the paradigmatic origin of the individual’s emotional topography. She demonstrates how self-help and therapeutic addresses of human interiority use the figure of the child as a reserve for adult self-understanding, discerning that in these practices “the adult returns to childhood to re-appropriate the child he or she once was in order to establish a more stable adult self” (p. 5). Childhood, in this context, becomes a backwards contemplation which occurs through a seasoned reason only available to those in the developmental stage of adulthood. Both Castaneda and Steedman reveal how the child is “the story waiting to be told” (Steedman, 22), latent in the adult. Kincaid, in line with this theorizing, writes: “The child given to us is the Romantic child, allowing not only a continuous selfhood but also a child that is somehow still us. The boundaries of childhood expand: the child is made the course of past pain and of present suffering and rejuvenation” (p. 251). “When we really want to know”, he writes, “we ask the child within, the riddler who holds the secret to our psychic (and erotic) life” (p. 251). In this formula, an adult in conflict can find resolution by communicating with the interior residues of their childhood.

For Jacqueline Rose (1984), Freud’s concept of the unconscious is a challenge not only to the field of children’s fiction but to why “we attempt to construct an image of the child at all” (p. 10). Out of the discipline of literary studies came one of the most provocative theses on the child as social construction since Aries, and one of the most
formative studies of the romantic notion of childhood innocence. In *The Case of Peter Pan Or The Impossibility of Children’s Fiction* (1984), Rose suggested that the trouble with children’s fiction is one of address. There is no child behind ‘children’s literature’, she insists, only the adult’s desire. Her thesis is that J.M. Barrie’s *Peter Pan* was never intended for children and that in order for it to be widely embraced as the quintessential story for children, a series of disavowals had to occur. She argues that in its original form, *Peter Pan* is a story about an adult’s desire for a child and that for it to become a popular story for children its sexuality has been suppressed. Drawing on Dunbar (1970) and Birkin (1979) Rose provides a genealogy of *Peter Pan* which reinserts the adult’s desire: “Behind Peter Pan lies the desire of a man for a little boy (or boys), a fantasy just at the moment when we are accepting the presence of sexuality in children’s fiction” (p. 3). Rose asks us to consider the story of *Peter Pan* as exemplary of the limits of children’s literature. Peter Pan “works precisely to the extent that any question of who is talking to whom, and why, is totally erased” (p. 2). She considers the writing of Children’s Fiction an impossibility because it must disavow that it is a deliberate “soliciting, a chase, or even a seduction” (p. 2) of children who are meant to form its audience. The story of Peter Pan, the boy who could not grow-up, allowed Barrie to imagine what it could mean to stall adulthood and possess the object of his desire: interminable boyhood.

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31 The *Case of Peter Pan* (1984) contains one of Rose’s earliest published negotiations with psychoanalytic thought. She uses Freud’s notion of the unconscious to refocus what has been suppressed in versions of *Peter Pan* told to children.
Peter Pan first appeared in *The Little White Bird*, Barrie’s 1902 novel written for an adult audience. In 1904, this story was excerpted from the novel and mounted as a stage play that garnered popularity. Though still regarded as a story for adult consumption, and employing a cast of mostly adult actors, Rose suggests the play staged childhood for an adult audience (p. 32). Historicizing the play helps her to ask if Peter Pan is a “Spectacle of childhood for us, or play for children?” (p. 33).

We will see all these difficulties surfacing constantly in different forms, and just as constantly being suppressed. It is, however, the very definition of suppression—according to Freud at least—that it never really works, especially perhaps when what is being got rid of are all the queries, at the level of sexuality and language, which Freudian psychoanalysis was uncovering at exactly the same time that Peter Pan was being promoted and reproduced (p. 33).

Rose renders a compelling story of the child as an effect of the adult’s desire, a subject premised on a series of conflicts relating to sexual development. In Chapter 1, “Peter Pan and Freud”, she tells us that “Freud effected a break in our conception of both sexuality and childhood from which we do not seem to have recovered” (p. 14). With Rose, I agree that Freud’s consideration of the polymorphous and perverse nature of childhood sexuality continues to provide clarity on how the child’s desire is formed, contested and molded by libidinal energies and fantasy life. And, that Freud’s theory of the unconscious can help us to understand what psychic operations are underneath adult’s theories of childhood. Psychoanalysis disputes theories of childhood that suggest growth
occurs along linear and accumulative lines: “it undermines the idea that psychic life is continuous, that language can give us mastery, or that past and future can be cohered into a straightforward sequence, and controlled” (Rose, p. 134). In the context of my project, psychoanalytic theories of childhood might be considered queer because they require creative reconstruction, and disrupt a sense of time that is linear while foregrounding the future as something created by impressions made in the past.

My notion of queer childhood borrows heavily from Kathryn Bond Stockton’s *The Queer Child: Or, Growing Sideways in the Twentieth Century* (2009). Stockton shows how the belief that children are void of sexuality endures, while at the same time, children are assumed to be growing-up and towards futures defined through heteronormative sexualities. Stockton characterizes the queer child as a subject that hovers above and outside of histories of childhood; troubling assumptions that the child does not and has never fantasized queerly. She is not simply interested in the idea of a gay child, but also in the queerness of all childhoods, which results from the perpetual delay of reason that ensures adulthood does not come too soon. Stockton points out that gay children do not appear in History: “They are not a matter of historian’s writings or of the general public’s belief” (p. 5).

In spite of Anglo-American cultures, over several centuries, thinking that the child can be a carefully controlled embodiment of non-complication (increasingly protected from labor, sex, and painful understanding), the child has got thick with complication. Even as idea (p. 5).
Unlike the normative idea of the child whose future we must save, the queer child promises nothing, though it may hint at contingent and provisional futures. The queer child is that which haunts normative descriptions and temporal positionings of what it means to grow-up. Stockton’s work demonstrates that in many renditions of the child, there exists both the occlusion of children’s sexuality and the tacit understanding that the child should grow up and towards heterosexuality. Asking how the queer child grows despite the possibility of growing towards social legibility is a generative inquiry, and in Stockton’s hands reveals part of how cultures that organize themselves around theories of childhood innocence often hurt children’s curiosity and imagination.

The gay child, Stockton proposes, often has a “backwards birth” that solicits childhood as an adult work of re-construction: When the straight adult is dead (decides they are gay), the adult then reconstructs their childhood to conform to their contemporary understanding of what it must have felt like to have a queer childhood. Stockton cites Freud’s *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* to show how his seminal text linked the appearance of adult homosexuality (which, at the time was often identified as ‘inversion’) to childhood sexuality. Working with Freud’s text, she writes: “Making room, it seems, for an invert child—though perhaps only through adult memory—Freud states clearly that the ‘trait of inversion may either date back to the very beginning, as far back as the subject’s memory reaches’ (p. 24-25). In Freud’s foundational text on the child’s possession of sexual wishes, he imparts a queer temporal schematic: The invert adult searches for the moment that “a sexual impression occurred which left a permanent after-effect in the shape of a tendency to homosexuality” (Stockton, p. 25).
Psychoanalytic theories of childhood, inaugurated by Freud, may be understood as queer because they insist on the perversity of sexual impulses in childhood, and that the adult’s sexuality is best understood through a backwards reconstruction.

The body of literature surveyed above reveals adulthood to be a precarious achievement, reliant on the suppression of children’s agentic potential to build knowledge concerning sex, death and loss. Childhood, it shows, is often a belated understanding and a description of adult interests and sexual conflicts. This literature forms the backdrop against which I study childhood and psycho-sexual development in the remainder of this dissertation. I now return to a discussion of the child’s ‘right to have rights’ (via engagement with Edelman and Smith) in order raise question about how childhood as a social construction informs the treatment of material children.

*Queering Children's Rights*

As Lee Edelman states in *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (2004), our culture is obsessed with the child as the entity for which we build a future without conflict. For Edelman, the fantasy of the child as innocent futurity and as the object for which sociality is organized disciplines queer subjects. In order to be legible subjects in the social imaginary, we must be operative members of what he terms reproductive futurism. The ‘cult of the child’ signals an always already impossible future to which queers are promised potential belonging if they uphold the contract of futurity which assures that culture is repeated without difference. The reproductive body, in this schematic, becomes an emblem of achieved adulthood that signals the loss of childhood.
Those who do not reproduce themselves into the future cannot be privileged in a symbolic order that celebrates life-producing sex as paramount contribution to humanity. So, Edelman asks that we learn to find pleasure in sites and acts that do not secure a future. Queerness, for him, is on the side of the death drive, never finding an identity, only ever disturbing one (p. 17). Edelman’s assertions are critical of liberal movements in queer communities towards replicating normative structures of kinship and progeny, which he understands as forlorn pleas for recognition from a culture that privileges those who secure repetition. “No baby, no future”, and thus no sincere privileging in the symbolic or political world. Edelman hopes for a queer renouncement of loyalty to the child, a loyalty he believes rushes towards a future made of equality while ignoring the past and present conditions that create violence for LGBTQ individuals and communities. A disavowal of the persistent hum of the death drive. Better, he thinks, to understand queerness as that which is destructive to the social order.

Andrea Smith (2010), in an essay on convergences and distrust between queer theory and native studies, responds to Edelman’s production of a subjectless critique of childhood innocence. She posits that: “Edelman’s ‘anti-oppositional’ politics in the context of multinational capitalism and empire ensures the continuation of th[e] status quo by disabling collective struggle designed to dismantle these systems” (p. 47). Smith notes that “while Edelman contends that the Child can be analytically separated

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33 Smith cites Jose Munoz’s critique of Edelman: “The future is the stuff of some kids. Racialized kids, queer kids, are not the sovereign princes of futurity. [Edelman’s] framing nonetheless accepts and reproduces this monolithic future of the child that is indeed always already white” (Page 48 in Smith, page 363 of Munoz: “Cruising the Toilet: Leroi Jones/Amiri Baraka, Radical Black Traditions, and Queer Futurity”, *GLQ* 13(2007)).
from actual children”, an indigenous critique of his text reminds us that in the context of genocide, “Native peoples have already been determined by settler colonialism to have no future” (p. 48).

If the goal of queerness is to challenge the reproduction of the social order, then the Native child may already be queered. For instance, Colonel John Chivington, the leader of the famous massacre at Sand Creek, charged his followers to not only kill Native adults but to mutilate their reproductive organs and to kill their children because ‘nits make lice’ (p. 48).

In this circumstance, the Native child is not invested with assurance of futurity and cannot cohere in Edelman’s privileged portrayal of the cult of the Child. The Native child, for Smith, is queered because it “is not the guarantor of the reproductive future of white supremacy; it is the nit that undoes it” (p. 48). Smith makes her ambivalence towards Edelman’s project clear: she finds the “idea of reproductive continuity as homophobia” useful, and suggests that the adoption of a ‘subjectless critique’ within Native Studies could help to “demonstrate that Native studies is an intellectual project that has broad applicability not only for Native peoples but for everyone” (p. 44). However, she also makes it clear that she finds “Edelman’s analysis lapses into a vulgar constructionism by creating a fantasy that there can actually be a politic without a political program that does not always reinstate what it deconstructs, that does not also in some way reaffirm the order of the same” (p. 47). She continues: “That is, it seems difficult to dismantle multinational

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34 Edelman capitalizes the Child, as conceptual figuration, to distance it from material, embodied children.
35 Andrea Smith (2010, p. 46.)
capitalism, settler colonialism, white supremacy, and heteropatriarchy without some kind of political program, however provisional it may be” (ibid). Smith invokes Jose Munoz in her assertion that “relationality is not pretty”, but is required in the context of genocide and its enduring violences (p. 47).

Edelman and Smith’s texts help to clarify what I mean by submitting that there is a dilemma in administering rights to children while at the same time revising a definition of childhood that emphasize the child as screen for the adults fantasies and desires. Andrea Smith makes this point clear when she writes: “The Child can be the phantasm that ensures the status quo, or the Child can be the nit that undoes it, or the Child can be both” (p. 50). I trace their conversation here with the aim of demonstrating the difficult necessity of making conceptual and figurative references to childhood relate to concerns about how children (and some adults) are treated. After No Future, and attentive to Smith’s critique, I wonder if and how thought surrounding childhood might be sufficiently queered so that it resists being constrained by normative developmentalism and productively challenges how national, racial, classed and gendered affiliations and identifications the uneven distribution of rights to children.36 This query, though related, is not accounted for in Edelman’s polemic, because he juxtaposes queerness to children. Though Edelman aims to deposit his critique in a post-political world, his analysis has been critiqued as an effort to elide collective narratives of struggle.

36 I return to this question in the conclusion. Related to my consideration of how discourses of childhood helped to justify colonial logics, Smith also discusses the Native as providing “the occasion for Europe to remake its corrupt civilization. Once the European is remade, the Native is rendered permanently infantile or—as mostly commonly understood—an innocent savage. She cannot mature into adult citizenship, she can only be locked into a permanent state of infancy… (p. 51).
In this chapter I have been grappling with the paradox that arises when children’s rights to agency and participation in the world are secured, while at the same time it is suggested that they are innocent and lacking complexity. One of the reasons that I invoke this problem is to highlight what is at stake when queer theory speaks about childhood but forecloses a consideration of the actual child. In not thinking about children’s material rights, there are issues that get forgotten. Canada’s history of residential schools and their devastating effects may be one of the issues forgotten or repressed when queer theory evades recognition of how the preservation of innocence (in the name of rights) has not protected all childhoods equally. An intervention into the futures of the children put in residential schools was deemed justified because they were not protected by a rhetoric of innocence. Nor did their parents have the same rights to their children that others did. Residential schools were, perhaps, a sort of straightening out for aboriginal children, meant to civilize their desires.37

Without rights, children are tenuous members in political communities. In contemporary times, there has been a movement towards legal protection of the rights of children (though some are argued to be deserving of more freedoms and securities than others). But, before a child can be granted the “right to have rights”, adults must have in mind a theory of what it is about childhood that should be protected. If we are compelled to protect the child, we must believe, at least unconsciously, that it has a right to be

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37 It is important to note that in Canada, a large amount of aboriginal children continue to be taken from their families (Sinha and Kozlowski, 2013). Also useful in thinking about children who are not contained in stereotypes of childhood innocence is Anna Davin’s Growing Up Poor: Home, school, and street in London, 1870-1914 (1996). Davin investigates how the children of poor parents in nineteenth century London became problems for notions of innocence and purity that were expected to underpin the experience of childhood. The street child, she shows, was not often helped by protective legislation. Specifically, “some critics held that poor parents were unfit for the task of training up good citizens” and thus, children should be rescued from the home at an early age (19).
protected. I have been apprehensive about theories of the child that do not account for its rela

tionality. Edelman’s evocation of the child as innocent futurity is not relational, for example, it does not attempt to grapple with the traumatic legacies of statelessness, genocide, or war. Andrea Smith’s request that a theory of childhood make room for recognitions of the genocidal foundations of nation-states in North America has deepened my understanding of child rights as contingent on relationality. In raising questions about how the adult’s theories constitute the conditions for a child’s lived experience, I have surveyed critical histories of childhood in order to historicize child protections. The question of a child’s right to sexual subjectivity, specifically, has provoked inquiry into how the child gets included in the social world. A psychoanalytic lens has helped to elaborate the child’s pursuit of subjectivity, and the adult’s making of theories of childhood, as engagements with sexual desires. In this chapter I have theorized that the queer site of childhood is what refuses to be controlled, civilized, and declines to act as a prop for a predetermined future. A queer approach to childhood is useful in asking how needs of imagined children trump even those of embodied adults (Berlant 1997; Bernstein 2002: p. 2; Smith 2010). In the next chapter, I build on these ideas by formulating a method for encountering aesthetic representations of childhood. I continue to probe the adult’s psychical relation to childhood, asking what the adult gains from constructing a theory of childhood. I turn to the aesthetic to consider representations of childhood as emotional resources for learning. Again, psychoanalysis forms the theoretical grounding for my thesis as I think about the relationship between gender, childhood and symbolization.
Chapter 2: Towards An Aesthetic Theory of Childhood: Aggression and Belonging in Shane Meadows’ *This is England*

Shane Meadows’ 2006 film, *This is England*, is a semi-autobiographical return to his childhood and his momentary involvement in a gang of skinheads. The film results, in part, from a biographical impulse to share the filmmaker’s story of his childhood and to describe the feeling of growing-up as a member of the working class in England in the 1980s. Less interested in a mimetic or exact performance of his childhood, Meadows imaginatively reenacts some of the events and people who impacted him at this time in order to offer an artistic version of how his childhood was contoured by involvement in and admiration for skinhead culture. In the film, a child protagonist is first seduced by the striking aesthetic of skinhead movements, and then becomes involved in the racialized violence and right-wing nationalism which stains some iterations of what it means to be a “skin”. *This is England* depicts how a community of men and boys clung to a nation, like a parent, while repressing frailty and vulnerability in relation to masculinity, war and unemployment.

The film’s protagonist is a young version of the filmmaker, a twelve-year-old boy named Shaun Fields (a pointed revision of Meadows’ name) whose father has been killed in the Falklands War. We are introduced to Shaun as he sits in his small bedroom, with walls that are crumbling and have chipped paint, staring longingly at a picture of his father and listening to Margaret Thatcher’s speech on the last day of her first term.

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Thatcher’s words, as captured by the BBC, will help to fill-out the soundtrack for the rest of the film and to tell a story about the private casualties of national problems. In this story of childhood, the child character ‘grows up’, moves beyond childishness, when he is able to reassess and feel guilt for the injuries he causes while inflicting violence on others. Meadows aims to make sense of how young boys were persuaded by the aesthetic and influence of men who identified as skinheads, and how a nation was both seduced and devastated by Thatcher’s philosophies on limiting social welfare and labour unions in favour of economic deregulation and privatization. The child protagonist who resembles the adult filmmaker’s child-self is used to mend contemporary conflict surrounding personal and national history.

Meadows explains that *This is England* is a reaction to the impressions left on the filmmaker during childhood, and that the film is a conscious mode of self-fashioning. I am drawn to the film for its careful demonstration of how aggressive masculinities and violence are used to cover over, melancholically, vulnerability and personal histories of loss. *This is England* symbolizes some of the internal and personal ramifications of class and of national belonging. In this chapter I am most interested in how the film, as cultural production, helps its audience to resolve or face difficult and contradictory feelings about their own early experiences. Specifically, I consider the emotional significance of watching a film about childhood and am interested in the dialectic of social and psychical influences that can make this experience meaningful for the adult. I begin by situating *This is England* as an aesthetic text that can work as a resource for symbolizing feelings of conflict and loss. The point is not to examine what is truth and what is fiction in
Meadows’ revisions to his childhood, but to explore the psychic properties of the film as it illuminates how a return to an adult’s past might be motivated by an attempt to make sense of the impressions that history has left on an individual and a nation.39

A cult film, later serialized into a BBC television series, *This is England* is a popular story. In an effort to better understand both how art influences emotional life, I ask: How does this art object act on the subject? How does Meadows’ rediscription of his childhood allow his audience, also, to feel the potential of reparative acts and to share in an emotional world of empathy? If, as Melanie Klein suggests, reparation is what drives creative activity, this film might be transformative for its audience due to acknowledgement of the losses that inform aggression. And, because it tells a story of a child whose hate is a desperate attempt to restore a loved object.

Using psychoanalytic theories of art and aesthetics, as first described by Sigmund Freud, I move towards a method for understanding the uses of childhood experiences in aesthetic encounters. The experience of watching a film relies on identifications, incorporation and projections, which indicates that using psychoanalysis to reflect on how child characters become yoked to affective economies of spectatorship can be generative. Psychoanalysis, as interpretive method, can connect cultural and psychological productions, understanding that representation and affect are deeply conjoined. Because aesthetic experience, in psychoanalytic terms, is understood as an elaboration of infantile experiences and our first relations, childhood is inextricable from creative processes and experiences. Christopher Bollas explains that aesthetic experience allows one to contact

39 Subjected to the effect of the adult environment and knowledge about what has come after, the childhood memory takes the shape of contemporary psychic demand. D.W. Winnicott wrote of the adult’s possession of childhood memories: “Much is forgotten but nothing is lost” (1993, p.147).
the “unknown child self” (1987, p.101). I make a case for understanding the potential of aesthetic objects to assist in the symbolization of psycho-social conflicts experienced in childhood; that is, to clarify the link between the inside world and the outside world. As Freud established in his writing on war, on group belonging and nation building\(^40\), psychoanalysis is not solely interested in the individual’s psyche, but also in the social spaces between psyches, and relations between inner reality, imagination and material reality.

Plotting out historical movements in psychoanalytic thought concerning the aesthetic, I work towards an understanding of how the residues of childhood continue to be implicated in the adult’s encounter with an aesthetic object. Differently, Melanie Klein and D. W. Winnicott aid in a discussion of creativity as the child’s effort to air resent, grief and loss. Using Klein’s theories on creativity and reparation, and Winnicott’s notion of potential space (1971), I posit a method for thinking about affective encounters with representations of childhood in art, specifically film, and the emotional uses of child characters. Vital to this method is a consideration of the art object as a symbolic resource. Tania Zittoun explains that:

A person using a symbolic resource is a person using a novel, a film, a picture, a song, or a ritual, to address an unfamiliar situation in her everyday life. This person is thus not simply having the cultural experience of watching that film or hearing that music, or even not solely of remembering it: she has that experience, or remembers it, in relation to something else, located in her social world or in her inner life (2007, p. 343).

\(^{40}\) As in Civilization and its Discontents (1930), for example.
In this chapter, I put forth the assertion that cultural texts which depict children and childhood can operate as symbolic resources, as they carry the potential to awaken and assist in redescribing one’s own repressed history. In asking: “what constitutes an aesthetic experience for the patron of art?”, Dina Georgis explains that in psychoanalytic terms there is “no sovereign meaning to an aesthetic text” (p. 78). Rather, art is “an emotional resource, a potential space for working through and mourning injuries: inflicted and suffered” (p. 78). Art’s meaning, like the dream, is enigmatic because it refuses finite description or definitive meaning and therefore can handle and even entice ambivalent feelings.

The relationship between the aesthetic object and the contemplator of art is therefore a complex psychic encounter of memories: between what belongs to the contemplator of art and what belongs (unintended and intended) to the artist. There is an obfuscated relationship between the history of the author’s life and this history of the aesthetic object, with which the contemplator of art has a subjective encounter (p. 78-79).

Aesthetic experiences for both the artist and the contemplator of art are valuable because of their ability to increase pleasure, to symbolize loss, and facilitate negotiations of contradictory feelings.

With this in mind, I am not interested in demarcating the truth of Meadow’s story, but in theorizing the relationship between an aesthetic object and the residues of childhood experiences on adult emotional and psychic life. In an investigation into the
nature of aesthetic experiences, Francois J. Sirois (2008) suggests that contact with an aesthetic object can be profound in assisting one to tolerate ambiguous and contrary feelings within the self. For Sirois, the aesthetic object is important for its ability to “facilitate the cohabitation of contrary feelings” (p. 135). Interested in the psychical use of the art object, Sirois purports that “aesthetic feelings are those that help “one to overcome the tension of ambivalence, to not be overcome by hate” (p. 135). Sirois suggests that a subject’s reparative tendency helps to explains how “the aesthetic object…becomes the locus of a psychic appropriation” (p. 135). For the adult, an encounter with an aesthetic object offers a potential venue for returning us to our earliest conflicts and the origins of phantasy. Art can help to alleviate conflict, but it can also help us to face the frustration of communicating the inside to the outside.

In the context of my interest in aesthetic experience as potentially offering a space for working through injury (as Georgis describes it), both Klein and Winnicott’s explanations of the aesthetic encounter give strength to my thinking. Interested in the subject’s use of an object for psychic gain, object relations theorists like Melanie Klein and D.W. Winnicott take the emotional and imaginative life of infants and children as profoundly demonstrative of the searing greed, envy, rage and crushing anxiety that makes us human. Inspired by Eve Sedgwick’s application of Klein’s theory of the depressive position to the scene of reading, I include a discussion of how Meadow’s personal restorations invite his audience to adopt reparative practices, and to “re-assemble objects and histories to make them more nourishing” (Sedgwick, p.128). For

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41 Sirois (2008) contends that Melanie Klein introduced guilt into aesthetic theory, as her deliberations on creative practices included an understanding of creative work as staging grievances.
Sedgwick, reparative readings are attuned to psychic damage and do not work to forestall pain, but use psychic pain to make life feel better. Later, I provide an in-depth description of how Sedgwick’s reparative reading practices invites an approach to *This is England* that centers its potential for restoring hope for social change. But next, I wish to unfold in more detail how the link between psychoanalysis and the aesthetic has been constructed, debated and shifted over time.

*Interpretations of Art and Aesthetics in Psychoanalysis*

Though in his work on aesthetics Freud most often reflected on the relationship between the artist and the art object,\(^{42}\) he began his inquiry through recognition that art has the power to transform the affective and emotional life of the spectator, the contemplator of art—in this case, himself. Freud had felt compelled to address a lack of certainty about what drew him, affectively, to it and opened-up his emotions. In his 1913 essay, “The Claims of Psycho-Analysis to Scientific Interest”, Sigmund Freud tentatively suggested that psychoanalysis could be uniquely adept at addressing some of “the problems concerning art and artists” (p. 187). Then, in “The Moses of Michelangelo” (1914) Freud reflected on his confrontation with Michelangelo’s sculpture of Moses; he was drawn to its magnitude and felt identifications with both it and its creator, but intellectually could not grasp why. He was aggravated by Moses’ affective impact; he could not understand how an art object could hail him so profoundly, despite

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\(^{42}\) In his work on Leonardo DaVinci (1910), for example, Freud argues that the artist’s inability to realize most ideas for artistic projects was a result of his father’s absence during childhood. In this text, Freud suggests that the art object is, also, a sublimation of the artist’s sexual fantasies.
confounding his intellect. What drew Freud to thinking about art as a viable object of psychoanalytic study were his frustrations with its unintelligibility and cause for “intellectual bewilderment”:

This has brought me to recognize the apparently paradoxical fact that precisely some of the grandest and most overwhelming creations of art are still unsolved riddles to our understanding. We admire them, we feel overawed by them, but we are unable to say what they represent to us (p. 211).

Freud realized that the methods he was developing for studying the psychic operations which appeared in dreams could be used in interpretations of the art object to apprehend the artist’s unconscious motivations. Though quick to defer authority, and announce his lack of expertise on the subject of art, he suggests that it is possible that the psychoanalytic method has a rare aptitude for explaining the psychology of the artist. Art, Freud thought, could be interpreted like the manifest content of dreams, as both reveal more than the subject means to say, providing hints as to what lies in the unconscious of their creator. Psychoanalysis, he proposed, could uniquely help to uncover the artist’s intention and thus, explain the art object’s meaning.

Freud began his theory on art with the belief that art and dreams, as psychic productions, are texts which can be read as symptoms, and can be interpreted as carrying traces of what has been repressed. Though also careful to attend to their differences, Freud used art (sculpture, literature, painting) to explore some of the ways that artists
(like the dreamer) are bothered by something that resides in their unconscious.\(^{43}\) In his 1913 essay on the aesthetic encounter, Freud suggested that “the connection between the impressions of the artist’s childhood and his life-history on the one hand and his works, as reactions to those impressions on the other is one of the most attractive subjects of analytic examination” (p. 187).\(^{44}\) Important to Freud’s theory of aesthetics was the establishment of a connection between the art object and the artist’s childhood—the reproduction of infantile relations in the artwork.

In *The Childhood of Art: An Interpretation of Freud’s Aesthetics* (1988), Sara Kofman traces Freud’s deliberations on art and his development of a psychoanalytic theory which could render the effect that art had on him intelligible. Art, Kofman suggests, is the childhood of psychoanalysis: a site not as mature or refined as the clinical setting, but also because of its regressive plunge, is capable of elaborating and expressing unconscious wishes and repressions. Kofman believes that in his writing on aesthetics, Freud demonstrated the weakness of psychological theories which oppose intellect and sensibility (p. 3). Both art and dreams demonstrate a repression which is “not entirely successful”:

> This failure is the only thing that opens a space of legibility in the work.

> One of these traces is the effect of the work on other people: what is

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\(^{43}\) Primary and secondary processes are at work differently in the creation of art and in dream work. The difference between art and dreams (or unconscious phantasies) is the deliberate use of wishes and conscious methods of symbolization. Sara Kofman, though, insists that primary processes are always also at work in art because it symbolizes in excess of what the artist means to communicate. Unlike the dream, art has a social function: it is a cultural production. (Kofman, p. 105)

repressed by the artist and can be read in his work produces a powerful and enigmatic affect (Kofman, p.15).

Since Freud’s first ruminations on psychoanalysis’ application to art, there have been many reconsiderations of how, or even if, the artist’s intentions matter to another’s experience of an art object. Winnicott, for example, did not imagine artistic talent as necessary for an aesthetic experience; rather (as I will later show), he believed that the creative impulse belongs to “being alive” (1971, p.91). Marion Milner, too, took an approach to art that used psychoanalytic critique to depart from Freud’s original thoughts on the subject. In *On Not Being Able to Paint* (1957), Milner posed questions about psychic creativity not through a study of artistic genius, but by reflecting upon her own practice as an amateur painter. Though she finds it possible to read an “expression of hidden aggressive impulses” (p. 41) in her own work, and a desire for “violent rebellion against …inner authorities” (p. 49), she concludes that interpretations of art as an externalization of what already exits in the inside are not enough.

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45 Winnicott believed that “it is creative apperception more than anything else that makes the individual feel that life is worth living” (1971, p.87). He continues on the theme: “Where psychoanalysis has attempted to tackle the subject of creativity it has to a large extent lost sight of the main theme. The analytic writer has perhaps taken some outstanding personality in the creative arts and has tried to make secondary and tertiary observations, ignoring everything that one could call primary. It is possible to take Leonardo da Vinci and make very important and interesting comments on the relationship between his work and certain events that took place in his infancy” (p. 93). But, what Winnicott thinks is missing from this approach is a consideration of the “creative impulse itself” (p. 93).

46 It is interesting to note that in the early 1930s Milner spent time working as a psychologist at a collection of schools for girls in England. The results of her research study on behavioral problems in the schools she worked was published under the title *The Human Problem in Schools: A psychological study carried out on behalf of the Girl’s Public Day School Trust* (1938). Here she explains the work of creativity as central to the girls potential to build a positive relationship to learning and to their peers. She writes: “What she seems to need is some bridge, some activity which brings reassurance, and also lessens the tension which otherwise seems to inhibit all her relationships with the group. The most effective ‘bridge’ activities seem to be what is usually called creative work, whether on the physical level or the level of intuitive expression” (p. 174). As an effective treatment, Milner suggests “free symbolic expression in any material that her sensory gifts make appropriate—such as clay, or paint, or the imaginative use of words” (p. 176). She follows with a description of Freudian theory concerning how the human impulse to construct can have a “strongly integrating effect” (p. 174).
In a fragment of a diary entry transcribed in the book, Milner writes: “That’s partly why I paint, in order to preserve” (p. 57). She concedes that an attempt to “preserve, recreate, restore” (p. 159) a lost object is involved in her process, but her artworks are “much more than wish-fulfilling fancies of what one might hope would happen; they seemed to be, some of them at least, very complicated reflections upon the central problems of being alive” (p. 74).

But I think also there is much evidence to suggest that this function of art, as restoring lost objects, is in fact secondary; and that the primary role is the ‘creating’ of objects, in the psycho-analytic sense, not the recreating of them (p. 160).

What is at issue here is the artist’s ability to make something new: a “new bit of the external world” (p. 160). Thus, Milner suggests that learning to paint did not offer her a medium to re-create the world as it is, but to understand psychic creativity as the potential to unleash affects and desires that have yet to be known.

Object relations theorists, such as Milner and Winnicott, suggest that the adult in an aesthetic experience is replicating the child playing, because he or she is using artistic creativity to symbolize affect and anxiety. Kofman explains:

The artist, by means of play of unconscious psychic processes, the play of affects in the process of transformation, and that of representations in the combinatory, tries to repeat what the child does in his play before reason and judgment come to impose constraints (p. 112).
Art, then, can be an affront to the reality principle, a way to deal with the impact of reality on fantasy. In the next two sections, I turn to Klein and expand on Winnicott’s theories to substantiate and detail the relationship between childhood experience and an encounter with an art object. Nicky Glover explains that, “Where Klein’s theory focuses on the drama of the inner world (the trajectory of psychological and emotional development from fragmentation to integration), Winnicott focuses on the child’s interactions with the external world via the transitional object” (2009, p. 181). Winnicott himself explains where he departs from Klein:

The Klein statement includes the concept of reparation and restitution. In my opinion, however, Klein’s important work does not reach to the subject of creativity itself and therefore it could easily have the effect of further obscuring the main issue. We do need her work, however, on the central position of the guilt sense (1971, p. 94).

In the next section, I begin with a discussion of Klein’s theory of reparation, and then summarize Eve Sedgwick’s translation of this theory to the socio-political sphere, before addressing Winnicott’s theory of creativity and potential space.

Reparative Urges

Because the child cannot free associate with the use of language in the way Freud’s method opened, Melanie Klein understood and observed the child’s play as symbolic of unconscious wishes and conflicts.47

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47 Klein writes of child analysis: “For we find that, as regards the depth and scope of the analysis, we may expect as much from children as from adults. And still more, in the analysis of children we can go back...”
In their play children represent symbolically phantasies, wishes and experiences. Here they are employing the same language, the same archaic, phylogenetically acquired mode of expression as we are familiar in dreams (1975, p.135).

The child’s play, for Klein, was a “discharge of phantasy” (1975, p.199). She believed that “the baby’s impulses and feelings are accompanied by a kind of mental activity which [she took] to be the most primitive one: that is phantasy-building, or more colloquially, imaginative thinking” (1964, p.60). Klein built a theory that explains how the child’s instinctual impulse necessitates a phantasy world where they could assuage guilt and anxiety. Hanna Segal explains the Kleinian model of phantasy as not simply an “escape from reality, but a constant and unavoidable accompaniment of real experiences, constantly interested with them” (1974, p.14). Children’s games, Klein thought, “enable us to form certain special conclusions about the very early sense of guilt” (p. 132). In play, Klein was able to watch children’s phantasy life rise to the surface; phantasy, for Klein, animates the child’s interactions and perceptions of the world and its objects. She believed that “the baby’s impulses and feelings are accompanied by a kind of mental activity which [she took] to be the most primitive one: that is phantasy-building, or more colloquially, imaginative thinking” (1964, p.60).

Interested in what she deemed the “emotional situation of the baby” (1964, p.58), Klein observed that very early on, children’s psychic lives were characterized by tensions between love and hate, or ‘good’ and ‘bad’ objects. Klein calls the infant’s division of

to experiences and fixations which in adults we can only reconstruct, while in children they are directly represented” (p. 135).
good and bad ‘splitting’ and theorized that in phantasy, children would seek revenge against the mother/object who refused to appease its desire. She locates this child in the ‘paranoid schizoid position’, as it tries to split the world in two, retaining good objects and expelling bad ones. In 1935 Klein began to conceptualize something she termed ‘the depressive position’, a struggle to tolerate ambivalence and to synthesize good and bad objects, or to live with conflicting feelings towards others (this is her definition of what it means to love). The child, in phantasy, has damaged its mother and as it grows it comes to realize that the breast that denies gratification and the breast that satisfied wishes belong to the same mother. The child’s voracious greed for good objects and simultaneous attack on bad ones now results in feelings of guilt and attempts to repair the damage done in the world of phantasy. The Kleinian child, for example, is not innocent or naïve to an aggressive world; there is an aggression inside of her and these feelings have, she explains, “far-reaching effects on the child’s future mental well-being, his capacity for love and his social development. From them springs the desire to restore” (p. 294).

Where once the child felt compelled to divide its objects into pieces, to keep distances between persecutory and idyllic objects, it must now repair damage waged in phantasy against what is loved. She explains:

The ego feels impelled to make restitution for all the sadistic attacks that it has launched on that object…At this stage of development loving an object and devouring it are very closely connected (p. 265-266).
Hinshelwood terms this reparative urge: “Children’s distress at their own aggressiveness” (p. 369). Klein believed that in the child’s creative activity, there is an attempt to reduce the weight of guilt caused by splitting and damaging the loved object in phantasy. For Klein, the work of creativity restores the psychic impressions left on the subject from a propensity to wish damage on the loved object. The stress of love and hate in psychic governance leaves impressions that are worked out symbolically, both consciously and not, in creative endeavors. For Klein, the ability to symbolize a relationship to the loss of ideals was reparative. The urge to repair hate to alleviate its weight, is what drives one towards creative activity. Repair of the internal world after splitting is, then, an act of creativity, stimulated by anxiety and is a condition for the child’s development.

Segal points out that Klein chose the term ‘position’ and not ‘stage’ or ‘phase’, implying a “specific configuration of object relations, anxieties and defenses which persist throughout life” (p. ix). The adult never surpasses the potential to split ‘good’ from ‘bad’, as human phantasy life remains a struggle to negotiate love and hate. Reparation, as translated by Eve Sedgwick, acquires political currency. Sedgwick understood critical theory and much of social activism to be driven by a paranoia which works on behalf of the paranoid-schizoid position that Klein described. In “Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading, or, You’re so Paranoid, You Probably Think This Essay is About You” (2003), Sedgwick diagnosed contemporary critical practices as

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48 Hinshelwood clarifies that Klein “came to think of reparation as a significant root in all creative activity” (p. 398).
49 Segal explains, “There are aspects of splitting which remain and are important in mature life. For instance, the ability to pay attention, or to suspend one’s emotions in order to form an intellectual judgment, would be achieved without the capacity for temporary splitting” (p. 35).
being too quick to try and uncover the truth of an oppressive operation or motive where it lay hidden, and to reify negative affects by discerning, revealing or finding what one suspects to be there before they begin to read. Sedgwick employs Klein’s descriptions of how children learn to reform part-objects, through fantasy, into more satisfying whole-objects, to comment on how our reading practices might be more attuned to what helps us feel pleasure and repair injury. Sedgwick admits that at times, to her, Klein’s concepts can sound like a “cartoon”, with her descriptions of infants doing things like desiring to: “Suck dry, bite up, scoop out and rob their mother’s body of its good contents” (1946, p.8). But, reading Klein and her animation of the infant’s psychic dramas presents a way to think about the potential for small children’s emotional and intellectual lives as complex and expansive, and the lingering of original emotional conflicts in adulthood.

For Klein’s infant or adult, the paranoid position—understandably marked by hatred, envy, and anxiety—is a position of terrible alertness to the dangers posed by the hateful and envious part-objects that one defensively projects onto, carves out of, and ingests from the world around one. By contrast, the depressive position is an anxiety-mitigating achievement that the infant or adult only sometimes, and often only briefly, succeeds in inhabiting: this is the position from which it is possible in turn to use one’s resources to assemble or “repair” the murderous part objects into something like a whole—though, I would emphasize, not like any preexisting whole (p. 128).
In this essay, she relates a recognition that she would likely not live to sixty due to breast cancer to how gay men’s queer temporalities were historically altered due to AIDS and the deaths it caused. Sedgwick sounds desperate for a new way of thinking about the possibility of social change. Paranoid practices are crucial and persuasive, she admits, but there must be something other than “dualistic thought”, or ‘splitting’. Paranoid reading, Sedgwick describes, is tautological: it uncovers what it suspects to be there. It is ‘anticipatory’, ‘cynical’ and resists surprises and therefore newness.\textsuperscript{50} She explains:

The unidirectionally future-oriented vigilance of paranoia generates, paradoxically, a complex relation to temporality that burrows both backward and forward: because there must be no bad surprises, and because learning of the possibility of a bad surprise would itself constitute a bad surprise, paranoia requires that bad news be always already known (p. 130).

Sedgwick conceptualizes reparative reading as being triggered by the affect of hope: Hopefulness is “among the energies by which the reparatively positioned reader tries to organize the fragments and part-objects she encounters or creates” (p. 146). Reparative reading practices are not attempts to ignore “loss, pain, and oppression” (p. 138), but to make marginalized and oppressed lives more livable by seeking “a range of affects, ambitions and risks” (p. 150) and to creatively live outside of a call and response between polarized accounts of love and hate which reduce the world to ‘good’ and ‘bad’.

\textsuperscript{50} Paranoid reading is similar to Freud’s concept of anticipatory mourning (1915), wherein the subject engages in an activity that defends against mourning that has not yet come. The anticipation of loss prevents the ability to work-through loss as it occurs. For example, they may resist forming meaningful friendships in order to defend against the possibility of losing them. Or, one may hold very tight to an ideal for fear of its breakdown.
Sedgwick asks how it feels to acknowledge the good affects that vacillate with aggression and negativity and how those feelings repair cynicism. Integration, both Sedgwick and Klein illuminate, involves a sometimes painful recognition that the romanticized gloss over ideas and objects held near to us might need to be done away with. The work of integration, as explained by Sedgwick, is both hopeful and painful because it requires that we turn to face what has failed and hurt us.

I have spent time working with Sedgwick’s ideas here because they demonstrate a potential use for Klein’s theory in cultural studies. Klein’s theories on reparation, bolstered by Sedgwick’s analysis, will later help to explain an encounter with *This is England* as a potentially reparative experience. In this chapter, my aim is to demonstrate the use of object relations theory in cultural analysis. Thus far, I have suggested that art can facilitate the transformation and expression of affect as it may loosen repressed psychic and social material, and can unearth what has previously resisted interpretation. In order to do so, I have demonstrated how Sedgwick’s re-working of Klein’s theory of the child’s phantasy life provides an example of object relation’s theory as useful to critical theories of cultural production. Below I work with Winnicott’s theory of creativity in a similar way. Though Winnicott expressed gratitude towards Klein for provoking thought concerning the child’s play and reparative tendencies, he parted ways with both her and Freud, in that he understood creativity to be essential to living. Winnicott’s theory is useful for considering the psychical and socio-cultural, inner and outer worlds and their interplay.
Film as Potential Space

In Playing and Reality (1971) Winnicott reflected on the child’s creative pursuits. He believed that in play, the child was creatively testing out its place in the world and learning to appropriately symbolize inner turmoil to the outside world. He believed that the work of creativity is foundational to human existence, and like other psychoanalytically minded theorists of aesthetic life, he understood creative impulses to be grounded in infancy and the concealed impressions left by childhood development. Though a self-proclaimed Freudian, Winnicott’s theory of aesthetics is a departure from Freud in that it does not claim aesthetic beauty a matter of the artist’s talent, but centers the human impulse to create. In play, Winnicott believed that infants and children expose that they have “built up something in [them]selves that could be called material for play, an inner world of imaginative liveliness” (p. 71). Winnicott was interested in children’s first engagements with objects such as blankets, toys, pieces of cloth, even their thumbs, and how they gave psychic life to these objects. An object invested with phantasy, though inanimate, these things became operative in the child’s inner world. Defined as transitional objects, the child’s first ‘not me’ objects were infused with phantasies and psychic attachments. The infant both creates these objects, he explains, and the world provides them (1964, p.143-44). Winnicott observed that children use transitional objects to test separation and individuation from the mother as they learned to be a ‘self’ in a frustrating world. He provides a sketch of this process:
The subject says to the object: ‘I destroyed you’ and the object is there to receive the communication. From now on the subject says: ‘Hello object!’ ‘I destroyed you’. ‘I love you’. ‘You have value for me because of your survival of my destruction of you’. ‘While I am loving you I am all the time destroying you in (unconscious) fantasy. Here fantasy begins for the individual. The subject can now use the object that has survived (1971, p.89-90).

At the centre of this test is the mother. Winnicott explains that as the ego slowly differentiates itself from the mother, “the excited infant violently attacks the mother’s body in fantasy although the attack that we see is but feeble satisfaction comes with the feeding experiences, and for the time being that attack ceases” (1993, p.108). He observed and studied the child’s negotiations with the mother’s breast—an object that became good when it satisfied and bad when it was withheld and did not gratify the child’s wishes. “There is a complication which is of extreme importance in the study of the particular value of breast feeding”, writes Winnicott: “the human infant has ideas” (1993, p.53). Attached to the breast are phantasies belonging to the feeding experiences, which Winnicott regards as both aggressive and tender. The infant does not yet realize the breast, in both its ideal (gratifying) and its bad (refusing to gratify) form, belongs to the same mother. Winnicott puts it this way: “Eventually the child grows up and gets to know her just as she is, neither ideal nor indeed a witch” (1993, p.84).

Through play with transitional phenomena, the child learns to manipulate reality and to externally symbolize what resides internally. To be of use to the child, the
transitional object must “survive instinctual loving, and also hating and, if it be a feature, pure aggression” (p. 7). Adam Phillips summarizes Winnicott’s theory of transitional phenomena: “integral to development and creativity alike was the search for an object, or an environment, or a medium, sufficiently resilient and responsive to withstand the full blast of the primitive love impulse” (2007, p.113). For Winnicott, the use of transitional phenomena was required for creative living. Through them, children learn what is ‘me’, what is not and begin a life-long process of individuation by substituting people and things for the mother. Winnicott added to psychoanalytic thought a more elaborative theory of how culture impacts the child’s development because he insisted that the ability to creatively use the spaces between psyches and objects was integral to becoming a healthy person. These spaces in-between form a potential space for symbolization and inter-relationality: “In order to give a place to playing I postulated a potential space between the baby and the mother” (p. 55). Though he could not pin down a definition of “culture”, he was sure that the child’s experience of it was important:

I have used the term cultural experience as an extension of the idea of transitional phenomena and of play without being certain that I can define the word ‘culture’. The accent indeed is on experience. In using the word culture I am thinking of the inherited tradition. I am thinking of something that is in the common pool of humanity, into which individuals and groups

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51 He expands on this idea: “The transitional object and the transitional phenomena start each human being off with what will always be important for them, i.e. a neutral area of experience which will not be challenged. Of the transitional object it can be said that it is a matter of agreement between us and the baby that we will never ask the question: ‘Did you conceive of this or was it presented to you from without?’ The important point is that no decision on this point is expected. The question will not be formulated” (1993, p. 17).
of people may contribute, and from which we may all draw if we have somewhere to put what we find.\textsuperscript{52}

Winnicott’s deceptively plain writing bequeaths cultural studies with methods for understanding why we relate to others and are drawn to aesthetic objects. He famously hypothesized that there is no such thing as a baby, because if you presented him with a baby you also showed him a mother and an environment populated with objects and their relations. Hagmann rephrases his words: “There is no such thing as a work of art”… “there is only the viewer and the art as they share a co-constructed psychic reality” (p. 23). Winnicott puts it this way:

This intermediate area of experience, unchallenged in respect of its belonging to inner or external (shared) reality, constitutes the greater part of the infant’s experience, and throughout life is retained in the intense experiencing that belongs to the arts and to religion and to imaginative living, and to creative scientific work (p. 19).

Winnicott’s aesthetics of play, an exploration of how the child finds life outside of the mother/infant matrix, has been valuable for cultural studies of art. For the adult, it is not always culturally accepted that the inner world is on the outside and the inside; art (inclusive of film) provides a space for the continuation or replacement of play, and acts as transitional or potential space, a bridge, between reality and fantasy. Films are public but they also rely on the individual spectator’s private emotional worlds, and therefore occupy what Winnicott terms ‘potential space’.

\textsuperscript{52} 1974, p.116, italicized in the original.
Annette Kuhn (2010) has used Winnicott’s idea of transitional objects, which occupy transitional spaces, to further her understanding of the psychic operations at work in watching a film. Film, she suggests, relies on the interplay between material and mental/psychic life; it operates in the spaces between people, between literal and imaginative worlds, between subject and object. Hagmann believes that “aesthetic experience is evocative of archaic, preverbal experiences of self-in-relation” (2005, p.26). Because film lives in the potential space between inner and outer reality, Kuhn posits that the medium is “capable of evoking highly invested objects and physical processes relating to transitional processes” (2010, p.82). It is both an imaginary and a real space and like in the world of play, “through editing, filmic spaces are joined together- sutured-in such a way as to create a map, in varying degrees intelligible, of the spatial organization of the film’s imaginary-and-yet-real world” (p. 88). She suggests that the experience of cinema has a distinctive quality that “expresses the liminality and kinetic attributes of transitional phenomena” (p. 88). Film is a mode of critical fiction that allows the repudiation of fact and truth (or, at least its suspension) in order to emphasize the social power of imagination.53

Film, as art object and cultural experience, can become a site to work through grief and grievances; to face what has been damaged while representing the complex and contradictory forms which human emotions can take. Winnicott’s theories on child development help to render intelligible some of the emotional conflicts of perceiving art and film’s potential to transform the ways that spectators relate to themselves and to

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others. Film unites people as audience, is a medium that operates in social spaces through collaborative exchange between filmmaker and spectator, but also bridges subjective inner reality to cultural experience. Throughout this dissertation, Winnicott’s theories on play and creative living help to justify my use of film as object for analysis. I offer a reading of *This is England* that begins to demonstrate how Winnicott and Klein may be engaged in a dialogue concerning art’s potential to repair or reshape relationships to the past.

*This is England as Reparative Practice*

England in 1983, reeling from the violence of unemployment and Thatcher’s failed economic programs, is the setting for Meadow’s attempt to narrate the psycho-social effects and affective energies which propped-up racism and anti-immigration attitudes. The backdrop of the story is working class Exeter, a city bruised by economic recession and affected by the impact of resultant miners’ strikes and protests. Featuring a boy encasing on adolescence, Meadows narrates how far right-wing politics infiltrated skinhead communities and how an invitation to enter a circuit of belonging entices a child to participate in a white supremacist order. In Meadows’ words:

Set in 1983, this is the first period film I have made. A great deal of it is based on my own childhood and I tried to recreate my memoirs of being an 11-year-old kid trying to fit in…

Like most 11-year-old kids who wore jumpers with animals on, I got bullied by the older kids at school. So I looked for my own tribe to join. It was the skinhead movement that enamoured me the most. I remember
seeing 10 or 15 of them at the bus shelter on my way home from school one summer night and thinking they were the most fearsome thing I had ever seen. Even though I was terrified of them, I was instantly attracted to them. To be a part of most of the other factions you had to be a little rich kid. But to be a skinhead, all you needed was a pair of jeans, some work boots, a white shirt and a shaved head. You could be transformed from a twerp into a fearsome warrior in 15 minutes.\(^5^4\)

Meadows wanted to render the white supremacist factions, which dominate popular imaginaries of skinheads, oppositional to a skinhead culture that is deeply entangled with post-colonial connections between transnational labourers and British working class men in England. He explains that as a child, he learned

…that skinheads had grown out of working class English lads working side by side with west Indians in factories and shipyards in the late-60s. The black lads would take the whites to blues parties where they were exposed to ska music for the first time. Soon, Jamaican artists like Desmond Dekker, the Upsetters and Toots And The Maytals were making a living out of songs aimed directly at English white kids. My film shows how rightwing politics started to creep into skinhead culture in the 1980s and change people's perception of it.\(^5^5\)

The creator uses the medium of film in an attempt to reconcile a personal and national entanglement with the infliction of racial injuries on others, and in so doing


\(^{5^5}\) Ibid.
creates an aesthetic experience for his audience. An archive of working class history in Britain, *This is England* has become a collective site for working through and understanding how race, class and gender mark the nation’s history. What is achieved for the film’s audience is exposure to a redescription of violence that underscores the psychological underpinnings of hate and phobias. The film is a conscious attempt to record a lived childhood, but it also imagines how the past could have been different had its characters dealt with loss and injury differently. For Marion Milner (1987), what would be of interest here is not Meadow’s ability to imitate or replicate what he knows, but “the fact that a new thing has been created. A new bit of the outside world, which is not the original primary wish, has been made interesting and significant” (p. 214).

Shaun, *This is England*’s child protagonist, has lost his father and is having a difficult time working through this loss. He is depicted as an awkward child who does not feel a sense of belonging. Shaun is saved from his loneliness while walking home from school by Woody- a man in his twenties who is the leader of a gang of young men. Woody feels sorry for Shaun and welcomes him into the gang, transforming him into a skinhead and filling the space of his loss with a patriarchal figure who manages a band of brotherly camaraderie. Shaun receives demonstrations of protection and affection, and is joyful with a sense of belonging. The environment shifts, though, when Woody’s old friend, Combo, is released from jail and returns to the social scene. Combo causes a fracture in the group due to his white supremacist politics and membership in The National Front. Able to manipulate Shaun’s vulnerabilities surrounding his father’s death, Combo convinces the boy that his father died in an unnecessary war and that his
participation in the Nationalist movement will avenge his father’s death. Shaun’s feelings of loss and loneliness, of being afraid and vulnerable, lead him to being governed by and adherent to fascist regimes of power, particularly as characterized by the National Front. Combo usurps the patriarchal role from Woody and Shaun is again transformed, adopting a pointedly anti-immigration stance, attending white nationalist meetings and terrorizing racialized men and boys in the neighborhood.

Shaun becomes monstrous under the tutelage of Combo, a man so broken he cannot control his violent aggression. Together, they create a world where violence against others is the answer to internal strife. Both Shaun and Combo’s monstrosity is highlighted as being the result of a projection of what is undesirable on the inside. The film’s evocation of the inner world of aggression and devastation, presents the audience with a representation of how cruelty can be a symptom of insecurity and internal persecutory fears. Each time they feel sadness, terrorizing another becomes an act of omnipotent destruction that defends against loss. Shaun, the child, is rendered capable of extreme violence and plays a part in a movement for the revival of the “Englishman” which requires immigrants to return ‘home’ so as not to take jobs away from ‘deserving’ men. He has his first girlfriend, his first encounter with drugs, and learns to terrorize other children while desperately filling the loss of his father and undergoing the

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56 In Kleinian terms, this might be deemed “projective identification”: “Much of the hatred against parts of the self is now directed toward the mother. This leads to a particular form of identification which establishes the prototype of an aggressive object-relation. I suggest for these processes the term ‘projective identification’” (1946, p.102).

57 Winnicott’s theory of delinquency (1956) would be helpful in characterizing Shaun’s behavior as a reaction to loss. His theory explains that in delinquency, “the secondary gains have become more important than the original course, which is lost” (1989, p.577). But, for Winnicott, delinquency is hopeful because it is the child reaching out, “trying to reach back over the deprivation area to the lost object” (p. 577).
impossible project of successfully mourning his death. As this child inches towards the borders of adolescence, he learns to substitute nationalism and Combo for the loss of his father and undergoes the process of disillusionment which marks growing-up.⁵⁸

In *This is England*, Shaun struggles with the creative work of fashioning a self and negotiating feelings of love and hate. One of the things that makes *This is England* so affecting is its depiction of the vulnerability and fear that cause Combo and Shaun, among others, to use violence as a defense against anxiety and against working through loss. Their violence is an accusation: the world does not provide safety for me as I need. From Combo, Shaun receives an education in inducing terror and dread in people, but this does not lead to successfully hiding vulnerability and tenderness. Meadows carefully invokes both Shaun and Combo’s brokenness, visually capturing the inextricable relationship between his injured masculinity and aggression. Tentatively, acts of violent destruction fill Shaun with strength and seem to avenge his father’s death. This child’s violent reconstruction of external reality is an attempt to diminish psychic stress and to control anxiety. He is operating from within what Klein may deem a paranoid-schizoid position. In an effort to stave off despair and anguish, he and Combo split the world into good and bad. This rigorous and grotesque splitting works to de-humanize immigrants. In order to belong to Combo’s gang, all members must remain vigilant to this splitting, otherwise be evicted from the group.

*This is England* tells a different rendition on the theme of childhood innocence from that raised in chapter one. The death of Shaun’s father is a violence in many ways,

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⁵⁸ Winnicott suggests that once the child is ready to be weaned from the notion that he created the world, the mother must gradually introduce a world that will fail. This process of disillusionment is considered a healthy part of growing-up.
because with his dad, Shaun loses a sense of innocence and protection. His father’s death is a devastating violation on the child’s sense of self and there is no one there to save or protect him from tragedy. It takes a scene of almost fatal violence, in which Combo severely beats one of Shaun’s friends, to shake the boy out of a tendency to idealize nationalism. It is when the child learns to repair a relationship to the source of his pain, and to disallow his destructive impulses to ravage his social world, that he can begin to build up the capacity to tolerate hate, and withstand an aggressive impulse. Combo is not a sufficient replacement for what he has lost; Shaun must learn to creatively repair the world after it is broken by the death of his father and the resultant loss of the feeling of being protected.

In suggesting that facing the psychological dynamics that sustain idealization and hate, Meadows shows the potential for his protagonist to work through injury. The artist’s careful rendering of the affective life of his characters does tell us something about his own history, and is in some ways a conscious attempt at wish fulfillment, but here I have placed emphasis on the film as an aesthetic resource for its audience. For Georgis (2009), “because aesthetic experience is directly linked to the conditions that the aesthetic object provides for making reparation and for expressing the depressive position, the turn to art for both artist and audience provides an occasion for integrating human experience of loss and its constituent conflicts” (p. 78). Georgis, within a tradition of psychoanalytic thinkers, imparts a method for thinking about the ways that the enigmatic residues of first conflicts impact how and what we can learn from art.
In this chapter I have been concerned with the potential psychic uses of art objects, and have evoked Freud, Klein and Winnicott’s theories on how art and creativity help in the address of emotional problems. Working with Winnicott’s notion of potential space, I have suggested that film can be conceptualized as transitional phenomena, and can be used to understand injury experienced and caused. Film exists at the nexus of subject-object relationality and therefore occupies potential space, relying on circuits of affect and identification being exchanged between audience and the screen. Engaging Melanie Klein to read *This is England* as a symbolic resource, I have set-up a reading practice that will form my encounter with films about childhood in the following two chapters.
Chapter 3: Learning and the Work of Mourning in Philippe Falardeau’s Monsieur Lazhar

This dissertation has analyzed narrations of childhood in visual culture, specifically film, and has considered the impressions these representations leave on the social, instinctual and emotional worlds of children. Privileging psychoanalytic theories of how aesthetic objects describe subjective experience, and narrate conflict, I have suggested that cinematic representations of children offer something important to theories and histories of child and youth development, and to the social worlds of children. In fictional narrations of childhood we imagine new arrangements of the adult/child relationship, which can reconceive measures of the child’s emotional, cognitive and social achievements. This chapter elaborates on this thesis by theorizing the relationship between trauma, childhood education and symbolization.

Cathy Caruth (1991) suggests that trauma “describes an overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events, in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed, and uncontrolled repetitive occurrence of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena” (p. 181).\(^59\) Trauma—an unexpected event that causes the subject to reenact, through symptoms, its effect—causes a specific form of non-congruence between affect and reason. A traumatic event repeats itself in the subject’s mind; not worked through, it causes an incapacity to control when psychic debris, left over and made from the unplanned and surprising event, will blend with reality. The experience of

trauma can interrupt an expected future and cause parts of the mind (and body) to defend against memory of the past. Trauma, according to Caruth, produces a history that is “no longer straightforwardly referential” (p. 182). Trauma injures the subject’s ability to form historical narrative: It poses a crisis in representation because it becomes difficult to form narrative sense out of the disruptive event, as it is both necessarily forgotten or distorted, and lies latent, likely to return (Caruth, 1996; Georgis, 2013).

Transposed to the site of education, the temporal structure of trauma and its psychic dynamics offer a mode of critique with which to consider the work of learning. The recognition that trauma interferes on linear temporality—on the ability to move forward without being haunted by the past—can be used to conjure a theory of learning that illuminates the fragmented, resistant and non-linear ways that knowledge is made. Attention to the effects of trauma on learning and teaching helps to conceive of an education for children who are experiencing loss, grief and suffering. Trauma exposes the mind’s ability to defend against knowledge, and against memory. It reveals the possibility that we might sometimes rather forget than remember; that in the aftermath of a difficult experience, the child’s resistances to knowledge may be an attempt to restore a time before trauma. To this end, this chapter considers Philippe Falardeau’s 2011 film, *Monsieur Lazhar*, as a resource for enhancing thought on the psychic life of childhood trauma as it poses conflicts in the classroom. In this film, children and their teacher reside together in the aftermath of trauma. In *Monsieur Lazhar*, child characters’ reactions to the unpredictable death of a teacher animate the inner world of object relations after traumatic experience. *Monsieur Lazhar* offers a commentary on the relation between
inner life and the material world of the children’s classroom, and uniquely renders the teacher a politically complicated figure. Bachir Lazhar is an Algerian immigrant whose family has been killed due to his wife’s political views. The film narrates his insertion into an elementary school classroom, after the suicide of its original teacher, despite his lack of teaching experience.

As audience to the film, we encounter children working to creatively repair and represent their brokenness within the confines of school policies that solicit compliance and ignore the unpredictable and unruly time of mourning. I employ the method for encountering aesthetic representations of childhood that I described at length in the previous chapter to read Monsieur Lazhar alongside psychoanalytic theories of how hope can be made after the imposition of a traumatic event. Especially salient to my dissertation is the film’s testament to children’s capacity for understanding complexity, the possible exertions they may exercise to take care of adults, and its general disruption to the illusion of childhood innocence. In the film, a teacher learns to discard a belief that a well organized classroom can control what children will take away from a lesson, in order to collaborate on the project of education with his students, that does not press knowledge onto them from the outside. The teacher’s notice of how the psychical conflicts invoked by trauma inform the children’s ability to learn allows him to rethink

60 I am suggesting that Melanie Klein’s theory of reparation, which centers a child dealing with loss and with guilt, is useful to understanding the child character’s movements towards and away from the depressive position. For Klein, the infant’s psychic existence is full of sadistic phantasies resulting from an innate aggressive drive. The stress of love and hate in the infant’s psychic governance leaves impressions that are worked out symbolically, both consciously and not, in creative endeavors (such as play). Thus, creative expression aims to fix “a [split] in the fabric of the world” (1917, p. 2). Klein’s model of early infantile development, as elaborated by Eve Sedgwick in an effort to characterize a reading practice that does not operate from the paranoid-schizoid position, also helps to explain the film itself as reparative text.
what education can do for both him and them. The necessity of pedagogy that undermines romantic constructions of childhood that assume innocence and inexperience (Boldt and Salvio, 2006; Farley, 2009; Silin, 1995; Stockton, 2009) is exemplified in *Monsieur Lazhar*.

Sara Matthews (2009) explains that the phantasy of the child as innocent comes from a relegation of aggression to “the world ‘out there’ as opposed to the constitutional flight of self-hood” (p. 72). Thus, fixing the time of childhood as “simple” operates as a “defense against encountering the traces of those early conflicts within” (p. 71-72). Matthews encourages an acceptance that adults must pass through their own psychical present in making a relation to children and adolescents. *Monsieur Lazhar* offers an occasion for thinking about childhood as a time marked by query, loss and potential distress, but importantly, Falardeau represents these problems as similarly discernable in adulthood. Falardeau does not inflate his child characters with precious innocence; rather, he narrates their complex engagements with death, post-coloniality, war and terror. Across categories of social difference, Lazhar and his students forge methods for grieving that highlight the human condition of loss while respecting the alterity of the other. These children do not suffer from ignorance or inexperience as much as they do from the violence inflicted by theories of childhood that make it a stage of human development where struggle is suspended or delayed. Neither adult nor child is shown to be better at representing loss.
Symbolizing Trauma

Important to my interpretation of the film is a consideration of what conditions are required for children to symbolize the effects of trauma. Specifically, the film provides a case study for how school curriculum can be designed with respect for children’s phantasy life and can facilitate the symbolization of unworked through loss. My reading gives attention, also, to the role of aggression in education, mourning and recovery from trauma. Though the uniqueness of their situations remains intact, and the teacher’s authority is certain, child and adult make meaning out of death together, allowing the curriculum to operate as transitional object (Winnicott) which facilitates the binding of affect to representation. Lazhar cannot adequately know how to respond to the children’s grievous loss, nor the children to his, but though their suffering remains mostly illegible to the other, they forge empathy in part because their grieving is synchronous.

Prior to his arrival, the class’ teacher, Martine LeChance, hanged herself with a blue scarf tied to a pipe that runs across the ceiling of the classroom. Soon after LeChance is found dead, we hear an example of a child’s precociousness, spoken calmly in the schoolyard: “My parents are freaking”. The experience of learning about LeChance’s death has also caused a disturbance to the adult’s sense of security. The film’s children are not demonstrated to learn and grow from moral lessons or mimetic repetitions of adult behavior: they express speculative queries and disidentifications with the adult’s behavior. In their precocity and synchronistic expression of grief with their teacher, these children exhibit a queer growth which does not follow lines of human
development that pose measured divisions between childhood and adulthood. Both children and adults have accumulated enough emotional wisdom to discuss death.

The cold and conventional aesthetics of the elementary school depicted belie the complex forms of emotional life and the passionate attachments to teaching and learning that permeate its architecture. Together, teacher and students increase their capacity for symbolization, while helping the audience to consider what happens to learning after a traumatic event. It is children who find LeChance’s body; first a ten-year old boy named Simone, whose aggressive behavior (a problem for the school before the death) is inflamed by what he witnesses. Alice sneaks up to the classroom door next, peering inside to view her teacher’s lithe body, hung. The children then begin to use each other, in acts of what Melanie Klein might deem projective identification, to negotiate the psychic weight of guilt and resentment they feel towards their dead teacher. At issue too is the possible violation of a child’s erotic innocence. Simone, unsure of what do make of a teacher’s affection, told his parents and school administration that LeChance had kissed him. The child’s knowledge that the accusation of a teacher’s kiss would cause her social and psychic damage displays a cunning astuteness to the social rules of sexuality. Alice resents Simone for sharing an exceptional intimacy with LeChance, and for misrepresenting the teacher’s affections. Onto each other they project feelings of hatred and guilt, uncertain of how to integrate them or hold them inside.

Lazhar is a patient man, whose teaching style is both formal and tender. His personal history of political exile from Algeria, servitude to a government which would be unable to prevent the killing of his wife when she critiqued its policies, and his
conscious negotiation of Quebec culture are not similar to Alice or Simone’s experiences. These children, born to Quebec culture, have never learned about Algeria or felt the coldness of an immigration court. But, in their grieving of a lost teacher and the repetition of her body hung that haunts them, Lazhar feels an identification with their struggle to symbolize trauma. Student and teacher reside in the same time of mourning and work together to understand how to live, and how to feel enlivened by learning, despite and because of the death of another.

Lazhar’s own emotional world has been scarred by the death of loved ones. While Lazhar wakes with the sweat of nightmares about his wife and children’s deaths, the children suffer from nightmares in which their dead teacher returns. Bachir Lazhar has not taught before, nor has he the credentials to do so, but his ability to use curriculum to symbolize psychic life makes his classroom a transformative site for learning. Lazhar enters the children’s classroom with his own trauma: forced exile from Algeria due to political antagonism and the deaths of his wife and children. The reparative potential of Lazhar’s pedagogy lies in its attunement to children’s affective entanglements with the experience of learning and the likelihood of transference between teacher and student. An uncertified and improbable teacher, he creates lessons for his students that help them to risk returning to violent scenes, to re-find themselves in them, and integrate them as intimate parts of the self. At first, this happens unintentionally. Lazhar finds that each curricular lesson he introduces into the classroom becomes a locus for the children’s

61 Freud (1914) used the term transference to discuss the unconscious transmission of psychic material onto another, most often without regard for their individuality or alterity. Projections of what he terms “the forgotten past” (p. 37) onto the analyst (and, he notes, onto the world) helped Freud to understand transference as fundamental to psychoanalytic observation.
compulsion to repeat trauma. With time, he understands that he can use curriculum to help the children symbolize aggression and ambivalence resultant from both their teacher’s death and their prior histories of loss. Thus, the film provides a complex representation of the creativity required in making a relationship to oneself after trauma. Though this film offers a specified example of the violence and trauma that children can experience, I use the text to open-up a discussion of how violence contours all forms of human relationality in post-colonial Canada.

In two mirroring events, Bachir Lazhar is presented with boxes that contain the physical effects of a teacher’s work. From the post-office he collects a box that contains what is left of his dead wife’s belongings: Brightly coloured rubber stamps for marking her student’s work, class photos with children seated in rows, a photograph of herself with her own children. Later, he is presented with a box that holds some of Martine LeChance’s belongings, left at the school after her death: Stickers for marking student’s assignments, class photos and a young adult novel. An inheritance from two women whose deaths were the result of variant forms of violence, the contents of both boxes make their way into his teaching practice. When he is able to find ways of integrating these inheritances into his own work (reading the novel to the children and using the stamps when marking assignments, for example), it signals a move in the film towards reparation. From the remains of trauma, Lazhar crafts an expression of how the dead hold a continued presence in both his inner world and external reality. The inclusion of LeChance and his wife’s belongings helps him to get in touch with his own and the children’s histories of loss. This is an aesthetic experience because he is able to creatively
use these objects in ways that commune with a psychic history of loss, and to understand how he has and will survive. Unworked through grief is converted into a more creative teaching practice, which opens-up his classroom to communal conversations about how to recover from an untimely death. Impressed upon his own teaching methods are ghostly reminders of these women’s work as educators and their attempts to infuse the classroom with creative challenges to the work of education.

Lazhar enters the classroom, a site of devastation haunted by LeChance, with notions of what education should look and feel like which are somewhat archaic and wildly different from what the children are used to. My interpretation of the film tracks Lazhar’s own education in teaching, suggesting that it is the children who teach him to teach. They show him how to infuse the classroom with emotion and imagination while maintaining authority. The children show him how to become a figure of authority who is dispassionate about the pursuit of mastery. And, whom can both provide a holding environment (Winnicott, 1953) for the children to project aggression and insecurity while assimilating reality with the world of phantasy and instinctual wishes. The teacher in this film learns to make curriculum out of grief, his own and his students. Required to do so is acknowledgment of the atemporal, nonlinear struggle required in mourning a lost object.

The work of mourning, as described by Sigmund Freud, involves repairing the ego after the world is impoverished by the loss of an object (1917). To perceive the world as good after devastating loss requires “reinvest[ing] the free libido in a new object”. Mourning is not pragmatic, nor does it assume a chronological timeline, but involves using the

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enigmatic psychic character of loss to create new encounters with old objects (Georgis, 2013).

Lazhar’s classroom is seething with suffering, with emotional responses to death. Between Lazhar and his students, circuits of transferential feelings circulate, as they narrate their losses through each other. Sigmund Freud explained transference, in the context of the clinic, as the analysand’s unconscious redirection of feelings onto the analyst. Freud noticed that his patients allowed him to become a substitute for the original object that caused conflict. Thus, his analysand’s response to and use of him was predetermined by elements of earlier relationships. Originally understood as a defect or breakdown in treatment, Freud came to understand the work of transference as integral to psychoanalytic practice. Transference became what was to be interpreted, containing the story of pasts that repeat themselves in the analysand’s present encounters with objects. In the clinic, the potential for transference is heightened and the hints it holds for why the analysand aims its desires and fantasies at certain objects can be better understood.

Lazhar has lost two children to a malicious fire that burned down his home in Algeria. Started by enemies of his wife’s political views, the fire also ended her career as a teacher. Freud’s theory of transference helps to explain the place that Alice takes-up in Lazhar’s emotional world. Alice becomes the child that Lazhar wants to protect, a role that both she and her single mother are grateful he occupies. Alice, along with her peers, offer Lazhar a chance to symbolically repair some of what he has lost. Though together they succeed in learning to build new attachments, Lazhar continues to grapple with the
inability to ignore the ghosts of his children, and Alice is haunted by the death of Martine LeChance.

**Exile, Immigration and Reparation in the Classroom**

Below I attend to three scenes from the film that speak to the theme of violence. My discussion considers Bachir Lazhar’s pedagogy strident in its ability to turn the classroom into a space where grief is socialized and treated as valuable to the design of curriculum. He does not try to repress the effects that violence has left on the children, but creates lessons that carefully forge space for them to play with and to creatively integrate lost objects. The scenes I isolate represent assorted modes of violence, demonstrating its capacity to affect both the realm of the symbolic and the social. Lazhar seeks to help the children come to know themselves through violence, to resist the temptation to ignore its psychic impacts, and to resignify it with the help of curriculum. Integral to the effectiveness of his lessons is the offering of support in building a capacity to symbolize, through play with words, the self in relation to trauma.

In the first scene discussed, Bachir accepts a dinner invitation that enters him into a conversation about why he cannot teach his story of immigration within the parameters of the curriculum approved by the school. From this scene I draw out a consideration of the trouble the unconscious makes for learning multiculturalism which is, in Canadian elementary schools, a legislated approach to racial belonging. There is no insistence on the usefulness of multiculturalism in the film, or on its failures, but it does reveal a fecund opacity surrounding multicultural curriculum: There are some traumas and
histories of violence that it cannot bear to hold. The multicultural fantasy of Canada as straightforwardly welcoming of immigrants is here undone. We observe the breakdown of national narratives of belonging that repudiate residual impacts of exile, colonialism and imperialism. Lazhar experiences the emotional conflicts of exile and struggles to continue after being estranged from his home and the death of his family. The film centers on his trauma and posits his story as difficult knowledge because it challenges what multicultural curriculum can know. In his tender relationship with his students, and Alice in particular, we are provided with encounters across difference that produce new relations and new identities. Foregrounded here may be what Paul Gilroy (2004) deems “the always unpredictable mechanisms of identification” (xi). Gilroy’s emphasis on the emergent relationality that characterizes new hybrid forms in postcolonial societies helps to explain Lazhar and Alice’s relationship. In the commonality of their losses, we glimpse the pleasures of solidarity and new forms of relationality that lead to a reinvention of self.\footnote{Lazhar and Alice’s relationship compels each to reinvent their self. Against the collective tragedy of death, their encounters across difference generate complex connections and identifications.} Monsieur Lazhar’s audience is asked to contemplate their own emotional relationship to the granting of citizenship to refugees and asked what citizenship has to do with who is qualified to teach children. Bachir Lazhar characterizes some of the conflicts of teaching about war, and the discontents of colonialism in Canada.

In the second scene discussed, Alice delivers a speech to the class that asks the children to consider whether LeChance wasn’t enacting a violence on the classroom in committing suicide. With her question, Alice draws the group closer to symbolizing the
effects of trauma because she struggles to use words as objects to represent grief and shows the class how to play with language as a mode of symbolizing trauma. As Caruth (1996) explains, trauma causes its subject to return, often unconsciously, to the site of trauma in order to make sense of what was lost in its intrusion. Alice’s brave use of words is compelled by an urge to renarrate the difficult event that she and her peers underwent, in order to understand how the experience of trauma might be integrated. The emotional resonance of what Alice and Simone have witnessed is unspeakable. The inarticuable excess of emotion that the children feel cannot be contained in words, but facilitations of their grief that repress language are also demonstrated to be damaging. The topic of Alice’s presentation surprises the class, and instigates a dialogue between Lazhar and the school principle about the reparative potential of her speech. From here I move to analyze a similar scene, made possible by Alice’s brave questioning of LeChance’s intentions. Alice draws out from Simone’s aggression an edge of sorrow and a wave of guilt for his teacher’s death. He breaks down in the classroom, seeking resolution to a difficult question that has plagued him since the death: It’s not my fault? This moment, a working through occasioned by another child, helps to ease the pressure of guilt on Simone and signals movement towards mourning. Under the care of Lazhar’s lessons on how to forge language out of despair, these children, bound by their witnessing, eventually motivate each other to symbolize the inner world of loss. Lazhar learns to use curriculum as a transitional object that can bridge inner and outer worlds. He gives up on a tacit agreement made with the school’s administration and the school
psychologist to “separate psychotherapy from pedagogy” and to leave the ghosts of the
dead outside of curriculum.

Long shots of mundane life during a Canadian winter (doing laundry, walking
through a city park while men play hockey outdoors, playing chess, waiting on public
transit, watching a plant die) are interrupted by scenes of a callous immigration court. On
a cold evening, Lazhar eats dinner with Claire, a white, Quebecois colleague, in her
home. She is infatuated by his foreignness and story of exile. Over dinner, while drinking
red wine, they discuss the emotional situation of teaching stories of immigration and
colonization to the children. Claire is insistent that Bachir find space in the classroom for
his own story of exile, his journey to Canada. “There is no room in the curriculum”, he
responds, quick to concede the difficulties of representing the complex and inexplicable
events that brought him to Canada. Claire does not relate to the affective dissonance
Bachir feels between his story of exile and the limits of the program of study approved by
the schoolboard. His private grief, an effect of political exile, cannot be represented in the
curriculum as it is provided: He must learn to pry it open and teach at its edges in order to
use it in ways that engage with the affective resonances of death on the classroom.

Lisa Farley’s psychoanalytically informed consideration of pedagogies of
uncertainty in history education inflects my reading of the film’s scene. In “Radical
Hope: On the Problem of Uncertainty in History Education”, Lisa Farley (2009)
proposes that pedagogy might be transformed as a way of asking questions about ethical
obligations, ontological crises and anxieties at work in efforts to teach and learn from
difficult histories, instead of a set of skills to utilize. For Farley, following D.W.
Winnicott and Jonathon Lear, pedagogy can be vital to the child’s ability to tolerate a world that fails. She argues that, “if education is to be an intervention into complexities of history, it does not reside in the adult’s capacity to provide a rational explanation that will resolve conflict” (p. 538). If, as Farley suggests, “failure is a condition of growth”, then teaching histories of race, war and coloniality might not be a project concerned with pre-determined outcomes, but with providing space for what Britzman calls ‘difficult knowledge’. In *Lost Subjects, Contested Objects: Toward a Psychoanalytic Inquiry of Learning*, Britzman (1998) proposes that learning is a psychic event, shaped by resistance to knowledge. Resistance, she advocates, is “a precondition for learning from knowledge and the grounds of knowledge itself” (p. 118). Difficult knowledge makes an interference into continuity of subjective reality, causing the subject to reconsider what and how it knows.

Difficult knowledge is a pedagogical challenge because it is “a confrontation with affective traces of an internal history from primal helplessness, disillusionment and crises of authority and (not)knowing” (Farley, 2009, p.539). For Farley, “in the context of history education”, one way that “‘difficult knowledge’ is difficult” is because of “its inclusion of traumatic content in an otherwise-sanitized curriculum” (p. 539). When confronted with difficult knowledge, educators and students are faced with their own vulnerability and histories of learning to tolerate a world that fails. Farley offers a “different understanding of pedagogy than debates in education that advocate for censorship of difficult material (in the name of protecting the child’s innocence)” or simply to speak “‘matter-of-factly’ about such knowledge” (p. 538-539). Both positions,
she points out, “assume the child’s innocence—either to be protected or disrupted” (p. 544). *Monsieur Lazhar*’s children’s emotional worlds are already informed by histories of race, dispossession, genocide and diaspora, before the curriculum addresses these issues.

Lazhar cannot reduce his story of immigration, or his crossing of borders that are made from histories of race and nation building, to rational explanation that can be held by the curriculum he is provided with. He is a stranger to the multicultural curriculum presented to him, and his challenge is to attempt to “figure out new designs for living with the pain and pleasures of modernity” (Walcott 2000, p. 138). While the children wake from nightmares induced by the shock of their teacher’s death, their teacher confesses to the return of his family in dreams. The death of his wife and children forms a menacing event that sits at the centre of his biography and comes into contact with the children’s own histories of failing and being failed. Farley’s psychoanalytically informed theory of pedagogy, which understands cognitive growth as recursive and non-linear, provokes a consideration of how ideas of the child bear upon the development of curriculum for children. Lazhar strains to know what is appropriate for the children, and how much of himself he can risk sharing with them. The pedagogical assignment, as Farley articulates it, is to understand how to “engage with knowledge that references its own breakdown, not solely for the outcome of understanding, but to notice how pedagogy—and knowledge itself—is marked by the very trauma it attempts to work through” (p. 538). What can it mean to approach education as something other than assisting in the child’s development of a conceptual network that substantiates a flood of
certainty about an object? We cannot know in advance how children will use and interpret curriculum on colonialism, immigration or war, but curriculum that invites symbolization of the conflicts of learning might help children to tolerate being failed. And, in this case, to feel hopeful about the world even after being witness to a death they cannot make sense of.

The Child’s Speech

In the social world that the children form, there are enduring but damaged friendships. Simone, the boy who first found his teacher’s body, has a hard time concealing his aggressive wishes. He acts out in class and taunts other children as they stumble through curriculum. Seated at the back of the classroom, he often causes disturbances and has difficulty taking school seriously. Underneath Simone’s violent outbursts, we catch a glimpse of a boy wrestling nervously with guilt. For him, the suicide hooks into a history of breakdown between the mother and child relationship. Simone’s aggression is arguably a desire to communicate grief (there are also hints that the antecedent roots of this boy’s aggression stem from revenges against a difficult relationship with his parents).\(^{64}\) Understood as a troubled child who comes from a

\(^{64}\) Freud’s theory of guilt, as introduced in Civilization and its Discontents, may help to explain Simone’s psychical condition and vacillation between acting aggressively and expressing guilt. Freud asks what happens in the subject “to render his desire for aggression innocuous” so that he or she may become an operative member of civilization (1973, p.60). “His aggressiveness is introjected, internalized”, Freud explains; “It is directed towards his own ego. There it is taken over by a portion of the ego, which sets itself over against the rest of the ego as super-ego, and which now, in the form of ‘conscience’, is ready to put into action against the ego the same harsh aggressiveness that the ego would have liked to satisfy upon other, extraneous individuals. The tension between the harsh super-ego and the ego that is subjected to it, is called by us the sense of guilt; it expresses itself as a need for punishment. Civilization, therefore, obtains mastery over the individual’s dangerous desire for aggression by weakening and disarming it and by setting up an agency within him to watch over it…” (p. 60-61).
difficult home, teachers are divided on how to treat his behavior—some want him expelled, others (including Lazhar) insist that the school must be patient with his anger. If, as Freud suggested, conflict and aggression are not necessarily symptomatic of pathology but irredeemably primal phenomena, than what Simone might be missing is a venue to symbolize aggression that allows others to perceive his suffering.

Alice and Simone have an emotional connection that has been injured by the suicide. Alice has no patience for Simone’s insolent behavior. She is antagonistic towards him and possesses obvious resentment of his relationship to LeChance. In one of the film’s most resolving scenes, Alice delivers a presentation to the class that directly addresses the suicide. Her speech captures the violence of coming to terms with how their teacher could commit suicide, on display for the children to see. In her speech, Alice is trying to make sense of Martine’s own pain, but also the act of aggression caused against the children when she chose to let them find her body. Her statements on the difficult subject are transformative and visibly touch Simone. She reads the speech to her class:

_My school is beautiful. Maybe not the most beautiful, but it’s mine..._

Simone’s fluctuation between expressing vulnerability, helplessness, guilt and aggression are clarified by a reading of Freud’s account of the use of guilt by civilization and the super ego. The boy is tormented by his super-ego; when his aggressive impulse is not held in check, he subsequently feels a sense of guilt and seeks punishment by the external world.

In *Sex, Death, and the Education of Children: Our Passion for Ignorance in the Age of AIDS* (1995), Silin grapples with the problem of communicating with children about death when it is believed that developmentally they are unable to deal with its complexity. The result, he suggests, is often the construction of “death-defying” curriculum, presented to students in the hope that the topic of death remains external to the pedagogical project (42). Here it is a child who forces the topic of death into the curriculum.
A big yard to play...Teachers see if we have lice, if we are aggressive, or hyperactive...But this is the nice school where, on a Wednesday night, our teacher hung herself. With her blue scarf from a pipe.

My mom was in Miami because she’s a flight attendant, but I wish she was home because I had a really hard time...

Martine must have been discouraged with her life. The last thing she did was kick her chair over. I wonder if this was a violent message. If we are violent we get a detention...Schools shouldn’t be violent. But we can’t give Martine a detention because she is dead.

The child has taken the curricular assignment (to write and present a speech on a self-chosen topic) as a chance to play with how words can be used to represent emotional life. She uses the curriculum to hold open a space for symbolization of the ego’s journey towards making sense from trauma. Her teacher’s death has caused a disruption to what she has previously understood as ‘violence’. School was explained to her as venue safe from violence—where violence is punished—but now, she points out, the children must incorporate violence into their understanding of what happens at school. The school’s policy of repression surrounding death forecloses the space needed to learn to represent conflict; a policy that Alice has adroitly contravened by speaking directly to the death within the assignment. Lazhar hopes to circulate Alice’s speech to the school and the children’s parents, believing that it demonstrates a desire to speak about and to mourn the lost teacher. The school principal does not allow him to do so, deeming the words that form the speech too violent to promote. *Life is violent*, Lazhar tells her, *not the text.*
Later, inspired by Alice and in an act of resistance to school policies that coax children into abstracting themselves from their suffering, Bachir Lazhar invites all of his students to locate and to play with words that come closest to signifying their feelings and uncertainties. A child has told the class about his grandfather, who was detained in Chile during political conflict and later committed suicide. Lazhar feels the room throb with wishes to incorporate LeChance into the discussion, to relate her death to the conversation of suicide. He gives up on a tacit agreement made with the school’s administration and the school psychologist to “separate psychotherapy from pedagogy” and to leave the ghosts of the dead outside of the lessons he imparts on the classroom. Lazhar cannot contain his frustration with procedural responses to the children’s trauma that encourage measured and predetermined allocations of moments where grief can be addressed. Such policies prove to be out of time with the labour of mourning: It persistently and unpredictably erupts, boisterous and indefensible. Freud knew that a defensive suppression of knowledge could not succeed in permanently evicting its pressure on the psyche: “Some distressing sensations may attach to the symptoms themselves, or it may prove impossible to prevent the release of anxiety, which in turn sets to work the mechanism of forming a phobia” (1915, p.156). Its failure is always increasingly marked, “the vanished affect comes back…” (1915, p.157). Psychic defenses of repudiation, disavowal and negation, which characterize repression, cannot eradicate the force of an affect or the pressure of the drive.66 Repression does not result in

66 Freud found that the mind’s penchant for resistance was so pervasive that he required a typology of five distinct techniques used to inhibit something from becoming unconscious (Symptoms and Anxiety, 1926). Repressions, transferences, compulsions to repeat, unconscious desires for punishment and conversions of interior disturbances into physical symptoms help to provisionally keep the ego out of
the annihilation of an idea, but builds obstacles in the path of its travel towards consciousness. Lazhar clears the path for mourning, hoping that the classroom can incite and hold a conversation about the traumatic effects of an unplanned for death.

In response the teacher’s suggestion that they should communicate their grief, that the classroom is a site for experiments in matching words to inner conflict, Alice inches Simone towards speaking: “Simone wants to speak”, she taunts. Though he is angry with her, and screams at her to stop pushing him towards speaking, he cannot resist the urge to symbolize his suffering. His anger gives way tears; breaking down and pleading with Lazhar to assure him that LaChance’s death was not his fault, Simone begins to work through guilt and hate. This scene signals a move towards reparation in Alice and Simone’s friendship, soon after they grin at each other and share a snack in the schoolyard.

“You keep re-opening her grave”, the principle accuses Lazhar before he is dismissed from his job at the school. Yet, it is Lazhar’s brave commitment to noticing how the dead continue to instruct encounters in his classroom that allow learning to continue after trauma. The ghosts of LeChance and his family interfere with learning, so he consoles the children with lessons on how to live after the other has died. Before he departs, Lazhar provides a final example of how his classroom lessons patiently show the children that they can tolerate the difficult work of symbolizing conflict surrounding death and trauma. He has the students correct intentional mistakes made in grammar and discomfort. The dialectical push and pull of urges and their prohibition, phantasy and its repression, characterize this process.
spelling in a fable he has written for them about the emotional trajectory of a butterfly, titled “The Tree and The Chrysalis”.

*There is nothing to say about an unjust death.*

*Nothing at all. As we will now show.*

*From the branch of an olive tree there hung a tiny chrysalis, the color of emerald.*

*Tomorrow she’d be a pretty cocoon.*

*The tree was happy to see his chrysalis grown, but secretly, he wanted her to stay a few more years.*

*“As long as she remembers me”.*

*He had shielded her from the wind.*

*He had saved her from ants.*

*But tomorrow she would leave to alone face predators and bad weather.*

His lesson on literacy is knotted with an attempt to build the children’s capacity for using and listening to words as objects that signify affect. He uses this lesson in service of refinding himself outside of them, also, and disinvesting himself of the role of teacher. His lesson is instructive to the children’s need to tolerate learning without the help of the teacher, and generally, to the work of separation from the other.

Alice knows that he is telling them a story about how they must now acquire independence from him, which does not mean that they must forget his influence. She is noticeably distraught after listening to his fable. In the school, expressions of affection and touching between teachers and students are diligently monitored. The film solicits inquiry into how a teacher can at times comfort and at times punish a child through touch.
Lazhar seems to be asking how to comfort a child in sorrow when you cannot touch them, and how one can punish a child without touch. In between the teacher’s and children’s bodies is the tyranny of the sound of a gym whistle, the sound of an empty stomach which prevents a hungry boy from playing games at recess, the memory of a mother’s embrace. When they do touch, the school’s administration reminds Lazhar that laws forbid hitting a student. Despite the dangers of touching, he trespasses boundaries that supervise affection: The film ends in a hug between Alice and her beloved teacher. Monsieur Lazhar, the improbable pedagogue, and his students are undone by each other in the classroom; the time of their mourning corresponds as the film’s children work through loss in ways that teach the adult to make new attachments. Teaching becomes a reparative practice, one that restores hope for bridging life stories that appear unconnected. For his students, reentering the classroom in the aftermath of trauma becomes an invitation to represent injury. In Lazhar’s classroom, both teaching and learning become the art of symbolizing loss. As he clears a path for his students to heal, the teacher encourages children to know what it can mean to acknowledge love that vacillates with aggression and negativity and how that knowledge can repair cynicism. *Monsieur Lazhar* imparts a method for listening ethically for what children can teach adults.
Chapter 4: Re-imagining Psycho-Sexual Development in *Ma Vie En Rose* and *Tomboy*

In the previous chapters I have attempted to demonstrate that film offers a mode of aesthetic encounter that exists in transitional space (Winnicott, 1979). Film, as aesthetic elaboration of emotional conflicts, is significant to both social and emotional life because it can help its viewer to negotiate with previously unprocessed psychic material. I have suggested that the aesthetic representation of childhood, specifically in film, offers the viewer an opportunity to confront what has previously been left unexamined on a conscious level. At stake in doing so is remembering how one learned to become an individual. Further, I have been suggesting that aesthetic representations of the child expose adult definitions of what a child should be, know and do.

This chapter works with psychoanalytic concepts of fantasy and eros to interpret two films where child protagonists make sexualities in excess of the biographies and futures imposed on them by adults. I employ the method I have been developing for encountering representations of childhood in cultural production to interpret Celine Sciamma’s 2011 film, *Tomboy* and Alain Berliner’s 1997 film, *Ma Vie En Rose*. Both films create conditions for learning, about ourselves and others, because they carefully attend to the difficult questions children raise about gendered and sexual subjectivity and in doing so, remind their audience that regulation of sexual desire has been learned. I find these films interesting because they provide variant strategies for aesthetically representing children who develop in queer ways. Specifically, we are presented with two child characters that hope to delay development in order to stave off puberty. Both films
present child characters that create realities where they test their sexual desires, but also face pressure to trade sexual desire for recognition and acceptance.

There are many ways to read and theorize these films, all of which might risk imposing the adult’s epistemologies, politics and desires onto the child protagonists, even as the hope is to leave their future open and undetermined. My employment of queer in this chapter, and in previous chapters, has aimed to register that which exceeds the confines of what is deemed normal and sexually appropriate.\textsuperscript{67} Thus, in the scope of this project, queer childhood has worked to transcend and trouble normative metrics of growth, non-normative sexuality and gendered identifications, and explain the child’s curiosity and creativity as potentially instructive to the adult’s theories of learning. In \textit{Ma Vie En Rose} and \textit{Tomboy}, queer desire is foregrounded as that which must be exchanged for social recognition and acceptance. These films are not only queer in their narration of children who engage in curiosity and creativity about gender and sexuality, but they also create an opening for the viewer to commune with desire that cannot be socially enacted and is therefore queer. They do so by animating childhood as a long lesson in controlling instincts (to wield a pretense of not feeling, not knowing, not desiring) and repressing desire. It is not my intention to catalogue these child characters as possessing queer identities, nor am I here concerned about what identity they might claim in the future, but suggest that these aesthetic texts induce or touch what Dina Georgis might deem “queer

\textsuperscript{67} It would be interesting and productive to read the film beside literature within the field of trans studies (and some queer theory). Instead, in this chapter I employ a theoretical framework drawn from object-relations theory as it relates to aesthetics, and use ‘queer’ not to predict the child’s future identity, but to capture its creative re-working of what the adult insists it must be in the process of becoming. Of course, my method risks its own impositions on the child characters and points to the larger problem of whether it is possible to allow the child freedom from the adult’s constructions, desires, and philosophies, even while maintaining that it should predict its own future. I use ‘him’ and ‘he’ when referring to Mikael to honour the way the child describes himself to peers.
affect”: Affects that arrive as surprise or interruption” (p.15), “suspending knowable or teleological time and unhing(ing) proper boundaries and habitual social relationalities” (ibid). Queer affect is the return of impossible desire, the unassimilable or “unrecognizable desires” that haunt relationality (ibid).

*Ma Vie En Rose* tells the story of a 7 year old child who is growing-up in Belgium and struggling against homophobia and transphobia. *Tomboy*, made 14 years later, tells a similar story about a 10 year old who quietly convinces the neighborhood to accept his gender. Both *Tomboy* and *Ma Vie En Rose* stage a queer childhood but their divergent narrative structures enable two different outcomes for a child who risks loving the other or the self in excess of what has been sanctioned by the community in which it lives. In offering representations of childhood as a spirited fight to make sense of culturally acceptable practices of loving, these films open a space for their audience to address what has been lost while undergoing their own education in sexuality.

*Tomboy* and *Ma Vie En Rose* are aesthetic engagements with the emotional conflicts of becoming educated in normative practices of sexuality. The children in both films are given a choice: Repress desire or lose the love and protection of family and community. Mikael and Ludovic, the 10 and 7 year olds in question, search for ways to symbolize erotic attachments to objects that are not socially sanctioned by the group. Both come up against the group’s aggression for trying to do so. Growing-up amidst exuberant refusals to support their passions, Mikael and Ludovic receive the group’s aggression because of their sexual difference. Despite aggressive responses to their non-conformant desires, neither child can cease the expression of what is deemed to be
pervasive. Pressures to adapt to conventional expressions of desire do not disparage their curiosities about why they cannot change their sex and why they cannot have crushes on children who are the same sex. Psychoanalytic thought on group psychology will later be used provide explanations for their difficult negotiations between freedom and submission to authority. This field of inquiry suggests that desire for autonomy must sometimes be sublimated or repressed in order to secure community. 68

*Ma Vie En Rose* and *Tomboy*, together, stage an intervention into assumptions that children cannot incorporate sexual knowledge, but more important here, these films encourage considerations of how to ethically listen to questions that children ask. The films protagonists’ curious engagements with the fields of gender and sexuality hold the potential to reinvent both the child and the adult self. I describe these children’s efforts to delay puberty and deny that adults know what is best for them as queer world making, and read these childhoods alongside a genealogy of children who have taught psychoanalysis to listen to the child’s questions and fantasies for insight into the unconscious. Freud’s early descriptions of children as determined sexual researchers (1905), driven to understand relationality as erotically charged, will be used to interpret Mikael and Ludovic’s questions. Since Freud’s original statements on the child’s sexual drives, psychoanalysis has been attuned to what the child’s question reveals about the unconscious. 69

“Remember”, Britzman urges, “for psychoanalysis sexuality does not

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68 In *Totem and Taboo* (1913), *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* (1922), and *Civilization and its Discontents* (1930), Freud cultivates a theory on how tensions between love and hate supervise the formation and maintenance of a group. Judith Butler, in *Undoing Gender* (2004) and *Frames of War* (2009), and Dina Georgis, in *The Better Story* (2013), also elaborate on the giving-up of individual desire in order to secure membership in a community.

begin with puberty. And children forever curious about their own otherness, make their own theories of sexuality” (1998, p.69). When the child poses a question that cannot be easily answered, a gap is exposed in the adult’s knowledge or mastery. Sometimes, as my discussion of Melanie Klein’s published case notes on her observations of her son will later show, the child refuses the knowledge that is proffered by the adult, and asks a question that performs as revolt and self-fashioning. *Ma Vie En Rose* and *Tomboy* stage children who resist, in creative and profound ways, the biographies and futures that adults construct for them as they assemble themselves outside of the confines of conventional social discourses of sexuality.

Though the narrative structures used in the films allow for different outcomes, with both Ludovic and Mikael we enter worlds of imagination that propose, if fleeting, a possible future not contaminated by the transmission of adult anxieties about sexual difference. Both children unveil gaps in the gendered logics held by those who surround them. What is difficult to watch is how adults respond to the unearthing of unthought dynamics about their own sexuality by maliciously repressing them and violently punishing the children. Here, my use of queer means to reference both Ludovic and Mikael’s imaginative revolts against the domestication of their sexual desires, and the remembered feeling of learning gender that these films might return their audience to. I deem this a queer experience because it reminds us that gender and sexuality are educated and therefore cannot be taken for granted as innate. *Ma Vie En Rose* is significant here for its proposition that we listen to the child’s worries about being unable to master gender in order to understand masculinity and femininity as imbued with
phantasy. Mikael and Ludovic engage with gender and sexuality in creative and novel ways and thus disturb notions that children come to find their place in a gendered or sexed relations innately. Oren Gozlen puts it this way: “Gender identification is one’s fiction” (p. 567). Gender, Gozlen explains, “as an un-conscious registration of trauma, is a mark of such subjectivity at which one arrives quite accidentally, unintentionally, and often reluctantly” (p. 569). Thus, “as an expression of unconscious desire, gender rests between its signifiers, wearing and shedding its shape in a constant movement” (ibid). In both films gender is explained as ‘a constant movement’ and a fiction that the children are in the midst of struggling to create.

My own viewing of the films releases an intellectual statement on how damage to queer desire comes to bear on our encounters with aesthetic texts. Both films offer new methods for repairing old conflicts, both social and psychic, because they unloosen queer affect and “offer an incitement to new beginnings from the site of queer loss and an ambivalence to security” (Georgis, 2013, p.14). For Georgis, queer affect offers an occasion for learning because it unsettles the stories we tell about ourselves and about others. *Ma Vie en Rose* and *Tomboy* offer new stories about how gender identification works and about the child’s psychosexual development. These films also depict children who bear the weight of the community’s hate.

Both children are ambivalent towards the security proffered by their communities because it requires them to exchange desire for self-fashioning for conformity.\(^{70}\) The

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\(^{70}\) In *Civilization and its Discontents*, Freud develops a theory of what is exchanged in order to be recognized as a member of society. He found that “man has exchanged a portion of his possibilities of happiness for a portion of security” (p.52). Instinctual life is tempered by the pressures of civilization to conform, and thus, a central tension is inaugurated between individual and society.
educational qualities of these films lie in their description of the antipathies between fantasy life and formal education. School becomes a site both children must fend off in order to maintain the ability to fantasize queerly. Mikael and Ludovic cast fantasy as a resource for imagining belonging beyond the social real and a strategy for combating education. Melanie Klein believed that phantasy—with a ph—was the constellation of libidinal impulses and drives which underwrote all mental activity. The work of psychoanalysis for both her and for Freud was to translate unconscious phantasy into consciousness. Fantasy refers to a conscious reconstruction of reality, and though distinct from phantasy it may be the result of unconscious wishes. In this chapter, I use fantasy to reference the innovative imaginary work that Mikael and Ludovic do to make amends between inner worlds and social reality. In different ways, both children craft a gendered subjectivity made from innovation and imagination not preordained knowledge about what it means to be a child. These children struggle to describe the world on their own terms and in their relationships to schooling, show the project of education to be potentially injurious to fantasies that contain desires for new forms of sexuality.

In both films, the classroom is explicitly described as a regulatory site where normative sexual practice and gender identification is surveyed. In Ludovic’s classroom a teacher insists that he must identify with toys made for boys and for Mikael, school is the ultimate death to an ability to perform boyhood. Into my discussions of the films and their consideration of childhood psychosexual development, I weave discussions from the

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field of curriculum and pedagogy that consider eros as conceptual terrain for learning (Boler, 1999; Burch, 2000; Darder, 2002; Kelly, 2007). This body of literature, interested in theorizing emotions of love and passion in relation to learning, suggests that eros represents the constant pull of inquiry. These child protagonists are driven by the erotic charge of learning themselves anew and forging bonds with the others across and in spite of difference. Sigmund Freud believed that teaching was an impossible profession. For him, the impossibility of teaching results from the unconscious’ proclivity for refusal of the education that we are subjected to. Consciousness is amenable to education but daydreams and raw affects swerve from education’s hold. In this sense, according to Britzman (2006), the unconscious is “where education cannot go” (p.76). In Ma Vie En Rose, ideological treatments of sexuality conflict with the child’s imaginative uses of gender. Ludovic, in his penchant for playing with dolls and wearing lipstick, and Mikael, in the crafting of a play-dough phallus and athletic prowess, revolt against gender education.

Eros and the Illusion of Security

Ludovic, especially, vocalizes curiosity about what the group will allow of him in respect to his creative desires for a new sexuality. His incessant questions about sex and love are erotically charged, driven by eros, which subverts finitude in the making of knowledge and compels human bonds. Freud appropriated the Greek myth of Eros to explain the human drive towards social ties, and the psychological operants at work in the creation of community. Eros, under Freud’s command, signifies the drive for connection,
which exists in polarity to Thanatos, the death drive which works to undo identity and unfasten human bonds. Freud employed the myth of Eros, the story of the god of love and beauty, and son of Aphrodite, to formulate a theory on how the unconscious is simultaneously propelled towards both destruction and unification. In the myth, Eros falls in love with Psyche but her meddling sisters drive a division between the two. Psyche leaves Eros; heartbroken, he spends the rest of his life searching for her and the reciprocity and wholeness he knew in their mutual love. Driving Eros’ journey was the desire for wisdom about what it means to love another; he did not hope to own or dominate knowledge about Psyche, but rather to remember beauty and his proximity to it. He sought perfect immersion with what he had lost, not domination or mastery over knowledge or the memory of what she was to him. Unlike Thanatos, which for Freud symbolized his belief that humans possess an innate aggression, Eros is responsible our capacity for connection. Freud, though, further complicated his account of the opposing weight of love and hate in psychic life when in Civilization and Its Discontents (1930) he suggested that a group might need to cast its aggression on an enemy (sometimes within its own borders) in order to sustain sameness.

Ludovic cannot successfully repress wishes to become a girl, but also aspires to gain the security and love that are promised in exchange for identifying with masculinity. Mark Edmundson considers eros to be sublimated by love for authority (2003, p.xviii), which can mean the authority of an ideal. Psychoanalytic ruminations on ideology can reveal that it requires falling in love. Jacqueline Rose has been interested in how

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psychoanalysis can illuminate what binds a group together (1996; 2007). She locates fear of loss as what guides love for belonging and submission to social domination. Rose repeats Freud’s line of questioning: “If the mass is held together by some force… ‘to what force could such an achievement be better ascribed than to eros, which holds the world together?’” (2007, p.67). Rose suggests that our love for the other is most energetic when we have the most to fear. To Rose, submission to an ideal or authority proffers safety, as “even the world at its most perilous” comes to feel more safe (2007, p.67). Ludovic and Mikael bravely test the limits of the group’s love and are faced with the difficult task of choosing between being embraced by family and community or expressing queer desires. They feel tension between the desire for freedom and the fear of disorder or lack of control. The adults in *Ma Vie en Rose* and *Tomboy* suggest that it is for the child’s sake that they must make interventions into their non-normative gendered performances. The illusion of security, in the guise of care, is promised when they can accord to the adult’s desire for normativity.

Both films begin with the scenario of a child who has moved to a new community and is involved in the arduous project of inserting themselves into existent social configurations. In introducing themselves to peers and neighbours, both children recognize a potential to re-write themselves amidst the conditions of newness that relocation creates. Both films narrate children who plead for a chance to become other than what they are and test the limits of gendered identity imposed on them from the outside. In fantasy, both children create conditions for self-determined futures and

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73 Rose is referring to insights made in *Civilization and its Discontents*, particularly, in which Freud proffers that one renounces “one’s satisfactions in order not to lose its love” (1974, p.64). Love, he says, “is a protection against punitive aggression” (p.65).
techniques to survive the betrayal of their changing bodies. They must also survive their parents’ hate, and the realization that unconditional love does not survive gender or sex nonconformancy. Striving for permanence of their dreams, these children are observed investigating their bodies for growth that warns of approaching puberty and fantasize staving off adolescence. Both films are lucid portrayals of how love and the anticipation of its loss conditions children’s gendered expressions.

Ma Vie En Rose (My Life in Pink) is a Belgian film which stars Georges Du Fresne as 7 year old Ludovic. In the film, director Alain Berliner eloquently captures the visceral detailing of suburban life. It is not without consequence that Berliner submits his story to the genre of ‘fantasy’. Unfurling his plot amidst animated scenes, life size dollhouses, airborne children and a colour pallet full of pastels and dizzying pinks, is aesthetically queer and allows a stylistic blending of fantasy and reality. The story opens with dozens of families crossing lush lawns to gather in the Favre family’s new backyard to welcome them to their new neighborhood and community. The neighborhood children are shown to be cheerful and excited; their white fingers wrapped about balloons or their parent’s steady arm as they enter the Favre’s yard to coalesce. After the eldest Favre boys are introduced without complication, their father, Pierre (whose new job is cause for relocation) pauses in an inability to locate his two youngest children. He squirms in puzzlement while filling the space with nervous banter. And then they appear—an adolescent daughter, Zoe, and Ludovic, a 7 year old who dons earrings and his sister’s princess gown, his mother’s red lipstick skillfully applied. The audience begins to applaud, assuming Ludovic to be a girl, but ascertaining his parent’s shock, they soon
realize the child’s cross-gender slip. The parent’s response to their child, and other adult’s subsequent apprehension of Ludovic’s performance, arrests an amicable environment; the camera pans the crowd and all dialogue is frozen. *Ma Vie En Rose* takes the inner world of this child, who imagines itself and expresses itself as exceeding the confines of the gender and sex that they have been prescribed, as its pulse. The party’s incident is not isolated, but initiates a sequence of events in which “Ludo” not only desires to express a sexuality not welcomed but also wants to share it with those whom he loves and expects to receive love from.

Ludo’s transgression of discrete fields of gender and their ostensibly natural codes of behavior make those around him nervous. The community has a loathing response to this child and eventually evicts him (as does his school for his ‘tastes’), revealing the laborious repressions that defend its borders. The film stages strategies and tacit agreements to normativity required for affiliation and the necessity of adopting the group’s ideals in order to purchase security. Britzman, in her reading of the film, reminds us that “the desire for purity compels one to project what is impure in the self onto other” (p. 99). Projected onto Ludovic are phobic reactions to difference that transferentially distribute his parents’, neighbours’ and teachers’ individual histories of conflict onto the child. Judith Butler has elucidated the process of projecting onto others ideas about ourselves that we cannot bear to hold (1997).

Masculinity, Butler suggests, is purchased

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74 In *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection*, Butler, explicitly, grapples with how “the desire to survive” becomes a “pervasively exploitable desire”. A part of this exploration involves a consideration of the sexual abuse of children. She proposes that debates on this issue “tend to misstate the character of the exploitation. It is not simply that a sexuality is unilaterally imposed by the adult, nor that a sexuality is unilaterally fantasized by the child, but that the child’s love, a love that is necessary for its existence, is exploited and a passionate attachment abused” (p. 8). This line of thinking adds complexity to Kincaid’s study of the adult’s erotic relationship to the child discussed in chapter 1 and 4.
through prohibitions and “repudiated identification” with femininity (1997, p.137). For Butler, gender cannot be an expression of a core self, rather it is constituted by laborious attempts, always incomplete, to sustain cultural ideals. “It seems clear”, she explains, “that the positions of ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine,’ which Freud (…) understood as the effects of laborious and uncertain accomplishment, are established in part through prohibitions…” (p. 135).

*Gender and Phantasy*

When Ludo brings a pair of dolls (which resemble Barbie and Ken) to school, his teacher smiles and asserts, in a stern manner that is also nervous, that he must want to be like the muscular male doll. Ludovic’s struggle is against the preemptive foreclosure of passion and the ability to form identifications with femininity. Incessant lessons on how to be a boy are deployed throughout the film but they cannot completely rattle Ludo’s fantasy life. Despite a bitter relationship between his fantasies and his education, Ludovic’s imagination remains a robust and persisting refuge from forced ideals. His psychic resistances to masculinity and identifications with femininity take the forms of dreams about living in a dollhouse. Freud was lucid on antipathies between children’s dreaming life and the sexual education imposed on them. Psychoanalysis, it may be said, began as the science of sexual enlightenment. Adam Phillips summarizes Freud’s

For Butler, what is exploited in this scenario is not the notion of childhood innocence, but the child’s need to attach to another and (assuming it has been “nourished in a ’good enough way’”) its beginning work of discriminating among those they should love (p. 8).

Butler turns to psychoanalysis, she explains, because it “insists that the opacity of the unconscious sets limits to the exteriorization of the psyche” and that “what is exteriorized or performed can only be understood by reference to what is barred from performance, what cannot or will not be performed” (p. 144-145).

Britzman (2006) expands on this point.
interest in children as a fascination with their refusal to be seduced by reality (1998, p.11) and their likelihood of being unimpressed by other people’s truths: “The relentlessness of the child’s questions, the sense that the child’s curiosity was his destiny—that was what Freud took to heart” (p.11). Observations of how the child builds knowledge and enacts resistance to knowledge were foundational to his development of psychoanalysis. Freud’s theories of the unconscious, a neon nucleus of repressed affect, ideation and desire, threw a wrench into linear notions of learning and knowledge accumulation. Learning became a recursive and non-teleological affair, and ignorance was proven to be potentially psychically satisfying. Phillips characterizes the Freudian child as being “driven by questions” and not believing “any of the answers, except his own that he finds satisfying” (p.11).

Freud initiated a theory of the child’s sexual development that sought to understand how fantasy allayed anxiety and allowed for “polymorphously perverse” infants to defend against becoming neurotic adults. The child, he proposed, must move through five stages of psychosexual development in order to successfully socialize libidinal drives. Successful libido development was Freud’s proposal for keeping neurosis or personality disorders at bay (which, he suggested were the result of childhood sexual fantasies gone astray). In his 1907 essay on “The Sexual Enlightenment of Children”, Freud’s theories on child development advised that the adult’s relations with others were derivatives of infantile sexual fantasies. In order to become a healthy adult, infantile sexual fantasies must be worked-through.
J.B. Pontalis (1981) summarizes Freud’s theory on the child’s sexual education:

“One must indeed encourage parents and educators not to lie to children, not to answer with ‘childish sayings’, in other words with myths concocted by adults for children, but one must not expect such knowledge to replace the unconscious” (p.97). Freud assumed that turning unconscious infantile fantasies into conscious material would help to alleviate the potential for adult neurosis. But, knowledge could not cure the unconscious’ likelihood of repressing phantasmatic attachments to perversity and producing affective reminders of loss caused by parental prohibitions. Ludovic’s persisting question: “Am I a boy or am I a girl” is an attempt to settle anxiety but also invites vulnerability. Ludovic slowly learns to anticipate the chastising that comes with contravening gender laws. This child, who understands the future to be enlivened by the sexuality it dreams of practicing, becomes melancholic when trying to exchanging self-fashioning for gender coherency. *Ma Vie en Rose* narrates how a child negotiates demands to substitute queer desire in exchange for group belonging. The child’s imagination becomes a forum outside of the violent reductions of desire that secure the future as a reflection of the adult’s desire. Though the film privileges the child’s creativity it also shows the adult’s gender to be a sort of fiction. Ludovic’s strident curiosity and incessant questioning (of anyone who will listen) unnerves those he encounters. This questioning child makes gender something malleable and learned, an identity that functions as a placeholder for a “constant movement” (Gozlen) of phantasy and desire.
A Psychoanalytic History of the Question Child

In Frontiers in Psychoanalysis: Between the Dream and Psychic Pain, J.B.

Pontalis (1981) coined the term “question child”. Pontalis used the term in his discussion of Melanie Klein’s Contribution to Psychoanalysis (1931). Pontalis characterizes Klein’s case study of Fritz, a boy who refused to be enlightened by her knowledge of sexuality, as an archetypal example of why the child’s question is innovative resistance to the adult’s enlightened truth. He deems Fritz a “question child”. In her 1921 accrediting essay for membership into The Berlin Psychoanalytic Society (later to be published in Contribution to Psychoanalysis), Klein recorded her theories on the importance of meeting the child’s fantasy with knowledge. In this essay Klein reviews reasons why analysis is useful for children, primarily because, as she shows, trauma and injury are known to occur before the age of six. Further, she insists that the child finds pleasure in the experience of analysis. Providing a child with the tools to think-through an injurious or surprising event would reduce the probability of the event to later induce adult neurosis. Pontalis summarizes Klein’s thesis as being: “What holds the child back?” (p.95). She attests to a “growing conviction that repressed sexual curiosity is one of the chief causes for mental changes in children” (1931, p.30) and that “the child’s very powerful impulse for investigation” (p.29) can be uniquely supported by psychoanalysis. The child, she thought, should acquire as much sexual knowledge as it wants and requires. Forced repression, she believed, causes “injury to the instinct for knowledge” (p.20): “an imposition, a forcing upon them of ready-made ideas, which are dealt out in
such a fashion that the child’s knowledge of reality dares not rebel and never even
attempts to draw inferences or conclusions, whereby it is permanently and prejudicially
affected” (p.21). Klein’s intervention was not original, as Freud had already made the
point that the adult should inhibit infantile fantasies by meeting them with ‘truth’. And at
the time, “many psychoanalysts shared this prophalactic illusion, dreaming of
kindergartens where the crystallation of neurosis would be avoided”.

To make her point, Klein references her observations of young Fritz’s
psychosexual development. She has provided Fritz with what she terms an education with
a psychoanalytic approach; she has not clinically treated him but has regular contact with
the child (who is later revealed to be her son). Her efforts to protect Fritz from
frightening fantasies caused by unconscious inhibitions steer her refusal to assuage the
difficulties of learning about sexuality and inspire an open discussion about reproduction,
sex and puberty with the child. To her surprise, despite pedagogical tactics of truth and
reality, with which she hoped to make the mysteries of bodily functions lucid, Fritz
remained ignorant to the enlightened thinking she tried to instill in him. The child proved
to hear and understand what she was telling him, but resisted incorporating the
knowledge into his own theories on sexuality. Fritz’s resistance to her knowledge
produced a change of thesis in the second part of Klein’s essay, written two years later.
Fritz’s resilience and imaginative questions, such as “Where was I before I was born”,

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Pontalis, (1981,p.95). Britzman describes Klein’s departure and extension of Freud’s handling of the
child’s sexual development: “[W]hereas Freud’s view of the child was primarily made from adult
reconstructions—an adult trying to look back on experiences that were hardly remembered but terribly
memorable—Klein’s view of the child became terribly untimely. Through symptoms caught in play and
drawing, children constructed in her analytic setting something unanticipated: a time before meaning
could ease the mysteries of and anxieties toward trying to understand when phantasy as the
representative of an inner world of object relations worked overtime” (2006, p.65).
“When will the boy become a Mama”, “How does skin happen to grow on people” and “How do eyeballs stay in” made palpable his refusal to integrate her explanations. The recurrence of Fritz’s questions, she explains, had no “intellectual basis” (p.28), but provided “a mass of analytic material” (p.31) from which she theorized.

Where part one of the paper is sure that sexual enlightenment will cure unnecessary repression, the second part does away with this surety, after reflecting on her own failure to enlighten Fritz. The stories Fritz told about body parts, about what could grow in his mother’s stomach, and what existed between his parents before he arrived, “produced the effect of dreams from which the secondary elaboration was lacking” (p.31). Pontalis explains: “The reversal that Melanie Klein had the merit to grasp on the spot: the child’s fantasies proved to be far closer to what was actually at stake than the knowledge meted out by the adult” (p.98). The child remained inquisitive; despite being corrected, the child held tight to his own stories.

Deborah Britzman (2003) has suggested that Klein’s analysis of Fritz’s’ insistent fantasies folds in on itself, as the child returns the analyst to:

Her own prescriptions and anxieties and maybe even her own parent’s.

The question child offers the adult an unusual test: to use the child’s question to find truth of the adult’s existence. The question child tests the adult’s reality by way of questioning the adult’s knowledge and proximity to phantasy.78

78 Britzman discusses Klein’s provision of a psychoanalytic education for Fritz in both After Education (2003) and “The Return of the Question Child: Reading Ma Vie En Rose Through Melanie Klein”, http:www.academyanalyticarts.org/britzman.html. This citation comes from the latter.
‘False’ or not, the child’s fantasies had a psychic purpose. In rejecting the adult’s imposition of knowledge, the question child raises the issue of what the purpose of knowledge is. The question child holds dearly to phantasmatic explanations of love and relationality, despite the adult’s request for adherence to truth. In her documentation of the call and response that transpired between her own and Fritz’s fantasy life, Klein explains that there are questions for which answers cannot quell distress or reduce inhibition. Klein provokes a recognition of children who do not recognize themselves in explanations of how sexuality functions. There are children who hope to be something else; the adult’s insistence on ‘the facts of life’ might foreclose children’s capacity to imagine an abundance of gendered existences.

Britzman believes that the ‘question child’ has the capacity to call “the foreclosure of his parent’s knowledge into question”. She draws parallels between Fritz and Ludovic, the boy with an urgent question: “When will I become a girl”. Klein was nervous that Fritz would not appropriately relinquish fantasies of bodies that surpass their biological capabilities in order to become enlightened. Ludovic’s creative summations of his existence, insistence that he is able to menstruate for example, cause his parents grief and anger. Britzman reflects on their anguish:

Perhaps they feel failure in not being able to understand or influence his desire, and maybe even a certain mourning for losing what they would want for their child. But there is no enlightenment for Ludovic: he is as stubborn as his paper

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79 In *After Education*, Britzman says that it is the question child who “ushers the problem of theory and its work of reparation into language” (127). And, that Melanie Klein tested her theory “against what the child could not say but nonetheless felt, and who used her interpretations as a provocation to say the unsayable” (127). Retrieved from http://www.academyanalyticarts.org/britzman.html.
predecessor. Fritz and so resistant not to what Melanie Klein first called “the
dangers and mysteries of sexuality”, but rather to the idea that he has to choose
a history before it can be attempted.80

Perhaps Ludovic’s parents are fearful that his questions will reveal their reality as
also being underwritten with fantasy. *Ma Vie En Rose* animates a child’s inner world,
revealing how the anxiety of a loss of love builds community. It also animates how
authorized forms of sexual subjectivity can fail to gain traction in fantasy life. In Ludo’s
fantasies, god can drop X and Y-chromosomes down chimneys, dolls are mentors and
guards, and boys can grow up to become women. This film, which gives credence to
the child’s difficult questions, shows that potentially more damaging than the child’s
curiosities about sexuality is the adult’s inability to imagine a boy who might grow up to
be a woman, or a girl who might one day love a boy who was one a girl. Transformation,
Ludovic finds, cannot be enacted in a stale world, a place where gender refuses his
desire, so the child weaves fantasies where change can be enacted. Instead of knowing
his parent’s love as regulatory device, in his dreams Ludo subverts regimes of knowledge
about gender and sexuality with the erotic charge of learning himself anew.

I extend psychoanalysis’ archive of ‘question children’ (Klein 1931, Pontalis
1981, Britzman 2006, Robertson and Keon 1999), to include Mikael, the child
protagonist in *Tomboy*. Britzman’s suggestion and program for inserting Ludovic into
this archive inspires my method. Britzman suggests that Klein discovered her own
resistance to what the child might ask. What unconsciously and unwittingly defends
again the child’s questions? After Britzman, I have read Ludovic within a psychoanalytic

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history of child analysands whose curiosities throw the adult’s knowledge and mastery into question. The questions that surround Ludo’s ontology are tireless and are reminiscent of Fritz’s. Having historicized the ‘question child’, I now move to another formative appearance of a child who creates and provokes curiosity about the origins of sexuality. I turn to *Tomboy* as an aesthetic resource that illuminates children’s potential for reshaping theories of sexual subjectivity. Like Ludovic, Mikael resists a biography asserted from the outside. In *Tomboy* a child struggles for his sexuality to be treated as unexceptional and ordinary. Instead of verbally posing questions to his parents, this child pleas that questions are not asked about sex or the secrets his body keeps. Thus, also including *Tomboy*’s child character in an archive of psychoanalytic question children would involve theorizing why children may not only defend against the adult’s knowledge, but also their question.

What do questions about the other’s sexuality seek to uncover? Mikael does not verbally pose many questions, but this child goes to excruciating lengths to defend against other people’s inquiries, knowing that the inspiration for their questions is to determine gender authenticity. The child’s determined test of the limits of gender and sexed identities display a profound curiosity about what the world can handle. Britzman suggests that: “Once Klein could give up on explaining the world as it is or more actually, in a language she supposed her son would understand, she could allow herself to listen to the child’s worries” (p.79). Mikael has many worries, none of which are attended to. In the end of the film, the question that has been painstakingly defended against (Have you been pretending to be a boy?) is posed by his angry mother. This question unleashes
physical violence (she slaps her child) and symbolic violence on the child’s potential to draw a self outside of the adult’s authority. It is unknown if the mother’s intervention will have terminated Mikael’s eloquent and inventive performance of boyhood.

Like *Ma Vie En Rose*, *Tomboy* provides a narrative account of the child’s appetite for knowledge. This French film (directed by Celine Sciamma) stars Zoe Heran as 10 year old who is boyish in looks and behavior; has short hair and chooses boy’s clothing, saunters across rooms and slouches in corners and has been given the name ‘Laure’. Like Ludovic, this child’s father has relocated the family to a new city because of work. When Lisa, a child of similar age finds ‘Laure’ playing alone and introduces herself, there is an opportunity to create a new beginning. Lisa asks: What is your name? “Mikael”, the child replies with little hesitation. Lisa does not appear to suspect otherwise and soon after introduces Mikael as “the new boy” to the other children who reside in and around the apartment complex. In an attempt to repossess history and identity, Mikael performs boyhood for the other children while keeping this new identity hidden from his parents. It is summer and without school to correct name or gender for other children, Mikael has more freedom to move as a boy. The child recuperates a personal history from the grip of a culture that abjects what does not conform to the sex or gender prescribed.

Mikael must fight off school, puberty and the family’s possible public disclosure of sex in order to maintain status as a boy. In the bathroom, in front of a mirror, Mikael inspects growth and investigates for the arrival of impending signs of femininity. Being pre-pubescent, removing a shirt while playing soccer and going swimming cause anxiety
for Mikael but the other children are not troubled at all. The problem of peeing is not so easily resolved and causes fear for of being caught. Lisa develops a crush on Mikael and soon they begin to hold hands and kiss in the woods. Tomboy’s narrative structure, perhaps, enables a more nuanced rendering of a child’s resistance to the adult’s knowledge. Whereas Ludovic is verbose in his quests for knowledge, Mikael quietly refuses to adapt to reality, cautiously and resolutely proclaiming variance from what is assumed to be the truth of his ontology. In Tomboy, language is conveyed as failing the ineffable nature of sexuality. There are no words to form questions about the enigmatic character of Mikael’s sexuality. Less interested in pleasing its audience while it details the child’s resisting growths, Tomboy is slow, the child says little, and its plot resists quick movements towards conclusive statements on what the child will become. Tomboy is not celebratory in its conclusion; it refuses to console the audience. We do not learn if the child does away with the fantasy of being another sex or if the adult revises their theory on how best to support a child. In finishing on a note of ambivalence, the film creates an opening for its audience to mourn while considering how knowledge that gender was learned is discarded or repressed.

In Tomboy, Celine Sciamma crafts a child character that asks for a non-exceptional experience of psychosexual development. The child protagonist in question does not vocalize many questions, but pursues a secreted battle against femininity that involves curiosity about how much resistance she is allowed to pose before being forced to surrender to the gender binary. Mikael has an ambivalent relationship to the security offered by the community: There is so much to lose in vying for it. Sciamma tells a
devastatingly beautiful story about a child whose autonomy and creativity is damaged by the conclusion of summer and the beginning of the school year. Lisa becomes suspicious when she reviews the class list for the approaching school year: “You’re in fourth grade, right? Weird, I didn’t see your name”. Mikael meets the question with a kiss, hoping to terminate further inquiry. This child does not ask questions, but in Mikael’s anxious reaction to questions about sexuality unearths what Klein had discovered through Fritz. The question is not as important as what lies beneath it: a world of object relations and phantasy resilient to knowledge.

When Mikael gets into a fist-fight with another boy, whose mother gets involved, the performance becomes no longer tenable. The other boy’s mother would like to speak to Mikael’s mother and knocks on her door. Upon realizing that her child has been using the moniker ‘Mikael’, she loses her temper and demands that a dress is donned. “School starts in two weeks”, she states, and therefore that they have no choice but to alert the children and their parents about Mikael’s ‘real’ name and sex. When the other children learn that they have been misled, they chase Mikael into the woods and demand to investigate his body. To touch and to see what isn’t there in order to determine authenticity.

The most tender relationship depicted in Tomboy exists between Mikael and his six year old sister, Jeanne. Jeanne becomes Mikael’s collaborator when she trips upon her secret. An unannounced visit from Lisa, looking for Mikael, alerts Jeanne to her sibling’s transition. Soon comfortable with the idea of Mikael, together they collaborate in playing the role of sister and brother. When they return from an afternoon of play with the other
children, Jeanne tells their parents that her favorite new friend is Mikael. Jeanne is devastated by their mother’s enraged cessation of the life of Mikael. Usually prudently obedient, Jeanne yells ‘no’ at her mother and attempts to hold Mikael back from their mother’s rage. Jeanne, the six year old, enacts a solidarity that is inspiring both for her confrontation of authority and her ability to recognize her sibling as non-exceptional. Their mother asks her child to hold onto the gender that was assigned at birth for safety and recognition, but six year old Jeanne recognizes this as a violence to her brother.

_Tomboy_ offers a capacious address of what can be lost in receiving an education in sexual normalcy. In learning to listen to her son’s questions, Klein began to hear unconscious phantasies being ventilated. The recurrence of Fritz’s questions had no apparent intellectual referent but told of an inner world attempting to discharge anxiety and make sense of taboos. Klein began with a resolute claim that she had mastered sexual knowledge and could reduce the child’s distress by transferring it to him. The augmentation of her theory on psychosexual development was caused by Fritz’s negation of her truths. He could not and did not want to integrate the adult’s knowledge because it had little to do with what really mattered: Phantasy. The purpose of reading Fritz and Ludovic via Britzman, and interpreting _Tomboy_, has been to suggest that phantasy is privileged in the child’s sexual development. If Mikael is a ‘question child’, his inquiry seems to be: How much of my masculine identifications can the world hold? Mikael and Ludovic’s fantasies of being the other sex test the limits of the community in which they reside. Both children are curious about how much defiance the group can accommodate. Curiosity becomes a mode of psychic strategy for the child in both narratives. Both films
treat the child’s curiosity as integral to psychic survival. *Tomboy* and *Ma Vie En Rose* are significant because they disclose gender and sexuality to be enmeshed in phantasy.

Neither story has a purely happy ending though each leaves an opening for the audience to imagine different conditions for the child’s queer existence and ask how an adult might listen to the child’s question ethically and patiently.
Conclusion: Queer Futurity and Cultures of Childhood

This dissertation has suggested that an adult’s theory of childhood implicitly determines how they treat children, and how they consciously reconstruct the events of their own history. I have made use of psychoanalytic theory to better understand how the adult’s theory of what is appropriate for children is premised on a series of conflicts in their own biography. The implications of this psychic and affective process have been discussed through the use of filmic representations of non-normative childhoods. I have grounded my discussion in object relations theory, specifically, and have posited that subjectivity, for the child, is a complex relationship between instinctual life and the pressures of society to conform. My critique, throughout this project, has not only been concerned with the violent impacts of homophobia on queer children, but suggests that more broadly, queer theory offers childhood studies a critical perspective on how sexuality is acquired, learned and reproduced. I use ‘queer’ to help loosen the parameters of normative development, so that a deeper and more capacious theory of children’s sexual education can be built. My use of ‘queer’ is not only meant to register a child’s potential desire for same-sex relations, but also to gesture towards and account for children’s deviances from normativity. I employ “queer” to both a). Mark sexuality, and b). Reference deviance from cultural norms. Thus, children who self identify or are identified with LGBTQ culture may be considered ‘queer’, but queer childhood should not be constrained only to identifactory regimes or an assumption of the stability of sex or gender. As I have been suggesting, the queer contours of childhood are the child’s
desires that refuse to grow-up towards normative ways of being an adult and therefore, also, the residual adult desire to play and to be creative.

In this dissertation I have dwelled on the contradiction that results from the synchronous assumptions of the child’s a-sexuality and proto-heterosexuality, to show how emphasizing sexuality within a discussion of how children negotiate gender is constructive. Here, in the form of a conclusion, I incorporate this thesis within contemporary conversations concerning early childhood education and its theories of sexual development. I begin from the premise that developmental theory and its attendant model of DAP (Developmentally Appropriate Practice) can be destructive to some children’s imaginative and social capacities. There has been a large amount of research into the reproduction of gender in the early education setting (Hagglund 1993; Jackson 2010; Renold 2006; Yelland 1998). This work has not often disrupted heteronormative assumptions about the child’s growth, but rather emphasized the reproduction of masculinity and femininity, through supervised games, play and curriculum. Gender and sexuality cannot easily be collapsed; queer theory has made this point very clearly. There are, of course, children whose desires do not easily fit within or reproduce gender binaries. Though there is a significant amount of work that considers the reproduction of gender at the level of childhood, there is a dearth of literature within the field of early childhood studies that sustains a conversation with contemporary queer theory. I suggest

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81 Kerry H. Robinson (2013) explicates: “Developmentalism theory underpins the philosophies and practices that are foundational to teaching and learning in children’s early lives. Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP), a concept stemming from psychological developmental theorists such as Piaget, has dominated early childhood education and the early years of schooling since the 1960s. This discourse defines the child and how children are expected to develop physically, emotionally and cognitively into adolescence and finally into adulthood” (p.65).
that forging more prolonged conversations between queer theory and early childhood studies may deepen understandings of children’s diverse educational needs and complicate assumptions that sexuality can be easily mapped onto a gender binary. The small but powerful and expanding body of work in which childhood studies scholars critique their discipline for a voiding of queerness provides the groundwork for my inquiry into how and why studies of children’s education have, generally, been more keen on securing knowledge concerning developmental stages and building professional capacities for realigning children’s growths that occur along calculated, horizontal and heteronormative lines (Janmohamed 2010; Silin 1995; Robinson 2008, 2012, 2013; Ruffolo 2009; Tobin, 1997). My analysis of queer childhood is profoundly indebted to this literature. David, V. Ruffolo’s work, for example, is pointed on heteronormativity as it appears in early childhood education:

The heteronormative underpinnings of ECE policy initiatives speak to the ways in which children are ab/normalized when they are faced with the challenge to purchase/rent collective identities that are unable to account for multiplicities of difference. The result of this is the establishment of minoritized subjectivities that are often disguised and/or disqualified… (2009, p.14-15).

Like Ruffalo, I am concerned with the erasure of queer sexualities in settings of childhood education, but also believe that queer theory can, more expansively, help to analyze how normativity is reproduced at the level of childhood. Despite advances in this field of work, much of the research done in this area employs ‘queer’ as something of an
identity, which is knowable and measurable. There are large amounts of literature that takes LGBTQ teachers (King 1998) and LGBTQ parents (Burt and Lesser 2010; Corbett 1993; Fox 2007; Robinson and Jones Diaz 2000; Wolfe 2006) as its subject of inquiry. I am interested in these subjectivities, but as I have been suggesting in this dissertation, a queer approach to child development and education can more generally disrupt teleologically constructed narratives of growth that require a developmental sequence which culminates in normalcy. In the context of this project, queer has worked to label children with non-normative sexual interests and aims, but it has also helped to capture desires and fantasies that are generally non-normative and potentially unconscious. Thus, producing a theory of childhood with the help of queer theory can help to constitute sexuality in its broadest sense, and help to loosen the boundaries between childhood and adulthood, so that the sharing of information and knowledge is not governed by developmentalism. This, then, could lead to a theory of childhood expansive enough to include a consideration of the adult’s own repressed history.

Of particular interest to my reflections on what queer theory bequeaths to early childhood education, are its advances in theorization of temporality and its relationship to queer life. Because it is so often said that children are the future, queer theory’s recent attention to (and searing debates on) queer futurity offer something new and important to studies of early childhood. Ultimately, I am suggesting that queer theory’s recent interest in childhood as a site of analysis (Edelman, 2004; Halberstam, 2011; Munoz, 2009; Stockton, 2009) could be strengthened by partnership with the field of early childhood education. While at the same time, childhood studies could be bettered by thoughtful
engagement with queer theory. My staging of a conversation between childhood studies and queer theory is not cynical acquiescence to queer negativity surrounding the figure of the child (Edelman, 2004), nor is it a reinvestment in the child as a blank space on which to write uncomplicated resistance to homophobia. Hope and other positive affectivities associated with childhood are not always naïve or unthoughtful defaults to romanticizations of the child (Munoz, 2009). There are other methods for disrupting the pervasive violence which results from what Edelman terms ‘the cult of the Child’ (a term he uses to describe how those who do not reproduce, such as, historically, LGBTQ communities, are excluded in a culture that privileges children as innocent futurity).

Below I rehearse some of queer theory’s ruminations on the child’s implications for the organization of queer life, with specific attention paid to discourses of futurity.

In the service of my interest in the renewal of thought concerning children’s psychosexual development, I engage in a reading of the It Gets Better Campaign. Though It Gets Better considers adolescence and middle childhood its object of care, the campaign and (its consequent critiques and revisions), and its provocation to theories of queer temporality, offer much to the field of early childhood studies. To grow-up queerly, it demonstrates, is a painful experience in a culture that does not validate your difference. Both the campaign and its critics point out that there is not enough done to clear a path for children and youth to develop queer identifications and attachments. Further, It Gets Better and the expanse of analysis it has spawned exhibits that queer temporality is extremely important to a consideration of how to survive education when it does not nurture your desires. Together, the campaign and its subsequent reproach create an
opening into a discussion of how queer studies and activism can deepen practices of supporting a child’s potential queer future. In order to make the case for more affiliation between studies of children’s education and queer theory, I begin with engagement of Eve Sedgwick’s seminal essay on queer childhood and then, from there, trace queer theory’s use of the figure of the child and consideration of the impact of homophobia on childhood.

*Straightening Futures*

Eve Sedgwick is commonly referred to as producing the text that inaugurated contemporary queer theory’s consideration of childhood. “It’s always open season on gay kids”, the late queer theorist, famously quipped in an essay audaciously titled “How to Bring Your Kids Up Gay”, written in 1991. In this essay, Sedgwick contended that “desire for non-gay outcome” was pervasive in how adults deal with “proto-gay” children. “Advice on how to help your kids turn out gay, not to mention your students, your parishioners, your therapy clients, or your military subordinates”, Sedgwick jested, “is less ubiquitous than you might think” (2004, p.145). In “How to Bring Your Kids up Gay”, Sedgwick foretold queer studies’ coming surge of bitterness towards curative interventions into the emergence and sideways growths (Stockton, 2009) of the queer child. She was concerned with the amount of interventions being made into queer children’s and youth’s lives which aimed to straighten-out their futures and brought psychoanalysis to task for its involvement in suggestions that queer childhood was not

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82 Sedgwick’s essay, originally published in *Social Text*, has been anthologized in *Curiouser: On the Queerness of Children* (2004).
viable or healthy.

But where, in all this, are psychoanalysis and psychiatry? Where are the “helping professions”? In this discussion of institutions, I mean to ask not about Freud and the possibly spacious affordances of the mother-texts, but about psychoanalysis and psychiatry as they are functioning in the United States today. I am especially interested in revisionist psychoanalysis, including ego psychology, and in developments following on the American Psychiatric Association’s much-publicized 1973 decision to drop the pathologizing diagnosis of homosexuality from its next Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM-III). What is likely to be the fate of children brought under the influence of psychoanalysis and psychiatry today, post-DSM-111, on account of parents’ or teachers’ anxieties about their sexuality? (p.140).

Sedgwick explained to her readers that the 1980 edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSMIII) (the first that did not classify homosexuality as pathological fault) was erroneously celebrated as liberatory for queer subjects. In the same edition, she explained a new category was indexed: “Gendered Identity Disorder of Childhood”. The establishment of “Gendered Identity Disorder of Childhood” as diagnostic classification assumed the ability to detect impulses not yet organized as queer identity and realign them with heterosexuality. In this essay, Sedgwick extended worry for the children who were being ‘fixed’ under this classification. Deborah Britzman (2003) fondly refers to Sedgwick’s “loving hold” on “sissy boys” and “he-she girls” when she
remarks that “How to Bring Your Kids up Gay” is uniquely important for its submission that it “takes the loving reparation of the figure of the child’s queer body, who catches, without reason, the shadow of the mother’s femininity or the father’s masculinity, even if these were not the first shadings of gender offered, to remind one of the chances nature can take” (p.143).

Ensuing Sedgwick’s foundational remarks, queer theory now includes a robust literature that rethinks and reinhabits the child with an attention to its queer character. As the literature in this field has revealed, the child is a dense site for both queer sociality and alientation. It is a locus of anxiety for homophobic culture because hinged on it is the reproduction of a heteronormative future. After Sedgwick, queer theory has mapped numerous temporalities onto the figure of the child: assurances of a better future, appeals for a voiding of the future (Lee Edelman, 2004, most famously), and the potential for metrics of human development that allow for sideways growth (Stockton, 2009), are some. The child has become both a limit and a hopeful subject for queer theory.

LGBTQ activism has also been invested in conversations about how the queer child grows. In 2010, an American initiated, though internationally responded to, social media campaign- *It Gets Better* - was created to show children and adolescents that it was okay to be gay and that a kinder future was hanging in the wings. *It Gets Better* is full of ‘advice on how to turn out gay’- which in 1991, Sedgwick pointed out was naught. Meant

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83 Butler made these points in “Is Kinship Always Already Heterosexual?” (2002), where she responded to debates on the topic of gay marriage: “Sexuality needs to be organized in the service of reproductive relations and that marriage, which gives the legal status to the family form or, rather, is conceived as that which should secure the institution through conferring that legal status…” (p.14). Many of the arguments made against gay marriage, she points out, “often focus on the fears about reproductive relations, whether they are natural or “artificial,” and what happens to the child, the child, the poor child” (p.21).
to show young LGBTQ people that there is a future beyond mandatory schooling, where homophobia can feel stifling and constant, *It Gets Better* is a strategy to prevent the high rate of suicide among this population. Initiated by Dan Savage, a white American media personality and author, and his husband, Terry Miller, *It Gets Better* began with a YouTube video-narrative in which the men describe how their lives improved after school and when they became adults. Savage says that because it was unlikely that schools would allow him to speak about sexuality to children, he used social media to “speak directly to LGBTQ kids…” (2011, p.4). In the introduction to a book of edited collection of essays and interviews based on the project, Savage rationalizes his project: “Things get better- things *have* gotten better, things *keep* getting better- for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people. I knew that had to be true because things had certainly gotten better for me” (2011, p.2).

*It Gets Better* has become a widespread phenomenon, inspiring 50,000 user created videos and 50 million views. What can exist in the aftermath of heterosexual failure is, according to *It Gets Better*, potentially livable—even desirable. In relation to my concern for the seemingly innocuous but effectively damaging impacts of normative theories of childhood development, is a consideration of how the advice provided in this campaign does not evenly support LGBTQ children and youth. The campaign has been highly critiqued for its inadequate consideration of how race and class, for example, are elided in how Savage and Miller explain their ability to overcome homophobia.

84 Demonstrating the campaign’s impact, a month after Savage and Miller posted their video, Barack Obama uploaded a message to American youth, pressuring them to understand the consequences of bullying. Retrieved from [http://www.itgetsbetter.org/pages/about-it-gets-better-project](http://www.itgetsbetter.org/pages/about-it-gets-better-project).
A contentious dialogue surrounding Savage’s project has surfaced, spurred by divergent approaches to queer futurity. There is a growing amount of activist response and allied scholarly publications, that both critique the campaign and sort through the psycho-social conditions which have compelled so many to participate in it. Many critics insist that the psychic and corporeal survival that is nurtured in dreams of a future that holds smaller amounts of homophobia and gender violence should not trump considerations of race, gender, disability and other markers of difference. Jasbir Puar suggests that “Savage’s IGB video is a mandate to fold into urban, neoliberal gay enclaves, a form of liberal handholding and upward-mobility.” The campaign’s viral success suggests that it satisfies some of the emotional needs of a wide audience, and thus demonstrates the sociality of feeling queer. Puar appropriately asks: “But how useful is it to imagine troubled gay youth might master their injury and turn blame and guilt into transgression, triumph, and all-American success?”

As case study, the “It Gets Better Campaign”, offers a valuable and complex examination of how LGBTQ identities get sutured to and evicted from educational institutions. It Gets Better could be bettered by a thoughtful commitment to reducing homophobia and heteronormativity as it occurs in the present in childhood educational settings, and promoting understanding of how the child’s potential failure at

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85 For example, itgetsfatter.tumblr.com
88 Ibid.
heterosexuality might be nurtured. What is not resolved in *It Gets Better* is the persisting psychic damage of heteronormativity on adult life, even after surviving homophobia as children and youth, and the uneven ways that the future will wrap comfort around their bodies. In *Feeling Backward: Loss and The Politics of Queer History* (2007) Heather Love offers another mode of thought concerning temporality useful to queer childhood studies. Love generates a capacious understanding of the psychic complexity of queer pain and grief, and how feeling hope for a more reparative future while ignoring the uneven quality of distribution of justice in the past and present becomes treacherous. (This is a major criticism of *It Gets Better*: It does not aim to alter injustice in the contemporary moment or increase resilience towards oppression within schools, but postpones better feelings to the achievement of adulthood). Love’s parsing of negative, queer affect from sexual minorities in history, helps to facilitate a different theory on how queer feelings move across time, back and forth between adulthood and childhood.

The invitation to join the mainstream is an invitation to jettison gay identity and its accreted historical meanings. Insofar as that identity is produced out of shame and stigma, it might seem like a good idea to leave it behind. It may in fact seem shaming to hold onto an identity that cannot be uncoupled from violence, suffering, and loss. I insist on the importance of clinging to ruined identities and to histories of injury (p.30).

Through an exploration of literary characters and plots, including centrally, Radclyffe Hall’s *The Well of Loneliness* (a seminal queer novel published in 1928), her
temporal mapping of queer affect suggests that in re-working the past we clarify who we are in the present. Love becomes sure that there is something to be learned about contemporary queer failure in studying damages waged against sexual minorities in the past.

Love disrupts progress narratives that dominate the telling of queer history (which assume we have moved from oppressive conditions to liberation). Interested in the corporeal and psychic costs of homophobia, she offers an alternative to the cruel optimism\footnote{For Berlant, “a relation of cruel optimism exists when something you desire is actually an obstacle to your flourishing. It might rest on something simpler, too, like a new habit that promises to induce in you an improved way of being. These kinds of optimistic relation are not inherently cruel. They become cruel only when the object that draws your attachment actively impedes the aim that brought you to it initially” (2011, p.1-2).} espoused in \textit{It Gets Better}: “Although many queer critics take exception to the idea of a linear, triumphalist view of history, we are in practice deeply committed to the notion of progress; despite our reservations, we just cannot stop dreaming of a better life for queer people” (p.3). In relation to my project: We just cannot stop dreaming up ways to save queer children and youth. Though the future is the medium on which Savage and his collaborators write their success, they can’t seem to leave their past behind. The messages to queer youth they tender are also a memo to themselves: It was supposed to get better, and it will, even if it isn’t and hasn’t. Savage et al are remembering the pain of growing-up queer but also allowing the shame of identification to hammer an insistence that gay adulthood feels good. Encapsulated in many of the video messages made for the campaign is a wounded recognition that queer adults feel as they remember their own failures in heterosexual training. Thinking about one’s own queer childhood requires \textit{feeling backward}, “embracing loss” and “risking abjection” (Love, p.30).
The insufficiency of narratives of queer progress becomes clarified in *It Gets Better*’s inability to comfort those who are concerned with the asymmetrical care and concern that is proffered by the state and the social order. Love’s thesis on contemporary desires to claim queer liberation as a reality for all LGBTQ subjects leans heavily on Anne Anlin Cheng’s *The Melancholy of Race: Psychoanalysis, Assimilation, and Hidden Grief* (2000). Persuaded by Cheng’s proposition that social grievance and grief cannot be conflated, Love asks how to mourn a history of social exclusion while understanding its psychic gravity. Both theorists ask: Can grievance adequately respond to psychic wounds? The effects of grief, she and Cheng insist, unfit us for the compensation that grievance promises:

If we are willing to listen, the history of disarticulated grief is still speaking through the living, and the future of social transformation depends on how open we are to facing the intricacies and paradoxes of that grief and the passions that it bequeaths (p.29).

To adapt to the condition of grief and the “haunting negativity” (ibid) that comes with admitting to living with injury instead of discounting its inevitable return on psychic life is difficult. Stubborn attachments to the hopeful renewal of queer subjectivity after the ‘closet’ disclose a cruel optimism because they rely on the construction and maintenance of a fantasy that the past can be severed from the present.

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90 I offered a more sustained engagement with Cheng’s supposition in the introduction. Love borrows from Cheng a method for understanding how a group’s historical exclusion can be grieved without allowing the mourning of the injury of that exclusion get melancholically stuck. She writes: “A sustained focus on the intangible wounds that form the fissures underneath visible phenomena of discrimination should be taking place in addition to, not in place of, the work of advocacy” (p.x).
The debate inspired by *It Gets Better* underlines how hotly contested theories of queer temporality and futurity are in both academia and activism. Aware of how heteronormative measures of successful growth have caused social exclusion and suffering for a variety of people, queer theory has worked to invalidate chronological, linear accounts of human development and historical narrative. One byproduct of this labor is a pronouncement of the border between childhood, adolescence, and adulthood to be ambiguous and vague. Far from a foreclosure or mistake, this undoing of strict markers of developmental stages is useful for understanding how the subject’s original conflicts impress upon adult selfhood. I have been proposing that though *It Gets Better* takes issue with queer youth suicide and feelings of alienation made from sexual difference, the application of its resultant cultural criticism to the field of childhood studies provokes a deeper understanding of what is at stake when children are not supported in queer explorations of sexuality. Both the *It Gets Better* campaign and its ensuing critiques admit that queer affect and homophobic damage circulates in classrooms and sites of education would be valuable to a reworking of heteronormative curricula and pedagogy for children.

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Queer Theory's Address of the Child

Queer theory can also learn something from early childhood studies. Because it so often chooses to think abstractly and conceptually about childhood, it can have difficulty accounting for the lived experiences of contemporary queer children. This is a fascinating elision, though, because it brings an important question to the surface: Why is queer theory resistant to thinking about childhood as materiality? Outlining an emergent discourse at the intersection of early childhood education and queer theory, I have been working towards broadening queer theory’s angle of analysis to include a consideration of the child who must live through childhood. Halberstam’s theory of childhood tendered in *The Queer Art of Failure* (2011) is an example of why queer theory might learn to appreciate the discipline of childhood education. Though it carries persuading examples of what can happen in the fecund import of philosophies on childhood to queer theory, Halberstam’s depiction of childhood also relies on ideas of what children do and like which seem a little too groundless or purposely hollow:

…children do not invest in the same things that adults invest in:

children are not coupled, they are not romantic, they do not have a religious morality, they are not afraid of death or failure, they are collective creatures, they are in a constant state of rebellion against their parents, and they are not the masters of their domain (p.47).

A more thorough reading of the literature published in childhood education may have demonstrated to Halberstam that children are, for example, afraid of death and
demonstrate anxiety of social failure. Halberstam does, though, hit on something important: There may have been a time before these things were learned. Trying not to think of the child as a site of pure resistance (as Halberstam arguably does), I am interested in what queer theory, while it lucratively continues to debate the terms on which the future is realized, can do when it is also interested in the quotidian lives of children. In the same vein, I ask what childhood studies could do differently if, as Robinson (2005) and Tobin (1997) appeal, it was more interested in queer theory, or at least queer affects which circulate in spaces where children move. Below I spend time pointing out some of what queer theory has offered childhood studies, and offer tentative suggestions for where its contributions require more rigorous investigation.

Vitally, one of the benefits of queer theory’s interest in childhood as a site of criticism has been the forging of an opening into dialogue concerning the child’s agentic relationship with sexuality. As I have discussed, Katherine Bond Stockton has pointed out that the child and the homosexual have, historically, been positioned as oppositional (2009) and so, the consideration of queer childhood becomes categorically provocative. The schematizing of childhood innocence and mutual rhetorics of vulnerability and its exploitation, have devalued the child’s sexuality and ensured that the traumatized child is a figure hard to miss in most historical renditions of homosexuality (Kincaid 1992, 1998; Kelleher 2004). A sexual encounter, where childhood innocence and a-sexuality is assumed, can only be understood as traumatizing and violating. The categories of childhood and perverse sexuality are inextricable: “The figure of the child”, Paul Kelleher remarks, “choreographs the paradoxical interrelation of perversion and
normality”.

Indispensably, this has included consideration of its potential to have sexuality outside of trauma, outside of victimology. Trauma, Cathy Caruth tells us, is an event that is “experienced too soon, too unexpected, to be fully known and is therefore not available to consciousness until it imposes itself again, repeatedly, in the nightmares and repetitive actions of the survivor” (3). In the aftermath of trauma, the subject, in order to survive, resituates the force of the event, ideally so that it might be integrated in history instead of “overwhelm the ordinary human adaptations to life” (Herman, 1992:33). James Kincaid (1998) and Bruhm and Hurley (2004) show how an easy collapse of all childhood sexuality into definitions of trauma forecloses careful consideration of the child’s agentic relationship to perverse and queer sexuality. Their work is not interested in minimizing the corporeal or emotional impacts of sexual trauma experienced in childhood, but in understanding the possibility of children and youth to recruit amounts of bodily pleasure and to retroactively rework, in adulthood, how and why these experiences are formative.

In a provocation to the suffocating rhetoric of childhood innocence, Bruhm and Hurley cut through the seal of virtuosity surrounding the child’s sexuality by suggesting that an intergenerational sexual encounter may be queerly pedagogical for the queer child or youth who is “initiated into sex by older figures who were not necessarily exploitative or harsh” (xxix). Their work submits that when the only option is for sexual encounters in childhood to be traumatic, the adult typically limns through impressions left from these passions.

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experiences vis-à-vis the only possible narrative arc—trauma—to inevitably sustain the impossibility of the child’s agentic relationship to sex. No matter the feelings, pleasures, requests made—sexual precocity is diagnosed and the child will be traumatized (xxv).

Bruhm and Hurley, Kelleher and Kincaid interrupt assumptions about the early antecedents of queer sexuality, and the relation between trauma and memory, to plead for a new story that does not “try to predict in advance what psychological, emotional, and political stories will arise” from childhood sexual engagement (Bruhm and Hurley, p. xxx).

LGBTQ adults are often pressed to locate an originary moment of queer desire in their childhood; the moment they ‘knew’ something of their queerness. Elspeth Probyn offers a critique of this social pressure, as she proposes a new method for recounting a queer narrative of childhood that can move us towards “other modalities of becoming” should they be able to admit the “implacability of truth-telling”, the impossibility of recalling an originary moment of queer subjectivity (p.460). This, she thinks, would help to mobilize the queer writing of childhood as a political tactic and help to tell stories outside of a “chronological chain that links the present to a fixed past” (p.441). 93

In the second half of Curiouser: On the Queerness of Children (2004), Bruhm and Hurley collect stories told by Kathryn R. Kent, Judith Halberstam, and Michael Warner which return to the scenes of their own queer childhoods and seem to work towards the

93 She continues: “Compared to the more evident exigencies of repelling the scientific quantification of queer childhood as pathology and resisting the sustained attempts by governments to capture childhood as their moral ground, rethinking childhood as the possibility of beginning may sound very abstract. However, it is in rendering evident the very non-necessity, the unnaturalness of the idea of beginning that we may unravel the sacred place that childhood occupies in fixed notions of morality” (p.462).
incorporation of Probyn’s recommendation. Strikingly different from the messages of liberation proffered in *It Gets Better*, in this work we read affective attachments to the difficult dimensions of being a queer child. While returning to this past, they plead for transportive, queerer futures that concede the difficulty of writing a historiography of one’s queer childhood. In *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer History* (2009), Jose Munoz also returns to his own childhood to understand how he developed an understanding of himself as sexually non-normative. While doing so, he reflects on recent murders of queer, racialized youth in the U.S. to ask how thinking the child, as only abstraction, elides the impact of racism. Munoz’s book is a response to Edelman’s polemical attempt to unfasten queerness from humiliated optimism. Edelman, against futurity, takes down the cult of the child in shrewd and deliberate jabs at breeders and futurists. Munoz, on a different path, points out that the Child which Edelman builds as his thesis’ target devalues the impact of structural disparities such as race, class and gender. Not all kids, Munoz insists, are wanted in the future or receive the state’s protection. He recalls a moment from his own childhood where he learned his gender as shame, in which he felt ‘queer’ and began to prudently conceal his difference. In his Cuban-American family home, he describes being mocked for bodily expression deemed too feminine and insists that he was sure that growing-up in safety would also mean ‘butching-up’ (2009, p.68).

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94 Here he is allied with Andrea Smith, whose critique of Edelman is summarized in the first chapter. Tavia Nyong’o has also noted that “black popular culture, with its pained awareness that the privileges of childhood are unequally distributed, has long held an ambivalent stance toward this dominant culture of the child. We can be as sentimental as anyone else about imagined childhood purity, but our culture also contains great reservoirs of skepticism toward the ideology of the child, who vulnerability and value in American culture are so often restricted to the white child, with the black child serving as a kind of foil, always already streetwise, tough, precociously independent” (2011, p.52).
Aided by Ernst Bloch’s *The Principle of Hope* (1987), Munoz refers to the terms of utopia, so often disparaged in the contemporary moment, to theorize the future as a ‘critical optic’ for intentional responses to violence in the present. Re-routing queer temporality after Edelman, he also borrows from Giorgio Agamban to further ‘potentiality’ as a way out of ‘political pessimism’—a diagnosis he lends to much of current queer activism and studies. Munoz likens ‘potentiality’ to Sedgwick’s hermeneutics of reparation, a way out of the depressive position’s insistence that it always already knows the bad that lurks and thus, refuses to be surprised by newness. He tells us that: “unlike a possibility, a thing that simply might happen, a potentiality is a certain mode of nonbeing that is eminent, a thing that is present but not actually existing in the present tense” (p.9). Queerness, under Munoz’s command, is a “potentiality”:

Queerness is not yet here…We may never touch queerness, but we can feel it as the warm illumination of a horizon imbued with potentiality. We have never been queer, yet queerness exists for us as an ideality that can be distilled from the past and used to imagine a future (p. 1).

Munoz’s aim is to revive political imagination and his comments on queerness as potentiality, a “not-yet-here”, lend themselves to a reconceptualization of the child’s future. The child’s future, like queer, is a not-yet-here which is always tenuous and provisional. It is not yet resolved but nonetheless illuminates the present. Attempts to foreclose the child’s potential queer future, by withholding support for non-normative sexual development works to reinforce homophobia and heteronormativity. The child’s queer futurity is “a realm of potential that (might) be called upon” while working towards

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95 In Chapter 2 I engaged both Sedgwick and Klein more thoroughly on this topic.
collective and individual projects which seek justice in the present. Childhood might operate like ‘queer’, a ‘becoming’, always in formation, where things are not yet resolved but gesture towards other worlds. ‘Queer’ is replete with possibility, and conceptually operates like childhood because both are designations which do not stabilize meaning. Both queer and childhood are “negotiations with meaning” (Owen, 2010). The project of educating children, inclusive of the provision of education about sexuality, may be to release children’s potentials without guarantees. In normative notions of what it means to offer a successful education to children, the future becomes a knowable, fixed-end. A queer disruption to such paranoid orientations to the future helps to reveal how the child’s future often becomes a matter of the adult undoing their own past and hoping to secure mastery over the unknown.

Crucial and inspiring to Munoz’s thoughts on queer futurity is a poem by Elizabeth Bishop, the famed American poet. In his text, he repeats the poem:

*One Art*

The art of losing isn’t hard to master,

So many things seem filled with the intent

To be lost that their loss is no disaster.

Lose something every day. Accept the fluster

Of lost door keys, the hour badly spent.

The art of losing isn’t hard to master.

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96 Gabrielle Owen makes this point in “Queer Theory Wrestles the “Real” Child: Impossibility, Identity, and Language in Jacqueline Rose’s The Case of Peter Pan”, 2010.
I lost two cities, lovely ones. And, vaster,
Some realms I owned, two rivers, a continent.
I miss them, but it wasn’t a disaster.
--Even losing you (the joking voice, a gesture
I love) I san’t have lied. It’s evident
The art of losing’s not too hard to master
Thought it may look like (Write it!) like disaster. 

Contained in these lines, Munoz finds, are queer affects which reference unspeakable loss. Like Georgis, Munoz understands the affective hold of lost objects to be constitutive to queer desire. Georgis, as I have explained, uses queer affect to reference what “has no place in the social symbolic”(p. 15). Munoz proffers that Bishop’s poem is likely a response to the death of her lover, but also discloses the elemental feeling of loss and failure that results from being a queer subject amidst heteronormativity (p. 72). The art of loss, as narrated in One Art, provides him with an orientation to the future that does not disavow or deny histories of grief, but draws from them a blueprint for future socialities (p. 1). Bishop characterizes the process of mourning as an aesthetic experience, and a form of art, which requires working-through the everyday, affective and ambivalent conditions produced from losing a loved object. In Cruising Utopia, Munoz wonders how best to rebuild after loss, and how to recognize the political and social alternates that come with and after failure to conform to social expectations.

In relation to childhood development, failure can operate as a mode of unbecoming, a resistance (conscious or not) to becoming what the adult expects. We might ask: If childhood is a time of becoming, what is lost or exchanged when we become? Because the child’s assignment is to become, they are permitted a margin of error in which failure and mistakes, social and cognitive, are tolerated while they learn to become a self. This is, though, a terminable stage; expected in the horizon is an amount of growth that will secure the onset of adulthood. The child who fails to imbibe normative expressions of sexuality and gender, the child who fails to learn from his or her mistakes, and the child who grows otherwise and awkwardly, offers allusions to childhood’s capacity for deligitimation or disruption of normative social orders. 

Gesturing towards and hinting at becoming otherwise, the child who fails to move appropriately through stages of development exposes the labour that goes into training children in heterosexuality, capitalism, racism, and acquiescence to mastery. The child who fails to appreciate the present more than the wrapping paper, who voices questions deemed inappropriate, or who insists on the utility of crayons, offers references to childhood’s capacity for creative failure of the demand to conform. Releasing children’s potentialities without guarantee helps to reject the consignment of childhood to one stage of life, and to recognize childhood’s continuous capacity to disrupt the social order. In the next section I extend this line of thinking into my discussion of *It Gets Better* and its relation to the child’s education, before forming concluding thoughts on the reparative potential of reconstructing theories of childhood.
Making Childhood Education “Get Better”

The liberal underpinning of It Gets Better is devastating in its inability to submit that maybe things don’t get better, but we learn to live in the wreckage of queer damage. It Gets Better aims to repair a world broken by homophobia’s injuries. To speak growth outside of obdurate renditions of human development is a difficult and creative undertaking which requires support and courage. Though devastatingly credulous to the impacts of racism, transphobia, classism, fatphobia and other forms of social exclusion, its stories of liberation mean to explain how one survives after heterosexual failure. Tavia Nyong’o reminds us that It Gets Better is a response to the trouble which arises when queerness enters the site of education. Its messages insist that surviving school is possible. In a response to the campaign, Nyong’o has written: “I think there is a bit of a queer salvific wish going on in the It Gets Better videos, which exhibits a similarly melancholic refusal to work through the grief that might come with the recognition that it doesn’t get better.” He continues: “Maybe the secret truth that we repress is that school sucks, even when we find a way to make it work for us”. For the marginalized child who daydreams of a future in which their desires may be realized, an insistence on ‘potentiality’ is a strategy for psychic survival. Their dream of a world that has a place for them after their struggle against homophobia is vital to their endurance. In this affective imaginary, the future promises a potentiality not yet realized. Their dream may

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later be disappointed, but it is nonetheless integral to transformative futures. The child
dreaming is off-time, animating the present with residues of the past and imaginative
encounters with the future.

A theory of the child by way of detour through queer theory clarifies the impact that
rhetorics of childhood innocence can have on biographies of learning. In the scope of this
dissertation, a negotiation with *It Gets Better* is a deeply ambivalent endeavor. There is,
on the one hand, the necessity of supporting LGBTQ children. But, I am less interested in
positing how education ought to do so, and more interested in the potential for queer
theories of childhood to expand the scene of analysis to include queer forms of
subjectivity and fantasy not limited by conscious affiliation with LGBTQ identities. This
is not a journey towards a more precise account of how it feels to be gay as a child, or
how to make the world better for children, but rather, towards a more capacious method
for reflecting upon the impact and residue of unresolved conflicts experienced in
childhood. Revisions to the *It Gets Better* campaign might include an acknowledgment
that queer childhood requires an education in resiliency that results from the necessity of
using failure as a resource to resist normative criterions of growth or success. Queerness
makes normative demands for growth and for grievance intolerable; it also ruptures
conventional schemas of ‘growing-up’, as it undoes anticipated congruency, the borders
between childhood and adulthood, and forms affinities convened on grounds of mutual
feelings of shame and difference. Reading *It Gets Better* against Heather Love’s *Feeling
Backward* reminds us that “the history of queer damage retains its capacity to do harm in
the present” (p.9). The psychic machinations at work in an adult’s compulsion to suggest
the adult world holds less amounts of homophobia reflect a severing of childhood from adulthood.

Acknowledging the affectivities of loss at work in the present while summoning an imagined future is a different sort of project. Queer growth does not promise a teleological guarantee of progress, but instead finds pleasure in delaying the finitude and predictable foreclosures of “grown-up” status. In this dissertation I have sought to contribute a theory of queer childhood that draws insight from childhood studies, cultural production, theories of learning and pedagogy, and psychoanalysis. Shadowing this work has been a concern for convergences and antagonisms between the disciplinary fields of queer theory and childhood studies. I have advocated that our theories of childhood are compelled by our own affective, remembered and unconscious experiences with education, family, and sexuality. And, I have advanced psychoanalytic thought as uniquely capable of making sense of how the enigmatic residues of originary conflicts shape adult encounters with children and childhood. In order to enhance understanding on the relationship between sexuality and human development, I began by historicizing social discourses of childhood. This history then enriched my ability to construct a method for interpreting the adult’s aesthetic experience of encountering an image or representation of childhood.

This study has lead me to understand how strengthening a conceptual relation between ‘queer’ and ‘childhood’ can help to cultivate a culture of critique concerning the interruptive force of normativity on the child’s development. And in relation, how the remains of childhood in the adult hold creative capacity for working through social and
individual conflict. Central to this work has been a consideration of how underneath conscious efforts to treat children with respect are the adult’s affective histories and psychic impressions that, when attended to, can become rich resources for re-imagining human development. Over the course of this work, what has emerged is a contemplation of how the adult’s politics, feelings and epistemologies are refracted through the child. With an attention to aesthetic objects that portray childhoods, I have offered a theoretical deliberation on how the adult transfers unresolved conflicts onto the child and how our own emotional ties to the past become foundational to the theories of childhood that we construct.
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