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# FEELING LIKE KILLING?

## Queer Temporalities of Murderous Motives among Queer Children

Kathryn Bond Stockton

Charged with the drainage of dreams, the police catch them in their filters.

—Jean Genet, *Querelle de Brest*

### (E)motions, or Feeling beside Oneself

Both of the girls hit their victim with a brick until her skull was badly broken. Using a purse to hide the brick, the girls had swung it by means of a stocking. The other killers, a pair of men with a different set of victims, had cut one throat with a hunting knife, then shot the other victims, one through a pillow, at point-blank range.

Swinging a brick; holding a knife against human skin; pulling a trigger against a head knowing you can't reverse that pull. Who, if anyone, feels like killing? What, if anything, is this feeling? And what kind of feeling is a motive for murder? A set of densities thickening motive—also thickening the queerness of children—surrounds these two different scenes of slaughter, both from the fifties, and their portrayals in two famous texts: Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood* (1965) and Peter Jackson's *Heavenly Creatures* (1994). Motive is the mystery behind these murders, the clotted matter clinging to them—intriguingly so since the motive, in each case, was shared by two killers working in tandem. How, it was asked, could two individuals, in the same moment, reach the same rage?

With Capote's *In Cold Blood*, the people of Kansas had good reason to feel almost cheated on the question of motive, to turn their suspicions back on themselves, locking their doors against each other. Capote, quoting a detective about

the murder of the Clutters in 1959 (four family members, one whose throat was gruesomely slit), notes that it “was a psychological accident, virtually an impersonal act; the victims might as well have been killed by lightning.”<sup>1</sup> The detective is referring to the fact that the Clutters were killed by two men who had never met them, who drove hundreds of miles to kill them with no apparent payoff in the form of robbery, though, as it later came to be known, the men mistakenly believed they would find a buried safe on the family farm. This circumstance “failed,” says Capote, “to satisfy [the FBI’s] sense of . . . design,” which, according to the details of the murders, seemed to hinge on rage or revenge (245). That is to say, the bureau’s agents could not discover a form for the feelings that they at last uncovered.

Jackson’s *Heavenly Creatures* mines a murder five years prior to the murder of the Clutters. This was the killing, in New Zealand, of a mother, committed by her daughter and the daughter’s “special” friend, who desperately sought to live together. Cannily, Jackson’s film makes the meaning of motive rotate among the definitions the dictionary offers: “an emotion,” “a desire,” “a physical need.”<sup>2</sup> On the latter count, there is even motion, as the film displays the two girls’ almost inexplicable, inexhaustible movements on the screen. *Motive* comes from the Latin word meaning “to move.” If a motive is a motion propelling an action, what kind of motion, exactly, is it? How far back in the chain of explanation must we go to capture motive? How many other motives (or simple drives toward motions) lie beneath motives? Motive is the mystery inside the explanation, especially since the lawyers defending the girls made a plea for “joint insanity”—the girls moved to madness at the same time.

Another factor makes motive dense and the question of pairs of killers fraught. Each of these artists, Capote and Jackson, gives us a portrait of a queer child—a seemingly protohomosexual child (Perry in one text, Pauline in the other), paired with a seemingly normative partner (Dick, Juliet). And both artists, Capote and Jackson, through the queer child, end up displaying unforeseen motives that don’t sound like feeling-like-killing at all: for Jackson, the two girls’ wish to run through a manicured garden, or down a long dock, or up a staircase to flop on a bed in a beautiful room; for Capote, the wish, felt or faked by two different men, to sing on a stage or to drive down to Mexico, dreaming of gold. Here, in fact, is the heart of my claim: it is the *specificities* of queer children (children who include the normative child) that make them emblematic of a general problem: the problem of motive as a form of explanation when it is more often a living, growing, cubist form of dramatically mismatched feelings and movements from different temporalities and from multilayered sideways inclinations. If motive is a feeling,

then the impulse to kill is often made from feelings that bear no resemblance to the feelings of the killing itself when performed. The feeling of running through a garden or digging for gold is not the feeling of smashing a head with a swinging brick. One set of feelings may motivate the killing that then leads to the other set of feelings—a pack of completely different feelings that the killer had perhaps never sought and that perhaps spoil the motivating feelings. In this way, motive, many layered as it is, may not seem like any of its elements at the point of murder, because of their spoiling.<sup>3</sup>

Children, of course, symbolize motive's complicated layerings for a striking reason: for better or worse, in the figure of the child, in the context of murder, we tend to take motives back to unspoiled, childlike feelings, and thus we undo murderous motives altogether, even as we seek their origins in childhood. For as we know, children are those peculiar legal creatures (especially in the Anglo-American fifties) who are generally deemed by the law not to have a motive to harm or, most especially, any rational intent to kill. Other motor forces and other banks of feeling quite aside from bloodlust may animate their actions, we seem to believe, but these feelings and motives *in themselves* cannot end up seeming like feeling-like-killing. In this way, our sentimental view of the child actually makes our model of motive *more* complex, makes for a model of surreptitious sideways growth (for motive and the child) that we, as a culture, otherwise deny.

The protohomosexual child symbolizes another significant feature of motive. Both have the features of a backward birth. Legally, there cannot be a motive to kill until there is a killing—or an attempt, or a conspiracy, to kill. A motive to murder is technically, legally born backward from the point of (attempted) death. Yet by the time it is born, at death, the motive to kill has itself expired. No one exemplifies this problematic better than the protohomosexual child. With no established forms to hold itself in the public, legal field, such a child is the perfect sign of an explanation unavailable to itself in the present tense.<sup>4</sup> Just like a motive, the protogay child (throughout the length of the twentieth century), can only appear through an act of retrospection and after a death. This queer child, whatever its conscious grasp of itself, has not been able to present itself according to the category of “the homosexual” or even “the queer”—categories culturally deemed too adult, since they are sexual, though we do presume every child to be straight. The effect for the child who already feels queer (different, odd, out of sync, and attracted to same-sex peers) is an asynchronous self-relation. Certain linguistic markers for its queerness arrive only after it exits its childhood, after it is shown not to be straight. That is to say, in one's teens or twenties, whenever one's straight destination has died, the designation “homosexual child,” or even

“gay kid,” may finally, retrospectively, be applied. “I am not straight”: “I was a gay child.” This has been the only grammatical formulation allowed to gay childhood. The phrase “gay child” is a gravestone marker for where or when one’s straight life died. Straight person dead; gay child now born—albeit retrospectively (even, for example, at the age of twenty-five). This kind of backward birthing mechanism makes the hunt for the motive of queerness a retrospective search for amalgamated forms of feelings, desires, and physical needs that led to the death of one’s straight life. And yet, by the time the tombstone is raised (“I was a gay child”), the “child,” by linguistic definition, has expired.<sup>5</sup>

The “gay” child’s necessary asynchronicities, its required self-ghosting measures, its appearance only after its death, and its fascinating fall back onto metaphor as a way to grasp itself are major parts of my study *The Queer Child, or Growing Sideways in the Twentieth Century*. Against the backdrop of crucial arguments made by Lee Edelman, James Kincaid, and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, I stake a different kind of claim for the child and for its intimate relations with queerness.<sup>6</sup> Overall, I want to pierce (deflate, or just delay) the vertical, forward-motion metaphor of “growing up” by exploring the many kinds of sideways growth appearing in the twentieth century. This kind of growth is made especially palpable by the emergence of the ghostly “gay” child—the publicly impossible child whose identity is a deferral (sometimes powerfully and happily so) and an act of growing sideways by virtue of its *future retroaction* as a child. This is a child who lives perhaps only in the twentieth century—a child who braids with other concepts of the child in play throughout this time. For this reason, I make distinctions only among queer children: the child queered by innocence, the child queered by Freud, the ghostly homosexual child, and the grown homosexual, metaphorically seen as a child. No matter how you slice it, the child, from the standpoint of “normal” adults, is always queer: either homosexual (an interesting problem in itself) or, despite our culture’s assuming every child’s straightness, not yet straight, merely approaching while crucially delaying (in its own asynchronous fix) the official destination of straight sexuality and therefore showing itself as estranged from what it would approach. This situation makes the category “childhood” a concept almost foreign to itself: a state of one’s being while also delaying a temporal approach to a time it is not.

Thus we should not be surprised that “children’s motives,” especially in the context of legal guilt or innocence, should involve us in our culture’s sense of a troubling oxymoron. The child is defined as a kind of immunity or legal innocence, a body more in need of protections than of freedoms, a creature who cannot by law consent to its sexual pleasure, or divorce its parents, or design its educa-

tion. The child was not even a “person” in the sense established by the Fourteenth Amendment until a U.S. Supreme Court case in 1967, *In re Gault*, began to raise the question of whether or not children should be as equal as “people.”<sup>7</sup> So how could such a being be said to intend, never mind plot, or have a specific motive in relation to anything so deep-seated, and befouling of innocence, as murder?

These intriguing aspects of the seemingly normative child, on the one hand, and the protohomosexual child, on the other, emblemize the features of motive: its way of making one feel unlike or beside oneself and its way of only ever being birthed backward. More powerfully, in the hands of Jackson and Capote, these aspects of these children prove to be an incarnation—a kind of bent embodiment—of both Freudian *and* legal issues surrounding motive, especially its temporal, sideways slides. In fact, these issues may even raise the question of whether some murders are the kinds of reproductions that Freud called dreams.

### Freud’s Queer Children: Deferring, Dreaming, and Turning on Their Sides

Dreaming aside for just a moment (and legal issues to come still later), one can perceive that the protohomosexual child literalizes a concept that Jacques Derrida deemed to “govern the whole of Freud’s thought”: *Nachträglichkeit*, loosely translated by a range of critics as “deferred effect,” “belated understanding,” “retro-causality,” and “afterwardness.” It refers to how events from the past acquire meaning only when read through their future consequences.<sup>8</sup> Freud developed this view—sometimes called “the ghost in the kindergarten”—to explain how a trauma encountered in childhood or, more precisely, received as an impression might become operative as a trauma, never mind consciously grasped as such, only later in life through deferred effect and belated understanding, which retroactively cause the trauma, putting past and present ego-structures side by side, almost cubistically, in lateral spread.<sup>9</sup> One notes how closely the protogay child is made, by the strictures of public discourse, to trace the path of the ghost in the kindergarten, though in this case, and this point is crucial, the ghostly gay child may be fully conscious of its deferred birth.<sup>10</sup>

Despite this difference, the theorist who directly builds a model of motive, especially one including the child in queer ways, is, of course, Freud. He speaks squarely of “the motive for dreaming” and often links this motive to the child inside the dreamer.<sup>11</sup> According to Freud, in many cases, the dream is a “peculiar” “reproduction” of particular “impressions” from childhood, “so that, to our surprise, *we find the child and the child’s impulses still living on in the dream*”—and “experiences from childhood also play a part in dreams whose content would never

have led one to suppose it" (*ID*, 221–22, 224, 223, emphasis in original). That is to say, the dream itself is a backward birth, a "peculiar" "reproduction," of childhood motives that cause the dream. And, quite importantly, as we have seen with murder, these motives manifest in an act—the dream—that may not resemble the motives at all. Why? Because, as Freud famously claims, the dream "fulfills" a "wish," a "motive," in both "distorted" and "unconscious" fashion (*ID*, 343). The motive and its manifestation "are presented to us," he explains, "like two versions of the same subject-matter in two different languages," making the dream's content seem "nonsensical" as "a transcript" of motive (*ID*, 311–13). Yet both "languages" of the dream *are* the dream, splitting the dream into its motive (its "dream-thoughts" or "wishes") and its act (its "manifestation" or "manifest content"). These "two versions," as Freud deems them, may explain why we commonly speak of wishes as dreams, as if dreams have yet to manifest ("or come true," as is commonly said). Moreover, the dream is at once a backward and sideways emotion: a way in which we are both behind and beside ourselves through condensation and displacement. Or as Freud ends up asking: "Are all the dream-thoughts [comprising "the motive"] present alongside one another? or do they occur in sequence? or do a number of trains of thoughts start out simultaneously from different centres and afterwards unite?" (*ID*, 315). Once again, the difference between Freud's model and the issues for my essay may be one of consciousness. For murder, like a dream, may be a distorted, disguised fulfillment of unconscious wishes, but it may also be a spoiling of certain conscious feelings—certain "emotionally cathected ideas," in Freud's words.<sup>12</sup> Murder may be a manifest content for a set of wishes it does not resemble and does not fulfill. Murder may manifest as a failed dream.

In fascinating ways, something of these dynamics appears in judicial issues from the 1950s to the 1990s, especially as legal scholars seek to separate, conceptually and linguistically, the matter of "motive" from "criminal intent."

### **Motive and Intent in Criminal Law: Concepts Not at Home with Themselves or Each Other**

In Anglo-American law, "intent" is a grounding legal concept that ends up looking definitionally ill at ease. As readers may know, in criminal law, "intent" is something distinct from "motive." Intent refers to the mental state of mind (*mens rea*) of a person legally accused of committing a crime. The prosecution, in its criminal case against this person, "must prove that the defendant intended to commit the illegal act."<sup>13</sup> It "need not prove the defendant's motive" (130), which, as something distinct from intent, explains why this person acted in the manner

that she or he did. As a legal encyclopedia informs us: “In determining the guilt of a criminal defendant, courts are generally not concerned with *why* the defendant committed the alleged crime, but *whether* the defendant committed the crime,” though “a defendant’s motive is important in other stages of a criminal case, such as police investigation and sentencing” (130).

One can see immediately that the law simplifies matters for itself. Instead of getting caught in the complications (temporal and otherwise) I spelled out for motive, which are often the psychologically thickest and most narratively interesting aspects of a case, especially if one takes a long view of motive that extends back to childhood, the law stays focused on something that sounds both immediate and narrow: intent to kill at the time of the act. But even here entanglement enters. So much so that a British treatise, *The Mental Element in Crime* (a set of lectures from the 1950s), opens with a striking complaint: “A layman might find it painfully ridiculous that, after a thousand years of legal development, lawyers should still be arguing about the expressions used to denote the basic ideas of our legal system.”<sup>14</sup> For “it would be simple to start by postulating that, as a minimum, *mens rea* means an intention to do the forbidden act—were it not for the fact that there is no judicial agreement upon the meaning of intention” (10).

The author, Glanville Williams, has an axe to grind. He feels that English judges lag behind academic legal commentators from New Zealand, England, and the United States on this score, all of whom show “little disagreement” on the issues he presents.<sup>15</sup> But we soon discover why this difference does not matter, why his distinctions between English judges and a host of Anglo-American academics fail to signify on this count. For no matter what academic elements he draws upon, Williams himself cannot unkink the serious contortions endemic to “intention,” even when he offers his ideal definition. Fundamentally, Williams wants an understanding of intent devoid of “involving a legal fiction—that is to say, such a violent twist of meaning as to make the legal language misleading,” “to cheat with words” and thereby cause a “murder of the English language” by “tortur[ing] the word ‘intention’” (26, 29, 39). And so he attempts to state succinctly that “among [the] synonyms [for ‘intent’], perhaps the most helpful for purposes of definition is the word ‘desire’. A consequence is intended when it is desired to follow as the result of the actor’s conduct. This meaning runs through all the relevant definitions of intention given in the Oxford English Dictionary” (10). But within two pages, Williams must admit that of course there are crimes that are desired, in one sense, while also not desired at all. Thus we might say, although Williams does not, that intent-as-desire splits from itself along the very axis that defines it. Williams, for his part, puts it this way: “The actor can be taken to intend not only the conse-

quences that he positively desires [for example, gaining money through a robbery], but also other consequences [for example, having to kill someone in the midst of a robbery] known to be inseparable from the consequence he desires, even though they are not themselves desired" (12, 13). Or, as Williams next explains, in a different case:

The consequence need not be desired as an end in itself; it may be desired as a means to another end. . . . There may be a series of ends, each a link in a chain of purpose. Every link in the chain, when it happens, is an intended consequence of the original act. Suppose that a burglar is arrested when breaking into premises. It would obviously be no defense for him to say that his sole intention was to provide a nurse for his sick daughter, and for that purpose to take money from the premises, but that he had no desire or intention to deprive anyone of anything. Such an argument would be fatuous. He intended (1) to steal money (2) in order to help his daughter. These are two intentions, and the one does not displace the other. English lawyers call the first an "intent" and the second a "motive"; this is because the first (the intent to steal) enters into the definition of burglary and is legally relevant, while the second (the motive of helping the daughter) is legally irrelevant, except perhaps in relation to sentence. Although the verbal distinction between "intention" and "motive" is convenient, it must be realized that the remoter intention called motive is still an intention. (14)

The arguments of Williams reveal three things. First, intention splits from itself in certain moments insofar as one may not, in any way at all, desire an act one legally intends and so, by legal definition, desires; intention is also a many-layered thing, since motive itself "is still an intention" and may involve "a series of ends." Second, in this respect, and quite strikingly, motive can show the nondesire for a criminal act inside the very intention to commit it, where intention is defined as desire. Third, this situation makes for a peculiar set of "inseparables" in some crimes, queerly yoking widely different sets of feelings and clearly mismatched inclinations, not to mention distinctive bodily actions undertaken at different points of time. All of these points will return in telling ways in the crimes depicted by Capote and Jackson—and all the more complexly in the acts of paired killers.

Tellingly, too, these issues all return over the years in legal theory. For example, in 1990 another book appeared that returned to these problems, as if they were still quite alive and unresolved. R. A. Duff, in *Intention, Agency, and*

*Criminal Liability: Philosophy of Action and the Criminal Law*, revisits the ground gone over by Williams and raises further problems for the question of intent. Indeed, as if he were echoing Williams, Duff, too, confesses: “One might be puzzled by the fact that controversy persists over the meaning of intention: if the concept plays such a crucial role in the determination of criminal liability, it should surely by now have a clear and agreed upon meaning.”<sup>16</sup>

Duff says that it does not. But, most intriguingly, since this issue strikes at the heart of the backward birthing mechanism I have suggested for motive and the protohomosexual child, Duff appears to detect a temporal problem with intent, though his wording stops short of giving it the shape I gave it earlier. Duff inquires: “What is it to have a bare intention to bring about some result in the future? We cannot say that it is to act as I do because I believe that my action might have that result (for I am not yet acting)” (68). “Bare intentions become intentions with which I act when I put them into action; a reason for action becomes the reason for which I act when I act on it” (69). Duff concludes—in a statement that sounds as if it could explain the linguistic bind of the protogay child—that all of this, unhelpfully, “does not distinguish cases in which I *now* intend to act in the future, from those in which I have as yet formed no intention but *will* form an intention in the future” (68).

Notice that these problems emerge for these critics of British legal discourse (one from the fifties, the other from the nineties) as they tangle with the central, defining terms of criminal responsibility—as Capote and Jackson also do. That is to say, if *In Cold Blood* and *Heavenly Creatures* seem to call up models of motive that sound as if they wed the thoughts of Derrida, Butler, and Freud, that is because, in strictly legal terms, intention potentially differs from itself and from the expandable series of ends that the law calls motive; these ends themselves could only be seen as joined to intent, as layering it, by virtue of a criminal act that, as one looks back from the act itself, will be seen as in some way caused by these ends that are not the act but “inseparable” from it. And so for those acquainted with theory, *différance* (the inseparable motions of differing and deferring that attend meaning) seems implied by the law’s own efforts to stabilize intent.<sup>17</sup> Butler might add that for a motive to exist over time, before it is enacted, it would need to be repeated—“to be instituted again and again, which is to say that it runs the risk of becoming *de*-instituted [non-self-identical] at every interval.”<sup>18</sup> Even Freud’s concept of *Nachträglichkeit* would seem germane to legal definition, since motive, in its complicated series of ends, which can seem to reach ever further back in time (even into childhood), in an extensive temporal chain, is

an example, supremely, of a deferred action—it is a deferral until it is an action and therefore not itself—which then causes, from the point of action, attributions of meaning to past events being read through what have become their future consequences. In this respect, motive stretches out sideways, as it is a gathering—a synchronic spread—of backward views. And this backward and sideways temporality is the heart of motive's mysterious motions.

### **Capote's Boy Adventurers: In Cold Blood**

Although the FBI may not have seen a meaning—a “design,” wrote Capote—behind the Clutter murders, before or after the killers were caught, this would not be so for Capote. As a reporter for the *New Yorker* who, in converting this story for his novel, came to have strong (even sexual) feelings for one of the killers, Capote himself had a design. He aimed, it appears, to smuggle a story into our heads and arrange around it an effulgence of sympathy. He proposed, that is, to investigate why certain motives for murder do not look like themselves, especially the motives of a queer child. To do so, he would have to unspoil motive (almost back to its undoing), separate one man's motive from intent (while also not denying intent), and birth a queer child backward from the killing, taking the form of sentimental sympathies (his and his readers') for a queer and disturbing ride.

Capote was exactly the person for the job. As a friend of Capote's once said of him, one of his “most distinguishing qualities as a writer was that he could interpret the inside of the brain of a child.”<sup>19</sup> This is precisely what the Clutter murder case allowed him to do. And this is why we are pulled inside, taken for what Capote himself calls “the long ride” (202). We ride in the closet of a car with a man (Dick Hickock, murderer number one) and a figurative child (Perry Smith, murderer number two and the object of our sympathy): “Little Perry,” “such a kid,” says Dick with disgust, “wetting his bed,” “sucking his thumb,” “spooky as hell” (108), played in the 1967 movie by Robert Blake. This is the grown, queer man-child with his impossible childhood trailing—crazy, unaccountable dreams still attached; the gifted child who is born out of temporal joint with himself. This is the child Capote loves because Capote, at least in his mind, *is* him. Capote made for himself, says a friend, “the special persona of a child prodigy”; “Truman,” says another, “remained a child, I think, all his life” (*TC*, 35, 27). And so Capote describes Perry as himself: “No taller,” we read, “than a twelve-year-old child” (15), “a chunky . . . child-man” (224), whose “tiny feet . . . would have neatly fitted into a delicate lady's dancing slippers” (15) and who, before execution, sleeping

all day, says of himself: “I pretend I’m a tiny little baby” (321). (“I used to think he looked almost fetal,” a Capote acquaintance said about Capote: “His funny, mincing little walk, the baby voice, the infantile gestures” [TC, 42].)

Capote, who may have been in love with Smith (and may, some believe, have become Smith’s lover in his visits to the prison) (TC, 188), structures the novel to birth this child, but not to flag Capote’s own motivated interests of sympathy wed to his own star search for money and fame through a best-selling story.<sup>20</sup> And so he runs the novel for much of its length on parallel tracks, which perfectly serve his temporal aims. Along track one, we are always in Kansas, case unsolved, watching the detectives try to figure out who would want to harm the Clutters. Along track two, in seesawing chapters, we are on the road with Perry and Dick, with feelings, desires, and physical needs from many different time frames driving two completely different people to the killings (and after, away from them) that, in other chapters, along track one, have already taken place and so birthed the motive to murder from the start. The effect of such a structure—motive reaching backward to miss itself as, in another form, it is driving forward—coupled with Capote’s absence from his narrative, and his constant use of free indirect discourse, is rather cleverly to closet a motive: namely, his own. For, through this structure, Capote can hide his own set of feelings while explaining those of the two different killers. What these explanations allow is the chance, in a neutral voice, or often in the voices of others, to give Perry the dramatically sympathetic trial he never had, to show the nondesire of Perry’s motive (a sandwich of childish dreams, effeminate Vegas hopes, and adventures pitched to boys) inside his legally confessed intent. Such a generous rendering, furthermore, also helps Capote soothe his own guilt over not doing more to assist the appeals delaying the deaths of Perry and Dick. In any event, through his own layered motives, Capote explores, at every turn, the sensitive boy’s defeat within his family and thus how the queer boy is formed by feelings in search of feeling-forms.

Capote’s prose starts to hold these feelings. Indeed, before we know it, the killing of the Clutters, in Capote’s hands, is the result of Perry’s *missing* the chance for a possible homosexual connection with a friend, as I show in a moment. But first, we need to understand the frames Capote builds for holding the cubist motive-in-motion that moves Perry. One frame, of course, involves the Clutters. Capote needs a sympathetic view of Perry’s targets in part to better sympathize with Perry himself. For not only does a tender portrait of the Clutters help Capote to hide his own moves, but it lets him subtly twin the victims with their killer on two different scores: temporal strangeness and poignant significance. Seated in the

narrative as people also out of temporal joint, who do not know that motive in a car is headed toward them and so they are dead—both at the time of the actual telling and then in the future unfolding of the narrative—the Clutter family members are saturated signifiers. Everything about them is potentially poignant no matter how ordinary in another context. Ordinarity thus starts to seem eerie and newly peculiar in Capote’s hands in part because it *was* estranging to Capote in ways he found enticing: “The village of Holcomb stands on the high wheat plains of western Kansas, a lonesome area that other Kansans call ‘out there’” (3); “horses, herds of cattle, a white cluster of grain elevators rising as gracefully as Greek temples are visible long before a traveler reaches them” (3); “drama, in the shape of exceptional happenings, had never stopped there” (5). Yet one senses that the Clutters—especially the father and the daughter—fit the oxymoron of exceptionally normal. That is to say, they’re too normal to be usual, living in “almost the exact middle of the continental United States” (33). Indeed, they are deemed “of all the people in the world” (one wonders: really? of all the people?) “the least likely to be murdered” (85), or, as one person puts it: “Feeling wouldn’t run half so high if this had happened to anyone *except* the Clutters. Anyone *less* admired. Prosperous. Secure. . . . that such a thing could happen to them—well, it’s like being told there is no God” (88). But this loss of meaning is precisely what makes every detail of their persons, in Capote’s telling, so drenched in significance, as if the gods of meaning are rising up before us. Every instant of their nondeath ticks with foreboding as it is read through their end.

In a weirdly similar way, what we learn about Perry’s background seems—by virtue of its simply being background, selected by Capote *as* this killer’s background—as if it must explain his future lethal actions, though here we may feel more on the hunt for those specific saturated signifiers that tell the story of why he pulled the trigger at a later point in time. Intriguingly, the ones we likely pull out are the ones we’re trained to see: alcoholic mother; roaming, gypsy childhood; first arrest at age eight; detention-home life; and (because he is half-Cherokee?) a sense of being his white father’s “nigger.” But this is where Capote pulls a fast one on us. A child’s “rotten life” as a motive for murder (later, in adulthood) is painfully familiar. But murder by reason of childish, sunny pamphlets and narrative genres, which act as forms to hold a child’s feelings, is less well known. According to Capote, it is due in part to films that Perry saw (especially *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre*, which he saw eight times and clung to as a kind of template for his dreams) that he hooked up with Dick. Indeed, before we know it, the case of small-town neighborly breakdown—starting people locking their doors against each other—is the result of a boy’s adventure story, a certain

fantasy of bodily movement (performed with other boys) that revolves more around digging for treasure and riding in cars than it does around a family's buried safe.

In fact, Perry's motive, his secret reason, for returning to Kansas is not to meet Dick but to meet a "best friend," the "faggot" Willie-Jay, who is being paroled. (Throughout the novel are sprinkled signifiers that could suggest — are meant to suggest? — Perry's own faggotry: his endless mirror gazing; his "girlish hands"; his "mannered," swishy writing; his "lispy, whispery voice"; his "sweaty studies of weight-lifting" athletes; the buffing of his nails to "a silky pink sheen"; and his persistent "theatrical fantasy" of being a performer, "Perry O'Parsons," in a Las Vegas club, "where, wearing a white top hat and white tuxedo, he strutted about, . . . sang 'You Are My Sunshine,' and tap-danced up a short flight of gold-painted . . . steps" while singing to "a strange audience, mostly men and mostly Negroes" [15, 119, 176, 178, 254, 319].) That Perry, in rather Shakespearean fashion, misses meeting his friend's bus is fateful for the Clutters. For Willie-Jay, who divined in Perry a poet, something "rare" and savable, brought to him the kind of "high-carat appreciation that [was] . . . more alluring than . . . buried gold" (45). Capote makes it sound like the giving of a ring. In fact, Willie-Jay, the clear homosexual, is the only force, it appears, that competes with Perry's boyish dreams of adventures with boys. For in place of touching bodies, Perry touches maps: one map, in fact, "was ragged, so thumbed that it had grown as supple as a piece of chamois" (14). The point of the maps is always the same: find the road to buried gold, to Acapulco, Cozumel, or Sierra Madre. Then, embrace that fantasy law, finders keepers: the fantasy of robbery fully free of charge: legal and maybe nobody hurt. Here is Capote in Perry's head: "Since childhood, for more than half his thirty-one years, [Perry] had been sending off for literature ('FORTUNES IN DIVING! Train at Home in Your Spare Time . . . 'SUNKEN TREASURE! . . . Amazing Offer . . .') that stoked a longing to realize an adventure his imagination swiftly and over and over enabled him to experience: the dream of drifting downward through strange waters, of plunging toward a green sea-dusk, sliding past the scaly, savage-eyed protectors of a ship's hulk that loomed ahead, a Spanish galleon—a drowned cargo of diamonds and pearls, heaping caskets of gold. A car horn honked. At last—Dick" (16–17). Before Capote has practical Dick put an end to this dream, honking his horn (and even his name) in staccato prose, we see the logic of Capote's narration: we start off with language close to the source—Perry's booklets forming his dreams, but as soon as it is time to render Perry's more liquid sense of reverie, Truman Capote is in his place, lending the child whatever refinement his dreams might require: alliteration ("dream of drifting downward"), Old English kenning (in the form of "sea-dusk"), metaphor

(“savage-eyed protectors”), topped with the jewels (diamonds and pearls) a queer might seek, along with gold.

As for Dick, a self-professed “normal” (though he admits to pedophilic acts with young girls, which he considers normal), Capote’s trick is to absent Dick, who is never a child, from this specific temporality. This Dick, bad Dick, evacuates his childhood, has no memories of life before ten, before he was an “outstanding athlete,” “star player,” and “pretty good student.” Normal envy, normal resentment, normal pedophilia, Capote implies, form the adventures of Dick, who dreams of a family safe, though who confesses that his main desire for the “score” at the Clutters is to rape the Clutter’s daughter. This is a Dick who, even so, cannot act on his own. His desire—his intent—needs another man’s motives (so different from his own), and so he must lasso a man-child’s differential, queer temporality that has been shown not to be Dick’s own. Specifically, Dick must find a way to capture the queer child’s fantasy of boyhood adventures with boys who seek gold. “Dick became convinced that Perry was that rarity, ‘a natural killer.’ . . . [and] that such a gift could . . . be profitably exploited. . . . He had proceeded to woo Perry . . . [to] pretend . . . that he believed all the buried-treasure stuff and shared his beachcomber yearnings . . . none of which appealed to Dick, who wanted ‘a regular life’ [and] . . . ‘plenty of blond chicken’” (55). Assuming we should find him distasteful enough, Capote still stacks the deck against Dick: Dick has a habit of running down dogs. Apparently feeling like killing them, he even swerves to hit them. From these depictions emerges a sense of Dick as the driving desire behind the killings, with Perry’s motives and background ensuring that he will be the motion at the critical moment, making him the one who will pull the gun’s trigger four separate times (and cut one throat). In this fateful way, Perry’s inseparables—his four acts of murder, his life as a child, his “twisted tenderness,” his possible proto-homosexual longings, his failure to meet up with a homosexual, his attraction to Dick’s masculine practicality, and his love of the boy’s adventure story, joining Jane Austen to Joseph Conrad—are legally wedded to each other.

Hence the thoughts of the FBI detective Alvin Dewey at the end of the novel: “[Dick’s] execution had not disturbed him. . . . But Smith[’s] . . . aroused another response, for Perry possessed a quality, the aura of an exiled animal, a creature walking wounded, that the detective could not disregard. He remembered his first meeting with Perry . . . the dwarfish boy-man seated in the metal chair, his small booted feet not quite brushing the floor. And when Dewey now opened his eyes [at Perry’s hanging], that is what he saw: the same childish feet, tilted, dangling” (340–41). That these are Capote’s words about Perry, put in Dewey’s mind so they can come to us through an FBI agent, is not in doubt. There are no quota-

tions in this passage—only Capote’s poetic feet, one is tempted to say—leaving Capote’s regressive adventure, his queer temporality of the queer child, to hang, as emotive, in readers’ minds.

### **Jackson’s Killer Starlets: Heavenly Creatures**

Jackson, like Capote, births motive backward by starting with a killing; then, like Capote, unspools motive, to the point of complication, by spinning it backward in temporal terms while he is birthing a protohomosexual child on the screen. In fact, more dramatically than does Capote, Jackson reads motives back to their sources in childlike wishes for physical motions. This sort of rendering is anything but simple or sentimental and results in Jackson’s artistic rendition of motive as a cubist form of feelings, desires, and needs (many starkly physical) feeding off each other at differential rates and involving temporal oddities and backbends—all of which is spoiled in the flash of a brick when the action of criminal intent spoils the motive that seemingly moved it.

*Heavenly Creatures* does not represent the subsequent trial, a media sensation that, even so, lasted all of six days. The defense argued for the killers’ innocence by reason of something they called “joint insanity”—two girls suffering from madness simultaneously, making their presumptive homosexuality merely a symptom of their diseased minds.<sup>21</sup> The prosecution countered that the killers, Pauline and Juliet, were “intelligent” and “perfectly sane,” even if “precocious and dirty-minded girls”—with a motive to kill Pauline’s mother so as to be together (84). Jackson’s film crucially transforms two legal questions central to these criminal proceedings. First, he complicates the question of insanity by temporally turning the two girls’ adolescent status back toward their status as children of parents who cannot seem to grasp their ambitions, fantasies, and longings to move with each other as a pair in the world. Second, he complicates the question of their queerness, their so-called homosexual relationship, by giving it the status of a class attraction that unfolds differently for each girl, but at the same time. Both of these girls, in Jackson’s depiction, are quite seriously in love with a family—Juliet’s family, a wealthy family—for the sake of physical motions that wealth and luxury provide them. They seem to know, as if they have read or intuited claims from Georges Bataille’s essay “The Notion of Expenditure,” that wealth is foremost the power to spend oneself and one’s belongings to the point of extremity.<sup>22</sup>

Indeed, fantasy, along with the girls’ wonderfully campy travels into their own fourth dimension, are launched from the garden at Juliet’s beautiful upper-

class home, where Jackson frees their limbs back to childhood. Here they move with obvious abandon, as if movement—physical motion and emotional exhaustion—were the point of wealth; as if feeling, together as a pair, at the same time, were the motive force of life (something Jackson would return to cinematically with his hobbits). On the film's evidence, the pair's ability to pull the camera into their feelings and their frenzied motion depends upon a wish to spend one's time always to the point of physical exhaustion, the temporal point at which (e)motions run out. Running in and out of emotional states, the girls rarely cease in their physical movements until they are spent—but on their own terms and in their own time.

Given that the girls, in Jackson's understanding, want to be some kind of sibling-lovers who have the same parents, who will foster their in-loveness, they are bound to be defeated. Pauline (who is also called "Paul," "Charles," and "Gina, the gypsy") is destined to be read as a "wayward child," with "unhealthy," "unwholesome" feelings for her friend—as Juliet's father tells Pauline's parents—since she is in love with a family not her own. For her plan to succeed, on the best of terms, she would have to divorce her lower-class parents in order to wed a wealthier pair. There is no form—and no legal method—for that queer wish. Never mind the fact that Juliet's own normative wish for her parents' love is dashed by their constant neglect of her. In Jackson's account, both of these girls are in love with a family that neither of them at that moment possesses. This could explain, in the movie's terms, why they are obsessed with birthing, between them, a royal family, a ruling family, calling themselves Charles and Deborah (the royals in question) who have a son who wreaks his havoc (at the age of ten) on any of their obstacles. Sexually, then, and for compelling reasons, these two girls bond around a set of heterosexual parents (figures for themselves), which they mold in clay and which they animate, worship, and rule, entering into their parents' temporality, at least in their own minds, while they exploit the prerogatives of childhood's imaginary powers.

On this point of imaginary powers there is quite a lot to say. Jackson makes these powers almost synonymous with moviegoing and moviemaking. In his formal choices for how he renders the girls' joint motives, it is as if he's filming their making of a movie, starring themselves (their favorite film to see). In a scene on a beach, the two girls kneel next to a castle (a mini stage set) they have made in the sand: as they narrate fervently ("Charles clutches his wounded shoulder as he gallops into the courtyard; Deborah awaits his return in their . . . boudoir. . . . she smells his scent from fifty paces and urges his steed onward"), the camera makes us rapidly swoop inside the castle, up its tiny steps, and burst into the bedroom ("he flings open the door and launches himself at the bed, ravishing her; oh, God,

yes!”). This is how the viewer of *Heavenly Creatures* seems to be captive to the girls’ camera, as if Jackson’s own filmmaking is taking their “direction.” But how does he extend this moviemaking parable, making the killers seem less insane than cinematic in their fantasies?

First, he makes the girls into quintessential emblems of the moviegoer. In fact, in the film, they are seen attending films—one in particular, starring Orson Welles (himself a symbol of the actor/moviemaker), who, they imagine, chases them back to Juliet’s house and scares them into forms of pleasuring each other, so that they each, in alternating moments, wear his face while they “make love.” In this weird way, the moviegoer of Jackson’s film may grasp that the girls, at the height of their fantasies, show us one face of our own film viewing: namely, according to claims we might tease out from the theories of Christian Metz and Laura Mulvey, how the spectator is positioned as a child with scopophilia; as a kind of pervert with erotic wishes, often tinged with violence; as a fetishist who is giving non-sexual objects—the celluloid image—sexual resonance; and as a fantasy-ridden lunatic getting lost in the fourth dimension of film, as it were, and constantly confusing movie fantasy with reality in our obsessions.<sup>23</sup> Thus we should grasp, from years of moviegoing, the appealing position of the perverted-child-who-is-taken-up-with-fantasies.

Jackson’s second ploy is to split our fetishism, as viewers of his film, along the very lines that Pauline splits hers: along the lines of class. That is to say, *Heavenly Creatures* makes us find our visual pleasure, or at least one form of it, in the film’s location of upper-class “objects.” With the camera’s long, objectifying gaze, the film caresses Juliet’s body (Kate Winslet’s upright posture, feminine gestures, and perfect complexion); her mother’s more beautiful, stilled erotic form; and, most important, Juliet’s house, with its formal elegance and inviting gardens. Even in several campy scenes, where the camera seems “snatched” by the person of Pauline, the camera catches Juliet stilled in its lens, dressed as a princess on a bridge by a fountain or sweeping down a staircase in an elegant gown. And she is clearly doubled by her stunning mother, who stands, in our first vision of her, in a three-quarter turn, coyly for the camera. Jackson is making it patently clear that Pauline sees this family (and Juliet sees it in Pauline’s gaze) as a fetishistic lure. In this case, the girl (a rather unusual bearer of the gaze) fetishizes class, in a way that Mulvey never taught us to expect. Precisely, however Jackson might term it, he makes Juliet, her mother, and their home the objects of our “fetishistic scopophilia” while training our “sadistic voyeurism” (both of these are Mulvey’s terms; 490, 492) on Pauline and her murdered mother—as if they come together (mother and child) as victims of the camera. One recalls that Mulvey’s sense of these two

terms is that they split visual enthrallment and visual punishment between them. Fetishistic scopophilia defines the way the camera “builds up the physical beauty of the object, transforming it into something satisfying in itself” (490). Sadistic voyeurism, on the other hand, is the camera’s way of “asserting control, subjecting the guilty person through punishment or forgiveness” (490). That Jackson splits these propensities between Pauline and Juliet, making the gypsy child (Pauline) and also her mother the objects of our sadistic gaze (they are dowdy, overweight, and caught in a range of awkward poses), may well add to the viewer’s tender sense of their raw class bind—the different sorrows for mother and child when the child would like to cleave to the family that enthralls her, not her own.

Jackson’s third technique is more intriguing still. As if he were defying the Hollywood tendency to equate feminine beauty with stasis (even though in other ways he relies upon it, as I have shown), he makes the *motion* of the female body compatible with and defining of a new visual pleasure—one that, in moments, either displaces the fetishistic gaze on the female form or outright spoils it, making a girl-child a *form* of spoiled pleasure that might capture the interest of the camera. This dynamic emerges from the start. Playing off the genre of the 1950s travelogue and its thematization of motion, Jackson overlays old documentary footage of Christchurch (which shows an airplane aloft above the city, buses in the bustling downtown district, bicycles, and cars) with the frenzied running of two girls’ legs: first, legs dirty and bloody in the trees; then, legs tidy and joyful on a boat. The camera seems to struggle to match their pace as it follows the girls, focused only on their legs. These are not the legs of visual pleasure, not those of years of Hollywood gazing; these are legs with a mind of their own, fleeing from murder (in the one image track) and running toward a mother (in an image from the other), as if these legs are of two different minds. Scenes that follow also focus on motions—even in an active undressing scene, in which the girls undress themselves as they are running, laughing, and singing with a soundtrack seemingly obligingly supplied by Mario Lanza, the opera tenor. The clay-figure scenes—in which clay modeling never looked so active—especially make it seem as if the girls are starlets in an animated feature they have written and directed. As the only people (the only regular celluloid images) in a world of clay, they dance, they twirl, but they also witness royals-made-of-clay slicing up inferiors and peasants copulating with abandon with each other.

Jackson, nonetheless, shows one set of images as different from the rest. In sepia tones, he depicts the central fantasy held by the girls—as if it were a tasteful, cinematic short. In these rolling images, the two girls imagine they are running on the deck of a large cruise ship. They run calling out “Mummy” and “Daddy”

to Juliet's parents, who turn toward the girls with embraces and smiles; the two girls kiss on the lips before the parents, almost as if they are wedding in front of them. This short "film" is their ideal image of themselves as sisters-lovers—their misrecognition, as Jacques Lacan would put it, of themselves as a *pair* in the family mirror.<sup>24</sup> As the most coherent and least ambiguous scene of visual pleasure in the film, Jackson dignifies it with a gravity their many other fantasies lack. The parents look dashing, not mismatched as they do in other scenes; the two girls' running looks measured and appropriate to their joy; the boat is in keeping with the class they want to share; and the sepia look of the scene makes it seem like a photographic still of a moment that took place, though it never has.

These are the motions and criss-crossing motives, according to Jackson, that lead two girls to kill the symbol of their obstacles: the lower-class mother. Yet this killing severely spoils the feelings that set it in motion—as the film's last scene, the murder of the mother, makes sadly clear. Notably bloody and cruel, this killing not only spoils the cinema spectator's visual pleasure but also immediately cuts the cord between the girls, as Jackson portrays in the sepia scenes that cross-cut the murder. Their fantasy image—and, therefore, their motive—is sharply spoiled: between the cracking motions of the brick are sepia-tinted clips: Pauline is stranded on the dock while the ocean liner pulls out of port, with Juliet and her parents aboard, and the two girls are crying inconsolably. The legal punishment for these girls—for their queer lineup of legal inseparables—is lifetime separation from each other. Sent to separate prisons, they are, ironically, by legal decree, said to be "detained at her Majesty's pleasure"—detained by a royal, and for the intent that was not their wish.

This is Jackson's own hung time for the queer child, his way of answering, through a set of layered, fantastic inclinations, what kind of feeling is a motive for murder. It is a feeling so different from the killing that will birth a dream that is likely to be drained.

### ***Elephant*: Motive Goes to School**

How have these issues evolved in recent years? Do they persist? How have they stretched to include the violence so prevalent in schools? One recent film makes a canny reply. *Elephant*'s experiment is boldly elemental, especially in contrast to the pretzel logics under display by Jackson and Capote. But if *Elephant* (2003) is not as rich in its logical twists, it is forceful in its sparseness before its devastation. As if it refuses the "why?" that has emerged from the high school slayings along the lines of Columbine, *Elephant* strips down to students-in-motion. Animal-like,

without our knowledge of what propels them, students cross surprisingly vast tracks of space in their high school setting, as if crossing space on the fields, in the halls, through gyms and cafeterias was what they were born for. Yet as director Gus Van Sant follows student bodies as a violent day unfolds in their midst, there is his experiment. He moves diachronically *through* synchronic spread, giving the day as a synchrony. That is, the camera is constantly backing up from its linear chain to offer a scene that was taking place simultaneously with the one before it, so that our progress “up to” the killings is often turning sideways for stretches of time. From these perspectives, we perceive a chessboard of bodies all in motion, with varying motives, passing each other and crossing one another as they pursue a series of ends, which they may in part be unaware of. “Why did the chicken cross the road?” is the joke that comes to mind. This kind of question, impossible to answer, is what the camera of *Elephant* captures.

Again, we have the tease of saturated signifiers. First we meet a boy with a bull on his shirt. Does the bull mean target—as in “bull’s eye”—or does it mean aggression? Or neither? Then we meet a beautiful jock with “Lifeguard” on his sweatshirt. Is this shirt ironic? Is this boy the killer? (Neither boy is.) But soon enough our questions are displaced by motions. A four-minute shot, uncut and on the move, captures the lifeguard crossing a field, climbing stairs, turning corners, and walking long hallways. Even the visual pleasure of his beauty bows to the camera’s attention to his motion. (It is that unusual, by dint of length and angles.) And though all the signs of Columbine are here—two boy killers who are disaffected, bullied, or unpopular, with a rage against jocks in particular and with erotic connections to each other—they are not linked in a causal chain. One does not know which signs are contributing, combining, building, or receding, since the film refuses to order them or even weight them differentially. In fact, the question of causality is thematized, but also pulverized, in a scene with the Gay/Straight Alliance at the school, in which we hear overlapping snippets of “a Trojan on it, OK? . . . so we were talking about walking down the street being gay. . . . how can you tell? or can you tell? . . . see, that’s the thing, I don’t think you can. . . . well, if you have tons of symbols and stuff . . . but I don’t think . . . did you guys see the cover story on the *Oregonian* about the gay rams? . . . apparently the farmers can’t tell if the rams are gay or not.”

Just on the heels of this ranging discussion, we see the boy with the bull on his shirt playing with a dog that is leaping for a ball in a slow-motion shot: this is the image (the motion of the dog) that in the film precedes our view of the killers each time we see them. And here, like Capote, Van Sant puts a queer child into

the mix. One of the killers seems surprisingly “sensitive”: from his soft eyes and gentle bearing to his love of drawing and playing Beethoven on the piano. (“Moonlight Sonata” and “Für Elise” suffuse the film’s soundtrack, as if he is providing it.) This same boy also clearly likes guns, Nazi documentaries, and, in some way, the other boy killer (who is lacking sensitivities), since they passionately kiss in the shower as a prelude to their killings. Do they feel like killing? It appears that they do. Do they “have fun,” as one instructs the other? Perhaps they do, though it is hard to tell. What we see is something of what we saw before in the film’s other scenes: two students crossing voluminous space, in long attentive shots, though this time with guns. The sensitive boy has a look of concern (at moments, fear?), a brief slight smile, confusion, worry (“fuck!”), fatigue, and then surprisingly little reaction to his point-blank killing of his partner in arms. We end in a meat locker where he has cornered the lifeguard and his beautiful girlfriend (visual pleasure made simply into meat?).

Here in *Elephant* we have seen intent in the criminal sense. There is no doubt about it. But have we seen motive—perhaps the elephant in the room, as the saying goes? We cannot say. What we do know is that we have been forced to share the camera’s interests: its punning play on the camera’s “development” of a set of students. What is forced is something rare, a deep curiosity. For we are made to watch, less for the purpose of “understanding” than inhabiting, the pleasure, elation, boredom, disappointment, and mysterious repetition of a set of student motions: a moving set of signs, still emerging into meaning.

## Notes

1. Truman Capote, *In Cold Blood* (New York: Vintage, 1994), 245. Hereafter cited in the text.
2. *The American Heritage Dictionary*, New College Edition, s.v. “Motive.”
3. For suggestive work that examines spoiling in the realm of identity, see Erving Goffman, *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1963); and Heather K. Love, following Goffman, in “‘Spoiled Identity’: Stephen Gordon’s Loneliness and the Difficulties of Queer History,” *GLQ* 7, no. 4 (2001): 487–519.
4. On the point of “no established forms to hold itself,” see, as evidence, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, “How to Bring Your Kids Up Gay: The War on Effeminate Boys,” in *Tendencies* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993), 154–66. Making her deep-seated focus the widespread cultural “wish that gay people *not exist*” and her more specific target “therapists’ disavowed desire for a nongay outcome,” Sedgwick (at first,

wittily) explains: “Advice on how to help your kids turn out gay . . . is less ubiquitous than you might think. On the other hand, the scope of institutions whose programmatic undertaking is to prevent the development of gay people is unimaginably large . . . [.] most sites of the state, the military, education, law, penal institutions, the church, medicine, and mass culture enforce it all but unquestioningly, and with little hesitation at even the recourse to invasive violence” (161). Needless to say, those who pit family values against the “threat” of homosexuality, under the banner of “what’s good for children,” never imagine there are children who are queer.

5. I do believe that now, at the time of this writing, signs of a cultural shift are emerging in public life. We are perhaps seeing the beginnings of a public concept of a gay child in the present tense. To take just one example: on a segment of the Oprah Winfrey show, “When I Knew I Was Gay” (November 17, 2005), the time frame of people “knowing” they are “gay” is the topic of the show. Taglines running under guests’ names (“Carson—Knew He Was Gay at Age 4”; “Billy—Knew He Was Gay at Age 8”) indicate that Oprah’s show itself is saying that children are often gay to themselves (in many cases, for a long stretch of time) before they come out. In fact, in one instance, a guest tells a story of outing herself to her mother at ten—though, tellingly, the mother (strategically?) forgot the trauma of this moment by thinking her child was “too young” to know “that”; hence, the “nightmare” (in the mother’s words) of seeing the “death” of her “dreams” when she learned that her daughter, at the age of seventeen, was gay (again). Guests on the show rightly predict that kids will come out now at ever younger ages. But, we might ask, will they come out as “gay,” or “queer,” or under the banner of some other term? It is clearly too early to say. But I do believe that the twentieth century will have been the century of the ghostly gay child.
6. In brilliantly different ways, James Kincaid in *Erotic Innocence: The Culture of Child Molesting* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998) and Lee Edelman in *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004) show the supreme brutality of our culture’s ideal of the Child. “Erotic innocence” is, for Kincaid, a tremendous impoverishment of sexual life by the sexual titillation of innocence—both for children (who are made to be it) and for those adults who are keen to pursue it. As for Edelman, embrace of the death drive, its energetic *jouissance*, could be a tender response to abuse at the hands of “the Child”—that idea (the Child) to which meaning and the future are wed in Imaginary and also pleasure-deadening ways. I want to scout a different path around this Child, the Child for whom growing up is invoked as its touching future. To do so, I return to the notion that Sedgwick so profoundly introduced in the early 1990s—the protogay child—and claim this notion, once again, for queer theory. Here a host of still-unexplored temporalities, theories of metaphor, moving suspensions, shadows of growth, and oddly anti-identitarian reachings toward gayness surface for the pleasure of our reconsideration. Moreover, it is instructive to see how the hauntings of the ghostly gay child in the twentieth century

open up aspects of the normative child that are tellingly queer. Far from a simple, sentimentalized plea for children's rights to come out gay, I consider children's proto-gayness as a bold and material instance of Derrida's notion of "delay." Derrida argues that "the structure of delay . . . in effect forbids that one make of temporalization . . . a simple dialectical complication of the living present as an originary and unceasing synthesis." Although these dynamics will be utterly changed—and not all to the good—when children can come out as gay, here I suggest that the ghostly gay child, in Derrida's words, "makes us concerned not with horizons of modified . . . presents, but with a 'past' that has never been present, and which never will be, whose future to come will never be a *production* or a reproduction in the form of presence" ("Dif-férance," in *Deconstruction in Context: Literature and Philosophy*, ed. Mark C. Taylor [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986], 413).

7. The landmark aspect of this due process case involving a juvenile (Gerald Gault, a fifteen-year-old charged with making lewd phone calls) was the U.S. Supreme Court's ruling that juveniles, too, are entitled to due process rights guaranteed by the Fourteenth Amendment. The court opinion famously held that neither the Fourteenth Amendment nor the Bill of Rights is for adults alone.
8. Jacques Derrida, "Freud and the Scene of Writing," trans. Jeffrey Mehlman, *Yale French Studies*, no. 48 (1972): 81. The phrase "deferred action" is James Strachey's translation of *Nachträglichkeit*; "deferred effect" and "deferred comprehension" also appear in his translations of Freud's discussion of this concept; see *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans. James Strachey (London: Hogarth, 1955), 1:356–59, 3:166–67, 17:44–45n1. See also Ronald Mather and Jill Marsden, "Trauma and Temporality: On the Origins of Post-Traumatic Stress," *Theory and Psychology* 14, no. 2 (2004): 205–19.
9. See Freud's long footnote to the "Wolf Man" case, in *Standard Edition*, 17:45n1. See also Tom McGrath, "The Transmission of Trauma," *Psychoanalytische Perspektiven*, nos. 41–42 (2000): 123–37; and Peter Fonagy et al., "Measuring the Ghost in the Nursery," *Journal of the American Psychoanalytical Association*, no. 41 (1993): 957–89. It is also worth recalling here Derrida's comments on delay from note 6: even this lateral simultaneity does not make the past now simply present, as if it has been merely retained.
10. In other words, the child may consciously, to itself, apply the words *gay*, or *homosexual*, or *queer*, even though there is no context—not even among friends or family—in which these words may be uttered out loud in relation to itself. It is also possible that this child will use a metaphor both to grasp and to suspend itself. See Kathryn Bond Stockton, "Growing Sideways, or Versions of the Queer Child: The Ghost, the Homosexual, the Freudian, the Innocent, and the Interval of Animal," in *Curiouser: On the Queering of Children*, ed. Steven Bruhm and Natasha Hurley (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), 277–319.

11. Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, trans. James Strachey (New York: Avon Books, 1965), 258. Hereafter cited as *ID* in the text.
12. Sigmund Freud, "Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality," in *The Freud Reader*, ed. Peter Gay (New York: Norton, 1989), 255.
13. Jeffrey Lehman and Shirelle Phelps, eds., *West's Encyclopedia of American Law*, 2nd ed. (Detroit: Thomson Gale, 2005), 130. Hereafter cited in the text.
14. Glanville L. Williams, *The Mental Element in Crime* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1965), 9. Williams, a Fellow of Jesus College, Cambridge, delivered the remarks that constitute his book as the Lionel Cohen Lectures at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem in 1957–58, a period between the murders depicted by Jackson and Capote. Hereafter cited in the text.
15. Specifically, Williams writes: "There is a very great measure of concurrence in the definitions of intention . . . advanced by such writers as Salmond in New Zealand (if he may be claimed in this respect as an academic), Turner in England, and Wechsler in the United States; and this agreement is notably reflected in the series of definitions set out in the American Law Institute's Model Penal Code" (9).
16. R. A. Duff, *Intention, Agency, and Criminal Liability: Philosophy of Action and the Criminal Law* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), 31. Hereafter cited in the text.
17. As Derrida explains in a now-familiar passage: "It is because of *différance* that the movement of signification is possible only if each so-called 'present' element . . . is related to something other than itself, thereby keeping within itself the mark of the past element, and already letting itself be vitiated by the mark of its relation to the future element" ("Différance," 405).
18. Judith Butler, "Imitation and Gender Insubordination," in *Inside/Out: Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories*, ed. Diana Fuss (New York: Routledge, 1991), 24.
19. George Plimpton, *Truman Capote* (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 33. Hereafter cited as *TC* in the text. A new film, *Infamous* (dir. Douglas McGrath, USA), largely based on Plimpton's book, was released in October 2006, after this essay had been completed.
20. Capote's search for fame through his book is the focus of *Capote* (dir. Bennett Miller, Canada; 2005), the recent film based on Gerald Clarke's biography *Capote* (New York: Carroll and Graf, 2001).
21. So we learn in Julie Glamuzina and Alison J. Laurie, *Parker and Hulme: A Lesbian View* (Ithaca, NY: Firebrand, 1991), 82–99.
22. See Georges Bataille, "The Notion of Expenditure," in *Visions of Excess*, ed. Allan Stoekl (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), 116–29. For a fine essay, with a different thesis, that complements my reading of *Heavenly Creatures*—that appeared after and independently of my 2004 MLA talk ("Who Feels Like Killing? Narrative Trials for the Queer Child")—see Betty Jay, "'Let's Moider Mother': *Heavenly Creatures* and the Politics of Delusion," *Genders* 42 (2005). 222.genders.org/g42/g42\_jay.html (accessed June 5, 2006).

23. See Christian Metz, “The Imaginary Signifier,” and Laura Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” in *Film and Theory: An Anthology*, ed. Robert Stam and Toby Miller (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), 408–36; 483–94. Hereafter cited in the text.
24. See Jacques Lacan, “The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I,” in *Écrits: A Selection*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Norton, 1977), 1–7.