

The Stakes of Post-Oedipal Child-Loving

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Abstract: Girardian tropes of erotic triangulation, mimesis, rivalry, and scapegoating, are provisionally being read alongside extant Lacanian motifs of the decline of taboo/Law, and of dedifferentiation, most abstractly, and of sexual abuse and pedophilia most emblematically. The latter rubrics are interpreted as coeval with a progressively erratic straining of the Oedipal triangle under modernity, specifically with a disavowed, resentful standoff not so much between parents but between taboo-observing and ambient 'sexological' investments in the child as a knowable object of desire. The concomitant 'mimetic escalation' is conducive to a conjuring up of a phantasmagoric, 'paraphilic' scapegoat whose festive 'recognition' as culprit and subsequent destruction would periodically defuse it.

Key Words: René Girard, scapegoating, mimetic theory, incest taboo, pedophilia, child sexual abuse, social anthropology

*The kingdom of the lame-winged Eros is a world of mirrors and mirrorings.
But where the winged one holds sway there is no mirroring.
(Buber 1947/2002:34-5)*

*How did he get from being a stand-in in blockbuster movies to standing in our kitchen?
(NBC *To Catch a Predator's* Chris Hansen's voiceover musing about a weeping 'predator,' who happened to be an actor, *Godzilla* among his gigs. *To Catch a Predator*, episode III-1, 2006)*

The obscure part of madness is one we create by our blindness to the caricaturally mimetic nature of its desire, because our own desire would be revealed as only a more moderate version of the same thing.

(Girard 2003:349)

Is the late modern pedophile a Girardian scapegoat? It has been suggested that the more generic rubric of 'sex offender' qualifies for such a reading (e.g. Douard 2007, 2008/9; Douard & Schultz 2013: 63-8; Mercer & Richman 2006:207-230; Kirkegaard & Northey 1999). However, comparable interpretations have been advanced with—I concur—due specification of the figure of the idiopathic child-lover, comprehensively in James R. Kincaid's two-volume genealogy of the Anglo-American 'erotic child' (Kincaid 1992; 2008; also 1991; 2004; further articulations are found in Ohi 2005). According to Kincaid, the pedophile emerged in late modernity as a despised double or evil alter of the child-loving parent, the result of a collective representational maneuver that proved, apart from 'paralytically predictable' and morose, essentially transferential—'a complex image of projection and denial' (1992:5; 1998:284). Kincaid's *Sittengeschichte*, demystifying the Anglo-American pedophile Other as 'a role and position brought into being and coordinate with the eroticizing of the child'—that is, with the crystallization of the child as an improbably prelapsarian, paradoxically 'erotic,' Other of the sexual self—stipulated a Copernican shift in understanding the trope of pedophilia. 'Pedophilia' was to be deciphered as an inflection of the panicked, late modern afterlife of the incest taboo.

Kincaid's, as any comparable, gesture has been met with the expectable bafflement and protest, and remains largely ignored outside the culture studies domain.¹ But if Kincaid is right, we have been witnessing more than thirty years of a transdisciplinary 'scapegoat' (Kincaid 1998:21,94; 2004:11,15) mechanism, its concealment, and its ratification, a process in which the public came to claim, mobilize around,

¹ Attack on academics has long accompanied the theme like its American shadow, centrally featuring Freud and Kinsey. A probable *unicum* in history, the U.S. Senate 'denounced' a peer-reviewed meta-review seeking empirical nuance on traumatogenicity in an APA journal, published in the same year as Kincaid's second monograph.

and cohere around a then not yet century-old and initially little known nosological circumscription.²

The intrigue has been recognized in a growing number of corroborative readings in the past decade, and constitutes an analytic topos suspended between cultural-critical and psychoanalytic contemplation (see among others, Berkel 2006; Kimbrough 2002; Schober 2007; Doyle & Lacombe 2000; Mohr 2004; Matravers & Maruna 2005; Maruna, Matravers & King 2004; Garland 2001: 263-264n64; Angelides 2004; Corriveau 2011: 171). None of published commentaries, however, seems to elaborate its apparent Girardian character. Kincaid made no reference to Girard (as signaled by Frederick Kirckhoff 1996: 101), and Girard to my knowledge never specifically reflected on the late modern American figure of the molester. John Steele however, though without specific explanatory elaboration, suggested that 'moral panics' over child sex 'fall squarely within Girard's theory and can be understood as examples of the archaic scapegoating mechanism at work in modern legal systems' (Steele 2001:62, 65). A somewhat more extensive connection of Girard with the troping of pedophilia is formulated in Andrew Kimbrough's 2002 note on a play by Paula Vogel, however largely aligning this connection with Julia Kristeva's comments on universal strangeness as contained in circumstantial strangers.

In sum, only general leads for a Girardian reading have been offered, while, on the one hand, we find in recent American culture an already extensive and explicit employment of sacrificial victimage, through melodramatic codes such as *predator*, *evil*, *sacrificial lamb* (cf. *Opfer*, *slachtoffer*), and *survivor*; and while, on the other hand, at the side of the offender, the topic has long been sociologized in general terms of *demonization*, *scapegoating*, *moral panic*, *witch hunts*, *mobs*, *pollution*, and *contagion* (e.g., Lynch 2002; Neuilly & Zgoba 2006; Waldram 2009). Below I will tentatively reassert the pertinence of Girardian theorems in interpreting this idiomatic saturation, and connect it to the contemporary articulations of the incest taboo. Triangulated with Girard, Kincaid's studies may be read as ethnographies of tabooed incest in late capitalism,

² The term *pedophilia*, with the telling specifier *erotic*, was probably coined in Richard von Krafft-Ebing (1896/1899:105), and appears in the 10th German edition of his *Psychopathia Sexualis* (1898:236).

in which a compound 'emic' (journalistic, multi-mediated, penal populist, psychobiological, medical forensic) circumscription of crimes against children marks the signature of the pontificating criminologist and of the wider prosecutorial society ratifying and demanding that forensic circumscription and topicalization.³ Thus, Girard's salience can be assessed alongside that of other theorists recognized as helpful in deciphering the (child) sex offender through the common topoi of social order, violence, and the sacred/pure (compare Giorgio Agamben, according to Spencer 2009; Émile Durkheim, according to Kennedy 2000; and Mary Douglas, according to Lynch 2002).

A prefatory note on the proximity of the theme at hand to Girardian environs of deliberation seems eligible, namely the reputation of religion, especially Christianity, in the face of a vast, indeed increasingly global, rallying against 'the abuser.' The Americanism of 'child sexual abuse' has become profoundly imbricated in the victimological pitting of The Child against The Father across religious and faith-sanctified administrations, in fact ubiquitously deployed against any consecutive modern system of care understood to function in loco parentis, from Victorian house personnel, 1960s communes and 1980s daycare up to Mahatma Gandhi, the prophet Muhammad, and the guru Zai Baba, particularly now the centrally administered, Catholic (and once medically approved) ethos of discretion. Philip Jenkins situates 'abuse' in a context of a 'gross efflorescence of anti-Catholic rhetoric' (2003:134). During the 1980-1990s, moreover, a most curious focalization around 'satanic ritual abuse' laid bare, in seemingly complete absence of forensic verification, a vital American interlocking of the topoi of child, sex, evil, sacrificial ritual, and besieged community. This particular clustering of phenomena has been almost universally qualified as absurd excess confounding recognition of real, 'verifiable' abuse (e.g., Frankfurter 2006:223-224). Rightly so. But it may be equally eligible to suspect such pervasive dramatics, arising from the contemporary idiomatic playing field of victims and predators, of expressing deep (in casu, mimetic and sacrificial) mechanisms operative in even the most even-minded mobilization around the metastatic trope of 'sex abuse.' In short, insofar as popular representation already explicitly tends to and

³ For a Baudrillardian, and arguably complementary, reading see Janssen (2010, 2011).

clings to the plot of ritualistic, conspiratorial, institutional victimization, the evident pervasiveness and manneristic tendentiousness of this plotting increasingly draws inferential attention to the persecuting apparatus itself, as an epochal tactic and mass advertised representational ritualism.

While neither a definitive nor even an elaborate interpretation of the sketched state of affairs can be offered here (see Kincaid, as cited, for the most elaborate—certainly the most humanizing—attempt so far), it seems that ‘child sexual abuse,’ as partly elective, partly panicked redeployment of the incest taboo beyond the symbolic perimeter of acting kin, and as rather effectively destructive indictment against ecclesiastic administrations and their Father figures, seems to speak through deep mechanisms of association and projection. Below I briefly explore the ancient stakes of ‘sexual abuse’ as well as the pertinence of notions of mimetic crisis and scapegoating as transpiring from the emergent ‘culture studies’ take on the subject, and continue by proposing that Girardian psychological anthropology should accompany any appraisal of the current ‘post-Oedipal’ orchestration of taboo, and traumatological instantiation of sociality.

‘Sexual Abuse’ After Taboo: Archaic Stakes

The present puzzle is not one of paleo-anthropological origins, but warrants a rather more presentist focus on the (late) modern family as constellation of intimate ties and as besieged cipher and cradle of social viability. Girard’s oeuvre seems an eligible starting point given extensive commentary on the incest taboo, both in reference to Freud and Lévi-Strauss (see especially Girard 1977; 2004), ranking incest among the ‘(stereo)typical,’ if essentially ‘eclectic,’ crimes of the indicted scapegoat (Girard 1986:50; 1987:83; 2001:74, 110). Whereas Girard’s anti-archetypal critique of Freud’s Platonist Oedipus concentrated on Freud’s centering on the child as the anthropological ego in the ‘nuclear,’ triadic structure of Western and modern kinship, I take mimetic theory, in tentative alignment with the Kincaidian thesis of projected child-loving, to allow centering of the late modern parent as ego within the triangular

formations that historically mediate her desire for the child as sentimentalized object-of-objects.

I take this to grant the opportunity of a less Lévi-Straussian or Freudian than Malinowskian dialogue with Girard, accounting for the child as possible object of desire, forbidden because among the 'most available and accessible objects,' thus associated with catastrophic dedifferentiation and high potential for mimetic rivalry in the domestic sphere, and consequently rendered indexical to the stability ('mental health') of group socialities. Accordingly, 'Incest would mean the upsetting of age distinctions, the mixing up of generations, the disorganization of sentiments and a violent exchange of rules at a time when the family is the most important educational medium' (2003/1927:76).

Though of minor importance here, I take note of Lévi-Strauss's later (1969:485-488) rebuttal (with reference to Durkheim) of Malinowski's thesis as ethnological universalism, as well as of the idea that it can be accepted as an explanatory account of tabooed incest. I agree, more relevantly, that it ventilates an *ex post facto* emic rationalization of taboo from an already defensive position, as such feeding into desire's mimetic and historical eventuality. Accordingly, both incest and its tabooing refer to preexistent (always already in place), integral patterns of mediation and insinuation. Moreover, controlled, latent rivalry between parents over pragmatically forbidden objects is radically confounded by a number of specifically modern and late modern latent rivalries and dissonances concerning the ontological and typological *representation* of desire, subjectivity, sociality, and object-status. These rivalries and dissonances arise from epochal shifts in the distribution and authorization of power differentials accompanying Western capitalism, and pertain broadly to relations between parents after second wave feminism; father and state; parent and child; parent and child-rearing expert; private and scientific knowledges; private and public truths; taboo/discretion and confession/disclosure; and ultimately what Foucault sees as superimposed orders of kinship's proto-modern 'symbolics of blood' and its modern 'analytics of sexuality.' The formidable challenge in this part Girardian, part Foucauldian, playing field is to read emergent forensic-psychiatric categorization as

simultaneously concealing and cryptically sealing (modeling and ratifying) adults' objectifications of the child. Helpful commentary on this point of objectification is available in books by (apart from Kincaid's) Jacqueline Rose (1986) and Virginia Blum (1995), the latter of whom in fact refers to Girard when characterizing the child as 'victimized by [its] go-between role imposed by adult desire' (8).

The re-pivoting of the classical incest triangle as crime scene cannot claim to be radical: it can only risk taking seriously the late 1970s speculative shift in onus from child-centered explanations of *repression* (Freud) or *inhibition* (Westermarck) to an adult-centered criminopsychiatry of *prohibition*, especially of the progressively assumed *failure* of prohibition, in ad hoc clinical terms of 'paraphilic' diatheses and reportedly concomitant 'cognitive distortions.'

The historical setting for this invites a number of side-hypotheses, including, first, a possible transferal in localization of the American family's preferential scapegoat, from the now medically approved and matrimonial but previously 'child-recruiting, promiscuous, disturbed' homosexual, to post-1980s pedophile. There may be more substance to the well-known and ongoing confusion of former and latter than opportune 'homophobic slander,' and more intrigue to their obviously anti-parallel careers than the otherwise indiscriminate, global accreditation of 'consenting adults.' Second, an initial, radical feminist troping of incest in the 1970s was soon moderated for its fundamentally anti-familist implications: the eventual rubric of 'child sex abuse' no more specifically indicted the family as hierarchical libidinal economy *per se*, but instead gravitated onto ambient 'patriarchy' and the idiosyncratic, 'predatory' appeal to it. If 'abuse' happened (as most likely) within the family, the familial setting was to be no more than a likely crime scene, a forensic factum not to be announced too widely. The family's face was rather to be that of the perennial ground zero of restorative commiseration and commemoration, less the insinuating norm or privileged cipher, of sex as, binarily, pristine gift or acute catastrophe.

Yet in modern *sexual abuse* and premodern *incest* alike, what is compromised or harmed is not the child as neuropsychological closed-circuit but its unambiguous *position* in, and hence unambiguous *role* in, the social order that renders the child intelligible as well as, thus, a

permanent advertisement for that regime of intelligibility. The new wave of clinical formulations of harm largely works to explicitly declare this ploy, while for another part it functions as a concealment of this essentially historical tactic and form, by pronouncing 'trauma' as ahistorical, acultural, cryptobiological fate.

Although it can be said to follow that, within its metonymy, the sexually knowledgeable ('sexually traumatized') child is one of today's 'scapegoats' (Blum, Egan & Hawkes, 2007:456, 457), it is evident that in contemporary everyday discourse Oedipus is not blamed for sex as crime scene; indeed, a whole technology has been put in place to socialize the 'minor' into the idea that it is 'not to blame,' that somebody else is – and indeed that incest pertains to a discrete rupture of the symbolic Alltag to be read as symptomatic of a lesion in the moral faculties of the offender. The little that can be said about the thus socialized child-object is perhaps that, through the new mimetic psychodrama of 'sexual trauma' – that trauma refers to a mimetic situation was both readily acknowledged and denied in the early 1980s awareness movement, both at the site of the hitherto laissez-faire parent and at that of the ignorant child – it is always already social, perhaps all the more clearly so where kinship finds itself preoccupied by contemplating its dreaded defeat by a totalizing ethos of consumerist individualism. The object, newly circumscribed as 'survivor' of transgressive desire, is instantiated as object in the same movement as the order that comes to lay claim to it, through a progressively organized stylistics of concern. Sociality expresses its stakes through the ubiquitous caveat of a psychological calamity, on whose imagined eventuality the social order therefore comes to depend. Accordingly, trauma's inevitability is an effect, the key message, of collective action: an imperative, structuring, socializing scenario. Submitted to its imperative situation, its declared 'position,' the object, any object within its advertised positionality, is to a vital extent secondary to this regime of subjectivation played out between sociality's self-proclaimed protagonists and their meticulously 'recognized,' theorized, and empiricized nemeses. The latter, in short, occupy the same position of necessity that characterizes the proclaimed and totalized 'victim;' their shared stipulated role is to inhabit, reaffirm and naturalize the tactical order of (to use Jacques Donzelot's expression) 'the social.'

Taking continued inspiration from Girard and contra Malinowski's Freudianism, we will want to resist desire's 'narrow libidinal connotation' (Girard 1996:267), specifically also such evermore medicolegally and sociobiologically presumed and exalted dichotomies as between sexual and non-sexual realms of desire. Phallogocentric research on 'normal populations,' such as is available, is highly informative precisely as Law's and Rule's shared entanglement in Fact. Indeed this peculiar *exclusive disjunction* between sex! and not!-sex, moreover its modern hardening in law and mind, may constitute a key condition for the new populist over-concretization of incest as 'sexual abuse,' whose guarded purview, after all, remains that of a *proclaimed* absurdity, impossibility, or impracticality. This extends, more radically, to the current 'empirical' face of the incest taboo: the never-ending chain of positivist research, examination, inquiry, disclosure, remembrance, and confession 'child sexual abuse' as a concept solicits, may be little else than the spectacular convulsions of a proclamatory necessity confronted with the perpetual vista of its erosion and compromise (I will return to this below). The effect, from the very beginning, has been a bombastic, Gothic declaration of universal 'harm' the empirical realization of which seems allowed little else than to conclude and confirm a panicked, ambient proclamation of the stakes of sociality. The ambient declaration of abuse stands in a strictly opportune relation to casuistics, and thus proceeds in loud and proud independence from the emotional minutiae of eventual cases. (My comments, in line with this, do not apply to particular cases, but precisely to the current medicolegal arrogance in the confrontation with casuistics.) Onanism/masturbation and sodomy/homosexuality make for enlightening caveats here: with the fiat of science, any traumatologically informed persecution can drag on for centuries, and may vanish rapidly, though perhaps not without leaving scattered traces of panic and hatred.

And in what position is science not to ratify widely campaigned intuitions of trauma? Where former Harvard researcher Susan Clancy recently declared child sexual trauma 'myth' (Clancy 2009) thus echoing 1960's and 1970's European psychiatric consensus, *myth* is to be understood as foundational narrative—not, as Clancy proposes, as informing a situation of falsifiability, but as that which confers and

ratifies the reign of a consensual facticity. The very least one must say is that most phenomenological formulations of incest avoidance in such decisive terms as ‘impossible types of intentionality’ (Hadreas 2002) or ‘affective dissonance’ (de Vos 1975) lack a proper cultural-historical localization, and do not account for historically mutable, only now pervasively ‘scientific,’ collective attitudes about the conceptual proximity of sex, child, and family. Mimetic theory seems better, indeed increasingly, suited to map articulations of desire whose historicity is evidenced, par excellence, by the ‘making and molding’ (Hacking 1991) of such ascendant demarcations as pedophilia and abuse.

Mimesis and Mass Mediation: Hidden Cameras

The literary and critical troping of displacement and projection in connection to incest/pedophilia has an extended 20th century history. Michael Shapiro, commenting on the American family in terms of the ‘mediating influence of genre,’ observes that displacement lies at the heart of the ‘family values’ discourse of both heresy and hubris; accordingly, it is only the molesters and abuse hysterics who are doing the displacing and distorting (Shapiro 2001:4, 9-11). Doubling and its parody centrally inform Nabokov’s *Lolita* (see for instance Meyer 2009), a seeming allusion to a wider American reach of such functions. Kincaid’s *pointe* indeed seems corroborated from unrelated directions—Valerie Walkerdine as well as Kathleen Karlyn, neither citing Kincaid, proposed readings of the erotic girl-child and U.S. (cinematic) incest as ‘a representational structure or motif that works [...] through various degrees of displacement and condensation’ (Karlyn 2004:70, 72). That modern incest leads to mass projection and protracted scapegoating is arguably confirmed in such carnivalesque ‘entrapment’ shows as NBC *To Catch a Predator* (2004-2008) where—to speak with Jean Baudrillard—‘we enter into a phobic relationship with an artificial other, idealized by hatred,’ congruent with a desperate ‘seeking of the other in the form of an evil to be combated’ (1996:132; cf. Janssen 2011; Adler 2011/12). *To Catch a Predator* spells out, with uncanny clarity, the contemporary scapegoat ritual as cynical entertainment event, as ratings success, as truth from the

(hidden camera) standpoint of the persecutor, indeed a truth in which the 'predator' is *set up, framed*, in a painstakingly literal way, and rendered guilty of a crime that in the end *never takes place* because of the evermore theatrical and spectacular preemption of the event.

As Foucault ventured in the mid-1970s, such charades may have characterized the modern 'hothouse family' since its modern inception: 'We are right in the middle of a domestic obsession. The devil is there beside the child in the form of the adult, and essentially in the form of the adult intermediary' (2003:244). And we find this powerfully confirmed in Ann Laura Stoler's postcolonial note on Foucault, suggesting that the 19th century preoccupation with housemaid and servant depravity was intimately connected to notions of racial contagion and the forging of European identity, leading to 'a rerouting of desires, a displacement of eroticism, an externalization of arousal to a native or mixed-blood surrogate self,' integral to a wider 'education of desire' (1995:163, 164).

A few authors speculate on the beneficiary scope of this principle of surrogation, variably considered religious, nationalist, or generically social. In a number of commentaries on misbehaving clergy, and in agreement with James Morone (2003:452), Edward Ingebretsen (1998: 93, 96; 2001; 2005; 2007) supplements Kincaid's reading of 'Gothic criminology' by arguing that 'the sex monster' derives in part from a religious bestiary today manically recited against its authors by listing the latter in its index. Regarding sex-offending priests: 'While the discourse of the [sex] monster owes something of its persistence to theological authority as well as to Gothic formula, it is increasingly apparent that such rhetoric applies imperatives of each, often inappropriately, to the shaping of political narrative.'

Recent historical commentary by Gillian Harkins (2009) and (independently) by Peter Coviello (2008), has insightfully focused on the ways the ambient climate of indictment paraphrased by the notion of 'child sexual abuse' gives swing and voice to America's late capitalist or neoliberal, nationalist, and exceptionalist (whether ultimately nostalgic) imaginary of familial intimacy and extrapolated vistas of solidarity, through conflated choreographies of outrage.⁴ A range of authors

⁴ Harkins studied incest as providing 'a key resource for neoliberal transformations in the political economy and cultural articulation of 'America' [...] a particular meeting

corroborates this implication of the child figure in commemorative and commiserative orchestrations of sociality (see e.g. Evans 2003; Conrad 1999; Fass, 1997), and it would perhaps, in this light, be unimaginable had the American child not become and remained central in ongoing proclamations of traditional sexual sociality (sociality's 'reproductive futurism' as Lee Edelman 2004 suggests). Late modernity's explicit nosological rubrication of child-love, accordingly, may have to be read as part of a seeming wider, simultaneous erratic extension, intensification, and consequent panicked projection of incest as structuring, generative taboo—a tactical maneuver seeking to reunite, or indeed unite for the first time, otherwise rivaling political stakeholders (most vocally feminists, conservatives, and assorted psychohistorians) around the eternal *idée fixe* of the American family.

In the words of Mark Rogin Anspach, 'While incest destroys specificities, the accusation of incest has the power to destroy a specific individual: the accused. If the accusation is made to stick, the latter will be destroyed in the eyes of the community, singled out as the sole source of what may actually be a more general process of undifferentiation' (in Girard, *Oedipus Unbound*, xiii). Apropos, can the contemporary conditions for and interdependencies of mimesis and desire be thought of in terms of such a general process? Where oedipal triangulation latches onto a domestic, intimate, and proprietary scene, this reference is increasingly articulated in terms of a realized or realizing situation—a conclusion or poetics—of crisis. The late 1970s nosological crystallization of 'child sexual abuse' and 'pedophilia' is contemporaneous with

point between nationalism and neoliberalism for a new era's family romances' (xvii, xviii). Peter Coviello also considered 'the story of the sexual child' as 'hardwired into the prevailing languages of belonging and mutuality that define the modern American sense of nationality, not least because sex remains one of the most reliable catalysts for the evocation of scenes of shock or trauma or loss. For a number of reasons, such scenes have come to stand at the center of American self-conception' (138). Specifically, the Americanism of 'child sexual abuse,' as once polygamy and slavery, seems subject to 'a particularly calibrated nationalist commitment to the adaptive logics of trauma, to an anchoring of fellow feeling in the fact of human vulnerability to woundedness, suffering, bereavement, and loss'—what is at work is what has been pervasively at work in articulations of perceived crisis: 'the production of trauma itself, of trauma as nation-binding spectacle' (151). Coviello's broader thesis can be appreciated from *Intimacy in America* (2005).

historical discussions of ambient dissolution: the decline or demise of kinship, Oedipus, generationality, adulthood, and childhood; with the aftermath of an indiscriminate call for 'sexual liberation;' the 'disenchantment' of the family and demise of its 'traditional privacy;' with genealogies and obituaries of 'the social,' and with poststructuralism.⁵ Similar themes have been addressed in more recent, Lacanian appreciations of the replacement of the 'society of prohibition' by the 'society of enjoyment' as formulated by Todd McGowan (2004), and by the de-oedipalized or 'post-oedipalized,' or 'post-patriarchal' condition of 'designer capitalism' as studied by Jan Jagodzinski (2004);⁶ comparable considerations, in fact, inform Lacan's own historical account of psychoanalysis (see e.g. Meloni 2002 and Žižek, 1999:ch.6). The common questions are that of the after-life, if any, of Oedipality in a post-Oedipal or weak-Oedipal world, of incest recast through a generic, utilitarian idiom ('abuse'), and of taboo recalibrated by a triumphalist ethos of promiscuous disclosure and coercive, mass mediation. This multi-faceted line of historical reflection, especially as following the proclaimed moment of sexuality's mutli-axial emancipation, suggests the family and its dramatis personae may have importantly become scenarios of dispossession, dedifferentiation, destratification, and implosion under regimes of mass commodification, erratic sexualization,

⁵ Arguments on invasive professionalization and pervasive rationalization were offered, for instance, in Michel Foucault's mid-1970s work (2003), his student Jacques Donzelot's *La Police des Familles* (1978), Christopher Lasch's *Haven in a Heartless World* (1977), and Kerreen Reiger's *The Disenchantment of the Home* (1985). On generationality, see e.g. Postman (1982) and Bly (1996).

⁶ Jagodzinski, in a way compatible with Girard's notion of double mediation, argues postmodernity is marked by an internal logic of post-Oedipalization, an authority shift in which the Oedipal Father is rivaled by a Jouissant Father at the mercy of whose campaign we are 'constantly confronted by the Other's enjoyment, often in its most unbearable dimensions' (91). The tabooing of incest, we infer, would be characterized by a permanent adrenergic state: 'In such a world of capitalist consumerism an impossible 'enjoyment' is posited in the Other that the Other doesn't have, and it is this positing – *not the actual enjoyment* – which leads to a rise in aggressivity' (95). Kincaid's culture of child molesting may fit what Jagodzinski discerns as postmodernity's 'strange inversion of enjoyment into jouissance – into forms of envy and jealousy that characterize resentment' (96).

and an ambient tyranny of arrogant 'expertise' and abstract, disembodied knowledges.

To be precise: what seem decisive is the ubiquitous looming of an *Angstbild*, hardly the empirical situation that would justify it. With Girard, this can be seen as a question of the late modern mimesis and mediation of desire in its hallmark doublings and reverberations, a question seemingly extending to the very conditions for emotive eventuality per se. Kincaid's 'culture of child molesting' can readily be, and has typically been, associated with a range of contemporary sociological conditions having to do with the mass mediation and mass ratification of the affect-event: *wound culture, trauma culture, post-traumatic culture, the new victim order, therapy culture, culture of self-help, culture of fear, risk society, moral panic, mass hysteria* (Seltzer 1998; Kaplan 2005; Farrell 1998:ch. 7; Baudrillard 1996:131-141; Füredi 2004, 2006; Illouz 2008; Glassner 1999: 31-40; Doyle & Lacombe 2002:xiv-xvi). These characterizations refer to a fundamental collectivization, through orchestrations of variably manneristic dramaturgies, of a simultaneously preemptory and post-traumatic solidarity – double mimesis of desire, but also of fear, anxiety, panic: multi-mediated fear, moreover, as the conduit and expressive medium of desire, as obscenely probable impossibility. The pedophilia trope enters, in the words of Jean-Claude Guillebaud (citing Girard and Barthes), 'a waltz of desires shaped by the media, airbrushed, retouched, and dependent on the same constraint dissimulated under the permissive slogans' (1999:106).

The mediator in modern parental desire for the child is an expanding milieu of information, a barrage of factoids, indiscriminate citations of mass-mediated models, provisos, and epistemologies. Popularized and successful knowledge fields in America, including psychoanalysis and sexology ('sexuality'), overarching economic systems in casu high capitalism ('sexualization'), historical untying of individual from structuring contexts in casu the family ('sexual revolution'), and an ever aggressive lobby for the downward dispersal of sexual truths ('sex education'), cumulatively insinuate an incest potential through dedifferentiation: by supplying the imaginary, if not imagery, of a

sexually entitled or sexually inclined child.⁷ On the one hand this has produced a privately, latently contested incest taboo as corollary of a general and often direct contestation of any ethos generically construed as 'repressive' or 'restrictive.' On the other, it may have stimulated incidental, private consolidation of identity around this transgressive window, in the form of a self-proclaimed and politicized 'pedophilic orientation.' Nowhere more blatantly in America, however, the broad spectrum of these phenomena unproblematically coagulates into a single undifferentiated insult to conservative sentiments, one broad 'slippery slope' toward incest and the destruction of familial life. If conservative reaction seems to have a panicked and unfounded concept of sex, family, or child, then, it needs to be observed that these notions have *always* been each other's condition for intelligibility, and that this fundamental intertextuality is codified in religion, science, and law on a global scale, and substantially ratified by virtually the entire, including most of the radical, Left.

According to Foucault, under modernity, the modeled, insinuated sexual ontology of the sphere of familial intimacy became the constitutive, driving motor of parental desire, effectively escalating the latter to its present sociological predicament of 'hysteria.' Chris Jenks usefully observes that modern "childhood' sustains the 'meta-narrative' of society itself, and abuse, both real and supposed, expresses our current ambivalence towards and impotence in the face of constantly emergent structural conditions' (2005:115). Specifically, 'To abuse the child today is to strike at the remaining, embodied vestige of the social bond [...]. The shrill cry of 'abuse' is a cry of our own collective pain at the loss of our social identity. The source of blame for this abuse whether projected into the form of psychopaths, perverts, devil-worshippers, colluding mothers, men, or even incompetent social workers should really be sought in the way that we have, over time, come to organize our social relationships' (1996:22). But above all, the loved child, its foundational but always imminently disruptive proximity to the sphere and idea of 'sexuality,'

⁷ Again, for an anthropological formulation it is immaterial whether any of these insinuations can be, or is being, shown to have an empirical basis. Empiricism, meanwhile, is likely to simply reflect, or made to express, the passion for certain conclusions, not just any conclusion.

and its radical otherness campaigned as banal difference (its status as 'minor'), in other words, seem pivotal illustrations of the Girardian observation that even the most primary forms of desire are always already mediated through the shifting conjunctive and disjunctive insinuations of the symbolic, semiotic, and discursive Umwelt, that is, via an ever more ill-defined internal/external (mass) ratification.

In line with the Kincaidian argument and larger 'culture studies' approach, this is relevant given the superimposition of ontological and parametric planes at which 'the incest taboo' is known to be deployed historically: kinship's symbolic economics of exchange ('our daughter and your son,' our moiety and yonder one), sentimentalized modern life stages or consumer strata ('childhood,' 'developmental psychology'), and the late modern semiosis of the subject as banal, evidentiary, even *virtual*, difference (current obscenity laws ban even 'computer-generated images of what appears to be a minor'). Events at one plane immediately and inevitably trigger reparatory, compensatory, and exegetic frenzy on all others. This is such that the object-status of 'child,' and hence the desire it is said to deserve, channel, or suffer, is continuously insinuated by a sphere of mimesis and mediation that encodes not just the Oedipal child, but (as Foucault and Donzelot suggested) a permanently hypertensive triangulation of parent, child, and a largely disembodied sphere of experts, media messages, loudly emancipated sexualities, psychological knowledges, and the everyday onslaught of graphic and narrative truths.

If we tentatively read Foucault/Kincaid with Girard, the pedophile would arise in modern history as part of a mimetic rivalry over a newly compelling Child—the Foucauldian/Kincaidian *othered*, improbably prelapsarian, hence *eroticized*, innocence. It is a desire to be historicized as a mimetic desire/knowledge, an 'erotics,' rather than an instinctual bond (Foucault speaks of a constitutive, 'epistemophilic incest'): an 18th-19th century rise of an assortment of authorities (medical, educational, sexological, psychological, criminological) modeled a new, modern epistemology of the family, a gradual enveloping of its core values in an esoteric but gratifying and compellingly conclusive sexological knowledge. Foucault suggests this medical-sexological-pedagogical courting of the familial cast resulted in a powerful

sexualization of the bourgeois domestic sphere:⁸ parents became 'zealous, excited and delighted agents of a new wave in the medical normalization of the family' (2003:268).

Doctrinal expert parlance, Foucault suggests, was initially acceptable to the parent: theory could morally exonerate parents by managing the etiological saturation of sex in the family with a verdict of directionality: the Oedipal child pursues the parent, rather than vice versa. Parents' proprietary relation to the child, threatened by imminent dispossessions by expert theory, institutional care and education, was given an extended guarantee implied by the child's deep desire; being the unmitigated focus of a new scientific certitude provided 'a kind of formidable gratification' (268). A generative, necessary gratification: 'We cannot proceed in our pursuit of desire without the lines that make that desire seem reasonable' (Moldoveanu & Nohria 2002:172). Indeed, under modernity the desire for the child came to be importantly replaced by the impersonal duty to know the child in terms of the minutiae of its 'normal development.'

Mimetic Crisis

Where the child's familial ecology enduringly required the acute dismissal of a sexual agency, it stipulated close surveillance on bodies and their attitudes. But this paradoxical administration of taboo risked perverse effects. Parents, interpellated and groomed as conduits of clinical intrigue, are empowered by the scientific gaze (and one can tentatively equate this relation with that of the imaginary of the sitcom family or talk show family) but also feel invaded in what traditional (e.g. scriptural) sources delineated as their private, intimate, and natural appropriations. Scientific demystifications of the child may insinuate and consolidate a newly alluring Otherness but can equally render its object continuous, self-same, co-extensive, and its appeal banal if not

⁸ 'To the physical intensity of sexuality within the family corresponds a discursive extension of sexuality outside the family and within the medical field. Medicine is able to put sexuality into words and make it speak at the very moment that the family makes it visible because it is watching over it' (Foucault 2003:251).

narcissistic and masturbatory. Hence, in the words of Girard, parents are increasingly 'torn between two opposite feelings toward [this] model—the most submissive reverence and the most intense malice [...] the passion we call hatred' (Girard 1965:10).

Ambivalence is tangible in the U.S. conservative right's idiosyncratic rejections of sexology coexisting with strikingly tendentious claims to scientific insight. Well-known condensations include Intelligent Design, abstinence-only education, and the permeability of the condom (see Claire Greslé-Favier 2009). This strategizing evidences a deep ambivalence, and a desire to split an unsplitable sphere of authorization: the scientific world is both revered and despised as mediating claim to the child's objective truth (to the child as object of truth, a truthful object, hence deserving of a true and truthful desire), but which is eventually experienced as a powerful intruder in and contender for the private, domestic appropriation of the Child. The informational density of modern, especially American, society (pop psychology, schools, media) both increasingly 'explains' and disturbs the wonder of pedagogical bonding, as it has children—both as subjects and as objects—answer to general, empirical, and 'irrefutable' truths; when these truths challenge romanticized origins, natures and destinies (as do universalistic evolutionary and sexual ontologies) they collapse a vital private alterity and with it, a sanctified personal micro-cosmology (a *grammar*) of care and desire.

Girard's triangular model of desire, in short, applies to the role of 'model' located in-between a safely remote or dangerously proximate mediator/rival, namely a whole *dispositif* of invasive, encroaching knowledge that needs to be conceptualized, via Foucault and the schizoanalysts, as at once constitutive of and an irresolvable threat to the family as an intimate owning and sharing *of* and *through* naturalistic truths. The elementary problematic laid bare is that of the epistemic ownership of the child necessarily oscillating between deep and undivided conviction (an ethos and a binding logic of blood, love, and providence) and secular and alienating regularity (the ambient discourse of scientific, Darwinian, and campaigned sexuality).

The plight of family values became acute, precisely when alter-sexualities consolidated into visible centers of emancipatory

indignation—that is, when signifying Others started to revolt against their derivative and structuring role. One sees it escalating under duress of the 1970s ‘liberation’ climate in which a broad line of European literati threatened to blow the fuse, directly so, in France, by proposing abolishment of the age of consent. Betrayal: the faith-based parent’s desire for the child historically mimed the flattering scientific appropriations of the child, but she increasingly realized she cannot have the child on her own (that is, mimed, abstinent) terms; she now faced a pervasive, disembodied, unreliable, and unpredictably arrogant rival beyond elimination through violence.

Scapegoat

The result of the sketched Giradian/Gordian knot can be considered resembling the impasse controversially attributed to feminism by Baudrillard: a feminine-maternal principle of seduction that would mime and compete—but which would mean: enduringly having to reconcile—with the intrusive and disenchanting sexual epistemes of modernity (Baudrillard 1979). The 1994 documentary *Blood Ties: The Life and Work of Sally Mann* (Dir. Steven Cantor & Peter Spierer 1994), analyzing the minor upheaval over photographer Sally Mann’s controversial child nudes in one of her books, effectively spelled out this emergent rivalry between the American maternal gaze and the persecutory academic desk-mob with its psycho-forensics of the appropriating and proprietary gaze. The documentary’s message is expectable, archaic, and tale-telling. A cold clinical eye that hunts after the nature of the child finds its mimetic rival in a (then still) selling artistic counter-claim of familial naturism; the conflict resolves over a communal disclaiming of ‘pedophilia.’

Enter the scientific instigation (in late 19th century) and popularization (late 20th century) of a circumscribed paraphilic desire and paraphilic alter of the non-incestuous parent: the point where the familial grammar of care and protection becomes interwoven and confounded with the incest taboo as structuring, organizing interdiction. Where the proclamation of both a primordial, instinctual desire for the

child and that of a primal, constitutive prohibition become instruments of a nostalgia for the eroded traditional stakes of that desire and prohibition, it is evident that there is the mounting need for a scapegoat embodying and epitomizing a complete, *total*, transgression, a persona reduced to crime and its contemplation. It is possible, as argued, that such *essential* transgressors arise as circumscribed *identities* in the same moment as the rekindled urgency of the scapegoat mechanism itself, although it seems an historical accident that they ended up rallying behind their own status in the tried manner of 'sexual minorities.' But their fate was obviously sealed from the very start. The scapegoat may or may not be guilty *in fact*, but he is always already more guilty than we can allow ourselves to appear, guilty, namely, of desire denied the scene that renders us intelligible to ourselves, and that forever clarifies, and is clarified by, the object of our desires, in its precarious truthfulness. The figure of this desire, moreover, importantly proceeds irrespectively of the empiricism we say congratulates us and condemns the scapegoat; and because desire arises, and remains visible, mostly through an ambient structure of legitimization, clinical retaliation is aimed at truth's restoration (a battle against 'cognitive distortions'), not proper desire: the scapegoat is killed (if mostly in the cinematic catharsis⁹), exiled (reportedly under bridges, beyond city borders, and in civil commitment facilities),¹⁰ or chemically castrated (destroying libido, though not the aim of desire). As a figural presence, obviously, the scapegoat must be retained, kept available and 'on the air,' as a segment in our reality shows, for our continued call for his death, exile, or castration.

Yet taboo—the principle and regime of interdiction—is massively upset by the widely advertized ubiquity of 'unthinkable' transgressions, 'predatory' transgressors, and 'sexualized' imagery. The historical resolution of a mimetic crisis is a unanimous antipathy against a fourth (extra-triangular) agent able to accommodate both parental and scientific credibility and to unite them in a common war on behalf of the child-object (who very much recedes to the background of this new War on

⁹ See films such as *Short Eyes* (dir. Robert M. Young, 1977), *L.I.E.* (dir. Michael Cuesta, 2001), and *Hard Candy* (dir. David Slade, 2005).

¹⁰ To get a feeling for this predicament, see *Louis Theroux: A Place for Paedophiles* (BBC2, 2009).

Predators). A ritual unleashing of collective violence onto this scapegoat provides temporary peace of mind, and assumes the shape of a shared, empirical knowledge about this violence's necessity. Systematic purging became vital to a sexual order that would thus 'cohere around the expelling of foreign matter' (Evans:168); Freud himself figured centrally in the early 1980s feminist troping of the abuse theme, as cowardly 'suppressing' seduction as consequential incident.

Girard suggests that cultural tactics of scapegoating work only if not recognized as such, either related to their being 'scarcely studied as such' (2001:156) or through organized outrage over the mere suggestion—'denunciation [of scapegoating] can even become a precondition of successful scapegoating in a world like ours, where knowledge of the phenomenon is on the rise and makes its grossest and most violent forms obsolete' (1996:15). Lastly, '[s]capegoating phenomena cannot survive in many instances except by becoming more subtle, by resorting to more and more complex casuistry in order to elude the self-criticism that follows scapegoaters like their shadow. [...] We now have need of procedures less comically evident' (2001:159). In this light we appreciate that late modern scapegoats are not anymore wholly innocent nor randomly chosen (they can be depended on offering themselves up, for instance in 'sting operations'), nor brutally slaughtered, nor deified after sacrifice, nor sanctified by scriptural decree, nor, ultimately, humanized under Christian rule—quite the contrary on all accounts. An increasingly 'scientific' ritual informed 'theatrical reenactment of a mimetic crisis in which the differences that constitute the society are dissolved' (1996:11) and in which sex—in its profuse imminence—is evermore empirically secured as idiom of generational alterity. The underlying mimetic crisis is modern, constant, constitutive, and shape-shifts as a forensics of child-spoiling (whether through onanism, 'homosexual recruitment,' 'grooming,' or any other circumscribed 'exposure' or 'assault' on the senses). An affective and symbolic predicament is transposed to a forensic pragmatics, a theatrical vigilance or intelligence that polices and arbitrates in the 'unintelligible' decompensations of beastly Others.

That dehumanized surrogate must be understood by all as truly the culprit of all sorrow, as final and indisputable enemy, and must be

destroyed if tranquility is ever to return. After Anita Bryant's 'Save Our Children' crusade (see Fejes 2008), homosexuality could be partially divorced from this centuries-long fermentation of *ressentiment*, and it can even be hypothesized that the post-1970s American pedophile carries forward the disruptive properties of the now medically approved and legally protected homosexual, the latter re-personified around an enduring criminality: recruiting and infecting innocents away from domestic bliss and heterosexual tranquility of mind and senses, destroying generational alterity. The resettling of alliances was claimed to be a simultaneously empirical and ethical victory. Yet the pedophile's predicament meticulously recapitulates the homosexual's in his always evidenced stigmata of restless and pathetic child-grooming, mother fixation, criminal promiscuity, mental disorder, brain dysfunction, impotence, criminal networking, eligibility to castration, and willingness to be entrapped in our entrapment schemes.

In Sum

A number of Girard's observations, indeed their larger message and enduring applicability, can be confirmed, allowing an appreciation of Foucault's 1970's (and prematurely aborted) study of the modern family's tangle of desire, of Kincaid's 1990s update, and of more recent confirmations of that study and update. On the one hand, concern for the child-object has become immaterial, subjugated to the fulltime task of scientific concealment and predator hunting. On the other, desire is erratically escalated by these hypertensive, exacting operations, an always imminently 'perverse' effect (corroborative arguments are offered in Adler 2001 and 2011/12; Danay 2005; Khan 2009). Anyone can be a secret pervert, a sexual terrorist—a possibility currently feeding a desperate litigious vortex without any admittance of its blatant psychological presentism and its generative, modeling properties. Girard's term 'mimetic escalation' captures the main logic of the initial situation—'the antagonists who desire the same object keep thwarting each other and desiring the object all the more,' an escalation both of 'necessarily' frustrated desire and mutual fascination, but in which the

latter gradually comes to eclipse, and thus 'resolve' or mollify, the former. 'Instead of trying to roll back mimetic violence [community] tries to get rid of it by encouraging it and by bringing it to a climax that triggers the happy solution of ritual sacrifice with the help of a substitute victim' (Girard 1996:13).

My survey has relied on specific interpretations of Girardian theorems. High capitalism insinuates and inculcates desire, but competes with domestic, value-based experience over grammatical solutions; the compromise is some bad guy whose hubris everybody can, and must, agree on. The pedophile only secondarily (but no less rigorously) upsets and intrudes on a delicate economy of parental desire as a distinct and competitive alter ego—mediator/model or 'double.' Primarily he is rather the 'scientifically' ungrammatical outside of a wider struggle characterizing the modern, proprietary epistemology of the 'family unit,' compromised archetypal scene that instituted sexuality as its most elementary (syn)tax, at its own peril. The desire that animates its epistemology, and by whose jurisdiction it is in turn animated, does not complicate or upset some delicate childhood constitution, but solicits its recitation as an unimpeachable, precisely archetypal, stake—a Freudian ground zero once again. Von Krafft-Ebing's provisional twin diagnoses of *Pädophilie erotica* and *paradoxia sexualis* (premature eruption of libido), accordingly, entail not straightforward phantasmagoric projections but agreeably scientific condensations, fleshed out only a century later as opportune figurations during the mimetic crises characterizing the family facing a general, postmodern angst. To consider the stranger/pervert fixture contrary to criminological data ('it happens mostly in families'), or elsewhere as 'homophobic stratagem,' is to conceal this tactic even further.

It is vital, then, that we see pedophilia embattled in the Other who is doubly contained in order to regulate the erotics of everyday in accordance with scientific precision, namely by both an 'incurable sexual orientation' and a pinpointed 'sex offense' imagined as its inevitable corollary. This is such that even the virginal or platonic pedophile is construed in exclusive terms of 'grooming strategies,' and that the onus for the parent is not just theatrical abstinence, outrage, and persecutory posturing, but also the demanding work of deconstructing the other's

'distortions' regardless of crimes and never to behave anywhere *like* the pervert – which is tricky, because he is the proverbial everyman, in fact the typical family man, according to all expert commentaries.

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