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Gilles Dauvé

Alice in Monsterland

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Alice is in trouble.¹

6,000 people on this planet are determined to abduct, rape, torture and kill her.

6,000,000 are attracted to her in a way that might lead to some minimal physical contact, which very rarely results in her getting hurt or forced into anything. Actually, quite a few of these 6,000,000, like deacon Charles Dodgson, are happy just to take pictures of Alice or look at them.

6,000,000,000 earthlings are most unlikely to fall into the first category, but may very well partake of the second, often for a very short while, maybe once in their life, or possibly only in their mind.

6 billion of us are increasingly regarded by psychologists, cops, judges and reporters as if they could turn into those 6 millions, while these 6 millions are currently treated as if they acted like the 6 thousand. In the year 2001, Socrates would be witchhunted as a child molester, and Oxford University would sack Lewis Carroll as a child pornographer.

Paedophilia; paraphilia in which children are the preferred sexual object.

Paraphilia; a preference for unusual sexual practices.
(*Webster's dictionary*, 1993)

After Freud, it is hard to believe that there is such a thing as a clear cut easily defined "sexual object".

It would be absurd to include Don Juan and Juliet's Romeo in the same category of "lovers". Whoever enjoys torturing cats is zoophobic, not zoophilic. A man like Dutroux in Belgium was raping and killing teenage girls and women. A man like Andre Gide would make love to young boys. Why amalgamate two utterly different types of behaviour in the same notion of "paedophilia"? Only Law and Order politicians call "drug addicts" both the hash smoker and the person who needs his fix twice a day. "Paedophilia" is just as intellectually relevant as "drug use". We're all paraphiliac.

¹ This is an abridged and modified version of *Autre Temps*, written in French by J.-P. Carasso, G.Dauve, D.Martineau, K.Nesic, published by troploin, May 2001. See also libcom.org (*For a World Without Moral Order*).

Kids are indeed mistreated in this world, in more ways than one. Some are marked for life by a forced sexual encounter in their youth. Lots are scarred by their family (in whose protective-repressive womb most unwanted sex occurs).

Our world deals with sexual horror as with all others. It perpetuates those conditions that breed it, puts it into words and behind walls, acts as if we were safe, and moralizes us while waiting for it to re-emerge.

Nobody denies the existence of child sexuality any more: Freud can't be as easily suppressed as Reich. But this sexuality is turned into a fortress no one has access to. Can we imagine, as in *Brave New World*, a father, a mother, a teacher or a social worker discreetly closing the door behind which two boys, or two girls, or a boy and a girl both aged 12, would be engaged in some sex play? The *Sun* reader would smack the kids, the *Guardian* reader would gently lecture them, and the young ones would probably pay a visit to the psychologist's office. Children's right to their own sex life means prohibition. Adults legally reserve themselves one single right over sexuality between children: to ban it altogether. Better forbid a sex act than risk sex abuse, that's the logic.

The same logic would justify a strict regulation of adult sex relationships, which can involve violence. Let's see for a moment adult sex as child-adult sex is usually perceived, i.e. only in its villainous and bloody aspects. Then any male should regard himself as a potential Jack The Ripper, and any wife should fear to be penetrated against her will by her husband every night.

This civilization is incapable of addressing child-adult relationships.

“What we call a child today, is our regret for the loss of an immediate relation with the world, of a connection between the intimate and the exterior: when Otherness, be it a human being, a rotten leaf, a river going through a copse or a dead owl in the attic, appeared in such plenitude that it formed part of us and enveloped us. Childhood is our sorrow for having had to undo all this, and is also the means to take revenge: I love

Well-wishers want to give the child the same rights as the adult (plus a few more): they draw the logical conclusion from the fact that children's situation reflects our general conditions of life — except it's worse for children.

As long as money rules, human beings will be bought and sold, there's no reason kids should escape this if they're marketable, and a whole host of remedies will only regulate the traffic: commodity with a human face.

Law never goes against the foundations of society. Some Greek philosophers refuted the existence of the gods; hardly any opposed slavery.

This society holds as a principle that sexual consent on the part of a child is not valid, because he can't know what he really wants and needs. But his needs and wants are considered valid when they concern his right to buy and enjoy. In the very same way as the customer is said to be always right, so the child is supposed to be. The child exists as a separate category which is a sad caricature of the adult. A boy or girl of 5 is increasingly treated like the rest of us capitalized human beings: he or she is a consumer, and is given rights, which are of course imposed as much as guaranteed.

One of the worst things that can be done to a human being is to treat him as if he existed only in order to be protected. Worse still, if his acts are banned in the name of his own freedom.

A child's rights are absolute as he is held irresponsible of anything. When society, i.e. the State grants him its complete protection, it deprives him of any autonomy. He's given every right, except the right to know what he wants, in other words the right that would give some content to all the other rights.

There's no better definition of that modern invention, childhood. A child stops being a child as he enters the age when he can be sent to prison.

Alice is in trouble, deep trouble.

how to buy, sell, get rich (in Monopoly money), compare their profits, etc. Certainly it's more pleasant for a 7 year old boy or girl to learn to be a boss in Denver, than spend 60 hours a week in a Peshawar sweatshop. The problem is, one implies the other. The moral critique will never realize the world is *one*.

Intellectuals are fond of Marx's phrase on "the icy water of ego-tistical calculation" that drowns "the most heavenly ecstasies of religious fervour, of chivalrous enthusiasm, of Philistine sentimentalism". They love it because they think it only applies to what they don't believe in any more, because capitalism has already gone beyond it: the glory of dying on the battlefield for King and Country, the virtues of colonialism, or the Biblical father image. They fail to realize that the very same process applies to those most heavenly modern ecstasies, parental love for instance.

"The bourgeois claptrap about the family and education, about the hallowed correlation of parents and child, becomes all the more disgusting, as through modern industry, all the family ties among the proletarians are torn asunder, and their children transformed into mere articles of commerce and instruments of labour.

But you Communists would introduce community of women, screams the bourgeoisie in chorus.

The bourgeois sees his wife as a mere instrument of production. He hears that instruments of production are to be exploited in common, and, naturally, can come to no other conclusion than the lot of being common to all will likewise fall to the women.

He has not even a suspicion that the real point aimed at is to do away with the status of women as mere instruments of production." (*Communist Manifesto*)

153 years later, that situation has not ended: it's been extended to everyone. Aren't we all, man, woman, child, "instruments of production"? Most Western women are wage-earners. A 12 year old no longer walks into the spinning mill, but into a school that's more and more defined as a place to get a training to get a *job*. Sexual exploitation of kids is only the most visible and obnoxious form of their transformation into "mere articles of commerce".³

³ While Western good conscience denounces the exploitation of child labour in poor countries, US (and soon European and Japanese) primary school kids are taught

the child because he is my childhood, and hate him because he points to my vanished childhood."²

We are neither born guilty nor innocent. There is no happy benevolent nature that would spontaneously choose altruism against selfishness, and cooperation against aggression. It is an illusion to suppose that human creatures are born good, then only perverted under the pressure of authority, class and State, until their underlying basic goodness is set free from the chains of repression. This vision merely takes as its starting point the original sin creed (whereby man is always inclined to ignore or enslave his neighbour, and only acts socially through the Law), and turns it upside down. Although the "optimistic" outlook is more palatable than its "pessimistic" counterpart, a human perspective has to supersede this symmetrical opposition.

Crime and violence cannot all be explained by the material and mental shackles of class. The freest society will never do away with the possibility of "anti-social" behaviour. But a *Gemeinwesen*, a being-together might reduce it to a minimum (whereas exploitation societies multiply it), and be able to live with it, to re-absorb most of it (whereas exploitation societies sweep it under the carpet). Communism might witness crimes, probably not the concept of the "criminal".

The question: What would become of child-adult relation in "communism"?, can only be answered by questioning the question. Marx opposed ideal Utopian plans (which often contained illuminating insights) with the *critique* of the existing social and mental order: critique of philosophy and Law, critique of the Jewish question, critique of economy . . .

Any present solution to the problem is wrong, because it is based on "child" and "adult" as they are currently defined. All we know is that a child is not a miniature adult. An insurmountable difference separates and binds them. The problem arises precisely because this distance gradually disappears as the child grows up, as it does not, for instance, between humans and animals.

² C.Gallaz, *L'Infini*, n.59, 1997.

What is to be done? Kids don't live on another planet. There is a child sexuality, and even mutual seduction between child and adult, but everything is not possible at every age. I talk to a baby who is still unable to reply in words: I don't read him *The Society of the Spectacle*.

As regards sex as well as other matters, "public debate" means nothing but us being presented with pressing issues waiting for their solutions: mad cows, work harassment, global warming, paedophilia, speculation, etc. Each of them contains an element of factual truth, set in such a way as to lead to a variety of answers all within the scope of what present society can understand and admit. The State usually proposes central control, and the left even more of it, albeit in democratic forms.

People like the writers of this text are regarded by reformers as impractical out-of-the-worldists. Yet everyone has to be judged according to his own values: let's ask the realists about their own achievement. If we listen to a whole army of criminologists, sociologists and social workers, in spite of their dedicated efforts over several decades, what is known as paedophilia is reported to be on the increase. Couldn't it be that this society reinforces the evils it pretends to cure, and instead of solving them shifts them from one place to another? It regulates capital by developing State power and oligopolies that eventually lead to deeper crises. It gets rid of crime by putting more and more people in jails that breed criminals. It decreases pollution by new technologies that portend alternative disasters.

Let those who have a vested interest in the continuation of this world take part in such debates. We have no solution to what present society describes as its most pressing emergencies.

The paedophilia issue is as much a product of this world as any other. Childhood as we know it is a creation of modern times. Most traditional societies, for better or worse, thought of kids as young adults. Industrialization separated work from non-work, productive time from other social acts, and created a much more rigid division between the non-worker and the worker, leading to a growing differentiation between child and adult. (This was also the time when "retirement" came into existence.) Early industrialists used child

labour inasmuch as they made profit out of cheap unskilled labour in general, women and children particularly. When kids ceased to be exploitable (partly under workers' pressure), society "discovered" childhood as a totally distinct moment in life, one that has to be socialized and systematically taught (whereas before only a minority got some schooling). Over a century later, consumer society "discovered" teenagehood as a specific phase requiring special attention, and of course mobilizing its own experts.

Classical revolutionary theory defines the proletarian as having no reserves and only possessing his offspring, his lineage (*proles*). If this is true, then one must view our age as that of mass proletarianization. Our contemporaries behave as if their kid was their prime concern, but in practice buy him a lot and ban the essential. He has a life of pocket money + compulsory schooling + no open sex. Isn't that close to treating him as if they own him? Unfortunately for the family balance, such a possession is proving more and more volatile. The set roles of the traditional family belong to the past. The age old patriarchal hierarchy is being gradually replaced by a direct submission of everyone, young or old, male or female, to capitalist logic.

Families are no longer meant to be an object of love (or hate, as Andre Gide asserted over a century ago), but are more simply lived with and, as a bestseller says, survived. Thanks to capital's "practical critique" of the family, women have been liberated from the role of housewife and become wage-earners. It's quite common for mother and father to be separated. The nuclear unit is on the wane, replaced by looser forms, such as the single mother living on welfare. Kids are now likely to be in creches or cared for by child minders.

This increased fragmentation has gradually turned experiments like the 60's and 70's communes into alternative lifestyles.

It also makes the child more isolated, fragile or volatile, often unmanageable: hence a new "social problem". Whether politicians talk of controlling violent youth gangs or protecting innocent children, the obsession is the same. A society that does not know how to relate to its kids shows it no longer believes in its own reproduction.

Children are only made sacred nowadays because too much is at stake there, especially in a world that is desecrating everything.