

# Introduction

**THE LAMBDA NORDICA** special theme issue “Child” is an intervention to the intersection of childhood and sexuality. In recent years, the figure of the child has become visible in LGBTQ-politics and queer-theory in a new way. According to many LGBTQ activists, the possibility of having children, along with registered partnership or marriage, is a step towards equality between heterosexual and non-heterosexual people. In the more radical queer theory, especially within the so-called antisocial queer theory, presented by Lee Edelman in his book *No Future* (2004) however, this tendency of getting married and having babies has been seen as the latest development of normalisation and assimilation of non-heterosexual people. In Edelman’s theory, the cultural figure of the Child with capital C is seen as the symbol of all positive values that are attached to being human in our Western contemporary culture. Edelman claims that this has led to mystification of children: they are seen as untouchable and saint, as the prerequisite of making one’s life whole.

This special issue is tuned between two opposing poles: in the analysis of the child as an abstract concept or cultural figure that is loaded with values and meaning and real children who live in non-heterosexual families. The first two articles discuss the “Edelmanian” antisocial theory, the next two show how interpretations of images as “improper” often build on an underlying theory of childhood innocence, which is still the hegemonic discourse on childhood. The last two articles widen the perspective: the first discusses childishness or infantilism as fetish in adult feederist pornography. The latter indicates that the concept of child is not only grounded

in innocence, it is also grounded in heterosexuality and in heterosexual parenthood specifically.

The issue opens with an article by Harri Kalha, where he examines the usefulness of the controversial idea of antisocial theory, presented by Lee Edelman in his book *No Future* (2004), and in a number of lesser-known articles. Kalha connects Edelman's ideas to the analysis of cultural discourses, art practices, and societal reactions. The article, suggestively entitled "What the hell is the figure of the Child? Figuring out figurality in, around, and beyond Lee Edelman" shows, how panicky attitudes towards representations of nudity result in "speed-reading" of representations. Instead of explaining the harmfulness of these "disturbing images", these kinds of interpretations work to mystify the cultural figure of the Child.

The "Edelmanian" point of view is further examined in Lisa Downing's article "On the fantasy of childlessness as death in psychoanalysis and in Roeg's *Don't Look Now* and von Trier's *Antichrist*". The article explores the idea of childlessness and asks whether a loss of a child, or barrenness, are such universal human tragedies that they could be seen as symbolic equivalents of the death of the parents or would-be parents. Through a close-reading of three cultural products Downing argues that the commonly stated idea of futurism should be read as an ideological claim rather than as a universal emotional truth. Downing also shifts focus to the gendered politics of antisocial theory and its implications for feminism – a concern that is largely absent from Edelman's critique of reproductive futurism.

If the academic debate has centred on the politics of reproduction, the public debates, on the other hand, focus mostly on the moral panic over child sexual abuse caused by the intersection of childhood and sexuality. Annamari Vänskä's article "Seducing children?" analyses this kind of controversy through one Calvin Klein advertising campaign of children's underwear line from 1999. Even though the company saw it representing happy children, the public saw it as promotion of children's sexual abuse.

Vänskä traces the genealogy of the child abuse -argument and shows that it has been constructed through a re-reading of Sigmund Freud's "seduction theory" in the aftermath of sexual revolution in the 1970s and 1980s cultural climate of the United States.

Steven Angelides' article "What's behind child sex panics? The Bill Henson scandal" further examines the child abuse and kiddie porn -argumentation. This time around, the polemic erupted over an exhibition of the world-famous Australian photographer of adolescent children Bill Henson in 2008. His exhibition was closed down before it had even been opened due to a public controversy evoked by the opening night invitation featuring an image of a naked 13-year-old girl with budding breasts and hands covering her genitals. Analysing the case Angelides shows that the overt concern about protecting children from abuse masks an anxiety that Western societies are having extreme difficulty acknowledging: children's agentive sexual subjectivity.

Sexual subjectivity is also the focus in Katariina Kyrölä's article "Adults growing sideways: Feederist pornography and fantasies of infantilism". Kyrölä examines images of feederism and the practice of sexualised weight-gain in pornography, and shows how feederist imagery, which draws from the eroticization of infantilism in adult bodies, challenges gendered norms pertaining to body size, subjectivity and adult-child binaries. She states that if the child has traditionally represented the not-yet-subject, the infantilized adult growing sideways in feederist pornography can be seen as an aspirational no-longer-subject: simultaneously defiant to subjection and rejected from subjectivity.

The last article "Culturally queer, silenced in school? Children with LGBTQ parents, and the everyday politics of/in community and school" by Malena Gustavson and Irina Schmitt moves from representations to real children. The authors' focus is in school as a space, where notions and practices of subjectivity and family are negotiated. Their case study

exposes the heteronormativity of school: teachers rarely recognise non-normative family-structures and include them in teaching. The authors introduce the concept of “culturally queer” as a potentially useful framework for understanding the experiences of children and young people who have LGBTQ parents.

The front-cover of the issue is from the series “Twins”, a photographic project by the Finnish visual artist Heidi Lunabba. This and other pictures were taken in workshops investigating how clothes and other visual emblems are used to accentuate and define a child’s gender. Each child has been photographed as both a girl and a boy, and the two pictures have been digitally merged into a single image to make “twins”.

ANNAMARI VÄNSKÄ