Reproductive Futurism—or No Future?


[Public appeals on behalf of ... children [are] ... impossible to refuse. ... "We're fighting for the children. Whose side are you on?" [T]he affirmation of a value so unquestioned, because so obviously unquestionable, as that of the Child whose innocence solicits our defence ... distinguishes public service announcements from the partisan discourse of political argumentation. But ... the image of the Child invariably shapes the logic within which the political itself must be thought. That logic compels us, to the extent that we would register as politically responsible, to submit to the framing of political debate—and, indeed, of the political field—as defined by the terms of what this book describes as reproductive futurism (2)

... For politics, however radical the means by which specific constituencies attempt to produce a more desirable social order, remains, at its [3] core, conservative insofar as it works to affirm a structure, to authenticate social order, which it then intends to transmit to the future in the form of its inner Child. That Child remains the perpetual horizon of every acknowledged politics, the fantasmatic beneficiary of every political intervention. Even proponents of abortion rights, while promoting the freedom of women to control their own bodies through reproductive choice, recurrently frame their political struggle, mirroring their anti-abortion foes, as a 'fight for our children' ... and thus as a fight for the future. What, in any case, would it signify not to be 'fighting for the children'? (3)

... I examine in this book the pervasive invocation of the Child as the emblem of futurity’s unquestioned value and propose against it the impossible project of a queer oppositionality ... Far from partaking of this narrative movement toward a viable political future, far from perpetuating the fantasy of meaning’s eventual realization, the queer comes to figure the bar to every realization of futurity, the resistance, internal to the social, to every social structure or form. (4)

... Rather than rejecting ... this ascription of negativity to the queer, we might, as I argue, do better to consider accepting and even embracing it. Not in the hope of forging thereby some more perfect social order – such a hope, after all, would only reproduce the constraining mandate of futurism, just as any such order would equally occasion the negativity of the queer – but rather to refuse the insistence of hope itself as affirmation, which is always affirmation of an order whose refusal will register as unthinkable, irresponsible, inhumane. (4)

... Historically constructed ... to serve as the repository of variously sentimentalized cultural identifications, the Child has come to embody for us the telos of the social order and come to be seen as the one for whom that order is held in perpetual trust.” “In its coercive universalization ... the image of the Child, not to be confused with the lived experiences of any actual historical children, serves to regulate political discourse—to prescribe what will count as political discourse—by compelling such discourse to accede in advance to the reality of a collective future whose figurative status we are never permitted to acknowledge or address. From Delacroix’s iconic image of Liberty leading us into a brave new world of revolutionary possibility—her bare breast making each spectator the unweaned Child to whom it’s held out while the boy to her left, reproducing her posture, affirms the absolute logic of reproduction itself—to the revolutionary waif in the logo that miniaturizes the 'politics' of Les Mis (summed up in its anthem to futurism, the 'inspirational' 'One Day More'), we are no more able to conceive of a politics without a fantasy of the future than we are able to conceive of a future without the figure of the Child. That figural Child alone embodies the citizen as an ideal, entitled to claim full rights to its future share in the nation’s good, though always at the cost of limiting the rights ‘real’ citizens are allowed. For the social order exists to preserve for this universalised subject, this fantasmatic Child, a notional freedom more highly valued than the notion of freedom itself, which might, after all, put at risk the Child to whom such a freedom falls due. Hence, whatever refuses this mandate by which our political institutions compel the collective reproduction of the Child must appear as a threat not only to the organization of a given social order but also, and far more ominously, to social order as such,
insofar as it threatens the logic of futurism on which meaning always depends. (11)

... So, for example, when P.D. James, in her novel The Children of Men, imagines a future in which the human race has suffered a seemingly absolute loss of the capacity to reproduce, her narrator, Theodor Faron ... gives voice to the ideological truism that governs our investment in the Child as the obligatory token of futurity: 'Without the hope of posterity, for our race if not for ourselves, without the assurance that we being dead yet live ... all plesasures of the mind and senses sometimes seem to me no more than pathetic and crumbling defenses shored up against our ruins' ... How better to characterize the narrative project of The Children of Men itself, which ends, as anyone not born yesterday surely expects from the start, with the renewal of our barren and dying race through the miracle of birth? (12)

... The Child ... takes its place on the social stage like every adorable Annie gathering her limitless funds of pluck to 'stick out [her] chin / and grin / and say: 'Tomorrow! / Tomorrow! / I love ya / Tomorrow / You're always / A day / Away." And lo and behold, as viewed through the prism of the tears that it always calls forth, the figure of this Child seems to shimmer with the iridescent promise of Noah's rainbow, serving like the rainbow as the pledge of a covenant that shields us against the persistent threat of apocalypse now—or later. (18)

... [T]he disciplinary image of the 'innocent' Child perform[s] its mandatory cultural labor of social reproduction. We encounter this image on every side as the lives, the speech, and the freedom of adults face constant threat of legal curtailment out of deference to imaginary Children whose futures, as if they were permitted to have them except as they consist in the prospect of passing them on to Children of their own, are construed as endangered by the social disease as which queer sexualities register. (19)

... Thus, while lesbians and gay men by the thousands work for the right to marry, to serve in the military, to adopt and raise children of their own, the political right, refusing to acknowledge these comrades in reproductive futurism, counters their efforts by inviting us to kneel at the shrine of the sacred Child: the Child who might witness lewd or inappropriately intimate behavior; the Child who might find information about dangerous 21 'lifestyles' on the Internet, the Child who might choose a provocative book from the shelves of the public library; the child, in short, who might find an enjoyment that would nullify the figural value, itself imposed by adult desire, of the Child as unmarked by the adult's adulterating implication in desire itself. ... On every side, our enjoyment of liberty is eclipsed by ... the logic of a narrative wherein history unfolds as the future envisioned for a Child who must never grow up.

29 Pope John Paul II ... condemn[ed] sate-recognized same-sex unions as parodic versions of authentic families ... 'Such a caricature has no future and cannot give future to any society.' Queers must respond to the violent force of such constant provocations not only by insisting on pur equal right to the social order's prerogatives, not only by avowing our capacity to promote that order's coherence and integrity, but also by saying explicitly what Law and the Pope and the while of the Symbolic order for which they stand hear anyway in each and every expression of queer sexuality: Fuck the social order and the Child in whose name we're collectively terrorized; fuck Annie; fuck the waif from Les Mis; fuck the poor, innocent kid on the Net; fuck Laws both with capital Ls and with small; fuck the whole network of Symbolic relations and the future that serves as its prop.

31 ‘It is we who must ... pronoun[e] at last the words for which we’re condemned should we speak them or not: that we are the advocates of abortion; that the Child as futurity's emblem must die; that the future is mere repetition and just as lethal as the past. ... And so what is queerest about us, queerest within us, and queerest despite us is this willingness to insist intransitively – to insist that the future stop here.