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The Disposal of Fear: Childhood, Trauma, and Complexity

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Every ugly thing told to the child, every shock, every fright given him, will remain like minute splinters in the flesh, to torture him all his life long.—Angelo Mosso

Although armed with his plastic sword and senior cousin Chloe . . . he started sobbing "Get me out, get me out!" within minutes of the curtain going up. —*Guardian*

Fear figures in a great many accounts of subjectivity and its development. Freud made fear the backdrop for the Oedipal drama, a locus classicus for all contemporary accounts of subjectivity. Fear, in the form of the Father's power over the family trinity, makes the cut that separates the child from the world, where previously, from the child's point of view, child and world had appeared indivisible. To create a subject, on this view, is to create a "residence," a site of property and belonging distinct from the world. Fear and the disposal[1] of fear are implicated in the making of subjects.

In the resolution of the Oedipal drama the disposal of fear within the subject serves to complete and to strengthen the division between world and subject, to establish the bounds and possibility of the subject's self-ownership. Fear becomes owned, contained, disposed of in the form of a possession—an experience that is owned. The subject becomes the home of the unheimlich. In this lies fear's power of unmaking. Psychoanalysis was established on the recognition that the traumas of hysteria and anxiety are the keys to understanding the fragmentation of identity. Trauma is the indelible mark of past hurt, of intense fear. It spread out across the subject like so many lines of fracture, dissolving coherent self-possession into a confetti of names and memories.

A powerful story. One that cries out to be challenged. So when Deleuze and Guattari (1984) eloquently announced their position as anti-Oedipus, this account of subjectivity emerging from the ownership and disposition of fear became their prime target. Similarly, when Foucault (1970) famously proclaimed the erasure of the figure of man from a central position in our thinking, he was announcing with it the collapse of the "grounds of possibility of all the sciences of man" (386) in the late nineteenth century, a cipher for ethnology and psychoanalysis. No more grand myths about the origins of the human subject. No more Totem and Taboo.

From these germinal works the contemporary social sciences inherit the now familiar conceptual operation of "decentering the subject." In recent years this operation has proved crucial in redefining the social study of science, technology, and medicine. Crudely put, the operation consists in breaching any, or ideally all, of the boundaries that separate the human subject from the media in which it subsists: language, discourse, materiality, technology, desire. What remains is very little: "A self does not amount to much, but no self is an island; each exists in a fabric of relations that is more complex and mobile than ever before. Young or old, man and woman, rich or poor, a person is always located at 'nodal points' of specific communication circuits, however tiny these may be. Or better: one is always located at a post through which various kinds of messages pass" (Lyotard 1984, 15).

Although it does not amount to very much, what remains of the subject is said to be "more complex." Lyotard makes a turn from the more or less stable possessive self to a complex and mobile relational self. Decentering the subject involves a turn from an ontology of the individual, bounded subject to a more complex relational ontology. As Lyotard envisages it, this relational self is spatially complex, distributed across "communication circuits." It is the result of the disposition of messages. Crucially, on this view, the self has no ability to possess and can provide no harbor. With no boundary the subject can own nothing, not even itself. The humanistic characterization of "experience" and "memory" as forms of property is put radically into question because what the subject seems to own, it is merely passing on. Fear shares the fate of all other properties in a relational ontology. Fear does not belong to the subject; it cannot be possessed. The subject can no longer be understood as the site of fear's disposal.

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The various material semiotics and forms of ontological politics (Mol 1999) currently at work in science and technology studies urge us to expand the range of distributions we should consider beyond Lyotard's fascination with language. Selves are distributed through prosthetics and through technical devices (Latour 1999). They are elements of wider "actor networks" (see Ashmore, Wooffitt, and Harding 1994). Further, from the early stages of their development these approaches were concerned with temporal distributions alongside spatial ones. An early question for the actor-network approach, for example, was how relationships could persist over time (Bijker and Law 1992). They hinted at the temporal complexity of selves as forms of order.

Our interest in all this can be summed up quite simply. We want to know what happens to the experience of fear and to the persistence of fear (under the name of trauma) in a context where the subject is best understood as a "fabric of relations." If there is no bounded subject, then fear would seem to have no proper place. Is it then the case that without a place of possession, without a home, fear ceaselessly patrols the "communication circuits" that constitute us? In doing away with the bounded subject are we condemned to circle in ever more elliptical paths around our own complex traumas and anxieties? Or are there "timings" that allow for fear to be taken out of general circulation, to be "disposed of" or to take up residence with a subject?

The connection with "complexity" should be clear. Once, *complex* named specifiable arrangements of intrapsychic forces, a set of tensions that, even as they were resolved, left an abiding trace in the subject. Now, in an audacious reversal (founded on the suspicion that our accounts of insides and outsides were "inside out"), we give the name *complexity* to the fabrics and arrangements that constitute the subject in the moment that they escape possession by the subject (see Latour 1999). These fabrics, by implication, also escape exhaustive analysis and specification. This usage of *complexity* clearly bolsters contemporary social scientific emphases on the limits of analysis and adds to the current popularity of such terms as *undecideability* (Day 1998), *incommensurability* (Lyotard 1984), *unawareness* (Beck 1998), *ambivalence* (Smart 1999), and *modesty* (Haraway 1997). *Complexity* begins to look like a synonym for *poststructuralism.*

The contrast between possessive and complex relational views of the subject, then, forefronts the questions of persistence and possession. It

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also raises questions about whether a focus on complexity can be understood to achieve anything more than a confirmation of, by now, standard social scientific accounts of the limitations of social scientific analysis. Thus, as we examine fear's persistence, we will also attempt to make a clear and positive use of *complexity.*

In this essay, then, we will address the contrast between possessive and relational subjectivities, concepts that are crucial for how science studies understands the psychological subject. We will be led by the movement of a child's trauma through crosscutting psychological and legal discourses that are fixated on issues of good and bad timing. We will highlight the significance of the cultural performance of boundaries between the mature and the immature and between ontological realms of fantasy and reality in the production of persistent fear. We will pursue our interest in fear and its persistence by way of a single example, the case of the three-year-old boy, Morris, quoted in our second epigraph, who was traumatized by a theatrical performance.

PETER PAN AND THE LOST BOY

"Like a pirate from Never Never Land, the power of J. M. Barrie's original *Peter Pan* has reached out from a theatre stage to throttle recent, saccharine versions—unfortunately scaring a three-year-old witless in the process. The parents of Morris, who tried to hide under a seat and his Dad's coat as the tale of child kidnap, plank walking and the relentless croc unfolded, are taking legal action over his 'stress and trauma' " ("Peter Pan Producers" 1996, 1). *Peter Pan* is a popular family theatrical production in the U.K.[2] In the play a group of children are transported to "Never Never Land," where they have a series of adventures and pass through perilous situations. Peter Pan is their native guide. He is a peculiar figure—a boy who never grows up. He is a "lost boy," stuck in a state of perpetual childhood. This is a play, then, that thematizes fear, maturation, and failure to mature. The group's adventures in Never Never Land involve clashes with the pirate Captain Hook. This character does not have children's best interests at heart. He is a kidnapper of infants who enjoys drowning people. As you can imagine, this play could be a little scary.

In 1996 the three-year-old boy Morris, his grandmother, parents,

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and six-year-old cousin Chloe went to see a performance of the play. Grandma had booked the tickets early for her sixty-first birthday treat. We have seen how the play sounds scary. This production in particular capitalized on scariness. Peter Pan wore a dramatic cloak of black feathers. Wolves circled the stage. A crocodile character was huge and imposing. Morris was scared and, within minutes of the curtain going up, sobbed, "Get me out. . . . Get me out!" According to his mother, Morris was "absolutely petrified."

This was bad enough in itself. One would hope that once his parents had gotten Morris out, Morris would be able to leave his terror behind him. But the family's troubles continued. Morris did not leave his terror behind him. He had nightmares about the play. The events also distributed relationships within the family: "My own grandson now calls me 'Nasty Granny' for taking him to the theatre. . . . I'm distressed that I took him to see something so frightening" ("Peter Pan Producers" 1996, 1).

According to his parents, Morris had undergone "stress and trauma." In his dreams and in the way he conducted his relationships, Morris, it would seem, was still in that theater, still exposed to the terrors of Never Never Land. This little boy, like some of Peter Pan's fellow denizens of Never Never Land (characters called the "lost boys"), had gotten lost in time.

If we say, with his parents, that Morris was traumatized by the play, we are saying that fear had not loosened its grip on him and that he was unable to let a frightening experience go. Still marked by the traumatic incident, Morris is living his terror again and again. He has become stuck in the past, out of "synch" with the real world, lost in time. The danger is that Morris, with respect to his granny, will become like Peter Pan, the boy who never grew up. Stuck in the past, still fixated on one event, Morris will be unable to dispose of his feelings of fear. His parents decided to seek legal remedy for the stress and trauma occasioned by the performance.

CHILDHOOD AND TIMING

Understandings of childhood have long been informed by a division between ontological states of "being" and "becoming" (Qvortrup 1994). In terms of this division children are always becoming beings, passing

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through childhood toward a future in which their journey of development will end. In contrast, fully developed adults are taken to be beings already (Lee 1999). In this sense temporality is understood to be the substance of childhood, but it is merely the medium of adulthood. With childhood so closely linked to temporality it is hardly surprising that although we may be concerned about what happens to adults, we may also be concerned when certain things happen to children. Thus childhood is often conceived of as a period of special vulnerability to trauma, fear, and external influence. Childhood is a passing phase, and because of this it is also a phase in which the external world may mark the child permanently.

Childhood is also a period in which timing is of the essence. Because childhood is understood as a period of becoming, childhood vulnerabilities are understood to change in degree and in kind over time. Thus a good deal of psychological research and legislation concerning childhood has aimed at rendering childhood's vulnerability and its variation over time comprehensible and manageable. The complex timings of childhood needed to be charted in order to establish a basis of discrimination between good timings and bad timings for events in children's lives. The principal means by which these aims have been pursued are the detection of general laws of development and the attempt to show that these hold good for all children, and the determination of legal boundaries within childhood that are made to hold for all children within a given legislature. The regulation of the timings in particular children's lives by scientific, medical, and legal authority has long rested on the possibility of making general or, at least, generalizable statements about childhood.

There is evidence, however, of a drift away from the "becoming" view of children as the institutions that compose childhood change. Late modern processes of the individualization of risk (Beck 1998), for example, take place partly through the identification of "rights" for each and every particular individual regardless of age. Further, rather than seek out the general regularities of the process of becoming, recent students of childhood (Hutchby and Moran-Ellis 1998; James and Prout 1997) have focused on children as "beings," competent social participants who need to be studied "in particular." In this view, given the many variations in children's lives and circumstances across cultures, within societies and over historical time, the search for generalized natural laws of childhood

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and the attempt to regulate in general for childhood appears not only quixotic but also politically and ethically suspect. A refusal to recognize a person's "being" is, arguably, tantamount to refusing him or her full recognition as a human being. Generality and universality in knowledge nowadays carry the taint of imperialism or the command economy.

COMPLEXITY: BETWEEN THE GENERAL AND THE PARTICULAR

The changing image of the child is, for us, an instance of the relations between the "general" and the "particular." As we have suggested, the general and the particular have political resonances within the social sciences. In recent years the general and the particular have often been set against each other as competing epistemologies. The growth of the "politics of recognition" (Taylor 1992) as a sphere of cultural conflict has been reflected in social scientific conflicts over the relative merits of universalist and particularist theories, methods, and modes of explanation. As Geertz notes: "Many social scientists have turned away from a laws with instances ideal of explanation towards a cases and interpretations one" (Geertz 1983, 19).

Geertz's social scientists have changed their job descriptions. They are no longer in search of that moment of greatest explanatory power in which all particulars are aligned in commonality such that they might be taken to declare their shared indebtedness to the "general." It is now clear that the unification of particulars will result in a simplification that social scientists should no longer countenance. But this opposition to simplification does not necessarily add up to a recognition of social complexity. We would suggest that in the social sciences *complexity* best names the spaces and processes that lie between the poles of the general and the particular. It names the host of attempts made by social scientists, among others, to manage the relationship between the general and the particular in order to produce explanations of social phenomena. The general and the particular certainly can be played as competing epistemological viewpoints, but in this they most clearly exhibit their status as cultural resources of sense-making practices.

As we return to Morris's case, we will suggest, first, that he lies in this space between the general and the particular and, second, that it is his location here that allows for fear persistently to be disposed of onto him,

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generating his "trauma." Before we make these arguments, however, we need to see a little more of the cultural and theoretical context in which Morris's reaction to a scary play could become so significant as to require legal remedy.

THE GROWN-UP CAN DISPOSE OF FEAR

The day after Morris's story was reported, the *Guardian* (a U.K. national daily newspaper) published a commentary by the journalist Suzanne Moore. She argued that a recourse to legal remedy was inappropriate in this case: "A boy is scared in Peter Pan, and his parents are now suing the theatre. Is this right? We can't stop kids from having nightmares, nor should we. Growing up is all about coping with fear" (Moore 1996).

Morris's parents were seeking redress for his trauma, for his being "stuck in time." In their account Morris was traumatized, or had become stuck with a terrifying event, because the theater had gotten its timing wrong in two ways. First, the theater should have carefully considered the "age appropriateness" of the play, and, second, once it had considered this, the theater should have given parents fair warning of the play's content. As it happened, such a warning was given on handbills but only ten minutes before the curtain went up. Bad timing. Because the theater got its timing wrong, the timing, the benign intergenerational synchrony of grandchild and grandparent that should link Morris with his family, has been disrupted.

Moore tells us that we (including Morris's parents) should not be so "protective" of children. She tells us that children's exposure to frightening events, be they real, dramatic, or imaginary, is inevitable and under certain circumstances aids their maturation. After listing fictional characters such as "the Wicked Witch of the West," "Cybermen," and "Daleks" that terrified her as a child,[3] she writes: "When I think of these things now I still turn cold, but I'm a grown up and I've learnt to live with fears. These childish fears have been pushed aside by more adult ones and now it's the real world, not a fictional one, that terrifies me. Learning to live with fear is part of growing up. I am not suggesting that we deliberately expose our children to the stuff of nightmares but, even if we don't, they will continue to have bad dreams" (Moore 1996).

Here a premium is set on a process of learning to live with fear as a

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normal part of growing into an adult. Maturation involves learning how to dispose of fear, to push it to one side. If children encounter terrifying fictional characters, as long as adults are there to help them understand, these encounters will help them learn to cope with fear. Good timing in intergenerational relationships leads to good discrimination between the real and the imaginary. Such experiences of being assisted in discrimination will give children the impetus to overcome life's hurdles. For Moore, Morris's parents are overplaying their helplessness in the face of his terror. If he seems to be stuck in time, their job is not to protest about it and seek to blame somebody for it but to coax him back into synchrony. Through this encounter with terror Morris could be made stronger for the future.

But Morris's trauma is not only a matter of being "out of synch" with the rest of his family. Unless and until he can let go of the frightening incident, he will also be out of synch with his own appropriate development, which should take place through an ongoing accommodation to new experience.[4] This is the law of developmental health for Morris because it is the law of developmental health for children in general. Morris's ongoing accommodation has been stalled by trauma. As long as Morris is possessed by fear, his development will not be normal. The growing child should learn to tell the difference between "real" fear and "imaginary" fear, the real world and imaginary worlds, because to be in an adult state is to be able to dispose of one sort of fear (imaginary) and to manage one's response to another sort of fear (real). For Moore, the trauma event that holds Morris in its thrall involves a confusion on Morris's part between the real and the imaginary. Once marked by a trauma event, unless he is given the right sort of help, such a confusion may persist, threatening to stand in the way of Morris's making appropriate discriminations in the future.

HOW DO CHILDREN GET STUCK IN TIME?

Moore, Morris, and his family are not alone in this peculiar cultural space of good and bad timings, age-appropriate responses, and neatly categorizable fears. Throughout Morris's case, generalized forms of knowledge of what is good for children, which share an investment in the appropriate timings of normal development, were vying to be the best

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match for Morris's particular case. On the one hand, Morris's parents detected injury to him through the production company's bad timing. The company's timing was bad because the performance was too "old" for Morris. On the other hand, Moore tells us that if his parents were to intervene in his experience, this bad timing could have been converted into good timing, converting his trauma into a developmental hurdle successfully vaulted.

Bettleheim's psychoanalytic account of the developmental value of fairy tales (Bettleheim 1976) seems to provide one source for Moore's comments. If fairy tales, like the play *Peter Pan,* contain terrifying figures and events, for Bettleheim this is no reason to shield children from them. Children are involved in "the struggle for maturity" (Bettleheim 1976, 277) and can "transcend infancy with the help of fantasy" (123). In this struggle they will often find that they have powerful, ambivalent, and confusing feelings about the real world and, in particular, about their parents. Held in tension between dependency and growing autonomy, children may be overwhelmed with the fear that they are unable to manage such tension and may be pulled apart by it. Fairy tales, as forms of fantastic fiction, are sketchpads for the child's unconscious mind, materials on which to practice making appropriate discriminations, places to learn to disambiguate real from imaginary fears to gain mastery over themselves. By presenting children with manageable terrors fairy tales help them learn to dispose of those fears, which are rooted in the welter of ambiguous feelings that characterizes the childish mind. According to Bettleheim:

> Fairy tales, unlike any other form of literature, direct the child to discover his [*sic*] identity and calling. . . . Fairy tales intimate that a rewarding, good life is within one's reach despite adversity—but only if one does not shy away from the hazardous struggles without which one can never achieve true identity. . . . The stories also warn that those who are too timorous and narrow-minded to risk themselves in finding themselves must settle down to a humdrum existence if an even worse fate does not befall them. (24)

Development is a process of consolidating a "true identity" by confronting and disposing of fear. This struggle could not involve higher stakes. Not only might the child never learn to live with fear, or to dispose

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of it properly, and so be condemned to a humdrum adult life, but she or he might also never properly make it out of childhood itself. If childhood conflicts are not resolved, then no matter what the chronological age of the person, he or she, at some fundamental psychological level, will remain stuck in time. In such cases of faulty development "some people withdraw from the world and spend most of their days in the realm of their imaginings. . . . Such people are locked in" (Bettleheim 1976, 119). The best way to avoid this sort of bad fantasy life, with its eternal simplicity, its inertia resulting from the inability to have done with and dispose of particular fears and fascinations, is not to eliminate fantasy but to give it as much material to work with as possible. By living out a "rich and variegated fantasy life," the child allows her or his imagination full flight, which enables the child to move on from a "few narrow preoccupations" (ibid.). This then constitutes the royal road to a complete, integrated personality, one that is able to deal with the complexities of reality represented by the ambivalence between well-founded and fantastic fears.

A bounded "true self" is the goal of childhood "becoming." It is possible to tell when someone has become a fully fledged "being" when he or she is able to make appropriate discriminations between fantasy and reality. At every step along the journey of development, fantasy and reality threaten to become indiscriminable, but by the time we have reached maturity, if our development has been normal, we will be able to dispose of imaginary fears.

THE LINE OF NORMAL DEVELOPMENT

Our discussion of Morris's case has involved various articulations—by Morris's parents, by Moore, and by Bettleheim—of a shared sense-making resource. The propriety of timings, the conduct of Morris's parents, and Morris's likely degree of vulnerability have all been judged against a "line of normal development"—a line that leads from childish inability to categorize, and thus dispose of, fears to an adult integrity of self that is achieved by clear discrimination and successful management of fears. When Moore and Morris's parents seek to gain purchase on Morris and the trauma event, to make sense of what has occurred, this line of normal development proves very useful. As an article of generalized knowledge it would seem to help us understand the particular

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events involving Morris by giving us a general template with which to organize our judgments, a "skeleton key" with which to unlock understanding of any difficulties involving particular children.

The line of normal development gains its utility as an explanatory resource in this case by being potentially applicable to all children and therefore applicable to Morris. Note that its successful application requires a clear passage between the general and the particular. We could characterize such generalized knowledges as the line of normal development as "simple" and as "oversimplifying." But we are led to more than a condemnation of generalized knowledge and a championing of the specific and the particular. It is clear that generalized knowledge is valuable in making sense, in apportioning blame and responsibility, and in projecting futures for Morris. The question is whether the relationship between the general and the particular is like that of a skeleton key to a number of locks, whether general knowledge can successfully contain Morris as a particular instance and render him comprehensible.

Although the different views in the debate all mobilize this same general resource—the line of normal development—and although they match it to the same particular case, quite different effects are produced. Morris's parents use the matching process to detect an offense against Morris, whereas Moore uses it to reveal Morris's parents as mistaken. Although the general template promises to match up well to Morris's particular case in order to help us tell good timings from bad and well-founded fears from imaginary ones (our own fears for children as well as Morris's fears), in the movement from general to particular still more diversity of opinion is generated. In other words the more the generalized notion of the line of normal development is applied, the more complex the situation becomes. An iterative simplicity begets complexity.

The general and the particular are not related in the way that a skeleton key is related to a set of locks. There is no univocal match between the line of normal development and Morris's case. Indeed the generalized knowledge of the line of normal development can even be mobilized to prejudice claims based on the line of normal development, as when Moore criticizes Morris's parents. But it is the possibility of making that passage from general to particular that allows us to recognize Morris's trauma. Unless generalized knowledge of the developmental characteristics of children applies to Morris, we have no way of acknowledging his

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trauma. Or so it would seem. We will shortly offer an account of Morris's trauma as a "disposal" of fear onto him. We will suggest that this disposal took place through a play of the "general" and the "particular" and of the "real" and the "fantastic." First, however, we need to clarify our view of the general and the particular as cultural artifacts.

WHERE DID THE LINE OF NORMAL DEVELOPMENT COME FROM?

The general and the particular are, as we have described, frequently understood as epistemological viewpoints. Essentialist approaches gamble on these viewpoints being integrable. Constructionist approaches tend to assert the impossibility of such integration between the general and the particular as epistemological viewpoints. What if both these views were mistaken about the nature of the general and the particular?

Foucault tells us that in the mid-eighteenth century, in a certain school of drawing, so as to produce skilled draughtsmen in the most efficient manner, the pupils were required to perform "individual tasks at regular intervals; each of these exercises, signed with the name of its author and date of execution, was handed in to the teacher, the best were rewarded; assembled together at the end of the year and compared, they made it possible to establish the progress, the present ability and the relative place of each pupil" (Foucault 1977, 157).

Within these practices judgments about pupils' work were not limited to whether the work was good or bad but whether the work was good or bad relative to the accumulated time that the pupils had spent at their studies. The specific journey a pupil took through her or his education became tied to the general passage of time marked out by the regular intervals between tasks and by the passage of years. By comparing different students, according to these timings, standard expectations could be derived. Such expectations could govern judgments about the relationship between a specific pupil's progress through the curriculum and the general progress of time. Steps could be taken to synchronize a specific pupil's changing levels of attainment with a standard.

This was a pedagogy that aimed at keeping different timings in synchrony with one another. This pedagogy worked on a mass of different timings, defined by pupils' differing degrees of skill and diligence to spin

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a single thread—a line of normal progress. With respect to this line, constructed by comparisons between individual performances, a given pupil could be a slow or a rapid learner. With such practices of comparative judgment and record keeping, a truth regime emerged in which it made good sense to describe each pupil as slow or fast in their passage along the line of normal progress.

It seems here that "discipline," the formation of the student body into a set of individual subjects, involves a number of simplifications. A collection of bodies in interaction with one another is boiled down into a number of individuals who can, to all intents and purposes, be treated as independent of one another. Minute variations in performance, which approximate the random and the incalculable—slips of the pen, illness, inability to attend—the myriad backward and forward steps to be expected of persons can be safely offset against the record composed of regular measurements, ignored, that is, until they themselves become a regularity. A single governing chronology emerges, spun from a bundle of times hitherto at odds with one another, and along with this chronology emerges a picture of each pupil as being in possession of a specifiable degree of competence, the increase of which can be measured over time.

Foucault, then, tells us how the practices of testing and record keeping, the technologies of pedagogy, allowed for the production of a line of normal development. These practices produced this line by ensuring first that each pupil could be treated as an individual case. Once each pupil is individualized in this manner, the individual cases could be compared to produce a general norm. This suggests that the general and the particular are not just different kinds of knowledge to be set in mutual complicity or antagonism but are fundamentally linked products of attempts to set pupils in order.

The task of disciplining is not finished with the establishment of such an ordering scheme, however. To render these pupil's and children's lives knowable requires continual efforts to integrate the general and the particular. In Foucault's school of calligraphy these efforts took the form of yearly assessments of each pupil. In Morris's case, as we have seen, the general and the particular appear integrable, the line of normal development applicable, in different ways. Different commentators choose different passages between the general and the particular. It is when the bid for understanding becomes distanced from the technologies that ground

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the line of normal development that we see that a truth regime is also a regime of controversy. It turns those who would "know," and be able securely to apportion responsibilities for Morris's trauma, into disputants.

BACK TO THE THEATER

So how, at once, can we register the inadequacy of the line of normal development for understanding childhood yet avoid disposing of specific fears as belonging to a particular child like Morris? Perhaps by describing how a fear that originally belongs to no one comes to be made the property of a child. Perhaps by charting the disposal of a fear, that itself has no proper place, onto a child. Let's go back to the theater with Morris and take with us the intuitions that the operation of fear is complex because fear "belongs" nowhere and that the "competence" to discriminate between real and imaginary fears is complex because no one, not even an adult, has full possession of it.

It would seem from all that has been written about his case that Morris has a problem with distinguishing between fantasy and reality. Because he is such a very young child, he cannot tell that the events on the stage are only pretend. If he were further along the line of development, the producers of the play would not have been at fault. The material they were presenting would have been age-appropriate. As it stands, Morris is not competent to tell the vital difference, and that is why he is afraid. When he feels fear, then, it is a fear that belongs to him and is simply and logically attached to him by his pregiven age-determined incompetence. On this reading the events in the theater could not have turned out any other way. The play's producers are at fault for making Morris afraid, and for disturbing his passage along the line of proper development, because they were inattentive to his incompetence and got the timing of their warnings wrong.

But is an incompetence over the disposal of fear age-determined? Is fearfulness or a susceptibility to fear proper to childhood? Is Morris's fear originally his own?

Let's look at the play again and ask what sort of performance it is. We can quickly and easily say that the events staged were "pretend" and thus that Morris's fear was inappropriate, a reaction only an incompetent would have. However, Captain Hook, his crew, and those snapping croc-

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odiles were all given physical substance. If they were really there, with what certainty can we characterize Morris's reaction as that of an incompetent? To make a parallel example, we adults "know" that a ride on a roller coaster, an experience reserved for those understood to be old enough, exposes us to imaginary danger; but we are, nevertheless, propelled through space. The roller coaster is a machine for generating fear effects that we can then manage, perhaps with the help of others. The roller coaster is a test of our fear-disposal competences. It takes us, as adults, in and out of the competence proper to an adult. If we cannot do the disposal work ourselves, our companions at the fair will help us, either by scorning us for being afraid of something that is "pretend," saying, "Don't be a baby," or by nurturing us with the reassuring "Don't worry, it'll be over soon." To be frightened on a roller coaster, then, can be a "becoming child" that is procured for us by a real, twisting journey through space. There is a sense in which we are never fully competent disposers of fear. The roller coaster does not reveal a fearfulness that already lies within us, determined by our age, waiting for exposure; rather, it provides an opportunity for the dramatization of the difference between competent and incompetent, adult and child, reality and fantasy.

The family play *Peter Pan* is no different in this respect from the roller coaster. Real things happen on the roller coaster so that fear effects are generated, competences and incompetences are distributed, and fear is given a disposition in the sense that it is laid on certain people. The difference between the roller coaster and *Peter Pan* is that the play is about producing a "becoming child" in those who are already understood to be children. In the case of the roller coaster the settlement of the question of who is to comfort or scorn whom will depend on the various adults' reactions to the experience. But in the case of the play, those attending already know that they are of different generations. It is a peculiar feature of the play, among other fear generators, that it aligns competences and incompetences in the disposal of fear with ready-made generational differences. As we have argued through the example of the roller coaster, incompetence in the business of disposing of fear is proper, in general, to no one. But the play brings this incompetence into alignment with a scale of maturation.

With respect to the susceptibility to fear, we have by now left the line of proper development behind us as an instrument for rendering events

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comprehensible. However, there are some assemblages, and the play is among them, where the "intergenerational effect" we have called "becoming child" is played out between those who are already "adult" and those who are already "children." Although we have left the line behind us, we have not found ourselves in unaccountable space. Although we have left the line behind us, we have not abolished the specificity of childhood fear.

The performance of the play in the theater does not end at the footlights. The separation between players and audience is not a simple fact. It is itself an actor in a larger play that involves all the adults and children in the theater. It is an actor in a play in which specifically intergenerational differences in competence can be generated. The division between stage and audience, fantasy and reality can be called upon by adults to help children dispose of fear. Fear, then, is generated by the complex tension between the fantastic and the real, and the theater is the engine of its generation. A very specific collective fear haunts the theater. Costumes, actors, adults, stage effects, children, and lighting all participate in its generation. But it is not yet proper to Morris. We have yet to come to the question of how this collectively generated fear is marked out as "his" and how, subsequently, he comes to be marked, traumatized, by it.

What marks Morris as the fearful one? Although other children may have been startled by the play's events, and may have covered their eyes at certain moments, only Morris sobbed the words "Get me out. Get me out." It would certainly make sense to "read backward" from his words to impute a specifically childish incompetence in Morris, the sort of incompetence we expect from one so young, an inability to tell pretend from reality, which results in an inability to dispose of fear. To do this would be to reconfirm the pertinence of the line of normal development. But we can also "read forward" from his words. As soon as Morris made his speech, the fantasy/reality or stage/audience split became untenable. As we have suggested, this division was a vital actor in the theater-wide play of maturity and competence, and once it was unable to perform, the characteristics of that play were bound to change. As his caregivers became stirred by his words and became concerned for him, the physical reality of the events and characters on the stage became apparent. And as this reality revealed itself, so the events and characters on the stage left

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their fantastic zone of freedom from accountability and responsibility. Prior to Morris's speech, for example, Captain Hook had been able to menace and abduct children without police officers storming the stage. After Morris's speech however, with the deactivation of the reality/fantasy actor, the events on stage entered a legal and psychiatric regime of accountability. It was Morris's speech that led his parents to take the play's producers to court. It was through Morris's speech that a fear, deliberately generated and, up until that moment, belonging to no one, found Morris, rather than any of the other children, and claimed him for its own. It was Morris's speech that made that homeless fear Morris's own.

Although Morris's fear is "constructed," through complex contingent and culturally specific circumstances, rather than predetermined, it is still real and still his. Although his age does not determine that he will experience fear, as the line of normal development would lead us to think, fear has found him in circumstances partly composed of intergenerational relations. To this extent, and in this manner, Morris is fearful because he is a child. In the midst of the conflict between the line of normal development, the becoming view, that would have Morris's fear be originally his property, and the being view that would dispose of the idea of specifically childish fears, we have tried to show how childhood vulnerability can be recognized without recourse to the line of normal development and its simplification and generalization of the states of childhood and adulthood. With Morris's inadvertent assistance we have teased the question of competence in the disposal of fear away from chronological age. Rather than just failing to recognize a real distinction between fantasy and reality, Morris stalled that distinction's ability to act within the theater. With his speech he broke the stage/audience boundary, opening the events onstage to a regime of accountability. This gave grounds for his parents to take the play's producers to court.

What have we to say, then, of Morris's continuing trauma? Now that fear has marked him for its own and made itself belong to him, now that fear occupies the same space as Morris, now that an originally homeless fear has been disposed of onto Morris, any comment Morris himself makes on the events in the theater can be read as emerging from that fear rather than from Morris. After the visit to the theater Morris should continue to do the work of a grandchild, to secure the bond between his parents and their parents as an intergenerationally shared repository of love.

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He should do this work by being particularly well behaved in his grandmother's presence. But he, or something else, spoils it all. Among the evidence of his trauma we find that he now calls his grandmother "Nasty Granny." Could this be Morris talking, expressing his own judgment of the events? Perhaps he has found grounds to dislike his grandmother. How could this statement be revealed as a sign of trauma? Only under circumstances where Morris and the fear disposed onto him have become fully identified with one another. Morris is "traumatized" because he and an originally homeless fear have become each other's property.

CONCLUSION

Fear was generated in a theater. It was "set up" to be disposed of. If we take the view that this fear was imaginary, we can reach a position in which Morris's experiences are to be accounted for as a specific instance of general phenomena: because of his position on the line of normal development, Morris was unable to discriminate between the real and the imaginary, unable to dispose of fear by accounting for it as imaginary, and thus was bound to be traumatized. Once this position has been reached, commentators and participants could "discipline," assigning the blame for Morris's trauma either, like his parents, to the theatrical production company or, like Moore, to his parents.

To reach this disciplinary position, it is necessary to view the events onstage in the theater as imaginary. As we have argued, however, these events were both real and imaginary. They were simultaneously to be taken seriously enough to be engaging and fear provoking and lightly enough that such fear could be disposed of. Morris's cries effectively put the reality of the real/imaginary distinction into question. Morris's cries rendered the space of the theater, its division into stage and audience, so ambivalent that fear, for Morris's well-being, leaped from the stage to claim Morris's parents and to set them in search of the locus of blame. From this point on the business of integrating the particular with the general could proceed, and attempts could be made to characterize Morris as a particular exemplar of general phenomena in terms of his competence and his position on the line of normal development. Once the play of the real and the imaginary was spoiled, blame had to be assigned, and Morris's experience and reactions could be understood as "trauma," pro-

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ducing him as possessor of a persistent memory of fear by virtue of his peculiarity as a child. Through this disposal of fear, traced through timings good and bad, Morris, a "nodal point" in a "specific communication circuit" (Lyotard 1984, 15), became a "harbor," capable of possession.

So here is the key point we want to make. Science studies, and social science more generally, cannot choose between the possessive and the relational views of self in the way that Latour (1999), among others, suggests. Yes, we are doubtless relational selves, defined in complex webs of discourse, technology, and practice. But circulating through these same webs are forces set in play by the assemblages of law, science, and medicine—forces that are also played out in settings as mundane as the theater. Fear is one of these forces. It is less an "emotion" than an affective movement of connection that traverses relationships, a movement that is at once real and produced. Subjects become possessive selves (or should that be selves possessed?) when they are positioned as owners of this circulating fear, when through their actions—maybe just the simple act of crying out—the job of disposing of fear falls onto them alone, a job for which we may all, at times, be singularly ill equipped.

NOTES

1. We owe this usage of *disposal* to Munro (1995).
2. The play is derived from James Matthew Barrie's novel, which also forms the basis of the Spielberg film *Hook.*
3. These characters are from *The Wizard of Oz* and the long-running U.K. television program *Dr. Who,* respectively.
4. The Swiss psychologist Jean Piaget is widely regarded as founding the contemporary discourse of developmentalism (e.g., Piaget 1952). In brief, Piaget argues for a linear process of development, marked by distinct stages, in the course of which the child's cognitive powers become more complex and accurate in the task of processing reality. Key terms are *assimilation* and *accommodation.* The child develops by assimilating new information, which then becomes accommodated into new cognitive configurations as the child revises the structure of their mental representations. For antidevelopmental accounts of childhood see Burman (1994); Stainton Rogers and Stainton Rogers (1992).

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