

Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*, Durham and London, Duke University Press, 2004, 191pp.

In *No Future*, Lee Edelman polemicizes the rhetoric of futurity underwriting a political discourse and social order that is, as he maintains, violently heteronormative. The connection among the political, the social and the heteronormative is evident in the figure of the Child, whose innocence 'we' are supposed to protect by fighting for a 'better' future. Acting in the name of the Child results in a shared investment in the future and thus secures identifications and collective beliefs in the present.

For Edelman, the 'reproductive futurism' expressed through the figure of the Child is problematic as it rejects those not seeking to live for or define themselves against the future (4). Queers, he argues, have a more problematic relationship with reproductive futurity and everything it entails. The main issue is not that queer sexuality is non-reproductive (even though it may very well be). More importantly, Edelman positions queerness within a Lacanian framework and associates it with negativity, the refusal to secure meaning through the anticipation of a single and stable future. In turn, queerness makes problematic stable constructions of the self and resists identity politics and social order.

The evocative quality of Edelman's book results from the fact that he forces his readers into an awareness of the pervasive rhetoric of futurity that has come to characterize not only mainstream political discourse, but also queer theory itself. Queer has often explicitly or implicitly been defined in terms of potentiality, as that which is not yet possible, thinkable or legible. In other words, queer has come to be associated with a present of disavowal and a future of possibility, offering hope to those who cannot yet exist in the present. Edelman, on the other hand, encourages his readers to stop reaching out for a future and to realize what is at stake in the very gesture of anticipatory hopefulness:

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 [...] 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)

If hopefulness can afford the queer realization and substantiation, it also results in yet another constitutive exclusion, another queer negation. To avoid this vicious circle, Edelman argues that queers should say 'no' to the future, to anticipation, and to hopefulness. Instead of finding ways of including queers within a liberal political discourse of reproductive futurism, Edelman calls for an embrace of queer negativity. He promotes an anti-relational stance that frees queers from the restrictions of a future horizon and thus allows them to enjoy the instability of personal and collective identities

and to find *jouissance* in the breakdown of singular meanings.

There are many reasons why *No Future* has become such a widely discussed text in recent years. Edelman addresses problematics queer theory has struggled with for a long time - such as identity politics, kinship dynamics, or social violence, to name but a few. Discussing these issues in terms of futurity allows Edelman to present an original and often surprising argument with far-reaching implications for queer theory. The fact that Edelman illustrates his ideas by turning to a variety of sources, including U.S. political discourse, novels by Charles Dickens and George Eliot, and Alfred Hitchcock's films, shows not only the pertinence of his claims, but also demonstrates the variety of disciplines within which his approach can be put to good use.

Ironically, the argument presented in *No Future* has proven to be suggestive enough to contribute to the very future of queer theory itself. While many scholars writing in the wake of Edelman continue to explore the implications of queer negativity expressed in the rejection of futurity, recent studies like Michael D. Snediker's *Queer Optimism* or José Esteban Muñoz' *Cruising Utopia* work productively against Edelman as they seek to align queerness with optimism and utopian hopefulness. What remains to be seen is how Edelman's argument translates to other fields of inquiry, such as feminist theory. How, for instance, do the effects of reproductive futurism manifest themselves in feminist theory? What is the role of the Child in feminist politics, and what are the implications of Edelman's rejection of futurity and hopefulness when it comes to feminism? Whether we decide to follow Edelman's example of rejecting the future or vehemently react against his polemic, *No Future* leaves no doubt that we cannot get around thinking critically about the uses and abuses of futurity.

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Works Cited

Muñoz, José Esteban. *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*. New York: New York University Press, 2009.

Snediker, Michael D. *Queer Optimism: Lyric Personhood and Other Felicitous Persuasions*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008.