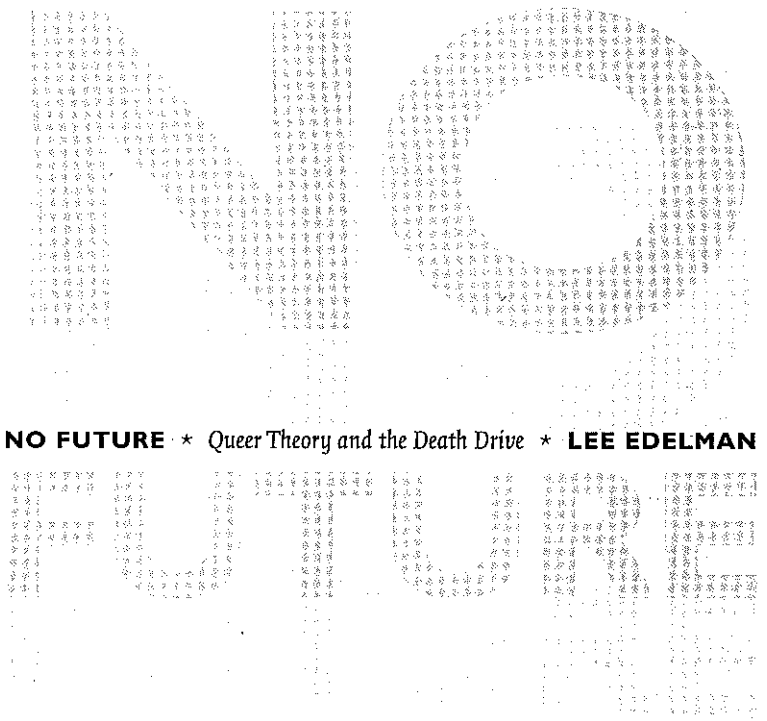

NO FUTURE ★ *Queer Theory and the Death Drive* ★ **LEE EDELMAN**

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CONTENTS

1. THE FUTURE IS KID STUFF

In the spring of 1997, before the right-wing assault on his presidency succeeded in drawing real blood at last, Bill Clinton was the subject of a minor but nonetheless telling political controversy. His appearance beside his wife and daughter in a series of public service announcements sponsored by the Ad Council, a nonprofit organization, "raise[d] questions," according to the *New York Times*, "about where politics stops and where public service begins." Such questions, for those who raised them at least, reflected a concern that his widespread depiction in a series of print ads and video spots in support of a group that identified itself as the Coalition for America's Children might bolster the President's popularity with voters by showing his commitment to a set of values widely thought of as extrapolitical: values that center on the family, to be sure, but that focus on the protection of children. By showing the President, in the words of the *Times*, as "a concerned, hard-working parent"—as one

committed to the well-being of those least able to care for themselves, and specifically as "the defender of children, on issues like education and drugs"—these public service announcements seemed likely to heighten his moral stature and, with it, his standing with the American electorate, or so feared Alex Castellanos, a Republican media consultant. "This is the father picture," he complained in the pages of the *Times*, "this is the daddy bear, this is the head of the political household. There's nothing that helps him more."[1]

But what helped him most in these public appeals on behalf of America's children was the social consensus that such an appeal is impossible to refuse. Indeed, though these public service announcements concluded with the sort of rhetorical flourish associated with hard-fought political campaigns ("We're fighting for the children. Whose side are you on?"), that rhetoric was intended to avow that this issue, like an ideological Möbius strip, only *permitted* one side. Such "self-evident" one-sidedness—the affirmation of a value so unquestioned, because so obviously unquestionable, as that of the Child whose innocence solicits our defense—is precisely, of course, what distinguishes public service announcements from the partisan discourse of political argumentation. But it is also, I suggest, what makes such announcements so oppressively political—political not in the partisan terms implied by the media consultant, but political in a far more insidious way: political insofar as the fantasy subtending 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: terms that impose an ideological limit on political discourse as such, preserving in the process the absolute privilege of heteronormativity by rendering unthinkable, by casting outside the political domain, the possibility of a queer resistance to this organizing principle of communal relations.

For politics, however radical the means by which specific constituencies attempt to produce a more desirable social order, remains, at its 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—for our daughters and our sons," and thus as a fight for the future.[2] What, in that case, would it signify *not* to be "fighting for the children"? How could one take the *other* "side," when taking any side at all necessarily constrains one to take the side *of*, by virtue of taking a side *within*, a political order that returns to the Child as the image of the future it intends? Impossibly, against all reason, my project stakes its claim to the very space that "politics" makes unthinkable: the space outside the framework within which politics as we know it appears and so outside the conflict of visions that share as their presupposition that the body politic must survive. Indeed, at the heart of my polemical engagement with the cultural text of politics and the politics of cultural texts lies a simple provocation: that *queerness* names the side of those *not* "fighting for the children," the side outside the consensus by which all politics confirms the absolute value of reproductive futurism. The ups and downs of political fortune may measure the social order's pulse, but *queerness*, by contrast, figures, outside and beyond its political symptoms, the place of the social order's death drive: a place, to be sure, of abjection expressed in the stigma, sometimes fatal, that follows from reading that figure literally, and hence a place from which liberal politics strives—and strives quite reasonably, given its unlimited faith in reason—to disassociate the queer. More radically, though, as I argue here, queerness attains its ethical value precisely insofar as it accedes to that place, accepting its figural status as resistance to the viability of the social while insisting on the inextricability of such resistance from every social structure.

To make such a claim 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 that would oppose itself to the structural determinants of politics as such, which is also to say, that would oppose itself to the logic of opposition. This paradoxical formulation suggests a refusal—the appropriately perverse refusal that characterizes queer theory—of every substantialization of identity, which is always oppositionally defined,[3] and, by extension, of history as linear narrative (the poor man's teleology) in which meaning succeeds in revealing itself—*as itself*—through time. 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.

Rather than rejecting, with liberal discourse, 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. And the trump card of affirmation? Always the question: If not this, what? Always the demand to translate the insistence, the pulsive *force*, of negativity into some determinate stance or "position" whose determination would thus negate it: always the imperative to immure it in some stable and positive *form*. When I argue, then, that we might do well to attempt what is surely impossible—to withdraw our allegiance, however compulsory, from a reality based on the Ponzi scheme of reproductive futurism—I do not intend to propose some "good" that will thereby be assured. To the contrary, I mean to insist that nothing, and certainly not what we call the "good," can ever have any assurance at all in the order of the Symbolic. Abjuring fidelity to a futurism that's always purchased at our expense, though bound, as Symbolic subjects consigned to figure the Symbolic's undoing, to the necessary contradiction of trying to turn its intelligibility against itself, we might rather, figuratively, cast our vote for "none of the above," for the primacy of a constant *no* in response to the law of the Symbolic, which would echo that law's foundational act, its self-constituting negation. The structuring optimism of politics to which the order of meaning commits us, installing as it does the perpetual hope of reaching meaning through signification, is always, I would argue, a negation of this primal, constitutive, and negative act. And the various positivities produced in its wake by the logic of political hope depend on the mathematical illusion that negated negations might somehow escape, and not redouble, such negativity. My polemic thus stakes its fortunes on a truly hopeless wager: that taking the Symbolic's negativity to the very letter of the law, that attending to the persistence of something internal to reason that reason refuses, that turning the force of queerness against all subjects, however queer, can afford an access to the *jouissance* that at once defines and negates us. Or better: can expose the constancy, the inescapability, of such access to jouissance in the social order itself, even if that order can access its constant access to jouissance only in the process of abjecting that constancy of access onto the queer.

In contrast to what Theodor Adorno describes as the "grimness with which a man clings to himself, as to the immediately sure and substantial," the queerness of which I speak would deliberately sever us from ourselves, from the assurance, that is, of *knowing* ourselves and hence of *knowing* our "good."[4] Such queerness proposes, in place of the good, something I want to call "better," though it promises, in more than one sense of the phrase, absolutely nothing. I connect this something better with Lacan's characterization of what he calls "truth," where truth does not assure happiness, or even, as Lacan makes clear, the good.[5] Instead, it names only the insistent particularity of the subject, impossible fully to articulate and "tend[ing] toward the real."[6] Lacan, therefore, can write of this truth:

The quality that best characterizes it is that of being the true *Wunsch*, which was at the origin of an aberrant or atypical behavior.

We encounter this *Wunsch* with its particular, irreducible character as a modification that presupposes no other form of normalization than that of an experience of pleasure or of pain, but of a final experience from whence it springs and is subsequently preserved in the depths of the subject in an irreducible form. The *Wunsch* does not have the character of a universal law but, on the contrary, of the most particular of laws—even if it is universal that this particularity is to be found in every human being.[7]

Truth, like queerness, irreducibly linked to the "aberrant or atypical," to what chafes against "normalization," finds its value not in a good susceptible to generalization, but only in the stubborn particularity that voids every notion of a general good. The embrace of queer negativity, then, can have no justification if justification requires it to reinforce some positive social value; its value, instead, resides in its challenge to value as defined by the social, and thus in its radical challenge to the very value of the social itself.[8]

For by figuring a refusal of the coercive belief in the paramount value of futurity, while refusing as well any backdoor hope for dialectical access to meaning, the queer dispossesses the social order of the ground on which it rests: a faith in the consistent reality of the social—and by extension, of the social subject; a faith that politics, whether of the left or of the right, implicitly affirms. Divesting such politics of its thematic trappings, bracketing the particularity of its various proposals for social organization, the queer insists that politics is always a politics of the signifier, or even of what Lacan will often refer to as "the letter." It serves to shore up a reality always unmoored by signification and lacking any guarantee. To say as much is not, of course, to deny the experiential violence that frequently troubles social reality or the apparent consistency with which it bears—and thereby bears down on—us all. It is, rather, to suggest that queerness exposes the obliquity of our relation to what we experience in and as social reality, alerting us to the fantasies structurally necessary in order to sustain it and engaging those fantasies through the figural logics, the linguistic structures, that shape them. If it aims effectively to intervene in the reproduction of such a reality—an intervention that may well take the form of figuring that reality's abortion—then queer theory must always insist on its connection to the vicissitudes of the sign, to the tension between the signifier's collapse into the letter's cadaverous materiality and its participation in a system of reference wherein it generates meaning itself. As a particular story, in other words, of why storytelling fails, one that takes both the value and the burden of that failure upon itself, queer theory, as I construe it, marks the "other" side of politics: the "side" where narrative realization and derealization overlap, where the energies of vitalization ceaselessly turn against themselves; the "side" outside all political sides, committed as they are, on every side, to futurism's unquestioned good. The rest of this book attempts to explain the implications of this assertion, but first, let me sketch some connections between politics and the politics of the sign by establishing the psychoanalytic context within which my argument takes shape.

Like the network of signifying relations that forms the Lacanian Symbolic—the register of the speaking subject and the order of the law—politics may function as the framework within which we experience social reality, but only insofar as it compels us to experience that reality in the form of a fantasy: the fantasy, precisely, of form as such, of an order, an organization, that assures the stability of our identities as subjects and the coherence of the Imaginary totalizations through which those identities appear to us in recognizable form. Though the material conditions of human experience may indeed be at stake in the various conflicts by means of which differing political perspectives vie for the power to name, and by naming to shape, our collective reality, the ceaseless conflict of their social visions conceals their common will to install, and to install as reality itself, one libidinally subtended fantasy or another intended to screen out the emptiness that the signifier embeds at the

core of the Symbolic. Politics, to put this another way, names the space in which Imaginary relations, relations that hark back to a misrecognition of the self as enjoying some originary access to presence (a presence retroactively posited and therefore lost, one might say, from the start), compete for Symbolic fulfillment, for actualization in the realm of the language to which subjectification subjects us all. Only the mediation of the signifier allows us to *articulate* those Imaginary relations, though always at the price of introducing the distance that precludes their realization: the distance inherent in the chain of ceaseless deferrals and substitutions to which language as a system of differences necessarily gives birth. The signifier, as alienating and meaningless token of our Symbolic constitution as subjects (as token, that is, of our subjectification through subjection to the prospect of meaning); the signifier, by means of which we always inhabit the order of the Other, the order of a social and linguistic reality articulated from somewhere else; the signifier, which calls us into meaning by seeming to call us to ourselves: this signifier only bestows a sort of *promissory* identity, one with which we can never succeed in fully coinciding because we, as subjects of the signifier, can only be signifiers ourselves, can only ever aspire to catch up to whatever it is we might signify by closing the gap that divides us and, paradoxically, makes us subjects *through that act of division alone*. This structural inability of the subject to merge with the self for which it sees itself as a signifier in the eyes of the Other necessitates various strategies designed to suture the subject in the space of meaning where Symbolic and Imaginary overlap. Politics names the social enactment of the subject's attempt to establish the conditions for this impossible consolidation by identifying with something *outside* itself in order to enter the presence, deferred perpetually, *of* itself. Politics, that is, names the struggle to effect a fantasmatic order of reality in which the subject's alienation would vanish into the seamlessness of identity at the endpoint of the endless chain of signifiers lived as history.

If politics in the Symbolic is always therefore a politics *of* the Symbolic, operating in the name and in the direction of a constantly anticipated future reality, then the telos that would, in fantasy, put an end to these deferrals, the presence toward which the metonymic chain of signifiers always aims, must be recognized, nonetheless, as belonging to an Imaginary past. This means not only that politics conforms to the temporality of desire, to what we might call the inevitable historicity of desire—the successive displacements forward of nodes of attachment as figures of meaning, points of intense metaphoric investment, produced in the hope, however vain, of filling the constitutive gap in the subject that the signifier necessarily installs—but also that politics is a name for the temporalization of desire, for its translation into a narrative, for its teleological determination. Politics, that is, by externalizing and configuring in the fictive form of a narrative, allegorizes or elaborates sequentially, precisely *as* desire, those overdeterminations of libidinal positions and inconsistencies of psychic defenses occasioned by what disarticulates the narrativity of desire: the drives, themselves intractable, unassimilable to the logic of interpretation or the demands of meaning-production; the drives that carry the destabilizing force of what insists outside or beyond, because foreclosed by, signification.

The drive—more exactly, the death drive—holds a privileged place in this book. As the constancy of a pressure both alien and internal to the logic of the Symbolic, as the inarticulable surplus that dismantles the subject from within, the death drive names what the queer, in the order of the social, is called forth to figure: the negativity opposed to every form of social viability. Lacan makes clear that the death drive emerges as a consequence of the Symbolic; indeed, he ends Seminar 2 with the claim that "the symbolic order is simultaneously non-being and insisting to be, that is what Freud has in mind when he talks about the death instinct as being what is most fundamental—a symbolic order in travail, in the process of coming, insisting on being realized."[9] This constant movement toward realization cannot be divorced, however, from a will to undo what is thereby instituted, to begin again ex nihilo. For the death drive marks the excess embedded within the Symbolic through the loss, the Real loss, that the advent of the signifier effects. Suzanne Barnard expresses this

well in distinguishing between the subject of desire and the subject of the drive: "While the subject of the drive also is 'born' in relation to a loss, this loss is a real rather than a symbolic one. As such, it functions not in a mode of absence but in a mode of an impossible excess haunting reality, an irrepressible remainder that the subject cannot separate itself from. In other words, while desire is born of and sustained by a constitutive *lack*, drive emerges in relation to a constitutive *surplus*. This surplus is what Lacan calls the subject's 'anatomical complement,' an excessive, 'unreal' remainder that produces an ever-present jouissance."[10]

This surplus, compelling the Symbolic to enact a perpetual repetition, remains spectral, "unreal," or impossible insofar as it insists outside the logic of meaning that, nonetheless, produces it. The drive holds the place of what meaning misses in much the same way that the signifier preserves at the heart of the signifying order the empty and arbitrary letter, the meaningless substrate of signification that meaning intends to conceal. Politics, then, in opposing itself to the negativity of such a drive, gives us history as the continuous staging of our dream of eventual self-realization by endlessly reconstructing, in the mirror of desire, what we take to be reality itself. And it does so without letting us acknowledge that the future, to which it persistently appeals, marks the impossible place of an Imaginary past exempt from the deferrals intrinsic to the operation of the signifying chain and projected ahead as the site at which being and meaning are joined as One. In this it enacts the formal repetition distinctive of the drive while representing itself as bringing to fulfillment the narrative sequence of history and, with it, of desire, in the realization of the subject's authentic presence in the Child imagined as enjoying unmediated access to Imaginary wholeness. Small wonder that the era of the universal subject should produce as the very figure of politics, because also as the embodiment of futurity collapsing undecidably into the past, the image of the Child as we know it: the Child who becomes, in Wordsworth's phrase, but more punitively, "father of the Man." Historically constructed, as social critics and intellectual historians including Phillipe Ariès, James Kincaid, and Lawrence Stone have made clear, 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.[11]

In its coercive universalization, however, the image of the Child, not to be confused with the lived experiences of any 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 universalized subject, this fantasmatic Child, a notional freedom more highly valued than the actuality 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.

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, Theodore Faron, not only attributes this reversal of biological fortune to the putative crisis

of sexual values in late twentieth-century democracies—"Pornography and sexual violence on film, on television, in books, in life had increased and became more explicit but less and less in the West we made love and bred children," he declares—but also 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," he later observes, "all pleasures of the mind and senses sometimes seem to me no more than pathetic and crumbling defences shored up against our ruins."[12] While this allusion to Eliot's "The Waste Land" may recall another of its well-known lines, one for which we apparently have Eliot's wife, Vivian, to thank—"What you get married for if you don't want children?"—it also brings out the function of the child as the prop of the secular theology on which our social reality rests: the secular theology that shapes at once the meaning of our collective narratives and our collective narratives of meaning. Charged, after all, with the task of assuring "that we being dead yet live," the Child, as if by nature (more precisely, as the promise of a natural transcendence of the limits of nature itself), exudes the very pathos from which the narrator of *The Children of Men* recoils when he comes upon it in nonreproductive "pleasures of the mind and senses." For the "pathetic" quality he projectively locates in nongenerative sexual enjoyment—enjoyment that he views in the absence of futurity as empty, substitutive, pathological—exposes the fetishistic figurations of the Child that the narrator pits *against* it as legible in terms identical to those for which enjoyment without "hope of posterity" is peremptorily dismissed: legible, that is, as nothing more than "pathetic and crumbling defences 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? After all, as Walter Wangerin Jr., reviewing the book for the *New York Times*, approvingly noted in a sentence delicately poised between description and performance of the novel's pro-procreative ideology: "If there is a baby, there is a future, there is redemption."[13] If, however, there is *no baby* and, in consequence, *no future*, then the blame must fall on the fatal lure of sterile, narcissistic enjoyments understood as inherently destructive of meaning and therefore as responsible for the undoing of social organization, collective reality, and, inevitably, life itself.

Given that the author of *The Children of Men*, like the parents of mankind's children, succumbs so completely to the narcissism—all-pervasive, self-congratulatory, and strategically misrecognized—that animates pronatalism,[14] why should we be the least bit surprised when her narrator, facing his futureless future, laments, with what we must call a straight face, that "sex totally divorced from procreation has become almost meaninglessly acrobatic"?[15] Which is, of course, to say no more than that sexual practice will continue to allegorize the vicissitudes of meaning so long as the specifically heterosexual alibi of reproductive necessity obscures the drive *beyond* meaning driving the machinery of sexual meaningfulness: so long, that is, as the biological fact of heterosexual procreation bestows the imprimatur of meaning-production on heterogenital relations. For the Child, whose mere possibility is enough to spirit away the naked truth of heterosexual sex—impregnating heterosexuality, as it were, with the future of signification by conferring upon it the cultural burden of signifying futurity—figures our identification with an always about-to-be-realized identity. It thus denies the constant threat to the social order of meaning inherent in the structure of Symbolic desire that commits us to pursuing fulfillment by way of a meaning unable, *as* meaning, either to fulfill us or, in turn, to be fulfilled because unable to close the gap in identity, the division incised by the signifier, that "meaning," despite itself, means.

The consequences of such an identification both of and with the Child as the preeminent emblem of the motivating end, though one endlessly postponed, of every political vision *as a vision of futurity* must weigh on any delineation of a queer oppositional politics. For the only queerness that queer sexualities could ever hope to signify would spring from their determined opposition to this underlying structure of the political—their

opposition, that is, to the governing fantasy of achieving Symbolic closure through the marriage of identity to futurity in order to realize the social subject. Conservatives acknowledge this radical potential, which is also to say, this radical *threat*, of queerness more fully than liberals, for conservatism preemptively imagines the wholesale rupturing of the social fabric, whereas liberalism conservatively clings to a faith in its limitless elasticity. The discourse of the right thus tends toward a greater awareness of, and insistence on, the literalization of the figural logics that various social subjects are made to inhabit and enact, the logics that, from a "rational" viewpoint, reduce individual identity to stereotypical generality, while the discourse of the left tends to understand better the Symbolic's capacity to accommodate change by displacing those logics onto history as the inevitable unfolding of narrative sequence. The right, that is, better sees the inherently conflictual aspect of identities, the constant danger they face in alterity, the psychic anxiety with which they are lived; but the left better recognizes history's persistent rewriting of those identities, finding hope in the fact that identity's borders are never fully fixed. The left in this is always right from the vantage point of reason, but left in the shade by its reason is the darkness inseparable from its light: the defensive structure of the ego, the rigidity of identity as experienced by the subject, and the fixity of the Imaginary relation through which we (re)produce ourselves. This conservatism of the ego compels the subject, whether liberal or conservative politically, to endorse as the meaning of politics itself the reproductive futurism that perpetuates as reality a fantasy frame intended to secure the survival of the social in the Imaginary form of the Child.

Consider, for example, a local moment from the ongoing war against abortion. Not long ago, on a much traveled corner in Cambridge, Massachusetts, opponents of the legal right to abortion plastered an image of a full-term fetus, larger in size than a full-grown man, on a rented billboard that bore the phrase: "It's not a choice; it's a child." Barbara Johnson, in a dazzling analysis of anti-abortion polemics like this, has demonstrated how they borrow and generate tropes that effectively animate by personifying the fetus, determining in advance the answer to the juridical question of its personhood by means of the terms through which the fetus, and therefore the question, is addressed.[16] Rather, therefore, than attempt to deconstruct this particular rhetorical instance (rather, that is, than note, for example, the juxtaposition of the pronoun "it," appropriate to a fetus, with the supremely humanizing epithet "child," which might call for a gendered pronoun, in order to show how this fragment of discourse maintains the undecidability it undertakes to resolve, casting doubt thereby on the truth of its statement by the form of its enunciation), I want to focus instead, for a moment, on the ideological truth its enunciation, unintentionally perhaps, makes clear.

For, strange as it is that a gay man should say this, when I first encountered that billboard in Cambridge I read it as addressed to me. The sign, after all, might as well have pronounced, and with the same absolute and invisible authority that testifies to the successfully accomplished work of ideological naturalization, the biblical mandate "Be fruitful and multiply." Like an anamorphotic distortion that only when viewed from the proper angle assumes a recognizable form, the slogan acquired, through the obliquity of my subjective relation to it, a logic that illuminated the common stake in the militant right's opposition to abortion and to the practice of queer sexualities—a common stake all too well understood (as the literalization of a figural identity) by radical groups like the Army of God, which claimed credit for the Atlanta terrorist bombings in 1997 of an abortion clinic and a nightclub frequented by lesbians and gay men. The Cambridge billboard thus seemed to announce what liberalism prefers to occlude: that the governing compulsion, the singular imperative, that affords us no meaningful choice is the compulsion to embrace our own futurity in the privileged form of the Child, to imagine each moment as pregnant with the Child of our Imaginary identifications, as pregnant, that is, with a meaning whose presence would fill up the hole in the Symbolic—the hole that marks both the place of the Real and the in-

ternal division or distance by which we are constituted as subjects and destined to pursue the phantom of meaning through the signifier's metonymic slide.

No more than the right will the left, therefore, identify itself with abortion; instead, as the billboard noted with scorn, it aligns itself with "choice." Who *would*, after all, come out *for* abortion or stand *against* reproduction, *against* futurity, and so against *life*? Who *would* destroy the Child and with it the vitalizing fantasy of bridging, in time, the gap of signification (a fantasy that distracts us from the violence of the drives while permitting us to enact them)? The right once again knows the answer, knows that the true oppositional politics implicit in the practice of queer sexualities lies not in the liberal discourse and patient negotiation of tolerances and rights, important as these undoubtedly are to all of us still denied them, but in the capacity of queer sexualities to figure the radical dissolution of the contract, in every sense social and Symbolic, on which the future as putative assurance against the jouissance of the Real depends. With this in mind, we should listen to, and even perhaps be instructed by, the readings of queer sexualities produced by the forces of reaction. However much we might wish, for example, to reverse the values presupposed in the following statement by Donald Wildmon, founder and head of the homophobic American Family Association, we might do well to consider it less as an instance of hyperbolic rant and more as a reminder of the disorientation that queer sexualities *should* entail: "Acceptance or indifference to the homosexual movement will result in society's destruction by allowing civil order to be redefined and by plummeting ourselves, our children and grandchildren into an age of godlessness. Indeed, the very foundation of Western Civilization is at stake."[17] Before the self-righteous bromides of liberal pluralism spill from our lips, before we supply once more the assurance that ours is another kind of love but a love like his nonetheless, before we piously invoke the litany of our glorious contributions to the civilizations of East and West alike, dare we pause for a moment to acknowledge that Mr. Wildmon might be right—or, more important, that he *ought to be* right: that queerness *should* and *must* redefine such notions as "civil order" through a rupturing of our foundational faith in the reproduction of futurity?

It is true that the ranks of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual, and transgendered parents grow larger every day, and that nothing intrinsic to the constitution of those identifying as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, transsexual, or queer predisposes them to resist the appeal of futurity, to refuse the temptation to reproduce, or to place themselves outside or against the acculturating logic of the Symbolic. Neither, indeed, is there any ground we could stand on outside that logic. In urging an alternative to the party line, which every party endorses, in taking a side outside the logic of reproductive futurism and arguing that queers might embrace their figural association with its end, I am not for a moment assuming that queers—by which I mean all so stigmatized for failing to comply with heteronormative mandates—are not themselves also psychically invested in preserving the familiar familial narrativity of reproductive futurism.[18] But politics, construed as oppositional or not, never rests on essential identities. It centers, instead, on the figurality that is always essential to identity, and thus on the figural relations in which social identities are always inscribed.

To *figure* the undoing of civil society, the death drive of the dominant order, is neither to be nor to become that drive; such being is not to the point. Rather, acceding to that figural position means recognizing and refusing the consequences of grounding reality in denial of the drive. As the death drive dissolves those congealments of identity that permit us to know and survive as ourselves, so the queer must insist on disturbing, on queering, social organization as such—on disturbing, therefore, and on queering *ourselves* and our investment in such organization. For queerness can never define an identity; it can only ever disturb one. And so, when I argue, as I aim to do here, that the burden of queerness is to be located less in the assertion of an oppositional political identity than in opposition to politics as the governing fantasy of realizing, in an always indefinite future, Imaginary identities foreclosed by our constitutive subjection to the signifier, I am proposing no platform or posi-

tion from which queer sexuality or any queer subject might finally and truly become itself, as if it could somehow manage thereby to achieve an *essential* queerness.[19] I am suggesting instead that the efficacy of queerness, its real strategic value, lies in its resistance to a Symbolic reality that only ever invests us as subjects insofar as we invest ourselves in it, clinging to its governing fictions, its persistent sublimations, as reality itself. It is only, after all, to its figures of meaning, which we take as the literal truth, that we owe our existence as subjects and the social relations within which we live—relations we may well be willing, therefore, to give up our lives to maintain.

The Child, in the historical epoch of our current epistemological regime, is the figure for this compulsory investment in the misrecognition of figure. It 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.' "[20] 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. Recall, for example, the end of Jonathan Demme's *Philadelphia* (1993), his filmic act of contrition for the homophobia some attributed to *The Silence of the Lambs* (1991). After Andrew Beckett (a man for all seasons, as portrayed by the saintly Tom Hanks), last seen on his deathbed in an oxygen mask that seems to allude to, or trope on, Hannibal Lecter's more memorable muzzle (see figures 1 and 2), has shuffled off this mortal coil to stand, as we are led to suppose, before a higher law, we find ourselves in, if not at, his wake surveying a room in his family home, now crowded with children and pregnant women whose reassuringly bulging bellies (see figure 3) displace the bulging basket (unseen) of the HIV-positive gay man (unseen) from whom, the filmic text suggests, in a cinema (unlike the one in which we sit watching *Philadelphia*) not phobic about graphic representations of male-male sexual acts, Saint Thomas, a.k.a. Beckett, contracted the virus that cost him his life. When we witness, in the film's final sequence, therefore, the videotaped representation of Andrew playing on the beach as a boy (see figure 4), the tears that these moving pictures solicit burn with an indignation directed not only against the intolerant world that sought to crush the honorable man this boy would later become, but also against the homosexual world in which boys like this eventually grow up to have crushes on other men. For the cult of the Child permits no shrines to the queerness of boys and girls, since queerness, for contemporary culture at large as for *Philadelphia* in particular, is understood as bringing children and childhood to an end. Thus, the occasion of a gay man's death gives the film the excuse to unleash once more the disciplinary image of the "innocent" Child performing its mandatory cultural labor of social reproduction. We encounter this image on every side as the lives, the speech, and the freedoms 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. Nor should we forget how pervasively AIDS—for which to this day the most effective name associated with the congressional appropriation of funds is that of a child, Ryan White—reinforces an older connection, as old as the antigay reading imposed on the biblical narrative of Sodom's destruction, between practices of gay sexuality and the undoing of futurity.[21] This, of course, is the connection on which Anita Bryant played so cannily when she campaigned in Florida against gay civil rights under the banner of "Save Our Children," and it remains the connection on which the national crusade against gay marriage rests its case.

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 dan-

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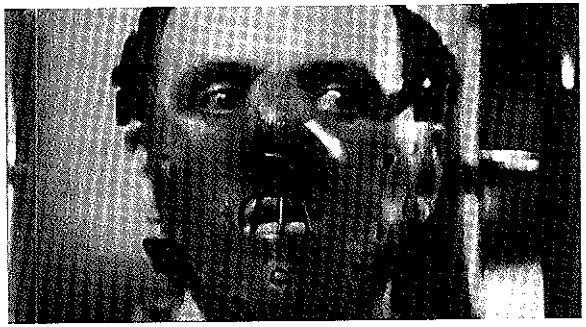

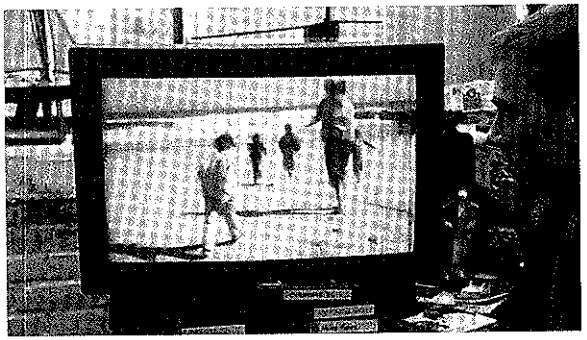

gerous "lifestyles" on the Internet; the Child who might choose a provocative book from the shelves of the public library; the Child, in short, who might find an enjoyment that would nullify the figural value, itself imposed by adult desire, of the Child as unmarked by the adult's adulterating implication in desire itself; the Child, that is, made to image, for the satisfaction of adults, an Imaginary fullness that's considered to want, and therefore to want for, nothing. As Lauren Berlant argues forcefully at the outset of *The Queen of America Goes to Washington City*, "a nation made for adult citizens has been replaced by one imagined for fetuses and children."[22] On every side, our enjoyment of liberty is eclipsed by the lengthening shadow of a Child whose freedom to develop undisturbed by encounters, or even by the threat of potential encounters, with an "otherness" of which its parents, its church, or the state do not approve, uncompromised by any possible access to what is painted as alien desire, terroristically holds us all in check and determines that political discourse conform to the logic of a narrative wherein history unfolds as the future envisioned for a Child who must never grow up. Not for nothing, after all, does the historical construction of the homosexual as distinctive social type overlap with the appearance of such literary creations as Tiny Tim, David Balfour, and Peter Pan, who enact, in an imperative most evident today in the uncannily intimate connection between Harry Potter and Lord Voldemort, a Symbolic resistance to the unmarried men (Scrooge, Uncle Ebenezer, Captain Hook) who embody, as Voldemort's name makes clear, a wish, a will, or a drive toward death that entails the destruction of the Child. That Child, immured in an innocence seen as continuously under seige, condenses a fantasy of vulnerability to the queerness of queer sexualities precisely insofar as that Child enshrines, in its form as sublimation, the very value for which queerness regularly finds itself condemned: an insistence on sameness that intends to restore an Imaginary past. The Child, that is, marks the fetishistic fixation of heteronormativity: an erotically charged investment in the rigid sameness of identity that is central to the compulsory narrative of reproductive futurism. And so, as the radical right maintains, the battle against

queers is a life-and-death struggle for the future of a Child whose ruin is pursued by feminists, queers, and those who support the legal availability of abortion. Indeed, as the Army of God made clear in the bomb-making guide it produced for the assistance of its militantly "pro-life" members, its purpose was wholly congruent with the logic of reproductive futurism: to "disrupt and ultimately destroy Satan's power to kill our children, God's children."[23]

Without ceasing to refute the lies that pervade these familiar right-wing diatribes, do we also have the courage to acknowledge, and even to embrace, their correlative truths? Are we willing to be sufficiently oppositional to the structural logic of opposition—oppositional, that is, to the logic by which politics reproduces our social reality—to accept that the figural burden of queerness, the burden that queerness is phobically produced precisely to represent, is that of the force that shatters the fantasy of Imaginary unity, the force that insists on the void (replete, paradoxically, with jouissance) always already lodged within, though barred from, symbolization: the gap or wound of the Real that inhabits the Symbolic's very core? Not that we are, or ever could be, outside the Symbolic ourselves; but we can, nonetheless, make the choice to accede to our cultural production as figures—*within* the dominant logic of narrative, *within* Symbolic reality—for the dismantling of such a logic and thus for the death drive it harbors within.

As the name for a force of mechanistic compulsion whose formal excess supersedes any end toward which it might seem to be aimed, the death drive refuses identity or the absolute privilege of any goal. Such a goal, such an end, could never be "it"; achieved, it could never satisfy. For the drive as such can only insist, and every end toward which we mistakenly interpret its insistence to pertain is a sort of grammatical placeholder, one that tempts us to read as transitive a pulsion that attains through insistence alone the satisfaction no end ever holds. Engaged in circulation around an object never adequate to fulfill it, the drive enacts the repetition that characterizes what Judith Butler has called "the repetitive propulsionality of sexuality."[24] The structural mandate of the drive, therefore, could be seen to call forth its object or end, indeed, the whole register of sexuality itself, as a displacement of its own formal energies, as an allegorization of its differential force. But that force can never be separated from, can never be imagined as existing before, the Symbolic order of the signifier that it functions to transgress, which is why Lacan argues that "if everything that is immanent or implicit in the chain of natural events may be considered as subject to the so-called death drive, it is only because there is a signifying chain."[25]

One way to approach the death drive in terms of the economy of this "chain of natural events" thus shaped by linguistic structures—structures that allow us to produce those "events" through the logic of narrative history—is by reading the play and the place of the death drive in relation to a theory of irony, that queerest of rhetorical devices, especially as discussed by Paul de Man. Proposing that "any theory of irony is the undoing, the necessary undoing, of any theory of narrative," de Man adduces the constant tension between irony as a particular trope and narrative as a representational mode that allegorizes tropes in general. Narrative, that is, undertakes the project of accounting for trope systematically by producing, in de Man's rehearsal of Schlegel, an "anamorphosis of the tropes, the transformation of the tropes, into the system of tropes, to which the corresponding experience is that of the self standing above its own experiences." In contrast, as de Man makes clear, "what irony disrupts (according to Friedrich Schlegel) is precisely that dialectic and reflexivity." The corrosive force of irony thus carries a charge for de Man quite similar to that of the death drive as understood by Lacan. "Words have a way of saying things which are not at all what you want them to say," de Man notes. "There is a machine there, a text machine, an implacable determination and a total arbitrariness . . . which inhabits words on the level of the play of the signifier, which undoes any narrative consistency of lines, and which undoes the reflexive and dialectical model, both of which are, as you know, the basis of any narration."[26] The mindless violence of this textual machine, so arbitrary, so implacable, threatens, like a guillotine, to sever the genealogy that narrative syntax labors to af-

firm, recasting its narrative "chain of . . . events" as a "signifying chain" and inscribing in the realm of signification, along with the prospect of meaning, the meaningless machinery of the signifier, always in the way of what it would signify. Irony, whose effect de Man likens to the syntactical violence of anacoluthon, thus severs the continuity essential to the very logic of making sense.

How should we read this constant disruption of narrative signification, a disruption inextricable from the articulation of narrative as such, but as a version of the death drive, which Barbara Johnson calls, in a different context, "a kind of unthought remainder . . . a formal overdetermination that is, in Freud's case, going to produce repetition or, in deconstruction's case, may inhere in linguistic structures that don't correspond to anything else"?[27] If irony can serve as one of the names for the force of that unthought remainder, might not queerness serve as another? Queer theory, it follows, would constitute the site where the radical threat posed by irony, which heteronormative culture displaces onto the figure of the queer, is uncannily returned by queers who no longer disown but assume their figural identity as embodiments of the figuralization, and hence the disfiguration, of identity itself. Where the political interventions of identitarian minorities—including those who seek to substantialize the identities of lesbians, gay men, and bisexuals—may properly take shape as oppositional, affording the dominant order a reassuringly symmetrical, if inverted, depiction of its own ostensibly coherent identity, queer theory's opposition is precisely to any such logic *of* opposition, its proper task the ceaseless disappropriation of every propriety. Thus, queerness could never constitute an authentic or substantive identity, but only a structural position determined by the imperative of figuration; for the gap, the noncoincidence, that the order of the signifier installs both informs and inhabits queerness as it inhabits reproductive futurism. But it does so with a difference. Where futurism always anticipates, in the image of an Imaginary past, a realization of meaning that will suture identity by closing that gap, queerness undoes the identities through which we experience ourselves as subjects, insisting on the Real of a jouissance that social reality and the futurism on which it relies have already foreclosed.

Queerness, therefore, is never a matter of being or becoming but, rather, of *embodying* the remainder of the Real internal to the Symbolic order. One name for this unnameable remainder, as Lacan describes it, is jouissance, sometimes translated as "enjoyment": a movement beyond the pleasure principle, beyond the distinctions of pleasure and pain, a violent passage beyond the bounds of identity, meaning, and law. This passage, toward which the pulsion of the drives continuously impels us, may have the effect, insofar as it gets attached to a particular object or end, of congealing identity around the fantasy of satisfaction or fulfillment by means of that object. At the same time, however, this jouissance dissolves such fetishistic investments, undoing the consistency of a social reality that relies on Imaginary identifications, on the structures of Symbolic law, and on the paternal metaphor of the name.[28] Hence, for Lacan there is another name that designates the unnameability to which jouissance would give us access: "Behind what is named, there is the unnameable," he writes. "It is in fact because it is unnameable, with all the resonances you can give to this name, that it is akin to the quintessential unnameable, that is to say to death."[29] The death drive, therefore, manifests itself, though in radically different guises, in both versions of jouissance. To the extent that jouissance, as fantasmatic escape from the alienation intrinsic to meaning, lodges itself in a given object on which identity comes to depend, it produces identity as mortification, reenacting the very constraint of meaning it was intended to help us escape. But to the extent that it tears the fabric of Symbolic reality as we know it, unraveling the solidity of *every* object, including the object as which the subject necessarily takes itself, jouissance evokes the death drive that always insists as the void in and of the subject, beyond its fantasy of self-realization, beyond the pleasure principle.

Bound up with the first of these death drives is the figure of the Child, enacting a logic of repetition that fixes identity through identification with the future of the social order. Bound up with the second is the figure

of the queer, embodying that order's traumatic encounter with its own inescapable failure, its encounter with the illusion of the future as suture to bind the constitutive wound of the subject's subjection to the signifier, which divides it, paradoxically, both from and into itself. In the preface to *Homographesis* I wrote that the signifier "gay," understood "as a figure for the textuality, the rhetoricity, of the sexual . . . designates the gap or incoherence that every discourse of 'sexuality' or 'sexual identity' would master."[30] Extending that claim, I now suggest that queer sexualities, inextricable from the emergence of the subject in the Symbolic, mark the place of the gap in which the Symbolic confronts what its discourse is incapable of knowing, which is also the place of a jouissance from which it can never escape. As a figure for what it can neither fully articulate nor acknowledge, the queer may provide the Symbolic with a sort of necessary reassurance by seeming to give a name to what, as Real, remains unnameable. But repudiations of that figural identity, reflecting a liberal faith in the abstract universality of the subject, though better enabling the extension of rights to those who are still denied them, must *similarly* reassure by attesting to the seamless coherence of the Symbolic whose dominant narrative would thus supersede the corrosive force of queer irony. If the queer's abjectified difference, that is, secures normativity's identity, the queer's disavowal of that difference affirms normativity's singular truth. For every refusal of the figural status to which queers are distinctively called reproduces the triumph of narrative as the *allegorization* of irony, as the logic of a temporality that always serves to "straighten" it out, and thus proclaims the universality of reproductive futurism. Such refusals perform, despite themselves, subservience to the law that effectively imposes politics as the only game in town, exacting as the price of admission the subject's (hetero)normalization, which is accomplished, regardless of sexual practice or sexual "orientation," through compulsory abjuration of the future-negating queer.

It may seem, from within this structure, that the Symbolic can only win; but that would ignore the correlative fact that it also can only lose. For the division on which the subject rests can never be spirited away and

the signifying order will always necessitate the production of some figural repository for the excess that precludes its ultimate realization of the One. In a political field whose limit and horizon is reproductive futurism, queerness embodies this death drive, this intransigent jouissance, by figuring sexuality's implication in the senseless pulsions of that drive. De-idealizing the metaphorics of meaning on which heteroreproduction takes its stand, queerness exposes sexuality's inevitable coloration by the drive: its insistence on repetition, its stubborn denial of teleology, its resistance to determinations of meaning (except insofar as it means this refusal to admit such determinations of meaning), and, above all, its rejection of spiritualization through marriage to reproductive futurism. Queerness as name may well reinforce the Symbolic order of naming, but it names what resists, as signifier, absorption into the Imaginary identity of the name. Empty, excessive, and irreducible, it designates the letter, the formal element, the lifeless machinery responsible for animating the "spirit" of futurity. And as such, as a name for the death drive that always informs the Symbolic order, it also names the jouissance forbidden by, but permeating, the Symbolic order itself.

By denying our identification with the negativity of this drive, and hence our disidentification from the promise of futurity, those of us inhabiting the place of the queer may be able to cast off that queerness and enter the properly political sphere, but only by shifting the figural burden of queerness to someone else. The structural position of queerness, after all, and the need to fill it remain. By choosing to *accept* that position, however, by assuming the "truth" of our queer capacity to figure the undoing of the Symbolic, and of the Symbolic subject as well, we might undertake the impossible project of imagining an oppositional political stance exempt from the imperative to reproduce the politics of signification (the politics aimed at closing the gap opened up by the signifier itself), which can only return us, by way of the Child, to the politics of reproduction. For the liberal's view of society, which seems to accord the queer a place, endorses no more than the conservative right's the queerness of resistance to futurism and thus the queerness of the queer. While

the right wing imagines the elimination of queers (or of the need to confront their existence), the left would eliminate queerness by shining the cool light of reason upon it, hoping thereby to expose it as merely a mode of sexual expression free of the all-pervasive coloring, the determining fantasy formation, by means of which it can seem to portend, and not for the right alone, the undoing of the social order and its cynosure, the Child. Queerness thus comes to mean *nothing* for both: for the right wing the nothingness always at war with the positivity of civil society; for the left, nothing more than a sexual practice in need of demystification.

But this is where reason must fail. Sexuality refuses demystification as the Symbolic refuses the queer; for sexuality and the Symbolic become what they are *by virtue of such refusals*. Ironically—but irony, as I've argued, always characterizes queer theory—the demystification of queerness and so, by extension, of sexuality itself, the demystification inherent in the position of liberal rationality, could achieve its realization only by traversing the collective fantasy that invests the social order with meaning by way of reproductive futurism. Taken at its word, that is, liberalism's abstract reason, rescuing queerness for sociality, dissolves, like queerness, the very investments on which sociality rests by doing away with its underlying and sustaining libidinal fantasies. Beyond the resonance of fantasy, after all, lies neither law nor reason. In the beyond of demystification, in that neutral, democratic literality that marks the futurism of the left, one could only encounter a queer dismantling of futurism itself *as fantasy* and a derealization of the order of meaning that futurism reproduces. Intent on the end, not the ends, of the social, queerness insists that the drive toward that end, which liberalism refuses to imagine, can never be excluded from the structuring fantasy of the social order itself. The sacralization of the Child thus necessitates the sacrifice of the queer.

Bernard Law, the former cardinal of Boston, mistaking (or maybe understanding too well) the degree of authority bestowed on him by the signifier of his patronymic, denounced in 1996 proposed legislation giving health care benefits to same-sex partners of municipal employees. He did so by proclaiming, in a noteworthy instance of piety in the sky, that bestowing such access to health care would profoundly diminish the marital bond. "Society," he opined, "has a special interest in the protection, care and upbringing of children. Because marriage remains the principal, and the best, framework for the nurture, education and socialization of children, the state has a special interest in marriage."[31] With this fatal embrace of a futurism so blindly committed to the figure of the Child that it will justify refusing health care benefits to the adults that some children become, Law lent his voice to the mortifying mantra of a communal jouissance that depends on the fetishization of the Child at the expense of whatever such fetishization must inescapably queer. Some seven years later, after Law had resigned for his failure to protect Catholic children from sexual assault by pedophile priests, Pope John Paul II returned to this theme, condemning state-recognized same-sex unions as parodic versions of authentic families, "based on individual egoism" rather than genuine love. Justifying that condemnation, he observed, "Such a 'caricature' has no future and cannot give future to any society."[32] Queers must respond to the violent force of such constant provocations not only by insisting on our 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 whole of the Symbolic order for which they stand hear anyway in each and every expression or manifestation 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.

We might like to believe that with patience, with work, with generous contributions to lobbying groups or generous participation in activist groups or generous doses of legal savvy and electoral sophistication, the future will hold a place for us—a place at the political table that won't have to come at the cost of the places we seek in the bed or the bar or the

baths. But there are no *queers* in that future as there can be no future for queers, chosen as they are to bear the bad tidings that there can be no future at all: that the future, as Annie's hymn to the hope of "Tomorrow" understands, is "*always*/ A day/ Away." Like the lovers on Keats's Grecian urn, forever "near the goal" of a union they'll never in fact achieve, we're held in thrall by a future continually deferred by time itself, constrained to pursue the dream of a day when today and tomorrow are one. That future is nothing but kid stuff, reborn each day to screen out the grave that gapes from within the lifeless letter, luring us into, ensnaring us in, reality's gossamer web. Those queered by the social order that projects its death drive onto them are no doubt positioned to recognize the structuring fantasy that so defines them. But they're positioned as well to recognize the *irreducibility* of that fantasy and the cost of construing it as contingent to the logic of social organization as such. Acceding to this figural identification with the undoing of identity, which is also to say with the disarticulation of social and Symbolic form, might well be described, in John Brenkman's words, as "politically self-destructive."[33] But politics (as the social elaboration of reality) and the self (as mere prosthesis maintaining the future for the figural Child), are what queerness, again as figure, necessarily destroys—necessarily insofar as this "self" is the agent of reproductive futurism and this "politics" the means of its promulgation as the order of social reality. But perhaps, as Lacan's engagement with Antigone in Seminar 7 suggests, political self-destruction inheres in the only act that counts as one: the act of resisting enslavement to the future in the name of having a life.

If the fate of the queer is to figure the fate that cuts the thread of futurity, if the jouissance, the corrosive enjoyment, intrinsic to queer (non)identity annihilates the fetishistic jouissance that works to *consolidate* identity by allowing reality to coagulate around its ritual reproduction, then the only oppositional status to which our queerness could ever lead would depend on our taking seriously the place of the death drive we're called on to figure and insisting, against the cult of the Child and the political order it enforces, that we, as Guy Hocquenghem made clear, are "not the signifier of what might become a new form of 'social organisation,' " that we do not intend a new politics, a better society, a brighter tomorrow, since all of these fantasies reproduce the past, through displacement, in the form of the future. We choose, instead, *not* to choose the Child, as disciplinary image of the Imaginary past or as site of a projective identification with an always impossible future. The queerness we propose, in Hocquenghem's words, "is unaware of the passing of generations as stages on the road to better living. It knows nothing about 'sacrifice now for the sake of future generations' . . . [it] knows that civilisation alone is mortal."[34] Even more: it delights in that mortality as the negation of everything that would define itself, moralistically, as pro-life. It is we who must bury the subject in the tomb-like hollow of the signifier, pronouncing 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. Our queerness has nothing to offer a Symbolic that lives by denying that nothingness except an insistence on the haunting excess that this nothingness entails, an insistence on the negativity that pierces the fantasy screen of futurity, shattering narrative temporality with irony's always explosive force. 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.

future the Child portends. Attempting to evade the insistent Real always surging in its blood, it lovingly rocks the cradle of life to the drumbeat of the endless blows it aims at *sinthomosexuals*. Somewhere, someone else will be savagely beaten and left to die—sacrificed to a future whose beat goes on, like a pulse or a heart—and another corpse will be left like a mangled scarecrow to frighten the birds who are gathering now, who are beating their wings, and who, like the drive, keep on coming.

NOTES

1. THE FUTURE IS KID STUFF

1 James Bennet, "Clinton, in Ad, Lifts Image of Parent," *New York Times*, 4 March 1997, A18, New England edition.

2 Donna Shalala, "Women's Movement," 150th Anniversary of the First Women's Rights Convention, Seneca Falls, New York, 17 July 1998, http://www.hhs.gov/news/speeches/sene.html. Note also the fundraising slogan of the National Abortion and Reproductive Rights Action League (NARAL): "For our daughters, our sisters, and our granddaughters."

3 Such a fantasy of substantialized and oppositional identities characterizes the Lacanian Imaginary stage, as distinct from the Symbolic order's wholly differential system of signifying relations.

4 Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E. B. Ashton (New York: Continuum, 1994), 325.

5 He writes, for example, in Seminar 17: "Ce que la vérité, quand elle surgit, a de résolutif, ça peut être de temps en temps heureux—et puis, dans d'autres cas, désastreux. On ne voit pas pourquoi la vérité serait forcément toujours béné-

fique." Jacques Lacan, *Le Seminaire, livre XVII, L'envers de la psychanalyse* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1991), 122.

6 "Je dis toujours la vérité: pas toute, parce que toute la dire, on n'y arrive pas. La dire toute, c'est impossible, matériellement: les mots y manquent. C'est même par cet impossible que la vérité tient au réel." Jacques Lacan, *Télévision* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1974), 9.

7 Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan. Book VII: The Ethics of Psychoanalysis, 1959–1960*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Dennis Potter (New York: Norton, 1992), 24.

8 In this context, another quotation from Adorno's *Negative Dialectics* might be useful: "If negative dialectics calls for the self-reflection of thinking, the tangible implication is that if thinking is to be true—if it is to be true today, in any case—it must also be a thinking against itself. If thought is not measured by the extremity that eludes the concept, it is from the outset in the nature of the musical accompaniment with which the SS liked to drown out the screams of its victims" (365).

9 Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan. Book II: The Ego in Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis, 1954–1955*, ed. Jacques Alain-Miller, trans. Sylvana Tomaselli (New York: Norton, 1991), 326.

10 Suzanne Barnard, "The Tongues of Angels: Feminine Structure and Other Jouissance," in *Reading Seminar XX: Lacan's Major Work on Love, Knowledge, and Feminine Sexuality*, ed. Suzanne Barnard and Bruce Fink (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002), 173.

11 See, for example, Phillipe Ariès, *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life*, trans. Robert Baldick (New York: Vintage Books, 1962); Lawrence Stone, *The Family, Sex, and Marriage in England, 1500–1800* (New York: Harper and Row, 1977); and James Kincaid, *Child Loving: The Erotic Child and Victorian Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1992) and *Erotic Innocence: The Culture of Child Molesting* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1998).

12 P. D. James, *The Children of Men* (New York: Warner Books, 1994), 10, 13.

13 Walter Wangerin Jr., "O Brave New World, That Has No People In't! *The Children of Men*," *New York Times Book Review*, 28 March 1993, 23.

14 "Narcissism!" the cry will go up. "Who, after all, more self-denying, more willing to sacrifice, than a parent? Who more committed to hours of work without ever getting paid?" Not paid? Consult the ledger book of social approbation. Tax codes, baby registries, the various forms of parental leave: these, of course, all pale before the costs of raising a child. But pro-natalism's payoff isn't primarily measured in dollars or sense. It's registered in the universal confirmation of one's standing as an adult and in the accrual of social capital that allows one a stake in the only future's market that ever really counts.

15 The lines preceding this read: "One might have imagined that with the fear of pregnancy permanently removed, and the unerotic paraphernalia of pills, rubber and ovulation arithmetic no longer necessary, sex would be freed for new and imaginative delights. The opposite has happened. Even men and women who would normally have no wish to breed apparently need the assurance that they could have a child if they wished" (James, *The Children of Men*, 167).

16 See Barbara Johnson, "Apostrophe, Animation, and Abortion," in *A World of Difference* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), 184–199.

17 Donald Wildmon, "Hope '97 Tour to Counter Pro-Homosexual Philosophy in American Culture," *American Family Association Action Alert*, 25 February 1997, http://www.cfinwed.com/HEADLINE.HTM.

18 Consider, in this regard, the controversy that followed Senator Rick Santorum's remarks to the Associated Press in April 2003 linking homosexuality with bigamy, incest, and the endangerment of the family. An op-ed piece in the *New York Times* taking issue with Santorum's comments could refute him only by echoing the discourse of familial values and reproductive futurism: "But gays and lesbians are more than just sons and daughters. We're moms and dads, too. My boyfriend and I adopted a son five years ago, and we plan to adopt again. As more same-sex couples start families, it's going to be harder for Republicans like Mr. Santorum to say we are somehow a threat to the American family." Dan Savage, "G.O.P. Hypocrisy," *New York Times*, 25 April 2003, A33.

19 There are many types of resistance for which, in writing a book like this, it is best to be prepared. One will be the defiantly "political" rejection of what some will read as an "apolitical" formalism, an insufficiently "historicized" intervention in the materiality of politics as we know it. That such versions of politics and history represent the compulsory norm this book is challenging will not, of course, prevent those espousing them from asserting their "radical" bona fides. A variant will assail the bourgeois privilege (variously described, in identitarian terms, as "white," "middle-class," "academic," or, most tellingly, "gay male") by which some will allege that my argument here is determined. That many of those proposing this reading will themselves be "white," "middle-class," and "academic"—and, perhaps, not a few "gay males"—will not disturb the ease with which such "determination" is affirmed. I have somewhat greater sympathy for those who might be inclined to dismiss the book for its language (which they'll call jargon), for its theoreti-

cal framework (which they'll view as elitist), for its difficulty (which they'll see as pretension), or for its style (which they'll find to be tortuous). These objections at least have the virtue of acknowledging a frustration of desire in the face of what is experienced as overpresence of a drive. "Somewhat greater" though it may be, however, my sympathy for even this form of response has its limits as well, I confess.

20 Martin Charnin (lyrics) and Charles Strouse (music), "Tomorrow," from *Annie* (1977).

21 See Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, "Some Binarisms (1)," in *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 128.

22 Lauren Berlant, *The Queen of America Goes to Washington City* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1997), 1.

23 Quoted by Kevin Sack in "Officials Look for Any Links in Bombings in Atlanta," *New York Times*, 2 February 1997, A13, New England ed.

24 Judith Butler, "The Lesbian Phallus and the Morphological Imaginary," in *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 62.

25 Lacan, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis, 1959–1960*, 212.

26 Paul de Man, *Aesthetic Ideology*, ed. Andrzej Warminski (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 179, 181.

27 Barbara Johnson, *The Wake of Deconstruction* (Cambridge, Mass.: Basil Blackwell, 1994), 98.

28 Thus Lacan observes that Freud "doesn't hesitate to make the point in *Civilization and its Discontents* that there is nothing in common between the satisfaction a *jouissance* affords in its original state and that which it gives in the indirect or even sublimated form that civilization obliges it to assume." See Lacan, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis, 1959–1960*, 199–200.

29 Lacan, *The Ego in Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis, 1954–1955*, 211.

30 Lee Edelman, *Homographesis: Essays in Gay Literary and Cultural Theory* (New York: Routledge, 1994), xv.

31 Ryan Slattery, "Cardinal Law Urges Menino to Veto Bill Giving Benefits to City Workers' Partners," *Boston Sunday Globe*, 17 March 1996, 68.

32 "Pope Warns Against 'Inauthentic' Version of Family," 26 January 2003, http://www/foxnews.com/story/0,2933,76598,00.html.

33 See John Brenkman's response to my original formulation of this argument: "Queer Post-Politics," *Narrative* 10 (2002): 177.

34 Guy Hocquenghem, *Homosexual Desire*, trans. Daniella Dangoor (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1993), 138, 147.

2. *SINTHOMOSEXUALITY*

1 The first two syllables of the word, therefore, should be pronounced as in the French *sinthome*, but the subsequent syllables should be pronounced as they would be in English. Hence: "san-TUM-o-SEX-u-al" and "san-TUM-o-sex-u-AL-ity."

2 As cited in Jean Baudrillard, *The Vital Illusion*, ed. Julia Witwer (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 87n. The quotation originally appeared in Elias Canetti, *Crowds and Power*, trans. Carol Stewart (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1984), 227.

3 Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan. Book XI: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Norton, 1981), 185.

4 Slavoj Žižek, " 'The Thing That Thinks': The Kantian Background of the Noir Subject," in *Shades of Noir*, ed. Joan Copjec (New York: Verso, 1993), 222.

5 "C'est une façon ancienne d'écrire ce qui a été, ultérieurement, écrit 'symptôme.' " Jacques Lacan, *Le Sinthome* (typescript of Seminar 23, 1975–76, University of Texas at Austin), 1. The translation is mine.

6 Reading this process of fixation in relation to Freudian theory's anticipation of Lacan's account of the sinthome, Paul Verhaeghe and Frédéric Declercq observe the priority of these definitive fixations over repression and its symptomatic traces: "A psychoanalytic cure removes repressions and lays bare drive-formations. These fixations can no longer be changed as such; the decisions of the body are irreversible. This is not the case for the positions of the subject toward the drive processes; these can be revised. There are two possibilities: whether the subject now accepts a form of jouissance that he earlier refused, or he confirms this refusal." Paul Verhaeghe and Frédéric Declercq, "Lacan's Analytic Goal: *Le sinthome* or the Feminine Way," in *Re-inventing the Symptom: Essays on the Final Lacan*, ed. Luke Thurston (New York: The Other Press, 2002), 63.

7 Dominiek Hoens and Ed Pluth, "The *sinthome*: A New Way of Writing an Old Problem?" in Thurston, *Re-inventing the Symptom*, 7. All subsequent references are to this edition; page numbers will be cited parenthetically.

8 Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (New York: Verso, 1989), 75.

9 Verhaeghe and Declercq, "Lacan's Analytic Goal," 67. All subsequent references are to this edition; page numbers will be cited parenthetically.

10 Marcel Proust, *Remembrance of Things Past*, trans. C. K. Scott Moncrieff and Terence Kilmartin (New York: Vintage Books, 1982), 1: 51.

11 Quoted in Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, 75.

12 Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, 75.