In 2002, two French films about children were released within two weeks of each other. Although *Être et avoir* (Nicolas Philibert, released 28 August) was a documentary focusing on a village school, and *Les Diables* (Christophe Ruggia, released 11 September) was a drama about two institutionalized children on the run, they had in common the fact that they focused on pre-adolescent children. While there are plenty of films about adolescents in most national cinemas, there are fewer proportionately that focus on pre-adolescent children (Spanish cinema being a notable exception). These films therefore exemplify a trend: since the 1990s, there have been an unusually large number of films in French cinema whose protagonists are young children. This essay will start by placing such films within a production context. Subsequently, it will be less concerned with explaining why there may have been a surge in such films during the last decade, than in theorizing their effect on spectators, with specific reference to *Être et avoir* and *Les Diables*. It will do so by working with concepts of space, as used by Michel Foucault and Henri Lefebvre, familiar to theorists of the postmodern working in architecture, but not as yet particularly developed by theorists working in Film Studies. Using Foucault’s spatially-focused ‘heterotopia’, the essay will develop a nexus of arguments focusing on the viewing position established by films with child protagonists. It will argue that the pre-adolescent child’s view brings together time past and an alternative space. We will first consider retrospection, linked with the familiar idea of nostalgia, before moving on to what will be called ‘heterospection’, a coinage which attempts to bring together issues of time and space in these films. Heterospection, the essay will argue, involves a different way of seeing, and of conceiving of the spectator’s reaction to a film. In that respect, the essay will return us to ‘screen theory’, but from a different perspective, as well as illuminating how the child film functions.

**Context**

The group of French films focusing on pre-adolescent protagonists since the 1990s show changes of focus relative to similar films which preceded them. There is a new focus on abuse, at its clearest in the controversial *L’Ombre du doute* (Aline Issermann, 1993), which deals with an eleven-year-old girl’s abuse by her father; but it is also in *La Classe de neige* (Claude Miller, 1998) where the over-protective father of a boy who goes on a school trip turns out to be a child abuser and murderer. There is a related emphasis on death in *Ponette* (Jacques Doillon, 1996), which is about a four-year-old’s attempts to come to terms with the death of her mother. There are also a number of films which improbably show their protagonists as drifters, homeless children seeking the parental affection which they have
never been given, either because their parents abused them, as is the case with Victor...pendant qu’il est trop tard (Sandrine Veysset, 1998) about a young boy who runs away and forms a friendship with fairground workers, or because they have no parents and are trying to escape from institutions. This is the case for Le Fils du requin (Agnès Merlet, 1993), a film which refers directly to Truffaut’s Les 400 coups, as it follows two socially marginalized young brothers. It is also the case with Les Diabiles, a film in which two disturbed children, a brother and his mentally-retarded sister, keep on breaking out of the institutions where they are kept to try and find the mother who gave them up. Despite the missing mother, the film is less about the importance of the mother than the need for place, in opposition to the displacement which forms the narrative as they travel southwards in search of the family home. A recurrent scene is the sister’s speeded-up assemblage of broken pieces of coloured glass in the form of their fantasized home.

Les 400 coups is also gestured at in Être et avoir, a film which, unlike Les Diabiles, was one of the most successful films of 2002, with 1.8 million spectators, and 200,000 DVDs sold subsequently. Être et avoir is part of a small sub-set of such films set in educational institutions. It is a sensitive study of a year in the life of a small rural primary school in the Auvergne, with emphasis on the seasons which structure the school year. In this respect it is the more utopian version of the considerably darker and more Loachian social-realist Ça commence aujourd’hui (Bertrand Tavernier, 1999), in which a socially-conscious primary-school headteacher in a northern French town, where unemployment is rife, gets involved in the lives of his pupils. In Être et avoir we also focus on a male schoolteacher, who has a single class of pupils of all ages, and who comes across as a warm and sensitive mother-figure, cuddling the children when they are hurt, for example, a similar situation as the big success of 2004, Les Choristes (Christophe Barratier).

While Être et avoir and Les Diabiles are logical developments in the work of both directors, they also suggest a broader interest in the intersection between state institutions and the role of the family, with children as potential victims of the failure of both, as can be seen in popularizing books, such as the psychoanalyst Elizabeth Roudinesco’s recent work, published the same year as the two films. It is not difficult to see why the French might be preoccupied by children in a socio-demographic and political perspective: on the one hand, France is the European country with the greatest increase and number of births in recent years; but on the other, divorce rates have increased, as has the number of single mothers. While these social shifts undoubtedly have their part to play in explaining why there has been a sudden increase in films focusing on children since the 1990s, this essay is not interested in pinpointing the causes, so much as the effects. The films mentioned above, with the exception of Être et avoir, are clearly not intended for ‘family viewing’; their intended

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1 Philibert’s major documentaries have combined an interest in institutions, and in how people communicate: the deaf in Le Pays des sourds (1992); the Natural History Museum in Un animal, des animaux (1994); a psychiatric hospital where the inmates are working to put on a play in La Moindre des choses (1997); drama students trying to create a play around a theme in Qui sait? (1998); the Louvre in La Ville Louvre (1999). Ruggia’s films focus on child protagonists: the short L’Enfance égarée (1993) and the adaptation of well-known novel, Le Gare du chaâba (1998) about the son of an Algerian immigrant in 1960s France.

2 Elizabeth Roudinesco, La Famille en désordre (Paris: Arthème Fayard, 2002), whose title translates as ‘the family in chaos’.

3 779,000 in 2000, or 189 births for 100 women (in other words, 1.89 children per woman), compared to 164 in the UK and 134 in Germany; see Lionel Doisneau, ‘Panorama démographique de la France en 20000’, Données sociales: la société française (Paris: INSEE, 2002), p.12 (pp.11-18).

4 Four out of ten or 39% in 1999 as opposed to 33% in 1991 and 24% in 1981; ibid, p.15.

5 Whereas 10% of women between the ages 40-45 were single mothers in 1990, in 1999 the age-range for this percentage has dramatically increased to 35-50; see Géraldine Labarthe, ‘Les Structures familiales’, Données sociales: la société française (Paris: INSEE, 2002), p.36 (pp.31-38).
audience is adults. This raises the question of how the use of child protagonists may create different meanings than the use of adolescent or adult protagonists.

**Retrospection**

Film representations of children look nostalgically backwards at childhood as a moment of purity and freedom from the materialistic constraints of the adult world, either explicitly in the case of a utopian film such as *Être et avoir*, or implicitly and liminally in more dystopian films, such as *Les Diables*, where the boy dies. This corresponds to the standard Romantic view of the child as one of almost pre-lapsarian innocence. Richard Coe, in his study of autobiography, writes that the Romantics ‘were unable to make the distinction between the reality of their child selves and the sentimentalized-idealized image of childhood innocence’.  

Freud’s polymorphously perverse child notwithstanding, it is a fantasy which has endured. This liminal nostalgia is present even in films where childkillers are the focus, as is the case with another film from 2002, the Brazilian *Cidade de Deus* (Fernando Meirelles/ Kátia Lund, Brazil/France/USA). The subtext in the first type is ‘I wish I could attain find that state of innocence again’ (nostalgia tinged with self-pity); the subtext in the latter is ‘thank God my childhood was not like that’ (nostalgia tinged with pity).

The mention of child-killers is far from irrelevant, as it will help us unravel what ‘innocence’ might mean in these circumstances. The word is etymologically linked to the idea of death. Connected to the Indo-European root /nek-/ (to bring about death), it gives us the Ancient Greek νεκρός (nekros, meaning dead), the Latin nex (violent death), and various derivations, including nocere (to harm), and nocens (guilty), leading to the antonym innocens (innocent): the one who is not guilty of harming. The child-killer is a contradiction, which accounts for the shock we may well experience when such characters are encountered: in the Romantic view of childhood, children are supposed to be incapable of inflicting harm. The utopian child’s point of view is therefore one in which violence does not exist, or is transformed into something else, a fantasy of immortality, as is exemplified in *Ponette*, where the four-year-old girl fantasizes the return of her dead mother as she waits in the cemetery.

That cemetery is located very firmly in the countryside. In both *Les Diables* and *Être et avoir*, too, non-urban space and place are key, corresponding again to the Romantic association of the child with the natural world. In *Être et avoir*, there are frequent shots of the countryside going through the cycle of the seasons. These shots give the film a structure, embedding the cameos of schoolroom events, but also embedding the nurturing provided by the schoolteacher in a nostalgic framework. In *Les Diables*, the children are at their most free when in the countryside, away from institutions and ordered urban spaces. We see the children hiding in woods where Chloé reconstructs her fantasized home with coloured shards of glass. But whereas we might, more stereotypically, expect such a representation to be drawn with coloured pencils on white paper, Chloé’s mosaic emerges elementally and ‘magically’ (these are the only fast-motion shots in the film) from the soil in the woods. The soil can be discerned through the coloured glass, underlining the link between ‘natural’ space, the fantasized home, and the feminine.

This is in keeping with Henri Lefebvre’s point that ‘nature’ is commonly perceived as origin: ‘Natural space was – and it remains – the common point of departure: the origin, and the original model, of the social process – perhaps even the basis of all “originality”’. He comments that social and political fragmentation leads to ideological appeals to the organic as mythified origin: ‘The idea of an organic space … is … an appeal to a unity, and beyond that unity (or short of it) to an origin deemed to be known with absolute certainty, identified

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6 Richard Coe, *When the Grass was Taller* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1984), p.40.
beyond any possible doubt – an origin that legimates and justifies’. 8 Against this mythified origin, he contrasts what he calls genital space, associated with property and the family, which is the way capitalist societies retain some sense of order as social bonds are undermined.9

Both films under consideration exemplify these ideologically-determined representations. Both incorporate appeals to the countryside, and in both cases the status of the family is in question. In Être et avoir, we rarely see the families of the children, as if the school, which has children of all ages in a single class, provides a surrogate family closer to what Roudinesco calls the ‘tribe’ than the bourgeois family of modern times. In Les Diables, similarly, institutional carers act as surrogate family, and the mother is presented to us as a psychologically fragile person, who abandons the children a second time, after revealing to her son that the child he considers as his sister is not related to him by blood at all, thus destroying his personal myth of himself as carer and nurturer. By contrast with what we might consider to signal the failing family, shots of the countryside are imbued with nostalgia. In Les Diables, the children not only travel through woods, potentially dangerous spaces familiar in fairytales, but also across the rather more idyllic lavender fields. These are associated with Provence in the French imaginary, which is itself associated with certain types of heritage film, such as Pagnol adaptations, whether those of the 1980s (Jean de Florette/Manon des Sources, Claude Berri, 1986), or the films directed by Pagnol in the 1930s and 1940s, to which these two films gesture.10

As I have explained in the context of British ‘alternative heritage’ films, the location of these films in provincial locations is an important component of spectatorial identification, which can be called metastasis, given the importance of displacement and the way in which displacement generates nostalgia:

The regional factor localises pastness geographically, making the general more specific. Spectators need that specificity because it gives a strong sense of place, and the evocation of the past requires that we be displaced from the present by the pull of a past place, the unrecoverable home. Spectatorial response can therefore be defined as a kind of metastasis: we are displaced from the present into a very abstract place, a utopia – literally, a no-place – but we are attracted there by a very specific place, a place whose regional specificity is precisely what makes it attractive. The spectators of a film that generates nostalgia are thus invited to relocate the past place, and relocate themselves within it: ‘I wish to be that boy in that place, because I was once (like) that boy in that place. I once also inhabited a very specific place.’ We are thus invited to desire sameness while maintaining difference (‘I could have been that boy in Liverpool, although in fact I was that this boy in London’).11

This oddly fractured spectatorial position is characteristic of the child film, and we shall develop it by considering another aspect.

There is a crucial difference between the two films under consideration. Être et avoir, with its seasonal structure and gently maternal male schoolteacher, is a utopia predicated on circularity and stability. Les Diables, on the other hand, is a dystopian road movie, where certainties are gradually demolished in linear fashion, signalling the destruction of fantasized organicity and the maternally-structured feminine, and the advent of what Lefebvre calls the

8 Ibid., pp.274-5; his emphasis.
9 Ibid., pp.232-3.
genital economy of space. It is precisely this difference which allows us to pinpoint a second major issue relating to innocence, after that of nostalgia: desexualization.

The presence of a pre-pubescent child desexualises relationships, in the sense that relationships are not represented as part of a genital economy. Part of the pleasure in *Être et avoir* is to see the male schoolteacher being as much a mother as a father to his charges, as is emphasized when the teacher holds up a piece of paper on which one of his pupils has written the word ‘mother’. When this is linked to the rhythm of the seasons, and shots of the countryside, with few shots of families, it is easy to see how a different, although sentimental and nostalgic space is constructed, fantasized as pre-oedipal. The narrative structure of *Les Diables* is somewhat different. There is certainly retrospection, in the sense that the children are trying to return to the home they have never had; but by the same token, they must leave to do so and project themselves into the world, looking forward in prospection. The film is a road movie, and adopts the kind of linearity, quite unlike the circularity of *Être et avoir*, which such prospection into the future requires.

Projecting their desires into the future leads to sexualization for the children; the desire for home, as the fantasy is destroyed, gradually gives way to oedipal and sexual desire, as well as death. The brother, who has been told by his mother that his ’sister’ is not his sister at all, becomes sexually excited as they play in an underground pool, which functions as a version of the swimming-pool they have imagined forming part of the fantasized home in the south of the country. Sex brings closure to the journey. The boy has a night of passion with his pseudo-sister, but is then, significantly, shot by a policeman he attacks when roaming the streets. The film thus stresses the re-imposition of the Law, in its widest sense, including death as the law of desire. The brother-who-is-not-a-brother (and therefore no-one he can recognize, since the film has insisted on his self-identity as a carer) slowly dies from his gunshot wound in the garden of the bourgeois couple the children have terrorized. The ending of *Les Diables* shows us then how desexualization and the evacuation of sexual desire are important for the child film. *Les Diables* shows, when contrasted with *Être et avoir*, how loss of desire for the other halts forward motion, halts projection and prospection. Lack of desire, lack of forward motion, and lack of the narratively-articulated fantasy of home, as there is in *Les Diables*, are the prerequisites for the circularity and stability we find as narrative structure in *Être et avoir*.

There is a further difference between the two films in this respect, demonstrating the in-between zone into which such films place us. It is the role of language. In *Être et avoir*, the children are constantly learning language, learning with difficulty how to articulate their position in the world. A similar situation occurs in *Les Choristes*, where Clément Mathieu teaches the unruly boys to express themselves through song. In *Les Diables*, by contrast, although Joseph, the brother, also has difficulty expressing his desires without being aggressive, he is very articulate, and never seems to stop talking throughout the film, as befits the protagonist of an oedipalized narrative, whose entry into language and into desire is coterminous; his logorrhoea is an excess of language, paralleling the excessive nature of his desires for the fantasized home and for his ‘sister’.

Children in the films we are concerned with are located between the advent of language (so after the infant stage; *infans* meaning deprived of language) and the onset of sexuality and death (desire and the death drive). The defining feature of representations of pre-adolescent children is that they are poised on a threshold, an in-between space – neither no-mans land, nor no-child’s land – where fantasy and reality are jumbled. Adult spectators, to the extent that they may be identifying themselves with the child protagonists, are looking both backwards nostalgically in retrospection to a period of innocence, as well as forwards in prospection to the entry into the ‘guilt’ constituted by desire and its violence. The child provides a threshold, or cusp, where desire can be configured as virtual, as a developmental
horizon, in sight, but out of reach, allowing the fantasy of pre-oedipal innocence to infect spectatorial affect. It is appropriate to remind ourselves that nostalgia is formed from the Greek words meaning home and suffering, in that order. In this optic, nostalgia is less a superficial phenomenon of postmodernity, associated with the visible, and history-free depthlessness, as Jameson might have it, than a deeply embodied affect, where meaning is invaded by emotion, accounting no doubt for the profound effect it can have on spectators.

In this section, we have seen how innocence and nostalgia are linked in films with pre-adolescent protagonists. Such films construct a fantasized pastness for spectators, an illud tempus or mythical time (the term frequently used by the historian of religions Mircea Eliade), prior to the atomization of the social into ‘genitalized’ family units by capitalism, as Lefebvre would have it. They do so more easily precisely because the child protagonist invites the reading of space and time as pre-oedipal, as being on the threshold. This places the spectator in the position of looking back (‘I was once that child’), while at the same time looking forward (‘that child will be what I am now’). The next section will consider how the threshold is not so much a binary structured on the retrospective and the prospective, or on the pre-oedipal/oedipal, as has been suggested so far, than a different type of space – a heterotopic space of difference – which the spectator is invited to inhabit.

**Heterospection**

What is heterotopia? Lefebvre occasionally uses the term purely functionally as part of a typology of spatial distinction (isotopias, utopias, heterotopias), where he defines heterotopias as ‘contrasting spaces’ or ‘mutually repellent spaces’. Foucault had previously developed the idea in a 1967 lecture. Heterotopic spaces for him are ‘counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted’. There are clearly problems with such contestatory spaces, not least the perennial problem of any radical discourse, whereby the naming of such a space immediately reduces its radical potential. Notwithstanding such issues, we can, by analogy, suggest that the young child film constructs a heterotopic view. Amongst Foucault’s examples are spaces where deviants are placed, such as psychiatric hospitals and prisons (the case with the children of Les Diables, as well as many other child films); spaces of juxtaposed spaces (cinemas, gardens); sacred spaces (cemeteries; we saw how Ponette configures a heterotopic child’s view within a rural cemetery); spaces of accumulated time (museums, libraries); spaces of transitory time (festivals, fairgrounds, holiday cottages); spaces of illusion which critique quotidian space (brothels); spaces of attempted perfection (the colonies).

The spaces Foucault talks of are real physical spaces, whereas the threshold space discussed here in relation to the child film is a more abstract space. Nonetheless, Foucault’s notion is useful, for three reasons. First, heterotopic spaces combine incompatible spaces: ‘The heterotopia is capable of juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces, several sites

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13 Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, p.382.
14 Ibid., pp.294, 366.
that are in themselves incompatible’. Foucault explains, for example, how one such space, the cinema, ‘is a very odd rectangular room, at the end of which, on a two-dimensional screen, one sees the projection of a three-dimensional space’.

A second reason is that watching a film is potentially to inhabit a heterotopic space in more than just the physical sense suggested by Foucault in the previous paragraph. He discusses the way in which the mirror is both a utopia but also a heterotopia, in terms which recall the Lacanian formulation of viewing familiar in Film Studies. It is instructive to replace the word mirror by the word screen in the following passage:

The mirror is, after all, a utopia, since it is a placeless place. In the mirror [screen], I see myself there where I am not, in an unreal, virtual space that opens up behind the surface; I am over there, there where I am not, a sort of shadow that gives my own visibility to myself, that enables me to see myself there where I am absent: such is the utopia of the mirror [screen]. But it is also a heterotopia in so far as the mirror [screen] does exist in reality, where it exerts a sort of counteraction on the position that I occupy. From the standpoint of the mirror [screen] I discover my absence from the place where I am since I see myself over there. Starting from this gaze that is, as it were, directed toward me, from the ground of this virtual space that is on the other side of the glass [screen], I come back toward myself; I begin again to direct my eyes toward myself and to reconstitute myself there where I am. The mirror [screen] functions as a heterotopia in this respect: it makes this place that I occupy at the moment when I look at myself in the glass [screen] at once absolutely real, connected with all the space that surrounds it, and absolutely unreal, since in order to be perceived it has to pass through this virtual point which is over there.

Identifying with a child protagonist is likely, we might argue, to increase this feeling of being ‘over there’ in a different space-time, identifying ourselves with the ‘ideal ego’ of psychoanalysis.

The third reason is that the word heterotopia is linked to a medical condition, although this is not something discussed by Foucault. The word heterotopia is attested in 1870. It is therefore clearly a phenomenon of modernity, broadly contemporaneous with the advent of film.17 In medicine it is used to refer to a displacement, when a tumour occurs in the body which is composed of parts not normally found in that location. We can relate this sense of displacement to the loss and anxiety that form nostalgia, itself originally conceived in the mid-eighteenth century as a medical condition.18

Bringing these three points together, we can hypothesize that heterotopic space, where viewing a film is concerned, is the abstract spectatorial space (conditioned by the physical experience of being in a physically-determined heterotopic space, that of the cinema), which constitutes a combination of dislocation in time and space, experienced as loss and anxiety. This space is more likely to be experienced in films where spectators are asked to adopt the point of view of the child, because this displaces them from the present space-time of the viewing experience to the past. The difference between seeing the past articulated around a child rather than a former adult self is the child’s body. Lefebvre writes about the radical potential of the body in relation to ordered genital space, saying that the body behaves ‘as a differential field … as a total body, breaking out of the temporal and spatial shell’.19 The child’s body actualizes that differential more immediately, by calling attention to past time, and the development of experience. The space is heterotopic in the medical sense of a space formed from spatial and/or temporal elements not normally found in the spectator’s present;

17 The concept of utopia originated in 1551 with the publication of Sir Thomas Moore’s book. The word dystopia, interestingly, is contemporaneous with heterotopia, being first attested in 1868 according to the OED.
19 Lefebvre, The Production of Space, p.384; his emphasis.
nor indeed is this space specific to individual spectators, except in the most generic sense that they might map their experiences onto those of the child protagonist.

Returning to the relationship between utopia and heterotopia, utopia is the space of imagined organic unity (similar to the ‘ideal ego’ of psychoanalysis). It precedes dystopia, which is the perception that we inhabit spaces that have lost the connection to the organic. Broadly, this is the difference between the vanished or vanishing social and communitarian on the one hand, and the fragmented genital spaces of the family on the other. It would be tempting to see heterotopia conceptually as a development along this linear axis: utopia-past, dystopia-present, heterotopia-future. But heterotopias coexist with the other two spaces; they constitute alternatives which combine the utopian and the dystopian, but which cannot be reduced to them. This is why we could describe *Être et avoir* as a utopian film, and *Les Diables* as a dystopian film, while positing that both engage us in a heterotopic space.

Heterotopic space is a different space. Its relationship to oedipal structures is one of differential; it is both within the male-female binary, and displaced within it, as a space which contests that binary. The difference suggested here is not just one of differential; there are two further issues related to it: defamiliarization and deviation.

The child’s view defamiliarizes the world. We have seen, using Foucault, how the heterotopic space is both ‘here’ and ‘there’, combining the recognizable, and the recognizable displaced into a heterotopic elsewhere so that it becomes unrecognizable. The world, in other words, in the child film, becomes *unfamiliar in its familiarity*. This is Freud’s definition of the uncanny, with its complex shuttling between the *heimlich* and the *unheimlich*, the homely and the unhomely, shading off into each other perplexingly. And what is *familiarity* if it is not the construction of the family? In other words, the child’s view both questions the family and reconstructs it differently for the spectator. That reconstruction is itself a question, a double-edged question: is the family a place of protection, or is it a place of death? *Les Diables* brings this issue into focus, with the recurrent use of Chloé’s glass home: the shards have the colour and shape of an innocent child’s construction of a safe space, but the pieces are made of glass, which can be partially seen through, in both the concrete and figurative sense, and are dangerous because they are sharp.

Finally, heterotopic spaces are spaces of deviation, Foucault suggests, citing as examples psychiatric hospitals, prisons, and retirement homes, the reason for the last mentioned being that ‘old age is a crisis, but is also a deviation since in our society where leisure is the rule, idleness is a sort of deviation’. He connects adolescents to ‘heterotopias of crisis’, but curiously does not mention the spaces inhabited by children. We could extrapolate from what he says of old age to characterize the social position occupied by children as one of idleness (rather than leisure), and to propose that their spaces, whether real or abstract, are *deviant heterotopias*. They are, to use a term employed by Maire Messenger Davies in this issue of *Screen*, ‘crazy spaces’. In such spaces, a Bakhtinian contestation of order flourishes. However, crucially, this occurs without the adults who are in charge of that order being aware of it. In that respect, the world is not made topsy-turvy in a recognized moment of renewal through excess, but a moment of radical otherness, an unrecognized tumour within the visible body, but which creates pain (of nostalgia, of loss, of dispersal) nonetheless. It is less a case of the child’s viewpoint being privileged, either consciously or unconsciously, over the adult viewpoint, than an issue of a different space, which like the medical definition of the word heterotopia, uses elements taken from elsewhere to construct a defamiliarized space-time.

Conclusion

The word ‘family’ is based on a pre-Roman word, *famel*, meaning ‘servant’. When it came to be used in Latin, *familia* originally referred to the household as constituted by a group of servants attached to a dwelling. Whatever else it may have meant subsequently in terms of
blood-relatives gathered together as a group subordinated to patriarchal laws, originally the family was a bond to a specific place (the home, as demonstrated so well in Les Diables), as well as a more general bond to a space (‘being a family together’). It therefore functioned, we might wish to argue, as both a place of servitude, and servitude itself. Both Être et avoir and Les Diables demonstrate the attachment to that bond, as well as, paradoxically, the desire to escape from it, even if they do so very differently. Être et avoir appeals to a surrogate family structure (the school) and the rhythm of the seasons to construct a nostalgic framework. Les Diables, by contrast, shows its protagonists escaping from similar institutional structures (the home for disturbed children), so as to rediscover the maternal home for which they nostalgically yearn.

What makes these films so interesting is that the child’s view allows spectators to inhabit both space-times. As spectators, we are, like the children themselves, on a threshold, looking back to our past and looking forwards to the present of our viewing from the place to which we are looking back. In that sense we are temporally (and temporarily) ‘differentialized’. We are also desexualized, relating to oedipal structures tangentially, asymptotically. We are defamiliarized, in the sense that the familiar (what we know, our social and conceptual structures) is made unfamiliar.

That spectatorial position can be defined as heterospection, in that it is not simply retrospectively (and potentially regressively) nostalgic; but nor is it entirely prospectively (and potentially progressively) ‘futured’. Heterospection is a moment which, to quote Foucault again, ‘simultaneously represents, contests, and inverts’. It looks backwards and forwards, but also sideways, outwards, escaping centrifugally into multiplicities, while at the same time coalescing in a specific moment, a specific place. It is a view which paradoxically captures a moment made of shifting refractions, where time and space collapse, rather like the coloured glass ‘home’ of Les Diables, emerging like a fast-motion kaleidoscope, only to be destroyed again.

Put more simply, heterospection is being-adult while also being-child, inhabiting two different but complementary space-times. The effect is to allow us simultaneously to experience innocence, and not just to view it, as well as to escape from the inevitable pain of innocence experienced, but also lost.20

20 I am grateful to Kate Chedgzoy and Ann Davies for their comments on an earlier draft of this essay.