THE PALGRAVE LACAN SERIES
SERIES EDITORS: CALUM NEILL · DEREK HOOK

Lacan's Cruelty

Perversion beyond Philosophy, Culture and Clinic

Edited by
MEERA LEE

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A Perverse Fascination for Death and Jouissance: Bataille, Lacan and the Anti-social Turn in Queer Theory

Frédéric Baitinger

To the question "Is sex worth dying for?" Kant's answer is categoric. No rational man, applying to his action the moral maxim of his pure practical reason, would be willing to die for his lustful inclination.[1] However, according to Lacan, it would suffice to substitute for the idea of pleasure the one of jouissance for the whole example to be ruined.[2] Because jouissance, contrary to what one may think, should not be confused with the idea of pleasure, since it is always tie to an unconscious imperative to "enjoy," even when to "enjoy" means to suffer! Such is the cruel paradox that lies at the very heart of the notion of jouissance, and what makes of Kant's famous example of the Gallows man, an example that simply ignores the sinful nature of jouissance, which is to say the secret link that unites the notion of jouissance to the one of the death drive.

Lacan, in his famous text "Kant with Sade," went even further and argued that the structure of the moral subject, as defined by Kant in *The Critique of Practical Reason*, was similar to the structure of the subject

F. Baitinger (✉)
The Research Chair in Philosophy at the Hospital, GHU Psychiatry and Neuroscience, Paris, France

M. Lee (ed.), *Lacan's Cruelty*, The Palgrave Lacan Series,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-06238-4_5

implied by the maxim defended by the marquis de Sade, both of them implying a subject gaining its agency out of a form of cruelty powered by the death drive.[3] Expanding on this idea in a text called "The Unconscious and the Speaking Body," Jacques-Alain Miller ventured for his part that the paradigm of our time was no longer the one of repression, so well analyzed by Freud in *Civilization and its Discontent* (1930), but the one of perversion, inasmuch as perversion implies the same structure, which is to say the same injunction coming from the super-ego, although this time it orders us to enjoy, to unleash our fantasies, to act upon them, even when theses fantasies keep disappointing us.[4]

And finally, it is as a reaction to this shift of paradigm (from repression to perversion) that some recent queer scholars belonging to what Jack Halberstam has called, "the Anti-Social Thesis in Queer Theory,"[5] made a return to Lacan's insight about jouissance and its relation to the death drive to support their right to opt out, which is to say to oppose the Imaginary injunction of the neoliberal super-ego to enjoy, to be happy, to keep working and consuming in agreement with the discourse of the master.[6]

If we look, indeed, at the work of one of its best representative, Lee Edelman, and pay particular attention to the way in which, in *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*, Edelman mobilizes Lacan's teaching, one can see that he does so to make visible the fact that the word queer does not refer only to the LGBTIQ++ movement and its political quest for recognition, but also to what incarnates the presence within society of the death drive. To substantiate his claim, Edelman uses one of Lacan's late inventions, the sinthome, to create a new term, sinthomosexuality, to which he assigns the task of conveying the idea that within queerness lies the sinthome, which "as a stupid enjoyment, as the node of senseless compulsion on which the subject's singularity depends—connects us to something Real beyond the 'discourse' of the symptom, connects us to the unsymbolyzable Thing over which we constantly stumble, and so, in turn, to the death drive, about which Lacan declares in his seminar devoted to the sinthome: 'The death drive, it is the Real in so far as it can only be thought as Impossible, which is to say that each time it shows the tip of its nose it is unthinkable.'"[7] By forging the word sinthomosexuality, Edelman makes apparent at the level of the letter the proximity between

what remains meaningless in queerness[8] and the meaninglessness of one's own opaque mode of jouissance,[9] which, in turn, leads Edelman to advocate in favor of a queer politics that would not be framed by the meaningful framework of "reproductive futurism," but by what could be called, after Georges Bataille and its rereading by Derrida, an "expenditure without reserve."[10]

However, is this articulation put forth by Edelman and other anti-relational queer scholars between the death drive, the sinthome, the Real and the Bataillant notion of "expenditure without reserve," the only one capable of subverting the cruel optimism that lies at the core of "reproductive futurism"? Or is such articulation hiding a potential misunderstanding of the Lacanian notion of the sinthome and its articulation with the meaninglessness of jouissance and the death drive? To explore these questions, this chapter will show first how Georges Bataille's thinking, which was redescribed by Shannon Winnubst as pre-queer scholarship, foreshadowed through his definition of inner experience, the notion of queerness defended by Edelman and other anti-social thinkers.[11] Second, it will explain why Bataille's definition of inner experience, which was characterized by Allan Stoekl[12] as an urtext for Derrida's deconstruction, also furnished the basis upon which Lacan developed his notion of the Real,[13] and conceived his late approach to jouissance, which is at once an approach that takes into account, as Bataille and anti-social thinkers do, what unites the notion of jouissance to the one of the death drive,[14] but that is also working at "limiting" the cruelty and the morbidity contained in jouissance through one of Lacan's late clinical inventions: the "know how" [savoir faire].

Bataille's Queerness and the Death Drive

When Bataille wrote his book *Inner Experience* (1943) during the Second World War, he had the ambition to elaborate, very much like Edelman, a subjective experience that would not be subordinated to any form of salvation, and thus to any form of socially acceptable fantasies about what is good and what is evil. Because fantasies, according to Bataille, are always, in one way or another, what assigns to our jouissance its limits, which is

why *inner experience*, as *queerness* for Edelman, opposes the power of fantasies when fantasies pretend to rule over jouissance. The crux of the matter being to recognize the limits that the Imaginary is imposing on jouissance in so far as it is linked to the negativity of the death drive. Which is also why, concludes Bataille, "no inner experience is possible for those who allow themselves to be dominated by pleasure and pain."[15] For to be dominated by pleasure and pain is to be dominated by the *pleasure principle*, and thus by the commonly accepted fantasies that work in agreement with this principle.[16] Unbound from such fantasies, Bataille's *inner experience*, like Edelman's anti-social sinthomosexuality, aspire to "naturally exceed the subordination of human life to the search from pleasure, to the flight from pain. It postulates a positive value beyond pleasure."[17]

Of course, to give a "positive value" to what stands beyond the pleasure principle is the "true" difficulty that weighs down the notion of inner experience, as well as what makes problematic the anti-social turn defended by Edelman and other queer scholars.[18] Well aware of this conundrum, Bataille admits that "the essential difficulty begins here. The search for a beyond in relation to immediate interests appears from the beginning as a principle of contestation."[19] Normally, what rules over human experience is what Bataille calls the possible and Edelman the Child.[20] The possible is equated by Bataille to the realm of organic life and its development in a favorable setting. The impossible, or queerness for Edelman, on the contrary, is equated to the presence of death in life. This is why we generally associate the possible with what is good, and the impossible with evil. As such, one could say that there exists a profound agreement between human experience and the possible, and that this agreement is what fuels human belief in God, or in authoritative figures thanks to whom the realm of the impossible is turned into an illusion, into a test imposed on men before eternal life. Bataille writes, "there is not an impossible if God exists, or at least the impossible is illusory: it is a test imposed on man while the triumph of the possible is given in advance."[21] As soon as the idea of God is given existence, its existence casts away the very possibility of the impossible as the expression of contingency, and substitutes for it something that has to do with man's guilt and misbehavior first, and then with the idea of salvation. Salvation

being, for Bataille, the element in every religious system that indicates the will to escape the confrontation with the impossible. Likewise, for Edelman, the Child is the element in every political system that indicates the will to escape the confrontation with queerness, which is to say with "the place of the social order death drive."[22]

This is why Bataille's *inner experience*, just like Edelman's definition of queerness, by "asserting itself against futurity,"[23] is an experience that implies renouncing any desire for salvation or political recognition, as well as an experience that implies renouncing the most laudable illusion—happiness. For happiness, just like salvation or political recognition, reduces life to the realm of the possible and, consequently, rejects outside politics the presence of the death drive. Consequently, to affirm the possibility of *inner experience*, or *queerness* is to affirm that such presence cannot be completely overthrown. Even if we imagine, like Hegel or Fukuyama, the end of history as a moment of complete victory of the possible over the impossible, a certain remainder will persist. As Bataille states in "Nietzsche's Laughter,"

> an impossible exists in man that nothing will reduce, the same, in a fundamental way, for the happiest and for the most disinherited. The difference is in the illusion; happiness is no doubt a desirable form of illusion, but happiness can only defer the deadline. As we cannot limit ourselves to postponing the deadline, in the end, we can only face the impossible.[24]

The deadline that happiness (as an illusion) is postponing is the one of becoming fully conscious of the fact that at the very core of life does not stand the Good and the possible but, as the Marquis de Sade's works show, the impossible.

However, what is important to notice is that the impossible can be recognized only if the possible, or the fantasy of "reproductive futurism" for Edelman, has been also recognized as such. For if the possible is not recognized first, it will tend to deny the very existence of the impossible through the concept of salvation, or through the concept of the Good, or through the concept of the Child. And, reciprocally, the impossible, if not recognized as such, would be reduced to the domain of evil (from a religious point of view), instead of marking the place of the Real and the

death drive. Bataille writes: "The impossible needs the possible from which to be disengaged. Salvation is the possible required by the mind for a confrontation with the impossible. But in salvation, the possible is the end of the impossible: it is therefore the evasion of the impossible."[25] The impossible or queerness is thus something that is inconceivable without the possible that constantly strives to reduce it to its own domain. And, reciprocally, the possible is what produces logically the impossible each time it fails to embrace what goes beyond it, or each time it discovers elements that cannot be reintegrated in its larger "positive" and thus meaningful narrative.

In "The Use-Value of D.A.F de Sade (An Open Letter to My Current Comrades)"[26] Bataille connects his reflection on the impossible to Sade's vision of morals, and gives to it a *use-value* that is not easy to grasp. For Sade's teaching is not addressed to the "normal man," nor is Edelman's teaching on queerness, in so far as the "normal man," submitted to "fear," and more broadly to the castration complex or the fantasy of "reproductive futurism," can only feel but disgust toward Sade's vision of the world. "The figure of Sade," writes Bataille, "is certainly unsympathetic to people moved by need and by fear. The sympathies and the dreads—the cowardice too, one must add—which determine man's usual behavior are diametrically opposed to the passion responsible for the sovereignty of the voluptuary."[27] Which is why, if one wants to discover the use-value of Sade, one has to learn how to think *with Sade*, which means that one has to learn how to think the human condition by putting at its very core the impossible, or queerness as Edelman defines it. Bataille writes:

> Without a profound complicity with natural forces such as violent death, gushing blood, sudden catastrophes and the horrible cries of pain that accompany them, terrifying ruptures of what had seemed to be immutable, the fall into stinking filth of what had been elevated–without a sadistic understanding of an incontestably thundering and torrential nature, there could be no revolutionaries, there could only be a revolting utopian sentimentality.[28]

But to come to terms with this sadistic understanding, it is first necessary to acknowledge that Sade's experience is grounded on a paradox. Put in a

syllogism, this paradox goes as follows. If life is the pursuit of pleasure, and if the intensity of pleasure is a direct ratio of the destruction of life, then life can only reach its highest intensity through a monstrous denial of its own principle. To make the paradox more vivid, it is important to connect its first part—the pursuit of pleasure—to the fact that Sade's heroes have to destroy in themselves all the limits that society has tried to impose on their pursuit of pleasure. And second, that they have to come to terms with the "odd" fact that they have to apply to themselves the very principle that they use to subject others to their quest of pleasure. In other words, to make room for the impossible in their life, Sade's heroes have not only to deny the existence of others, but they have also to be able to fully deny their own existence. For it is only on that condition—which defines the condition of perversion for Lacan—that Sade's world becomes not only a world divided into victims and torturers, but a world where each torturer accepts, in the name of the impossible, to be the victim of someone else's pursuit of pleasure. Which is why Sade's world is a world in which the possible and the impossible are not only connected to one another, but one in which they ceaselessly pass into one another. In this regard, Sade's apathy should not be confused, as it is often the case, with a purely selfish quest for unlimited pleasure, but praised as a "moral" experience that requires a form of inner cruelty that is at the service of what Bataille calls "communication."

To illustrate his concept of communication, Bataille proposes, in "Discussion on Sin," a re-reading of the sacrifice of Christ on the Cross as a form of Sadean apathy.[29] From a Christian's point of view, this sacrifice represents the summit of evilness. Men, by accomplishing this act, not only killed an innocent man, but they also killed the Son of God himself. Nonetheless, it is also through this crime that the being of God was wounded by men for the first time, and that the being of men, in return, got wounded by God. Through the culpability that His murder generated in them (Felix Culpa!), men and God broke their isolation and started to "communicate" with one another. Which leads Bataille to conclude that "it thus becomes visible from here that the 'communication' between separate being is rendered possible by evil. Human beings, without the presence of evil, would be encapsulated within themselves, locked up in their independent sphere."[30] But if it is true, it also means that

human beings are facing an "impossible" moral situation. They can either persevere in their own being at the price of maintaining their fundamental isolation from one another, or they can try to "communicate" with one another by taking the risk of violating their integrity as well as the integrity of others. In both cases, however, what is at stake is the way in which the death drive can be taken into account, and used to create a community of beings that are either the victims of their own cruelty, or the agent of a cruel and potentially perverse quest for communication and selflessness.

Bataille with Lacan: The Paradox of Jouissance

To understand how Bataille's thinking about the impossible, as well as his reading of Sade, had an influence on Lacan's own approach to ethics and jouissance, one has to understand, first, how Lacan considered the work of Sade, and the kind of misunderstanding that it could potentially engender, and especially in the thinking of "pioneers or militants embracing a radical position" like Bataille and Edelman.

Lacan, right at the opening of a lesson devoted to the question of "Jouissance and transgression," during his seminar year on *The Ethics of psychoanalysis*, says:

> I would like at least during this lecture to clear up the misunderstanding that might occur because we are dealing with Sade, and it might be thought that that constitutes a wholly external way of looking upon ourselves as pioneers or militants embracing a radical position. Such a view implies that, as a result of our function or profession, we are destined to embrace extremes, so to speak, and that Sade in this respect is our progenitor or precursor, who supposedly opened up some impasse, aberration or aporia, in that domain of ethics we have chosen to explore this year, and that we would be well-advised to follow him. It is very important to clear up that misunderstanding, which is related to a number of others I am struggling against in order to make some progress here before you.[31]

It is, I suppose, a fair guess to identify, under the periphrasis "militants embracing a radical position," not only the surrealists who praised Sade after Breton, but Bataille himself who was one of the few who took Sade's aberration very seriously. However, in order to be able to explain in more detail what Lacan is reproaching Bataille for and, indirectly, what Lacan would have perhaps reproached the "anti-social turn" in queer theory for, it is necessary to articulate better the relationship between the work of Kant, Sade and Freud.

In his text "Kant with Sade," Lacan introduced three thesis regarding the works of Kant, Sade and Freud.[32] In the first one, Lacan stated that "Sade did indeed begin the groundwork that was to progress for a hundred years in the depth of the taste in order for Freud's path to be passable,"[33] which is to say for Freud to be able to enunciate his pleasure principle without having to indicate what distinguishes it from the function of pleasure in traditional ethics. In his second thesis, Lacan put forward the idea that Sade's works were also representing, in this regard, the first step of an ethical subversion of which Kant marks the turning point. And finally, in his third thesis, Lacan ventured the idea that Sade's *Philosophy in the Bedroom* (1795) was not only consistent with Kant's *Critique of Practical Reason* (1788), but "it yields the truth of the Critique."[34] To justify his first thesis, Lacan argued that it was thanks to Sade's work that the Good lost its natural attraction and that Freud, freed from this bias, was finally able to approach scientifically the question of pleasure. To justify his second thesis about Kant's relation to Sade, Lacan underlined that Kant was in fact the first one to contest the natural attractiveness of the Good, which is to say the old link between the Supreme Good and the Supreme Truth on which the tradition of antiquity (of discriminating taste for various kinds of objects) was grounded. And by contesting this natural connection, Kant not only generated a kind of Terror in the field of ethics, but he also created a void; "The void of all that is 'pathological' in the subject. Pathological meaning, here, pathos, emotion, all the subject's sensory interests, everything that gives pleasure" as Miller puts it in "A discussion on Lacan's Kant with Sade,"[35] as well as a void that he filled with an inner "voice"—the voice of the super-ego—which he made appear at the very moment of the disappearance of the object. The Voice formulates an imperative. And the subject obeys it.

Which brings us to Lacan's third thesis about Sade's relation to Kant, which Lacan justified by saying that while the Voice, in Kant's work, presents itself as an auto-affection of the subject, in Sade's work, it reveals its true nature in so far as Sade's paradox, as Bataille described it, exhibits the inner division of the subject, while making the sadistic component of the super-ego visible, and not hidden in the depth of the moral subject. In the formulation, "I have the right to enjoy any parts of your body," the "I" is not the one of the one speaking, but the "I" of the one who will abuse. This is why the subject is split in two parts. Thus, the subject is no longer S, but $ as it is split between the Other and itself. In Sade's characters, the law reveals itself as being the inverse of desire and vice versa since what we call duty (moral duty) is connected to the drives and libidinal enjoyment. Miller writes:

> Hence, my client is much more honest than Kant. Kant leads us to believe that the subject is speaking to himself, enunciating a law that terrorizes him. Whereas Sade presents us with a formulation in which the distinction between subject and other is explicit. He reveals the division of the subject, whereas Kant makes us think it is an auto-affectation.[36]

From there, one can conclude that Bataille's reading of Sade prefigured, in a way, the one of Lacan in the sense that it also emphasized what was related, in Sade's apathy, to Kant's rejection of the old link between the supreme Good and the supreme Truth. But Lacan's reading of Sade differs from the one of Bataille in as much as Lacan does not make of Sade's experience of apathy the product of a transgression of the moral law, but rather what reveals the division of the subject, and the impact of the sadistic super-ego on the subject's mode of jouissance.[37] More importantly, Lacan's reading of Sade leads also to questioning the potentially perverse nature of Bataille's effort to think with Sade, and especially when it comes to articulating between the notion of jouissance and the notion of knowledge, since Bataille's inner experience, like Edelman's experience of queerness, is not only opposed to knowledge when knowledge claims to rule over experience, but it also culminates, as we will see, in a form of non-knowledge.

For Lacan, however, Bataille's notion of non-knowledge is not only obscure, if not mystical, but also, a notion that can potentially introduce a definitive confusion about "the sensible frontier between truth and knowledge." Lacan said during his conference *Talking to Brick Walls*,

> Those who have heard me quite well—or at least as best as they could—when I talked about knowledge as being the correlate of ignorance, and this idea tormented them a little. And there are some among them that have been poked by God knows which fly, a literary fly of course, things that can be found in Georges Bataille's writings, because, otherwise, I don't think they would have thought about it. I am talking about non-knowledge.
>
> Georges Bataille gave a conference on non-knowledge one day, it might be found in two or three different places in his writings. God knows that he did not make a fuss of it. And especially the day he gave his conference in the Salle de Géographie de Saint-Germain-des-Prés, which you must know because it is a renowned place of culture, he did not utter a word, which was not a bad way to show his own non-knowledge. People laughed, but they were wrong because now, it is very fancy, the non-knowledge. It can be found all over the place in the mystics, it is even from them that the notion comes from, it is with them that the notion has a meaning. And also, people know that I have insisted on the difference between knowledge and truth. Thus, if truth is not knowledge, it must then be non-knowledge. Aristotelian logic: everything that is not black is the non-black. (…) It is a discovery this non-knowledge. One could not find a better way to introduce a definitive confusion on a delicate subject matter, the point in question in psychoanalysis being what I called the sensible frontier between truth and knowledge.[38]

But how does Lacan define this "sensible frontier between truth and knowledge," and how should this sensible frontier be linked to Bataille's notion of non-knowledge, and to Edelman's definition of queerness?

To understand what the notion of non-knowledge means for Lacan, one has to interrogate, as Miller suggests in his Seminar *The Banquet of the Analysts*, the nature of the negation that is affecting the term "knowledge" in the signifier "non-knowledge."[39] What is the status and the function that determines the prefix *non*, in the notion of "non-knowledge"?

Lacan, in his teaching, constructed a table of three binary oppositions to order them. The first opposition is the one that opposes ignorance to naivety. While ignorance is a lack of knowledge at a place where a specific knowledge could be present, naivety marks a kind of lack of knowledge that opens onto the possible acquisition of new knowledge. In other words, if ignorance is the failed experience of acquiring knowledge, naivety is the subjective position that is required to be taught by experience, and thus to be able to acquire new knowledge. From this opposition, it then becomes possible to understand the two statuses that Lacan gives to the notion of zero in mathematics.

On the side of ignorance, zero is the mark of an incompetency, the mark of a privation, of an absence. Zero in this case indicates that the element that should have been marked into a certain set cannot be granted its entry into it for lack of conformity to the norms that defines that set. On the side of naivety, the zero indicates a form of positivity. It is the mark of what is to come. Another way to distinguish these two kinds of zero is to say that zero, on the side of naivety, is a zero that is a *relative*. It is a zero that is initial and arbitrary, and also a zero from which it becomes possible to introduce a difference between the Real as what is completely unmarked, and the Real as what can be marked. In this sense, the zero is like a point of orientation. It is a zero that opens up the rest of the process of developing knowledge. On the contrary, on the side of ignorance, the zero is a neutral element, just like the zero in mathematical addition. One can add as many zeros to any number and no changes will happen to the original number. The zero is simply a neutral element, something that does not count, that has, strictly speaking, no impact whatsoever.

It is from there that Lacan makes a new distinction between the void and nothingness. The void is what can contain the empty locus that can receive something, while nothingness is the content of the primordial void. Nothingness is thus the equivalent of the neutral zero, while the void is the equivalent of the relative zero upon which everything else can be constructed. When the void is reified, when one refers to it as a something, it becomes nothingness. And in order for it to become nothingness, it has to be localized. In other words, one has to be able to name it in order to make nothingness appear. Nothingness is the name of a

localized lack, the name of a place that can be filled with a presence, or hollowed out. Such an articulation of the two notions, nonetheless, does not fully satisfy the definitions of the two terms, for it leaves outside of its scope the possibility that the void could be limitless. The void, indeed, in the previous articulation, is always already posited as a limited void that can be instantly converted into a container, that is, into a locus.

But the void can also be equated to the infinite, and the limitless. This ambiguity in the definition of the void is at the root of the *différend* between Bataille and Lacan. If one gives to the void the sense of the limitless, it then becomes the support of a limitless non-knowledge *à la Bataille*, while if one gives to the limitless void the meaning of the zero, it then becomes possible to posit the relative zero, which is to say the void as the primitive set, the very framework that will shelter the future development of the natural number, and by extension the future development of knowledge. But in order for the void to become the support of knowledge, and not the justification of an ultimate and definitive non-knowledge, one has to reduce the limitless void to a limited void that can be equated to a concept reduced to its very core, that is, to the dimension of a mathematical set. The void becomes then the relative zero as it acquires the qualities of a locus, and through this quality, the mathematical properties of a set. This is why Miller can write, taking a stand against a possible confusion between Lacan's notion of non-knowledge and Bataille definition of non-knowledge:

> Even if it is a short cut, one can say already, from the point that we have reached, that psychoanalysis is not a mystique of non-knowledge, and that in this disposition one makes room for non-knowledge of the analyst at the beginning, but one does not consider that for the reason non-knowledge is the *culmen* of experience.[40]

While, for Bataille, the movement goes from knowledge to non-knowledge, it goes from non-knowledge to knowledge in Lacan. This also means that where Bataille posits the limitless void as the truth of inner experience, Lacan posits the infinite void as the truth of the analytic experience. On the side of Bataille, it is the eternal contestation of the infinite void in the name of the limitless, while on the side of Lacan, it is the

infinite quest for knowledge in the name of the contestation of the limitless void.

The Sinthome and the Meaninglessness of Jouissance

However, if the opposition between Bataille and Lacan is true when it comes to Lacan's early teaching, it is less certain that the same opposition could be made between knowledge and non-knowledge in Lacan's late teaching, and especially when it comes to the notion of the sinthome. In which way could we say that Bataille's notion of non-knowledge and Edelman's notion of queerness as *sinthomo*sexuality are in agreement with what Lacan tried to convey under the banner of the sinthome in his late and last teaching, or in which way this apparent agreement should be contested or nuanced?

The term sinthome, written with "th," is an old French term for symptom that Lacan used for the first time in a presentation on James Joyce, in June 1975, which became "Joyce the Symptom I," and "Joyce the Symptom & II," and then the title of his *Seminar XXIII*.[41] In the term sinthome, one can hear, in French, the word "Saint Homme," which means the "Holy man," and also, as Edelman emphasizes in his own definition of *sinthomo*sexuality, the word "sin." As such the word "sinthome" is a word that is marked, at the level of the letter, with a profound equivocity. And this equivocity is already an indication about the nature of the notion. The sinthome is not univocal. And it is not univocal because it is agitated by a kind of dance that makes its meaning incessantly go from the potentially unholy side of the drives, always ready to sin, to the potentially holy side of the Saint, always calling for new forms of sublimation.

More importantly, it is a term, as Miller suggests in his text "Pure Psychoanalysis, Applied Psychoanalysis," that represents the great future of Lacan's teaching inasmuch as it sketches a dance between the drives and the fantasy to the point of making it a concept, the sinthome.[42] What is at stake with the notion of sinthome is the possibility of understanding the symptom as a point of fixation of jouissance (body event), and not as

a meaningful formation of the unconscious (fantasy).[43] The sinthome is not a formation of the unconscious that is interpretable within the framework of the transferential unconscious, but a body event to which is attached a certain opaque jouissance, resistant to meaning.[44]

While, in the perspective of Freud and the early Lacan, the fantasy was considered to be what was true as well as what was the most Real in one's symptom (what was occupying the position of a fixed and unmodifiable principle) it becomes, for the late Lacan, what occupies the status of an ever changing *lying truth*.[45] For the early Lacan, the process of an analysis was based on the idea that it was possible to intervene on the symptom as the metaphor of the subject through the progressive *construction* of the *fundamental fantasy*, which was supposed to rule over the symptom. The end of analysis, within this perspective, coincided with the traversal of the fundamental fantasy, which was supposed to provoke the disappearance of the symptoms that had brought the analysand into therapy in the first place. It is what Lacan explained in his Seminar XII, *La Logique du fantasme*, and what Miller summarizes by saying that within the perspective of the *transferential unconscious*, there is a primacy of meaning over jouissance, and thus a primacy of the Symbolic over the Real.[46]

But in the perspective of the late Lacan, it is the very notion of truth, as well as its connection to the fantasy that is questioned. The fantasy is no longer considered to be the unconscious truth of the symptom but, on the contrary, what potentially prevents an analysand from getting in touch with the Real of his symptom, that is, with what is meaningless in his symptom. If the sinthome differs from the symptom, it is in the sense that the sinthome is resistant to the unconscious, and thus to the setting of the transferential unconscious that defines the early teaching of Lacan. And this leads Miller to conclude that "neurotics expect to be liberated from their symptom, precisely because they do not manage to turn it into a sinthome."[47] But how is it possible to turn a symptom into a sinthome?

To turn a symptom into a sinthome, one has to learn how to deal with what is meaningless in one's symptom, and thus stop hoping, unlike the neurotics or the early Lacan, to cure the symptom by getting rid of it. On the contrary, one has to be prepared to make of the unreadable part of the symptom the very core onto which one can build his identity—as well as his *escabeau (a stepstool)*—which means one's own singular ability to

understand and develop an *oeuvre* out of the meaninglessness of one's own symptom.[48] This makes of the sinthome not only a clinical question but also an ethical quandary that places at the core of Lacan's late teaching the question of the possible usefulness of the meaningless singularity of one's mode of jouissance.[49]

By making of the notion of the symptom not only something abnormal, nor something that needs to be cured, but also something that is absolutely unavoidable for all speaking beings, Lacan gave reason to Bataille's claim on the impossible, and agreed in advance with Edelman's point about queerness and *sinthomosexuality* as representing the reverse of "reproductive futurism." However, the problem with this enlarged definition of the symptom is that it leaves unresolved the question of how to deal with the excessive amount of opaque jouissance that is also attached to a symptom and that leads to the possibility of interpreting the sinthome, as Edelman did, I would say, in a Bataillean manner, which is to say as a form "an expenditure without reserve."

To explore the way in which a sinthome can be manipulated, and thus limited in its excess, Lacan did not follow Freud and his theory of the unconscious, nor Bataille and his definition of inner experience and nonknowledge, but he chose to follow James Joyce, and more specifically the way in which Joyce practiced his art of *cruelfiction*.[50] Joyce, to put it in a Kantian manner, awoke Lacan from his "dogmatic slumber," inasmuch as he showed to him what it means to "incarnate the symptom."

To incarnate the symptom is the opposite of giving a meaning to it, of reducing it to a form of the universal. Joyce, in his last book, *Finnegan's Wake*, managed to abstract his symptom (probably some imposed speech) from the system of interpretation through which he was previously understood.[51] Or rather, Joyce forced his readers to ponder in front of the text's enigma, which is to say, not on its lack of meaning, but on its excess. Through this effect of enigma, what is at stake, for Lacan, is Joyce's attack on the dream of literature, as Lacan puts it, which means as an attack on all the elements that were still subordinating literature to the realm of fiction. By doing so, Joyce did nothing less, for Lacan than "unhooking himself from the unconscious," as well as proving that a subject can do without the Name-of-the-father on the condition that one *knows how* to makes use of the function for oneself.

Conclusion: The Sinthome, a Heresy of the Good Kind

It is thus this singular *know how*, I would conclude, this singular use of the function of the Name-of-the-Father, which Lacan renamed *RSI* [Real, Symbolic, Imaginary], an acronym that can also be pronounced, in French, he-re-sy.[52] But while some heresies are conceptually or artistically weak and destined to be soon forgotten by the orthodoxy, some other are said by Lacan to be of the good kind, which means heresies that are not ruled over by their opaque jouissance, but ones that contain a certain "know-how," which means a certain capacity to manipulate and to valorize one's own mode of meaningless jouissance. Joyce, for example, who knew how to develop out of his meaningless jouissance his excruciating art of *cruelfictions*. In this sense, one could say that when it comes to the sinthome, the only relevant question is: how can one turn something completely contingent, traumatic and meaningless (e.g., the beating that Joyce received) into an *escabeau*, which is to say into a platform onto which one can present to others, at its most singular, his own meaninglessness.[53]

Such is the ultimate orientation of Lacan's late teaching. And this orientation, I would argue, makes of the late Lacan a good companion to Bataille's inner experience, and a good ally of Edelman's queerness, since it is a Lacan that makes room for the meaninglessness of one's own singular mode of jouissance. But it is also a Lacan that promotes a queerness of the good kind, I would add, since it is a queerness that is not strictly onto death, but one that permits redescribing the bar that Lacan puts on the S of the subject—the bar of its division—as a trait of "noble bastardy."

Notes

1. "Suppose someone alleges that his lustful inclination is quite irresistible to him when he encounters the favored object and the opportunity. [Ask him] whether, if in front of the house where he finds this opportunity a gallows were erected on which he would be strung up immediately after gratifying his lust, he would not then conquer his inclination. One does

not have to guess long what he would reply." See Emmanuel Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, trans. Mary Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), Part I, paragraph 6.

2. "For the sake of spending a night with a woman, no one would be mad enough to accept an outcome that would be fatal to him, since it isn't a question of combat but of death by hanging. For Kant, the answer to this question is in no doubt. (…) But it is important to note that one only has to make a conceptual shift and move the night spent with the lady from the category of pleasure to that of jouissance, given that jouissance implies precisely to accept death—and there's no need of sublimation—for the example to be ruined. In other words, it is enough for jouissance to be a form of evil, for the whole thing to change its character completely, and for the meaning of the moral law itself to be completely changed. Anyone can see that if the moral law is, in effect, capable of playing some role here, it is precisely as a support for the jouissance involved; it is so that the sin becomes what Saint Paul calls inordinately sinful. That's what Kant on this occasion simply ignores." See Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book VII: The Ethics of Psychoanalysis, 1959–1960*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Dennis Porter (New York: W. W. Norton, 1992), 189.
3. Dany Nous, *The Law of Desire: On Lacan's "Kant with Sade"* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).
4. "From Victoria to porno, we have not only passed from prohibition to permission, but to incitation, intrusion, provocation, and forcing. What is pornography but a fantasy that has been filmed with enough variety to satisfy perverse appetites in all their diversity?" See Jacques-Alain Miller, "The Unconscious and the Speaking Body," trans. Adrian Price, *Hurly Burly* (no. 12, 2015), 119–32.
5. The antisocial turn consists of prominent Lacanian scholars who, beyond their differences, valorize negativity in order to oppose what they consider to be the "fake" optimism of the LGBTIQ++ movement. See for more details Leo Bersani, *Is the Rectum a Grave? And Other Essays* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010); Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham SP: Duke University Press, 2007); Lynne Huffer, *Mad for Foucault: Rethinking the Foundations of Queer Theory* (New York, NY: Columbia Univeristy Press, 2010); Lynne Huffer, *Are the Lips a Grave? Queer Feminist Reflections on the Ethics of Sex* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013); Michael Warner, *The*

Trouble with Normal: Sex, Politics, and the Ethics of Queer Life (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003).

6. See Robert L. Caserio, Lee Edelman, Judith Halberstam, José Esteban Muñoz, and Tim Dean. "The Antisocial Thesis in Queer Theory," (*PMLA* 121, no. 3, 2006), 819–28.
7. Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham SP: Duke University Press, 2007), 38.
8. "Queerness 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 unnamable remainder, as Lacan describes it, is jouissance," Ibid., 25.
9. "I am calling *sinthono*sexuality the site where the fantasy of futurism confronts the insistence of a jouissance that rends it precisely by rendering it in relation to the [death] drive. *Sinthomo*sexuality also speaks, as neologistic signifier, to the 'sin' that continues to attach itself to "homosexuality (…) and materializes the threat to the subject's faith that its proper home is in meaning, a threat made Real by the homosexual link to a less reassuring 'home': the sinthome as a site of jouissance around and against which the subject takes shape and in which it finds its consistency." Ibid., 38–9.
10. "[Heterosexuality] must recognize the extraneous in sex that is never extraneous to sex, and that marks it as a "useless function," as a meaningless and irrecuperable." Or even, as Jacques Derrida has written with regard to *différance*, as "an expenditure without reserve" (64). See also, for Derrida's definition of the notion of *expenditure without reserve* in relation to Bataille's thinking, Jacques Derrida, "From Restricted to General Economy, a Hegelianism without Reserve," in *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press. 1978), 251–77. See also Carolyn J. Dean, *The Self and Its Pleasures: Bataille, Lacan, and the History of the Decentered Subject* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2017).
11. "If queer acts of pleasure are to dislodge the totalizing restricted economies of desire-prohibition-teleology, it may be through the valorization of their very lack of purpose: this particular kind of lack may usher in a general economy of excessive pleasures that are gloriously useless." See, for more details, "Bataille's Queer Pleasures: The Universe as Spider or Spit" in *Reading Bataille Now*, ed. Shannon Winnubst (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 200), 75–93.

12. See Allan Stoekl, "Derrida, Foucault and their Precursors," in *Politics, Writing, Mutilation: The Case of Bataille, Blanchot, Roussel, Leiris, and Ponge* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985).
13. Even though one has to acknowledge that Lacan was careful enough, in his *Ecrits*, "On a question prior to the treatment of psychosis," to position himself against Bataille by identifying Schreber's psychotic episode with Bataille's *inner experience*. Lacan said in the last footnote of his text: "The last word with which our century's 'inner experience' has yielded us its computation was thus articulated fifty years ahead of its time by the theodicy to which Schreber was exposed: 'God is a whore.' This is the term in which the process by which the signifier was 'unleashed' in the Real culminates, after the Name-of-the-Father began to collapse—the latter being the signifier which, in the other, qua locus of the signifier, is the signifier of the Other qua locus of the law." And to make sure that his critique of "inner-experience" could not be associated with the wrong person, Lacan added, right after: "The inner experience I am speaking here is a reference to Georges Bataille's work. In *Madame Edwarda*, he describes the odd extremity of this experience." See, Jacques Lacan, *Ecrits*, trans. B. Fink (New York: Norton & Company, 2002), 583–4.
14. See, for example, Panu Minkkinen, "Lacan avec Bataille avec Nietzsche: A politics of the impossible?" in *Jacques Lacan Between Psychoanalysis and Politics*, ed. Samo Tomšič and Andreja Zevnik (New York: Routledge, 2016).
15. Georges Bataille, "Socratic College," in *The unfinished System of Non-Knowledge*, ed. Stuart Kendall, trans. Michelle Kendall & Stuart Kendall (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 14.
16. For a very interesting reading of Freud's death drive and its link to Bataille and Lacan's work, see Richard Boothby, *Death and Desire* (New York: Routledge, 1991).
17. Ibid.
18. See, for a very stimulating reading of this debate over negativity, the death drive and its relation to Lacan's teaching, Mari Ruti, *Ethics of Opting Out* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017).
19. Ibid.
20. "That figural Child alone embodies the citizen as an ideal, entitled to claim full rights to its future share in the nation's good, through always at the cost of limiting the rights 'real' citizens are allowed. For the social order exists to preserve for this universalized subject, this fantastic 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 depends," Ibid., 11.

21. Georges Bataille, "Nietzsche's Laughter," in *The Unfinished system of Non-Knowledge*, 18.
22. Edelman, *Not Future*, 3.
23. Ibid., 33.
24. Bataille, "Nietzsche's Laughter," 18–27.
25. Ibid., 21.
26. See Georges Bataille, "The Use-Value of D.A.F de Sade (An Open Letter to My Current Comrades)" in *The Bataille Reader*, Part II, "Heterology," ed. and trans. F. Botting and S. Wilson (New York: Blackwell Publishing, 1997), 147–60.
27. Ibid., 149.
28. Ibid., 157.
29. Georges Bataille, "Discussion on Sin," in *The Unfinished System of Non-knowledge*, 26–74. For a full analysis of Bataille's reading of the sacrifice of Christ on the Cross, see Frédéric Baitinger, "De l'innocence de la victime aux délices angoissées du sacrificateur: Georges Bataille, René Girard et la question du sacrifice," in *Les Représentations du Sacrifice et du Don*, ed. I. Chassaing, J. Valcke and Z. Yang (Moncton: Perce-Neige, 2017), 97–111.
30. Ibid., 56.
31. Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book VII: The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, 191.
32. Lacan, "Kant with Sade," in *Ecrits*, 645–70.
33. Ibid., 765.
34. Ibid., 766.
35. See Jacques-Alain Miller, "A Discussion on Lacan's Kant with Sade," in *Reading Seminar I and II, Lacan's Return to Freud*, ed. R. Feldstein, B. Fink and M.Jaanus (Albany: State University of New York, 1996), 212–40.
36. Ibid., 234.
37. See, on this point, Silvia Lippi, "Grandeur et décadence de la transgression," in *Transgressions, Bataille, Lacan* (Paris, Edition Erès, 2008).

38. Jacques Lacan, *Talking to Brick Walls*, trans. Adrian Price (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2017), 16–7.
39. Jacques-Alain Miller, "Logics of Non-Knowledge," trans. A. Alvarez, *Lacanian Ink* (#37, Spring 2011), 6–27.
40. Ibid., 25.
41. See, Jacques Lacan, Seminar XXIII, *The Sinthome*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller and trans. Adrian Price, (Cambridge, Polity Press, 2016). See also Jacques Lacan, "Joyce le symptôme I" in *Autres Écrits* (Paris: Edition du Seuil, 2001). And see also for an excellent reading of the late Lacan, Jacques-Alain Miller, "The Sinthome, A Mixture of Symptom and Fantasy," in *Psychoanalytical Notebooks*, (#5, 2001), 9–31; "The Presentation of the *Sinthome,*" trans. S. Seth, *Lacanian Ink* (#49, Spring 2017), 98–137; "The Unconscious and the *Sinthome,*" trans. A. Price, in *Hurly Burly*, (#5, 2011), 39–49; and finally, for a very good reading of *Seminar XXIII, The Sinthome,* see Eric Laurent, *L'envers de la biopolitique. Une écriture pour la jouissance* (Paris: Navarin, Le champ freudien, 2016).
42. See Jacques-Alain Miller, "Pure Psychoanalysis, Applied Psychoanalysis and Psychotherapy" trans. B. P. Fulks, in *Lacanian Ink* (20, Spring 2002), 4–43.
43. See Jacques-Alain Miller, "Lacanian Biology and the Body Event," trans. B. P. Fulks and J. Jauregui, in *Lacanian Ink* (#18, Spring 2001), 6–29.
44. See Jacques-Alain Miller, "The Real Unconscious," trans. F. Baitinger & A. Kahn, in *Lacanian Ink* (#50, Spring 2017), 22–41.
45. See Jacques-Alain Miller, "The Lying Truth," trans. F. Baitinger and R. Raber, in *The Lacanian Review* (#7, Spring 2019), 149–55.
46. See Jacques-Alain Miller, "Fantasy and the Desire of the Other," trans. E. Ragland, *(Re)-turn: A Journal of Lacanian Studies* (vol. 3 & 4, Spring 2008), 9–32.
47. Miller, "Pure Psychoanalysis, Applied Psychoanalysis and Psychotherapy," 117.
48. See Colette Soler, "L'escabeau,"in *Lacan, lecteur de Joyce* (Paris: PUF, 2015), 163–94.
49. See Jacques-Alain Miller, "A New Alliance with Jouissance," trans. J. Snowden and R. Litten, in *The Lacanian Review*, Issue 2 (Autumn 2016), 105–16.
50. "O, you were excruciated, in honor bound to the cross of your own cruelfiction!" See James Joyce, *Finnegans Wake* (London: Penguins Classics, 1999).

51. See Colette Soler, "L'art-dieure," Ibid., 179–95.
52. See Jacques-Alain Miller, "Heretics." trans. B. Wolf. *Psychoanalytical Notebooks* (no. 32, 2018), 11–21.
53. See Miller, Jacques-Alain. "Speaking Through One's Body." trans. A. Price. *Hurly Burly* (no. 11, 2014), 131–7.

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