

I got married in June. After a year of stressful planning and financial bleeding, the day finally came. Much to my surprise, all the clichés turned out to be true: It was the most joyous day of my life. A moment of clarity so rare that the memory of the feeling it evoked is utterly clear, despite the blurring of my memories of its details.

Artworks

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In the lead up to the wedding, countless friends and associates pressed me to answer the loaded question: "Why get married?" The more cynical, and ultimately less malicious, of these inquiries were related to more practical considerations.

"It's so expensive!"
"Do you really need a ring to know that you love each other?"
"You're young and handsome, are you sure you're ready for a lifelong commitment?"

The more troublesome of these questions, however, was followed up with broader, more philosophical, and suspiciously self-righteous argumentation. "How could you possibly bring a family into this world?" asked a young woman. "A world that will soon be under water and without resources?"

What is it with the liberals of today and their tendency towards bottomless nihilism? I mean, sure. On some level, I get it. The failures of our own political system have never been more obvious. Political hostility and polarizing divisions amongst Western citizenry appear to be so malevolent that it's a wonder we haven't started murdering each other en masse already. And, of course, science predicts that global warming of 1.6 degrees Celsius is less than a decade away.

Terror. Anxiety. The end of the world is nigh!

But the end world has always been nigh. Society has always, excuse my reductive language, been fucked. Last year, I read philosopher Thomas Moynihan's *X Risk*, which examines the rise of existential and apocalyptic thinking amongst the humans of today, and thought: Maybe the reason we as a species are pondering our own demise so frequently has less to do with harsh realities unique to our era and more to do with the fact that we have been technologically enabled to be morbidly self-attentive?

We are hardly the first generation of mankind to face disturbing threats that challenge our sense of safety (the sense that is delusional to begin with). During the Bubonic Plague, tens of millions of Europeans perished, skyrocketing the continent's mortality rate. Surprisingly, however, the birth rates around that period remained relatively stable, almost as if mankind intuitively understood that it necessitated reproduction if it was to survive going forward. Conversely, declining birth rates during the first centuries following the death of Christ are consistent with the slow collapse of Rome. Rome became a victim of its own decadence and nihilism — Emperor Augustus even legalized divorce to dissuade husbands from having sex with prostitutes as a way to manage the decline of the population — so decadence, nihilism, and their attendant birth rates can be said to signal the demise of a once glorious civilization.

If this is true, then we are in deep trouble. In the face of eroding infrastructure and probable ecological decline, just as many people are dejected and questioning the purpose of raising a family in this world as there are demonstrating resolve and strength in the face of such civilizational uncertainty. It's almost as if the extreme narcissism that has been nourished by both the West's undeniable declining living standards and the peculiar disoriented and unsettled atmosphere of platform capitalism have made the extremely pessimistic and anti-natalist viewpoints of previously fringe (but highly interesting) thinkers like Peter Wessel Zapffe more mainstream than I'd have ever thought possible.

Cultural history, as well as observation of ourselves and others, allow the following answer: Most people learn to save themselves by artificially limiting the

content of consciousness," writes Zapffe [3] in his iconic essay "The Last Messiah," arguing that humans either need to march forward into self-oblivion OR limit the terms of their own consciousness, which he considered to be a tragic misstep in evolution that made us vulnerable to our thoughts in a way that no non-intelligent species ever is.

One can understand where Zapffe was coming from, just as one can understand the deep despair and hopelessness that is plaguing humanity today. Nevertheless, anti-natalism is hardly practical. In brutal honesty, it is an absurd fantasy. The world will keep turning, life will move on. And yet, urban liberals seem to denigrate the idea of having large families. I even find myself wondering upon seeing a family with many children: "How the fuck are you able to afford this?"

And that's the problem: At this stage in liberalism's development, we are being inculcated with sentiments that lean Malthusian, at the least, if not outright anti-natalist, at the most. Feminism, for instance, hasn't resulted as much in equal opportunities for women and men as it ideologically justified the double-income family. While women are instilled with a doctrine that values work outside the home and financial independence, households in America are not provided with the infrastructural support to cover the domestic duties. It is one of the most convenient contradictions of contemporary liberal capitalist states that society constantly feigns its support of mothers, yet the role of stay-at-home mom appears to be the most culturally shamed. How many TV shows are there about working mothers? *The Good Wife*. *Better Things*. *Gilmore Girls*. *SMILF*. How many shows are there about full-time mothers? I don't think there is one.

When you look at these social trends and inculcated dogmatic leanings and compound them with our recent economic and political crises, it's no surprise that we now have declining birth rates for the first time in generations. I find all this to be depressing. The world has always been a miserable and vicious place, full of war, famine, disease, poverty, cruelty, addiction and mass death. We are not special in this regard. But whereas previous civilizations were technologically disconnected enough to disregard the social rot around them and to live their lives, we have apocalyptic messages beamed directly into our heads all day every day (literally, through our phones) and, as a result, are becoming self-obsessed, politics-crazed nihilists incapable of soldiering on and finding our own peace and happiness. The world feels almost impossible to change, but we CAN change ourselves. We must find fortitude. And we can hope to find love.

In early 20th century artist Paul Klee's *The Thinking Eye*, the painter explains his aesthetic theory as well as his poetics. Aligned with the poetics of contradiction, with Rilke, Mallarmé, Poe and others, he believed that reality was fundamentally empty, but that we are also inescapably aware of the fact that we exist, nonetheless. Klee believed that the only way to bridge this gap, to reconcile this contradiction, and to fill the void of meaninglessness was through acts of artistic creation that tether you to the here and now through time and space. But art is not the only entry point to beauty, and for most people, the way to close this contradiction is through love. To give yourself over to another human being, to transcend your own egoistical drive and to lose yourself in the loving embrace of another, is one's greatest weapon in the war against despair.

So, why did I get married? Because I fell in love. Why do I want to have children, despite the hardships that the contemporary world presents? Because the future only exists with children. Why am I (mostly) happy? Because I found my own personal peace against a calamitous and cruel world. Why do I think the world will be OK? I don't, but that's OK, because I am loved.

SOURCES

- [1] Mary Shelly, *The Last Man*, Oxford University Press, 1998
- [2] Andrea Pensotti, "Where is Science Going? An Interview with Giorgio Agamben", Quodlibet, February 2021
- [3] Peter Wessel Zapffe, "The Last Messiah", Philosophy Now, 1933





Vas Differends (Rigged #8), 2021
Courtesy of the artist and Kraupa-Tuskany Zeidler, Berlin



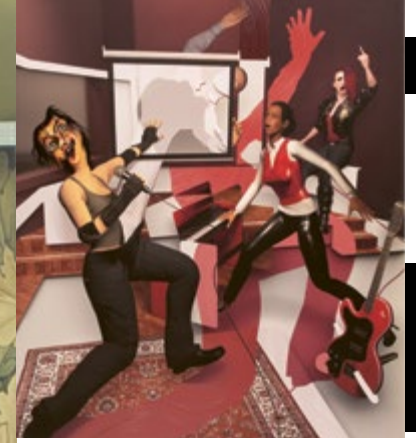
Unicorn Beach Platform (Rigged #15), 2021
Courtesy of the artist and Kraupa-Tuskany Zeidler, Berlin



Pissy Duet (Rigged #25), 2022
Courtesy of the artist and Petzel, New York



The Suit (Rigged #1), 2021
Courtesy of the artist and Kraupa-Tuskany Zeidler, Berlin



Join the Livestream! (Rigged #9), 2021
Courtesy of the artist and Kraupa-Tuskany Zeidler, Berlin



The Architect of Wheelbarrow Park (Rigged #22), 2022
Courtesy of the artist and Petzel, New York