



Kill the Child

By CAM and Voltarine Baedling

Teach your children well

Their father's hell did slowly go by

And feed them on your dreams

The one they pick, the ones you'll know by

— “Teach Your Children” by Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young¹

Children are the future. Frequently interpreted literally, this familiar adage carries an important theoretical underpinning: we must plan for the children of today to become the next purveyors of the social order. In the polemic *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*, Lee Edelman coins the term *reproductive futurism* and calls for Queer opposition to it.² Edelman argues that the conception of children as our future is the political idea of the Child: our participation in *politics* is predicated on building a better world for our children. Planning for a future world, whether by reform or envisioning an end-game utopia, has the neat benefit of revealing the social systems and institutions we wish to manifest. Rather than living for the present and people who exist now (including ourselves), we hope to assert the dominance of our politics and desired social order to shape children who will benefit from—and continue—our vision. Planning for this future society precludes the possibility of instead ending or rejecting society entirely. To escape our captivity to Future we must kill the Child: reject the idea of reproductive futurism in favor of an ecstatic queer anti-politic.

The hypothetical deferred Future built on the logic of the Child is irrevocably linked to the idea of straight time. As summarized by McKenzie Wark in her piece on Muñoz’s *Cruising Utopia*, “straight time is that of expanded reproduction of the same; [queer] time is an immersion and surrender into the present.”³ This idea of queer time as immersion into the present overlaps

with Guy Hocquenghem's idea of *jouissance*, an ecstatic pleasure tied up in daily enjoyment, joyful revolution, and orgasm.⁴ Child-centric futurity impels us to maintain the status quo of straight-cis-mononormative hegemony, acceptance of straight (linear) time, nuclear Families, State oppression, and a civilization that operates under the guise of politics of inclusion—as opposed to tools and forms of life that oppose this order.

Not only is the Child relevant to Future, but it also influences how we understand the past. The Child has been a key tool for development of civilization, private property, and the nuclear family. At the dawn of agriculture (and reified through successive movements for enclosure), the Child became an object used to secure and pass on wealth, through control of land for farming and possession of private property in the family unit.⁵ In order to efficiently consolidate generational wealth and individual economic security, paternity certainty and primogeniture gained economic and social importance. Which child(ren) “belonged” to whom began to matter in a particular economic way. This dovetails with the development of ideas about who carries our hopes for the future and who is excluded: not one of us, not family, not our child. Perhaps the focus shifts from the whole tribe as “family” to a more limited—though still extended to modern Western eyes—family model. We need the figurative Child to justify and reproduce our hoarding of wealth and resources at the expense of others. If it is “for the children,” privatization of wealth is justified! Under these models, the wellbeing of “our” children is predicated on scarcity and comes at the cost of sacrificing *other* literal children. By extending the timeframe of our future planning to the next generation, the violence and control of this one can be infinitely forgiven.

Of course, we also need literal children to further this vision of societal functioning with privatized family units which produce more laborers to ensure their own survival and feed the nation-state. Again, the mechanics of sexual reproduction become increasingly important. The Second Mythos from *Against the Gendered Nightmare* explains this well:

What was the original sin? A certain heresy tells that the forbidden knowledge was the realization that a certain type of sex leads to reproduction. Once Adam and Eve knew this, they couldn't unlearn it. From here, all of their activities were tied to an emerging symbolic order of domination. Whereas before they had simply indulged in utopia without a future, now their actions had consequences. From this knowledge stems the invention of the role of the Father, as well as the knowledge necessary for agriculture, and even the first form of the rational thought which would later become Science. Patriarchy, Civilization, Reproductive Futurism. All of it stems from this abominable discovery.⁶

People who can gestate fetuses are increasingly seen as always *potentially pregnant*, their bodies either communal/social/state property⁷ and subject to legislative controls (both prescriptive and proscriptive), or the specific property of the person (read: patriarch) who wishes to create a literal child. A child to call their own facilitates transfer of

inter-generational wealth and justifies the violence and wealth hoarding held up as “success” in this social order.

Along with the biological reproduction of children and division into more nuclear families comes atomization into couple units, especially heterosexual couples that produce offspring through heteronormative sex. These offspring are necessary today to serve capitalism and the state as both worker-wage-slaves and consumers. This system of social organization, Monogamism, reinforces other systems of power (capitalism, racism, colonialism, etc.) that alienate us from each other and ourselves.⁸ Monogamism is well-rooted as a system of social control whose influence ranges from legally-codified status (marriage, tax benefits, citizenship, social program eligibility) to social coercion (limiting how we interact with others based on their eligibility to be our “match” and/or with whom they are already paired) and our internal self-policing (how/if we want to be acknowledged as “attractive,” our goals and desires in relationships, imposed guiltiness about refusing others’ relationship rules—ie, cheating⁹). Couple units provide a clear foundation for an atomized family unit. In fact, this entire family structure from couples to children, is sold to us by both the State and corporations as the (only) good life. The couple unit becomes both the problem and its solution—dissatisfaction with dating is an individual problem that can be solved by finding the right person or buying the right products.¹⁰ Instead, we must seek the abolition of this system and reject the ways that society controls and limits our interpersonal relationships. Children are one way that parents can inoculate the next generation with the values they want to see in the world—never mind how this often backfires. “Radical parents,” Emma Goldman wrote, “though

emancipated from the belief of ownership in the human soul, still cling tenaciously to the notion that they own the child, and that they have the right to exercise their authority over it.... The child, being fed on one-sided, set and fixed ideas, soon grows weary of re-hashing the beliefs of its parents, and it sets out in quest of new sensations, no matter how inferior and shallow the new experience may be.”¹¹ These family units are conveniently self-propagating, as each individual is expected to find a partner to form a couple and continue the demanding social norms of Family. Even without producing literal children, the ideas of purpose, legacy, and impact are rooted within the framework of reproductive futurism. The logic of the couple unit folds neatly into the roles demanded by a heteronormative monogamist society and a State that seeks to limit our organization under a framework of rights for individuals and the couple-unit. These children, our future, then propagate civilization with rules that stem from their upbringing. Does it ever end? The Child is also a rhetorical tool used as political leverage. Children are convenient to advocate for, as they largely lack legal rights and social authority. They supposedly don’t know what’s best for themselves, don’t understand how the world works, or most straightforwardly, don’t exist or can’t communicate yet! This rhetorical tactic is not the approach of one specific political party or movement, but a tactic applied across a range of positions. For example, consider contemporary mainstream U.S. discourse on abortion:

The Right combines “pro-life” anti-abortion campaigns with child-centric stances against same-sex unions or marriages....

The Left, too, leans on this fulcrum. Defenders of abortion rights don't dare challenge the unmitigated good of a future life, and choose instead to argue from "choice"; environmentalists campaign for the children's future; and, in recent months, protesters scattered across occupy camps held cardboard signs emblazoned with future-looking slogans — it is for the kids' future, for a world with jobs and homes and health care, that many are now fighting.¹²

While these positions appear to be opposite—defending abortion rights or opposing them—both still argue for a future and the place that children may or should occupy in it. As the author later writes, "politics leaves room for difference, so long as the difference also promises to preserve a world for the universalized subject of the innocent Child."¹² Thus, the Child can support any politic one proposes. Other issues like gender-affirming treatment for youth, safety of youth among transgender adults, and immigration (both for and against) apply this same argument with different justifications for which children should be protected and how.¹³ Individuals and organizations in favor of maintaining the social order argue that we must "think of the children." Opposition to their ideas is deliberately reframed as a position against literal children to delegitimize any critique and, further, to malign opponents as against the social order.

Moreover, underlying this idea is that no reasonable person would oppose the social order entirely. Maybe have a different vision for it, or take somewhat different actions, but still within the framework of society and civilization in which there exists a Future. As described in *Baedan 3: Journal of Queer Time Travel*, we are not looking for a different form of captivity, but rather an escape entirely—"a way out."¹⁴ Future, as a deferred structural position in Straight Time, is yet another part of the all-consuming

Leviathan¹⁵; the Child is one of the rhetorical tools that funnels us back into the beast.

Now that we've looked further into how The Child figures into systems of social control, capitalism, morality... we renew our critique of reproductive futurism and The Child by asking: Whose children represent the future? Certainly not all literal children, but rather a subset of children we feel represent "us." As written by José Esteban Muñoz in *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer*, "The future is only the stuff of some kids. Racialized kids, queer kids, are not the sovereign princes of futurity."³ Mark Fisher, known by his blog "k-punk," expressed a similar sentiment in a post written in response to Edelman's *No Future*: "it is OK for us to bomb other people's children - because they aren't the Future."¹⁶ Indeed, the question of which children are valuable overlaps with systems of power that advantage some individuals at the expense of others. Taken in the context of current-day America, for example, the valuable or representative children are often white, middle-to-upper class, citizens, and otherwise normative. In particular, they largely come from and represent a future of heterosexual nuclear family units with distinct genders and gender roles.

Some anti-natalist critiques and opposition to the Child are mis-branded as ecofascism, as they advocate for reducing births and possibly the human population overall. This begs the question of who is expected to refrain from producing offspring and what punishment will be given to those who break these social (and/or legally-codified) rules. An ecofascist framework maintains that humans are damaging the Earth and a solution to that is less people. Additionally, the belief that resources are scarce or limited (at least in part based on the reality of how resources are hoarded so inequitably by the wealthiest in our

society) leads some to believe that the necessary solution is fewer people. In the face of eco-crisis or environmental collapse, the Child acts as a stand-in for the human species: climate change and resource depletion become problems foisted onto this next generation.¹⁷ Following this, the next logical step to protect “our” future is eugenics: some people must be prohibited from reproducing. We see this in a long history of genocide, forced sterilization, environmental racism, and experimentation on uninformed subjects. Of course, the vision of whose future this would protect is executed by dominant social groups with power, influence, status, and resources at the expense of all others.

To critique the Child is *not* to reinforce justifications for atrocities committed against bodily autonomy or intersections of social identity that result in inequitable health outcomes or choices related to biological reproduction. To the contrary, many literal children have been sacrificed in the name of the Child; for example, in Nazi Germany the ethnic minority children were targeted to supposedly secure a stronger future for the Aryan Child. As written by Natasha Lennard in a response to *No Future*, “Reproductive futurism is thus also about who does or does not get to count as a child worth fighting for.”¹² Rejecting the Child is not an opposition to literal children; rather, it is prioritizing individuals who exist now over the infinitely-deferred potential future.

It is only by refusing reproductive futurism that we can reject all politics whose existence precludes queer liberation. The Child serves to maintain or plan a replacement social order, rather than escape from that paradigm entirely. It was a key idea in the development of the civilization that now ensnares us: agriculture and accumulation of inter-generational wealth instilled economic

meaning to paternity certainty, securing the place of a future-driven family unit. Knowledge of the mechanics of sexual reproduction instilled a belief in concrete sexual differentiation, gender, and gender roles—all different iterations of the same myth. Monogamism reinforces the hegemony of child-producing units—couples and families—through social conditioning and legal status that create another axis of politics of inclusion and incentive to trade assimilation and security for our freedom. Beyond the relevancy to (re)production of children and families, the Child is a rhetorical tool that can justify almost any brand of politics. The diversity of policies and opinions is not as wide as it seems; much of it argues from a foundation of reproductive futurism. This harms all of us, including the literal children of here and now—especially those at the margins suffering under environmental racism, hyper-policing, State reproductive control, and white supremacy. Living in service to the idea of the Child will only propagate civilization, politics, and atomization into couple and family units that lend more power to the State. Denying reproductive futurism creates the possibility of a full immersion into the present, and with it all the revolutionary potential, explosion, and *jouissance* we could embody.

To quote again from *Against a Dream Deferred*, “let’s do away with hope. The challenge is rather to embrace an unmarked aperture — a ‘who knows?’ The challenge is to experiment together to find new ways of interacting, meeting, thinking of space, caring, and fucking; new ways of living. It’s part and parcel of queering...”¹² Embrace queer negativity, spontaneity, and “organize based on a wish to meet and explore each other.”¹⁸ This embodied existence in the present challenges absorption into the Leviathan and its conception of progress based on Straight Time. Instead, let’s build queer time and space. To do this, we must kill the Child.

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