NO FUTURE

Queer Theory and the Death Drive

LEE EDELMAN

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Edited by Michèle Aina Barale, Jonathan Goldberg, Michael Moon,

and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick

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To David Miller,

whose friendship,

like his gift for the novelesque,

lends the world,

and those he shares it with,

a style that is his alone

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Isn't there something in analytic discourse that can introduce us to the following: that every subsistence or persistence of the world as such must be abandoned?

JACQUES LACAN

Yes, I was thinking: we live without a future. That's what's queer . . .

VIRGINIA WOOLF

1. THE FUTURE IS KID STUFF

In the spring of 1997, before the right-wing assault on his presidency succeeded in drawing real blood at last, Bill Clinton was the subject of a minor but nonetheless telling political controversy. His appearance beside his wife and daughter in a series of public service announcements sponsored by the Ad Council, a nonprofit organization, "raise[d] questions," according to the *New York Times*, "about where politics stops and where public service begins." Such questions, for those who raised them at least, reflected a concern that his widespread depiction in a series of print ads and video spots in support of a group that identified itself as the Coalition for America's Children might bolster the President's popularity with voters by showing his commitment to a set of values widely thought of as extrapolitical: values that center on the family, to be sure, but that focus on the protection of children. By showing the President, in the words of the *Times*, as "a concerned, hard-working parent"—as one

committed to the well-being of those least able to care for themselves, and specifically as "the defender of children, on issues like education and drugs"—these public service announcements seemed likely to heighten his moral stature and, with it, his standing with the American electorate, or so feared Alex Castellanos, a Republican media consultant. "This is the father picture," he complained in the pages of the *Times*, "this is the daddy bear, this is the head of the political household. There's nothing that helps him more."[1]

But what helped him most in these public appeals on behalf of America's children was the social consensus that such an appeal is impossible to refuse. Indeed, though these public service announcements concluded with the sort of rhetorical flourish associated with hard-fought political campaigns ("We're fighting for the children. Whose side are you on?"), that rhetoric was intended to avow that this issue, like an ideological Möbius strip, only *permitted* one side. Such "self-evident" one-sidedness—the affirmation of a value so unquestioned, because so obviously unquestionable, as that of the Child whose innocence solicits our defense—is precisely, of course, what distinguishes public service announcements from the partisan discourse of political argumentation. But it is also, I suggest, what makes such announcements so oppressively political—political not in the partisan terms implied by the media consultant, but political in a far more insidious way: political insofar as the fantasy subtending the image of the Child invariably shapes the logic within which the political itself must be thought. That logic compels us, to the extent that we would register as politically responsible, to submit to the framing of political debate—and, indeed, of the political field—as defined by the terms of what this book describes as reproductive futurism: terms that impose an ideological limit on political discourse as such, preserving in the process the absolute privilege of heteronormativity by rendering unthinkable, by casting outside the political domain, the possibility of a queer resistance to this organizing principle of communal relations.

For politics, however radical the means by which specific constituencies attempt to produce a more desirable social order, remains, at its

core, conservative insofar as it works to *affirm* a structure, to *authenticate* social order, which it then intends to transmit to the future in the form of its inner Child. That Child remains the perpetual horizon of every acknowledged politics, the fantasmatic beneficiary of every political intervention. Even proponents of abortion rights, while promoting the freedom of women to control their own bodies through reproductive choice, recurrently frame their political struggle, mirroring their anti-abortion foes, as a "fight for our children—for our daughters and our sons," and thus as a fight for the future.[2] What, in that case, would it signify not to be "fighting for the children"? How could one take the *other* "side," when taking any side at all necessarily constrains one to take the side *of*, by virtue of taking a side *within*, a political order that returns to the Child as the image of the future it intends? Impossibly, against all reason, my project stakes its claim to the very space that "politics" makes unthinkable: the space outside the framework within which politics as we know it appears and so outside the conflict of visions that share as their presupposition that the body politic must survive. Indeed, at the heart of my polemical engagement with the cultural text of politics and the politics of cultural texts lies a simple provocation: that *queerness* names the side of those not "fighting for the children," the side outside the consensus by which all politics confirms the absolute value of reproductive futurism. The ups and downs of political fortune may measure the social order's pulse, but *queerness*, by contrast, figures, outside and beyond its political symptoms, the place of the social order's death drive: a place, to be sure, of abjection expressed in the stigma, sometimes fatal, that follows from reading that figure literally, and hence a place from which liberal politics strives—and strives quite reasonably, given its unlimited faith in reason—to disassociate the queer. More radically, though, as I argue here, queerness attains its ethical value precisely insofar as it accedes to that place, accepting its figural status as resistance to the viability of the social while insisting on the inextricability of such resistance from every social structure.

To make such a claim I examine in this book the pervasive invocation

of the Child as the emblem of futurity's unquestioned value and propose against it the impossible project of a queer oppositionality that would oppose itself to the structural determinants of politics as such, which is also to say, that would oppose itself to the logic of opposition. This paradoxical formulation suggests a refusal—the appropriately perverse refusal that characterizes queer theory—of every substantialization of identity, which is always oppositionally defined,[3] and, by extension, of history as linear narrative (the poor man's teleology) in which meaning succeeds in revealing itself—*as itself*—through time. Far from partaking of this narrative movement toward a viable political future, far from perpetuating the fantasy of meaning's eventual realization, the queer comes to figure the bar to every realization of futurity, the resistance, internal to the social, to every social structure or form.

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—such a hope, after all, would only reproduce the constraining mandate of futurism, just as any such order would equally occasion the negativity of the queer—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. And the trump card of affirmation? Always the question: If not this, what? Always the demand to translate the insistence, the pulsive *force*, of negativity into some determinate stance or "position" whose determination would thus negate it: always the imperative to immure it in some stable and positive *form*. When I argue, then, that we might do well to attempt what is surely impossible—to withdraw our allegiance, however compulsory, from a reality based on the Ponzi scheme of reproductive futurism—I do not intend to propose some "good" that will thereby be assured. To the contrary, I mean to insist that nothing, and certainly not what we call the "good," can ever have any assurance at all in the order of the Symbolic. Abjuring fidelity to a futurism that's always purchased at our expense,

though bound, as Symbolic subjects consigned to figure the Symbolic's undoing, to the necessary contradiction of trying to turn its intelligibility against itself, we might rather, figuratively, cast our vote for "none of the above," for the primacy of a constant *no* in response to the law of the Symbolic, which would echo that law's foundational act, its self-constituting negation. The structuring optimism of politics to which the order of meaning commits us, installing as it does the perpetual hope of reaching meaning through signification, is always, I would argue, a negation of this primal, constitutive, and negative act. And the various positivities produced in its wake by the logic of political hope depend on the mathematical illusion that negated negations might somehow escape, and not redouble, such negativity. My polemic thus stakes its fortunes on a truly hopeless wager: that taking the Symbolic's negativity to the very letter of the law, that attending to the persistence of something internal to reason that reason refuses, that turning the force of queerness against all subjects, however queer, can afford an access to the *jouissance* that at once defines and negates us. Or better: can expose the constancy, the inescapability, of such access to jouissance in the social order itself, even if that order can access its constant access to jouissance only in the process of abjecting that constancy of access onto the queer.

In contrast to what Theodor Adorno describes as the "grimness with which a man clings to himself, as to the immediately sure and substantial," the queerness of which I speak would deliberately sever us from ourselves, from the assurance, that is, of *knowing* ourselves and hence of *knowing* our "good."[4] Such queerness proposes, in place of the good, something I want to call "better," though it promises, in more than one sense of the phrase, absolutely nothing. I connect this something better with Lacan's characterization of what he calls "truth," where truth does not assure happiness, or even, as Lacan makes clear, the good.[5] Instead, it names only the insistent particularity of the subject, impossible fully to articulate and "tend[ing] toward the real."[6] Lacan, therefore, can write of this truth:

> The quality that best characterizes it is that of being the true *Wunsch*, which was at the origin of an aberrant or atypical behavior.
>
> We encounter this *Wunsch* with its particular, irreducible character as a modification that presupposes no other form of normalization than that of an experience of pleasure or of pain, but of a final experience from whence it springs and is subsequently preserved in the depths of the subject in an irreducible form. The *Wunsch* does not have the character of a universal law but, on the contrary, of the most particular of laws—even if it is universal that this particularity is to be found in every human being.[7]

Truth, like queerness, irreducibly linked to the "aberrant or atypical," to what chafes against "normalization," finds its value not in a good susceptible to generalization, but only in the stubborn particularity that voids every notion of a general good. The embrace of queer negativity, then, can have no justification if justification requires it to reinforce some positive social value; its value, instead, resides in its challenge to value as defined by the social, and thus in its radical challenge to the very value of the social itself.[8]

For by figuring a refusal of the coercive belief in the paramount value of futurity, while refusing as well any backdoor hope for dialectical access to meaning, the queer dispossesses the social order of the ground on which it rests: a faith in the consistent reality of the social—and by extension, of the social subject; a faith that politics, whether of the left or of the right, implicitly affirms. Divesting such politics of its thematic trappings, bracketing the particularity of its various proposals for social organization, the queer insists that politics is always a politics of the signifier, or even of what Lacan will often refer to as "the letter." It serves to shore up a reality always unmoored by signification and lacking any guarantee. To sayas much is not, of course, to deny the experiential violence that frequently troubles social reality or the apparent consistency with which it bears—and thereby bears down on—us all. It is, rather, to suggest that queerness exposes the obliquity of our relation to what we

experience in and as social reality, alerting us to the fantasies structurally necessary in order to sustain it and engaging those fantasies through the figural logics, the linguistic structures, that shape them. If it aims effectively to intervene in the reproduction of such a reality—an intervention that may well take the form of figuring that reality's abortion—then queer theory must always insist on its connection to the vicissitudes of the sign, to the tension between the signifier's collapse into the letter's cadaverous materiality and its participation in a system of reference wherein it generates meaning itself. As a particular story, in other words, of why storytelling fails, one that takes both the value and the burden of that failure upon itself, queer theory, as I construe it, marks the "other" side of politics: the "side" where narrative realization and derealization overlap, where the energies of vitalization ceaselessly turn against themselves; the "side" outside all political sides, committed as they are, on every side, to futurism's unquestioned good. The rest of this book attempts to explain the implications of this assertion, but first, let me sketch some connections between politics and the politics of the sign by establishing the psychoanalytic context within which my argument takes shape.

Like the network of signifying relations that forms the Lacanian Symbolic—the register of the speaking subject and the order of the law—politics may function as the framework within which we experience social reality, but only insofar as it compels us to experience that reality in the form of a fantasy: the fantasy, precisely, of form as such, of an order, an organization, that assures the stability of our identities as subjects and the coherence of the Imaginary totalizations through which those identities appear to us in recognizable form. Though the material conditions of human experience may indeed be at stake in the various conflicts by means of which differing political perspectives vie for the power to name, and by naming to shape, our collective reality, the ceaseless conflict of their social visions conceals their common will to install, and to install as reality itself, one libidinally subtended fantasy or another intended to screen out the emptiness that the signifier embeds at the

core of the Symbolic. Politics, to put this another way, names the space in which Imaginary relations, relations that hark back to a misrecognition of the self as enjoying some originary access to presence (a presence retroactively posited and therefore lost, one might say, from the start), compete for Symbolic fulfillment, for actualization in the realm of the language to which subjectification subjects us all. Only the mediation of the signifier allows us to *articulate* those Imaginary relations, though always at the price of introducing the distance that precludes their realization: the distance inherent in the chain of ceaseless deferrals and substitutions to which language as a system of differences necessarily gives birth. The signifier, as alienating and meaningless token of our Symbolic constitution as subjects (as token, that is, of our subjectification through subjection to the prospect of meaning); the signifier, by means of which we always inhabit the order of the Other, the order of a social and linguistic reality articulated from somewhere else; the signifier, which calls us into meaning by seeming to call us to ourselves: this signifier only bestows a sort of *promissory* identity, one with which we can never succeed in fully coinciding because we, as subjects of the signifier, can only be signifiers ourselves, can only ever aspire to catch up to whatever it is we might signify by closing the gap that divides us and, paradoxically, makes us subjects *through that act of division alone*. This structural inability of the subject to merge with the self for which it sees itself as a signifier in the eyes of the Other necessitates various strategies designed to suture the subject in the space of meaning where Symbolic and Imaginary overlap. Politics names the social enactment of the subject's attempt to establish the conditions for this impossible consolidation by identifying with something *outside* itself in order to enter the presence, deferred perpetually, *of* itself. Politics, that is, names the struggle to effect a fantasmatic order of reality in which the subject's alienation would vanish into the seamlessness of identity at the endpoint of the endless chain of signifiers lived as history.

If politics in the Symbolic is always therefore a politics *of* the Symbolic, operating in the name and in the direction of a constantly antici-

pated future reality, then the telos that would, in fantasy, put an end to these deferrals, the presence toward which the metonymic chain of signifiers always aims, must be recognized, nonetheless, as belonging to an Imaginary past. This means not only that politics conforms to the temporality of desire, to what we might call the inevitable historicity of desire—the successive displacements forward of nodes of attachment as figures of meaning, points of intense metaphoric investment, produced in the hope, however vain, of filling the constitutive gap in the subject that the signifier necessarily installs—but also that politics is a name for the temporalization of desire, for its translation into a narrative, for its teleological determination. Politics, that is, by externalizing and configuring in the fictive form of a narrative, allegorizes or elaborates sequentially, precisely *as* desire, those overdeterminations of libidinal positions and inconsistencies of psychic defenses occasioned by what disarticulates the narrativity of desire: the drives, themselves intractable, unassimilable to the logic of interpretation or the demands of meaning-production; the drives that carry the destabilizing force of what insists outside or beyond, because foreclosed by, signification.

The drive—more exactly, the death drive—holds a privileged place in this book. As the constancy of a pressure both alien and internal to the logic of the Symbolic, as the inarticulable surplus that dismantles the subject from within, the death drive names what the queer, in the order of the social, is called forth to figure: the negativity opposed to every form of social viability. Lacan makes clear that the death drive emerges as a consequence of the Symbolic; indeed, he ends Seminar 2 with the claim that "the symbolic order is simultaneously non-being and insisting to be, that is what Freud has in mind when he talks about the death instinct as being what is most fundamental—a symbolic order in travail, in the process of coming, insisting on being realized."[9] This constant movement toward realization cannot be divorced, however, from a will to undo what is thereby instituted, to begin again ex nihilo. For the death drive marks the excess embedded within the Symbolic through the loss, the Real loss, that the advent of the signifier effects. Suzanne Barnard expresses this

well in distinguishing between the subject of desire and the subject of the drive: "While the subject of the drive also is 'born' in relation to a loss, this loss is a real rather than a symbolic one. As such, it functions not in a mode of absence but in a mode of an impossible excess haunting reality, an irrepressible remainder that the subject cannot separate itself from. In other words, while desire is born of and sustained by a constitutive *lack*, drive emerges in relation to a constitutive *surplus*. This surplus is what Lacan calls the subject's 'anatomical complement,' an excessive, 'unreal' remainder that produces an ever-present jouissance."[10]

This surplus, compelling the Symbolic to enact a perpetual repetition, remains spectral, "unreal," or impossible insofar as it insists outside the logic of meaning that, nonetheless, produces it. The drive holds the place of what meaning misses in much the same way that the signifier preserves at the heart of the signifying order the empty and arbitrary letter, the meaningless substrate of signification that meaning intends to conceal. Politics, then, in opposing itself to the negativity of such a drive, gives us history as the continuous staging of our dream of eventual self-realization by endlessly reconstructing, in the mirror of desire, what we take to be reality itself. And it does so without letting us acknowledge that the future, to which it persistently appeals, marks the impossible place of an Imaginary past exempt from the deferrals intrinsic to the operation of the signifying chain and projected ahead as the site at which being and meaning are joined as One. In this it enacts the formal repetition distinctive of the drive while representing itself as bringing to fulfillment the narrative sequence of history and, with it, of desire, in the realization of the subject's authentic presence in the Child imagined as enjoying unmediated access to Imaginary wholeness. Small wonder that the era of the universal subject should produce as the very figure of politics, because also as the embodiment of futurity collapsing undecidably into the past, the image of the Child as we know it: the Child who becomes, in Wordsworth's phrase, but more punitively, "father of the Man." Historically constructed, as social critics and intellectual historians including Phillipe Ariès, James Kincaid, and Lawrence Stone have

made clear, to serve as the repository of variously sentimentalized cultural identifications, the Child has come to embody for us the telos of the social order and come to be seen as the one for whom that order is held in perpetual trust.[11]

In its coercive universalization, however, the image of the Child, not to be confused with the lived experiences of any historical children, serves to regulate political discourse—to prescribe what will *count* as political discourse—by compelling such discourse to accede in advance to the reality of a collective future whose figurative status we are never permitted to acknowledge or address. From Delacroix's iconic image of Liberty leading us into a brave new world of revolutionary possibility—her bare breast making each spectator the unweaned Child to whom it's held out while the boy to her left, reproducing her posture, affirms the absolute logic of reproduction itself—to the revolutionary waif in the logo that miniaturizes the "politics" of *Les Mis* (summed up in its anthem to futurism, the "inspirational" "One Day More"), we are no more able to conceive of a politics without a fantasy of the future than we are able to conceive of a future without the figure of the Child. That figural Child alone embodies the citizen as an ideal, entitled to claim full rights to its future share in the nation's good, though always at the cost of limiting the rights "real" citizens are allowed. For the social order exists to preserve for this universalized subject, this fantasmatic 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 always depends.

So, for example, when P. D. James, in her novel *The Children of Men*, imagines a future in which the human race has suffered a seemingly absolute loss of the capacity to reproduce, her narrator, Theodore Faron, not only attributes this reversal of biological fortune to the putative crisis

of sexual values in late twentieth-century democracies—"Pornography and sexual violence on film, on television, in books, in life had increased and became more explicit but less and less in the West we made love and bred children," he declares—but also gives voice to the ideological truism that governs our investment in the Child as the obligatory token of futurity: "Without the hope of posterity, for our race if not for ourselves, without the assurance that we being dead yet live," he later observes, "all pleasures of the mind and senses sometimes seem to me no more than pathetic and crumbling defences shored up against our ruins."[12] While this allusion to Eliot's "The Waste Land" may recall another of its well-known lines, one for which we apparently have Eliot's wife, Vivian, to thank—"What you get married for if you don't want children?"—it also brings out the function of the child as the prop of the secular theology on which our social reality rests: the secular theology that shapes at once the meaning of our collective narratives and our collective narratives of meaning. Charged, after all, with the task of assuring "that we being dead yet live," the Child, as if by nature (more precisely, as the promise of a natural transcendence of the limits of nature itself), exudes the very pathos from which the narrator of *The Children of Men* recoils when he comes upon it in nonreproductive "pleasures of the mind and senses." For the "pathetic" quality he projectively locates in nongenerative sexual enjoyment—enjoyment that he views in the absence of futurity as empty, substitutive, pathological—exposes the fetishistic figurations of the Child that the narrator pits *against* it as legible in terms identical to those for which enjoyment without "hope of posterity" is peremptorily dismissed: legible, that is, as nothing more than "pathetic and crumbling defences shored up against our ruins." How better to characterize the narrative project of *The Children of Men* itself, which ends, as anyone not born yesterday surely expects from the start, with the renewal of our barren and dying race through the miracle of birth? After all, as Walter Wangerin Jr., reviewing the book for the *New York Times*, approvingly noted in a sentence delicately poised between description and performance of the novel's pro-procreative ideology: "If there is a baby,

there is a future, there is redemption."[13] If, however, there is *no baby* and, in consequence, *no future*, then the blame must fall on the fatal lure of sterile, narcissistic enjoyments understood as inherently destructive of meaning and therefore as responsible for the undoing of social organization, collective reality, and, inevitably, life itself.

Given that the author of *The Children of Men*, like the parents of mankind's children, succumbs so completely to the narcissism—all-pervasive, self-congratulatory, and strategically misrecognized—that animates pronatalism,[14] why should we be the least bit surprised when her narrator, facing his futureless future, laments, with what we must call a straight face, that "sex totally divorced from procreation has become almost meaninglessly acrobatic"?[15] Which is, of course, to say no more than that sexual practicewill continue to allegorize the vicissitudes of meaning so long as the specifically heterosexual alibi of reproductive necessity obscures the drive *beyond* meaning driving the machinery of sexual meaningfulness: so long, that is, as the biological fact of heterosexual procreation bestows the imprimatur of meaning-production on heterogenital relations. For the Child, whose mere possibility is enough to spirit away the naked truth of heterosexual sex—impregnating heterosexuality, as it were, with the future of signification by conferring upon it the cultural burden of signifying futurity—figures our identification with an always about-to-be-realized identity. It thus denies the constant threat to the social order of meaning inherent in the structure of Symbolic desire that commits us to pursuing fulfillment by way of a meaning unable, *as* meaning, either to fulfill us or, in turn, to be fulfilled because unable to close the gap in identity, the division incised by the signifier, that "meaning," despite itself, means.

The consequences of such an identification both of and with the Child as the preeminent emblem of the motivating end, though one endlessly postponed, of every political vision *as a vision of futurity* must weigh on any delineation of a queer oppositional politics. For the only queerness that queer sexualities could ever hope to signify would spring from their determined opposition to this underlying structure of the political—their

opposition, that is, to the governing fantasy of achieving Symbolic closure through the marriage of identity to futurity in order to realize the social subject. Conservatives acknowledge this radical potential, which is also to say, this radical *threat*, of queerness more fully than liberals, for conservatism preemptively imagines the wholesale rupturing of the social fabric, whereas liberalism conservatively clings to a faith in its limitless elasticity. The discourse of the right thus tends toward a greater awareness of, and insistence on, the literalization of the figural logics that various social subjects are made to inhabit and enact, the logics that, from a "rational" viewpoint, reduce individual identity to stereotypical generality, while the discourse of the left tends to understand better the Symbolic's capacity to accommodate change by displacing those logics onto history as the inevitable unfolding of narrative sequence. The right, that is, better sees the inherently conflictual aspect of identities, the constant danger they face in alterity, the psychic anxiety with which they are lived; but the left better recognizes history's persistent rewriting of those identities, finding hope in the fact that identity's borders are never fully fixed. The left in this is always right from the vantage point of reason, but left in the shade by its reason is the darkness inseparable from its light: the defensive structure of the ego, the rigidity of identity as experienced by the subject, and the fixity of the Imaginary relation through which we (re)produce ourselves. This conservatism of the ego compels the subject, whether liberal or conservative politically, to endorse as the meaning of politics itself the reproductive futurism that perpetuates as reality a fantasy frame intended to secure the survival of the social in the Imaginary form of the Child.

Consider, for example, a local moment from the ongoing war against abortion. Not long ago, on a much traveled corner in Cambridge, Massachusetts, opponents of the legal right to abortion plastered an image of a full-term fetus, larger in size than a full-grown man, on a rented billboard that bore the phrase: "It's not a choice; it's a child." Barbara Johnson, in a dazzling analysis of anti-abortion polemics like this, has demon-

strated how they borrow and generate tropes that effectively animate by personifying the fetus, determining in advance the answer to the juridical question of its personhood by means of the terms through which the fetus, and therefore the question, is addressed.[16] Rather, therefore, than attempt to deconstruct this particular rhetorical instance (rather, that is, than note, for example, the juxtaposition of the pronoun "it," appropriate to a fetus, with the supremely humanizing epithet "child," which might call for a gendered pronoun, in order to show how this fragment of discourse maintains the undecidability it undertakes to resolve, casting doubt thereby on the truth of its statement by the form of its enunciation), I want to focus instead, for a moment, on the ideological truth its enunciation, unintentionally perhaps, makes clear.

For, strange as it is that a gay man should say this, when I first encountered that billboard in Cambridge I read it as addressed to me. The sign, after all, might as well have pronounced, and with the same absolute and invisible authority that testifies to the successfully accomplished work of ideological naturalization, the biblical mandate "Be fruitful and multiply." Like an anamorphotic distortion that only when viewed from the proper angle assumes a recognizable form, the slogan acquired, through the obliquity of my subjective relation to it, a logic that illuminated the common stake in the militant right's opposition to abortion and to the practice of queer sexualities—a common stake all too well understood (as the literalization of a figural identity) by radical groups like the Army of God, which claimed credit for the Atlanta terrorist bombings in 1997 of an abortion clinic and a nightclub frequented by lesbians and gay men. The Cambridge billboard thus seemed to announce what liberalism prefers to occlude: that the governing compulsion, the singular imperative, that affords us no meaningful choice is the compulsion to embrace our own futurity in the privileged form of the Child, to imagine each moment as pregnant with the Child of our Imaginary identifications, as pregnant, that is, with a meaning whose presence would fill up the hole in the Symbolic—the hole that marks both the place of the Real and the in-

ternal division or distance by which we are constituted as subjects and destined to pursue the phantom of meaning through the signifier's metonymic slide.

No more than the right will the left, therefore, identify itself with abortion; instead, as the billboard noted with scorn, it aligns itself with "choice." Who *would*, after all, come out *for* abortion or stand *against* reproduction, *against* futurity, and so against *life*? Who *would* destroy the Child and with it the vitalizing fantasy of bridging, in time, the gap of signification (a fantasy that distracts us from the violence of the drives while permitting us to enact them)? The right once again knows the answer, knows that the true oppositional politics implicit in the practice of queer sexualities lies not in the liberal discourse and patient negotiation of tolerances and rights, important as these undoubtedly are to all of us still denied them, but in the capacity of queer sexualities to figure the radical dissolution of the contract, in every sense social and Symbolic, on which the future as putative assurance against the jouissance of the Real depends. With this in mind, we should listen to, and even perhaps be instructed by, the readings of queer sexualities produced by the forces of reaction. However much we might wish, for example, to reverse the values presupposed in the following statement by Donald Wildmon, founder and head of the homophobic American Family Association, we might do well to consider it less as an instance of hyperbolic rant and more as a reminder of the disorientation that queer sexualities *should* entail: "Acceptance or indifference to the homosexual movement will result in society's destruction by allowing civil order to be redefined and by plummeting ourselves, our children and grandchildren into an age of godlessness. Indeed, the very foundation of Western Civilization is at stake."[17] Before the self-righteous bromides of liberal pluralism spill from our lips, before we supply once more the assurance that ours is another kind of love but a love like his nonetheless, before we piously invoke the litany of our glorious contributions to the civilizations of East and West alike, dare we pause for a moment to acknowledge that Mr. Wildmon might be right—or, more important, that he *ought to be* right: that queerness *should* and

must redefine such notions as "civil order" through a rupturing of our foundational faith in the reproduction of futurity?

It is true that the ranks of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual, and transgendered parents grow larger every day, and that nothing intrinsic to the constitution of those identifying as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, transsexual, or queer predisposes them to resist the appeal of futurity, to refuse the temptation to reproduce, or to place themselves outside or against the acculturating logic of the Symbolic. Neither, indeed, is there any ground we could stand on outside that logic. In urging an alternative to the party line, which every party endorses, in taking a side outside the logic of reproductive futurism and arguing that queers might embrace their figural association with its end, I am not for a moment assuming that queers—by which I mean all so stigmatized for failing to comply with heteronormative mandates—are not themselves also psychically invested in preserving the familiar familial narrativity of reproductive futurism.[18] But politics, construed as oppositional or not, never rests on essential identities. It centers, instead, on the figurality that is always essential *to* identity, and thus on the figural relations in which social identities are always inscribed.

To *figure* the undoing of civil society, the death drive of the dominant order, is neither to be nor to become that drive; such being is not to the point. Rather, acceding to that figural position means recognizing and refusing the consequences of grounding reality in denial of the drive. As the death drive dissolves those congealments of identity that permit us to know and survive as ourselves, so the queer must insist on disturbing, on queering, social organization as such—on disturbing, therefore, and on queering *ourselves* and our investment in such organization. For queerness can never define an identity; it can only ever disturb one. And so, when I argue, as I aim to do here, that the burden of queerness is to be located less in the assertion of an oppositional political identity than in opposition to politics as the governing fantasy of realizing, in an always indefinite future, Imaginary identities foreclosed by our constitutive subjection to the signifier, I am proposing no platform or posi-

tion from which queer sexuality or any queer subject might finally and truly become itself, as if it could somehow manage thereby to achieve an *essential* queerness.[19] I am suggesting instead that the efficacy of queerness, its real strategic value, lies in its resistance to a Symbolic reality that only ever invests us as subjects insofar as we invest ourselves in it, clinging to its governing fictions, its persistent sublimations, as reality itself. It is only, after all, to its figures of meaning, which we take as the literal truth, that we owe our existence as subjects and the social relations within which we live—relations we may well be willing, therefore, to give up our lives to maintain.

The Child, in the historical epoch of our current epistemological regime, is the figure for this compulsory investment in the misrecognition of figure. It takes its place on the social stage like every adorable Annie gathering her limitless funds of pluck to "stick out [her] chin/ And grin/ And say: 'Tomorrow!/ Tomorrow!/ I love ya/ Tomorrow/ You're always/ A day/ Away.' "[20] And lo and behold, as viewed through the prism of the tears that it always calls forth, the figure of this Child seems to shimmer with the iridescent promise of Noah's rainbow, serving like the rainbow as the pledge of a covenant that shields us against the persistent threat of apocalypse now—or later. Recall, for example, the end of Jonathan Demme's *Philadelphia* (1993), his filmic act of contrition for the homophobia some attributed to *The Silence of the Lambs* (1991). After Andrew Beckett (a man for all seasons, as portrayed by the saintly Tom Hanks), last seen on his deathbed in an oxygen mask that seems to allude to, or trope on, Hannibal Lecter's more memorable muzzle (see figures 1 and 2), has shuffled off this mortal coil to stand, as we are led to suppose, before a higher law, we find ourselves in, if not at, his wake surveying a room in his family home, now crowded with children and pregnant women whose reassuringly bulging bellies (see figure 3) displace the bulging basket (unseen) of the HIV-positive gay man (unseen) from whom, the filmic text suggests, in a cinema (unlike the one in which we sit watching *Philadelphia*) not phobic about graphic representations of male-male sexual acts, Saint Thomas, a.k.a. Beckett, contracted the virus that cost

him his life. When we witness, in the film's final sequence, therefore, the videotaped representation of Andrew playing on the beach as a boy (see figure 4), the tears that these moving pictures solicit burn with an indignation directed not only against the intolerant world that sought to crush the honorable man this boy would later become, but also against the homosexual world in which boys like this eventually grow up to have crushes on other men. For the cult of the Child permits no shrines to the queerness of boys and girls, since queerness, for contemporary culture at large as for *Philadelphia* in particular, is understood as bringing children and childhood to an end. Thus, the occasion of a gay man's death gives the film the excuse to unleash once more the disciplinary image of the "innocent" Child performing its mandatory cultural labor of social reproduction. We encounter this image on every side as the lives, the speech, and the freedoms of adults face constant threat of legal curtailment out of deference to imaginary Children whose futures, as if they were permitted to have them except as they consist in the prospect of passing them on to Children of their own, are construed as endangered by the social disease as which queer sexualities register. Nor should we forget how pervasively AIDS—for which to this day the most effective name associated with the congressional appropriation of funds is that of a child, Ryan White—reinforces an older connection, as old as the antigay reading imposed on the biblical narrative of Sodom's destruction, between practices of gay sexuality and the undoing of futurity.[21] This, of course, is the connection on which Anita Bryant played so cannily when she campaigned in Florida against gay civil rights under the banner of "Save Our Children," and it remains the connection on which the national crusade against gay marriage rests its case.

Thus, while lesbians and gay men by the thousands work for the right to marry, to serve in the military, to adopt and raise children of their own, the political right, refusing to acknowledge these comrades in reproductive futurism, counters their efforts by inviting us to kneel at the shrine of the sacred Child: the Child who might witness lewd or inappropriately intimate behavior; the Child who might find information about dan-

1

2

3

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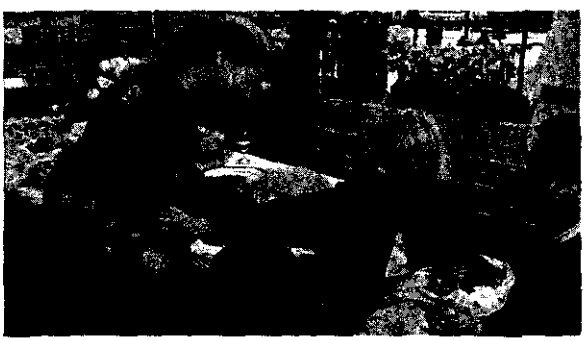
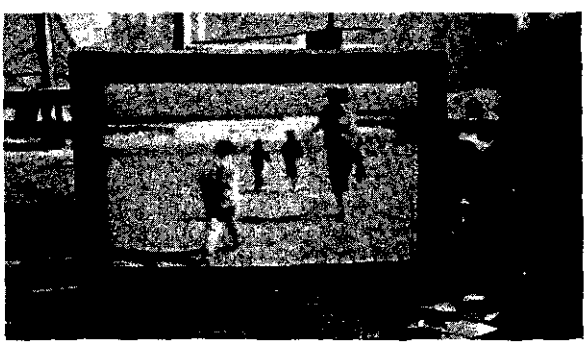




gerous "lifestyles" on the Internet; the Child who might choose a provocative book from the shelves of the public library; the Child, in short, who might find an enjoyment that would nullify the figural value, itself imposed by adult desire, of the Child as unmarked by the adult's adulterating implication in desire itself; the Child, that is, made to image, for the satisfaction of adults, an Imaginary fullness that's considered to want, and therefore to want for, nothing. As Lauren Berlant argues forcefully at the outset of *The Queen of America Goes to Washington City*, "a nation made for adult citizens has been replaced by one imagined for fetuses and children."[22] On every side, our enjoyment of liberty is eclipsed by the lengthening shadow of a Child whose freedom to develop undisturbed by encounters, or even by the threat of potential encounters, with an "otherness" of which its parents, its church, or the state do not approve, uncompromised by any possible access to what is painted as alien desire, terroristically holds us all in check and determines that political discourse conform to the logic of a narrative wherein history unfolds as the future envisioned for a Child who must never grow up. Not for nothing, after all, does the historical construction of the homosexual as distinctive social type overlap with the appearance of such literary creations as Tiny Tim, David Balfour, and Peter Pan, who enact, in an imperative most evident today in the uncannily intimate connection between Harry Potter and Lord Voldemort, a Symbolic resistance to the unmarried men (Scrooge, Uncle Ebenezer, Captain Hook) who embody, as Voldemort's name makes clear, a wish, a will, or a drive toward death that entails the destruction of the Child. That Child, immured in an innocence seen as continuously under seige, condenses a fantasy of vulnerability to the queerness of queer sexualities precisely insofar as that Child enshrines, in its form as sublimation, the very value for which queerness regularly finds itself condemned: an insistence on sameness that intends to restore an Imaginary past. The Child, that is, marks the fetishistic fixation of heteronormativity: an erotically charged investment in the rigid sameness of identity that is central to the compulsory narrative of reproductive futurism. And so, as the radical right maintains, the battle against

queers is a life-and-death struggle for the future of a Child whose ruin is pursued by feminists, queers, and those who support the legal availability of abortion. Indeed, as the Army of God made clear in the bomb-making guide it produced for the assistance of its militantly "pro-life" members, its purpose was wholly congruent with the logic of reproductive futurism: to "disrupt and ultimately destroy Satan's power to kill our children, God's children."[23]

Without ceasing to refute the lies that pervade these familiar right-wing diatribes, do we also have the courage to acknowledge, and even to embrace, their correlative truths? Are we willing to be sufficiently oppositional to the structural logic of opposition—oppositional, that is, to the logic by which politics reproduces our social reality—to accept that the figural burden of queerness, the burden that queerness is phobically produced precisely to represent, is that of the force that shatters the fantasy of Imaginary unity, the force that insists on the void (replete, paradoxically, with jouissance) always already lodged within, though barred from, symbolization: the gap or wound of the Real that inhabits the Symbolic's very core? Not that we are, or ever could be, outside the Symbolic ourselves; but we can, nonetheless, make the choice to accede to our cultural production as figures—*within* the dominant logic of narrative, *within* Symbolic reality—for the dismantling of such a logic and thus for the death drive it harbors within.

As the name for a force of mechanistic compulsion whose formal excess supersedes any end toward which it might seem to be aimed, the death drive refuses identity or the absolute privilege of any goal. Such a goal, such an end, could never be "it"; achieved, it could never satisfy. For the drive as such can only insist, and every end toward which we mistakenly interpret its insistence to pertain is a sort of grammatical placeholder, one that tempts us to read as transitive a pulsion that attains through insistence alone the satisfaction no end ever holds. Engaged in circulation around an object never adequate to fulfill it, the drive enacts the repetition that characterizes what Judith Butler has called "the repetitive propulsionality of sexuality."[24] The structural mandate of the drive,

therefore, could be seen to call forth its object or end, indeed, the whole register of sexuality itself, as a displacement of its own formal energies, as an allegorization of its differential force. But that force can never be separated from, can never be imagined as existing before, the Symbolic order of the signifier that it functions to transgress, which is why Lacan argues that "if everything that is immanent or implicit in the chain of natural events may be considered as subject to the so-called death drive, it is only because there is a signifying chain."[25]

One way to approach the death drive in terms of the economy of this "chain of natural events" thus shaped by linguistic structures—structures that allow us to produce those "events" through the logic of narrative history—is by reading the play and the place of the death drive in relation to a theory of irony, that queerest of rhetorical devices, especially as discussed by Paul de Man. Proposing that "any theory of irony is the undoing, the necessary undoing, of any theory of narrative," de Man adduces the constant tension between irony as a particular trope and narrative as a representational mode that allegorizes tropes in general. Narrative, that is, undertakes the project of accounting for trope systematically by producing, in de Man's rehearsal of Schlegel, an "anamorphosis of the tropes, the transformation of the tropes, into the system of tropes, to which the corresponding experience is that of the self standing above its own experiences." In contrast, as de Man makes clear, "what irony disrupts (according to Friedrich Schlegel) is precisely that dialectic and reflexivity." The corrosive force of irony thus carries a charge for de Man quite similar to that of the death drive as understood by Lacan. "Words have a way of saying things which are not at all what you want them to say," de Man notes. "There is a machine there, a text machine, an implacable determination and a total arbitrariness . . . which inhabits words on the level of the play of the signifier, which undoes any narrative consistency of lines, and which undoes the reflexive and dialectical model, both of which are, as you know, the basis of any narration."[26] The mindless violence of this textual machine, so arbitrary, so implacable, threatens, like a guillotine, to sever the genealogy that narrative syntax labors to af-

firm, recasting its narrative "chain of . . . events" as a "signifying chain" and inscribing in the realm of signification, along with the prospect of meaning, the meaningless machinery of the signifier, always in the way of what it would signify. Irony, whose effect de Man likens to the syntactical violence of anacoluthon, thus severs the continuity essential to the very logic of making sense.

How should we read this constant disruption of narrative signification, a disruption inextricable from the articulation of narrative as such, but as a version of the death drive, which Barbara Johnson calls, in a different context, "a kind of unthought remainder . . . a formal overdetermination that is, in Freud's case, going to produce repetition or, in deconstruction's case, may inhere in linguistic structures that don't correspond to anything else"?[27] If irony can serve as one of the names for the force of that unthought remainder, might not queerness serve as another? Queer theory, it follows, would constitute the site where the radical threat posed by irony, which heteronormative culture displaces onto the figure of the queer, is uncannily returned by queers who no longer disown but assume their figural identity as embodiments of the figuralization, and hence the disfiguration, of identity itself. Where the political interventions of identitarian minorities—including those who seek to substantialize the identities of lesbians, gay men, and bisexuals—may properly take shape as oppositional, affording the dominant order a reassuringly symmetrical, if inverted, depiction of its own ostensibly coherent identity, queer theory's opposition is precisely to any such logic of opposition, its proper task the ceaseless disappropriation of every propriety. Thus, queerness could never constitute an authentic or substantive identity, but only a structural position determined by the imperative of figuration; for the gap, the noncoincidence, that the order of the signifier installs both informs and inhabits queerness as it inhabits reproductive futurism. But it does so with a difference. Where futurism always anticipates, in the image of an Imaginary past, a realization of meaning that will suture identity by closing that gap, queerness undoes the identities through which we experience ourselves as subjects, insist-

ing on the Real of a jouissance that social reality and the futurism on which it relies have already foreclosed.

Queerness, therefore, 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 unnameable remainder, as Lacan describes it, is jouissance, sometimes translated as "enjoyment": a movement beyond the pleasure principle, beyond the distinctions of pleasure and pain, a violent passage beyond the bounds of identity, meaning, and law. This passage, toward which the pulsion of the drives continuously impels us, may have the effect, insofar as it gets attached to a particular object or end, of congealing identity around the fantasy of satisfaction or fulfillment by means of that object. At the same time, however, this jouissance dissolves such fetishistic investments, undoing the consistency of a social reality that relies on Imaginary identifications, on the structures of Symbolic law, and on the paternal metaphor of the name.[28] Hence, for Lacan there is another name that designates the unnameability to which jouissance would give us access: "Behind what is named, there is the unnameable," he writes. "It is in fact because it is unnameable, with all the resonances you can give to this name, that it is akin to the quintessential unnameable, that is to say to death."[29] The death drive, therefore, manifests itself, though in radically different guises, in both versions of jouissance. To the extent that jouissance, as fantasmatic escape from the alienation intrinsic to meaning, lodges itself in a given object on which identity comes to depend, it produces identity as mortification, reenacting the very constraint of meaning it was intended to help us escape. But to the extent that it tears the fabric of Symbolic reality as we know it, unraveling the solidity of *every* object, including the object as which the subject necessarily takes itself, jouissance evokes the death drive that always insists as the void in and of the subject, beyond its fantasy of self-realization, beyond the pleasure principle.

Bound up with the first of these death drives is the figure of the Child, enacting a logic of repetition that fixes identity through identification with the future of the social order. Bound up with the second is the figure

of the queer, embodying that order's traumatic encounter with its own inescapable failure, its encounter with the illusion of the future as suture to bind the constitutive wound of the subject's subjection to the signifier, which divides it, paradoxically, both from and into itself. In the preface to *Homographesis* I wrote that the signifier "gay," understood "as a figure for the textuality, the rhetoricity, of the sexual . . . designates the gap or incoherence that every discourse of 'sexuality' or 'sexual identity' would master."[30] Extending that claim, I now suggest that queer sexualities, inextricable from the emergence of the subject in the Symbolic, mark the place of the gap in which the Symbolic confronts what its discourse is incapable of knowing, which is also the place of a jouissance from which it can never escape. As a figure for what it can neither fully articulate nor acknowledge, the queer may provide the Symbolic with a sort of necessary reassurance by seeming to give a name to what, as Real, remains unnameable. But repudiations of that figural identity, reflecting a liberal faith in the abstract universality of the subject, though better enabling the extension of rights to those who are still denied them, must *similarly* reassure by attesting to the seamless coherence of the Symbolic whose dominant narrative would thus supersede the corrosive force of queer irony. If the queer's abjectified difference, that is, secures normativity's identity, the queer's disavowal of that difference affirms normativity's singular truth. For every refusal of the figural status to which queers are distinctively called reproduces the triumph of narrative as the *allegorization* of irony, as the logic of a temporality that always serves to "straighten" it out, and thus proclaims the universality of reproductive futurism. Such refusals perform, despite themselves, subservience to the law that effectively imposes politics as the only game in town, exacting as the price of admission the subject's (hetero)normalization, which is accomplished, regardless of sexual practice or sexual "orientation," through compulsory abjuration of the future-negating queer.

It may seem, from within this structure, that the Symbolic can only win; but that would ignore the correlative fact that it also can only lose. For the division on which the subject rests can never be spirited away and

the signifying order will always necessitate the production of some figural repository for the excess that precludes its ultimate realization of the One. In a political field whose limit and horizon is reproductive futurism, queerness embodies this death drive, this intransigent jouissance, by figuring sexuality's implication in the senseless pulsions of that drive. De-idealizing the metaphorics of meaning on which heteroreproduction takes its stand, queerness exposes sexuality's inevitable coloration by the drive: its insistence on repetition, its stubborn denial of teleology, its resistance to determinations of meaning (except insofar as it means this refusal to admit such determinations of meaning), and, above all, its rejection of spiritualization through marriage to reproductive futurism. Queerness as name may well reinforce the Symbolic order of naming, but it names what resists, as signifier, absorption into the Imaginary identity of the name. Empty, excessive, and irreducible, it designates the letter, the formal element, the lifeless machinery responsible for animating the "spirit" of futurity. And as such, as a name for the death drive that always informs the Symbolic order, it also names the jouissance forbidden by, but permeating, the Symbolic order itself.

By denying our identification with the negativity of this drive, and hence our disidentification from the promise of futurity, those of us inhabiting the place of the queer may be able to cast off that queerness and enter the properly political sphere, but only by shifting the figural burden of queerness to someone else. The *structural position* of queerness, after all, and the need to fill it remain. By choosing to *accept* that position, however, by assuming the "truth" of our queer capacity to figure the undoing of the Symbolic, and of the Symbolic subject as well, we might undertake the impossible project of imagining an oppositional political stance exempt from the imperative to reproduce the politics of signification (the politics aimed at closing the gap opened up by the signifier itself), which can only return us, by way of the Child, to the politics of reproduction. For the liberal's view of society, which seems to accord the queer a place, endorses no more than the conservative right's the queerness of resistance to futurism and thus the queerness of the queer. While

the right wing imagines the elimination of queers (or of the need to confront their existence), the left would eliminate queerness by shining the cool light of reason upon it, hoping thereby to expose it as merely a mode of sexual expression free of the all-pervasive coloring, the determining fantasy formation, by means of which it can seem to portend, and not for the right alone, the undoing of the social order and its cynosure, the Child. Queerness thus comes to mean *nothing* for both: for the right wing the nothingness always at war with the positivity of civil society; for the left, nothing more than a sexual practice in need of demystification.

But this is where reason must fail. Sexuality refuses demystification as the Symbolic refuses the queer; for sexuality and the Symbolic become what they are *by virtue of such refusals*. Ironically—but irony, as I've argued, always characterizes queer theory—the demystification of queerness and so, by extension, of sexuality itself, the demystification inherent in the position of liberal rationality, could achieve its realization only by traversing the collective fantasy that invests the social order with meaning by way of reproductive futurism. Taken at its word, that is, liberalism's abstract reason, rescuing queerness for sociality, dissolves, like queerness, the very investments on which sociality rests by doing away with its underlying and sustaining libidinal fantasies. Beyond the resonance of fantasy, after all, lies neither law nor reason. In the beyond of demystification, in that neutral, democratic literality that marks the futurism of the left, one could only encounter a queer dismantling of futurism itself *as fantasy* and a derealization of the order of meaning that futurism reproduces. Intent on the end, not the ends, of the social, queerness insists that the drive toward that end, which liberalism refuses to imagine, can never be excluded from the structuring fantasy of the social order itself. The sacralization of the Child thus necessitates the sacrifice of the queer.

Bernard Law, the former cardinal of Boston, mistaking (or maybe understanding too well) the degree of authority bestowed on him by the signifier of his patronymic, denounced in 1996 proposed legislation giving health care benefits to same-sex partners of municipal employ-

ees. He did so by proclaiming, in a noteworthy instance of piety in the sky, that bestowing such access to health care would profoundly diminish the marital bond. "Society," he opined, "has a special interest in the protection, care and upbringing of children. Because marriage remains the principal, and the best, framework for the nurture, education and socialization of children, the state has a special interest in marriage."[31] With this fatal embrace of a futurism so blindly committed to the figure of the Child that it will justify refusing health care benefits to the adults that some children become, Law lent his voice to the mortifying mantra of a communal jouissance that depends on the fetishization of the Child at the expense of whatever such fetishization must inescapably queer. Some seven years later, after Law had resigned for his failure to protect Catholic children from sexual assault by pedophile priests, Pope John Paul II returned to this theme, condemning state-recognized same-sex unions as parodic versions of authentic families, "based on individual egoism" rather than genuine love. Justifying that condemnation, he observed, "Such a 'caricature' has no future and cannot give future to any society."[32] Queers must respond to the violent force of such constant provocations not only by insisting on our equal right to the social order's prerogatives, not only by avowing our capacity to promote that order's coherence and integrity, but also by saying explicitly what Law and the Pope and the whole of the Symbolic order for which they stand hear anyway in each and every expression or manifestation of queer sexuality: Fuck the social order and the Child in whose name we're collectively terrorized; fuck Annie; fuck the waif from *Les Mis*; fuck the poor, innocent kid on the Net; fuck Laws both with capital ls and with small; fuck the whole network of Symbolic relations and the future that serves as its prop.

We might like to believe that with patience, with work, with generous contributions to lobbying groups or generous participation in activist groups or generous doses of legal savvy and electoral sophistication, the future will hold a place for us—a place at the political table that won't have to come at the cost of the places we seek in the bed or the bar or the

baths. But there are no *queers* in that future as there can be no future for queers, chosen as they are to bear the bad tidings that there can be no future at all: that the future, as Annie's hymn to the hope of "Tomorrow" understands, is "*always*/ A day/ Away." Like the lovers on Keats's Grecian urn, forever "near the goal" of a union they'll never in fact achieve, we're held in thrall by a future continually deferred by time itself, constrained to pursue the dream of a day when today and tomorrow are one. That future is nothing but kid stuff, reborn each day to screen out the grave that gapes from within the lifeless letter, luring us into, ensnaring us in, reality's gossamer web. Those queered by the social order that projects its death drive onto them are no doubt positioned to recognize the structuring fantasy that so defines them. But they're positioned as well to recognize the *irreducibility* of that fantasy and the cost of construing it as contingent to the logic of social organization as such. Acceding to this figural identification with the undoing of identity, which is also to say with the disarticulation of social and Symbolic form, might well be described, in John Brenkman's words, as "politically self-destructive."[33] But politics (as the social elaboration of reality) and the self (as mere prosthesis maintaining the future for the figural Child), are what queerness, again as figure, necessarily destroys—necessarily insofar as this "self" is the agent of reproductive futurism and this "politics" the means of its promulgation as the order of social reality. But perhaps, as Lacan's engagement with Antigone in Seminar 7 suggests, political self-destruction inheres in the only act that counts as one: the act of resisting enslavement to the future in the name of having a life.

If the fate of the queer is to figure the fate that cuts the thread of futurity, if the jouissance, the corrosive enjoyment, intrinsic to queer (non)identity annihilates the fetishistic jouissance that works to *consolidate* identity by allowing reality to coagulate around its ritual reproduction, then the only oppositional status to which our queerness could ever lead would depend on our taking seriously the place of the death drive we're called on to figure and insisting, against the cult of the Child and the political order it enforces, that we, as Guy Hocquenghem made clear,

are "not the signifier of what might become a new form of 'social organisation,'" that we do not intend a new politics, a better society, a brighter tomorrow, since all of these fantasies reproduce the past, through displacement, in the form of the future. We choose, instead, *not* to choose the Child, as disciplinary image of the Imaginary past or as site of a projective identification with an always impossible future. The queerness we propose, in Hocquenghem's words, "is unaware of the passing of generations as stages on the road to better living. It knows nothing about 'sacrifice now for the sake of future generations' . . . [it] knows that civilisation alone is mortal."[34] Even more: it delights in that mortality as the negation of everything that would define itself, moralistically, as pro-life. It is we who must bury the subject in the tomb-like hollow of the signifier, pronouncing at last the words for which we're condemned should we speak them or not: that *we* are the advocates of abortion; that the Child as futurity's emblem must die; that the future is mere repetition and just as lethal as the past. Our queerness has nothing to offer a Symbolic that lives by denying that nothingness except an insistence on the haunting excess that this nothingness entails, an insistence on the negativity that pierces the fantasy screen of futurity, shattering narrative temporality with irony's always explosive force. And so what is queerest about us, queerest within us, and queerest despite us is this willingness to insist intransitively—to insist that the future stop here.

2. *SINTHOMOSEXUALITY*

Sinthomosexuality: consider this neologism, grafting, at an awkward join, the sounds of French and English, to the benefit of neither, like a signifier each prefers to represent as foreign in the hope of thereby keeping it unheard of and unheard.[1] If this word without a future seeks a hearing here, it's not to play for time or, like Scheherazade, to keep at bay its all too certain doom. It would assert itself instead *against* futurity, *against* its propagation, insofar as it would designate an impasse in the passage to the future and, by doing so, would pass beyond, pass *through*, the saving fantasy futurity denotes. Can that be right, though? How could "saving" name a future that, whatever else it holds in store, is bound to hold our deaths? Just how could time to come, from which, in time, we're destined all to vanish, give the narcissistic solace that the ego, so conservative, so tethered to Imaginary form, so fixed to fixity, demands? In short: through fantasy. The central prop and underlying agency of futur-

ism, fantasy alone endows reality with fictional coherence and stability, which seem to guarantee that such reality, the social world in which we take our place, will still survive when we do not. It thus compels us to identify ourselves with what's to come by way of haven or defense against the ego's certain end. Elias Canetti seems to touch on this when writing about the human subject's investment in futurity: "[He] not only want[s] to exist for always, but to exist when others are no longer there. He wants to live longer than everyone else, and to *know* it; and when he is no longer there himself, his name must continue."[2] His name, that is, his surrogate, must take the subject's place; it must survive, if only in fantasy, because fantasy names the only place where desiring subjects can live. The sheltering office of fantasy, in concert with desire, absorbs us into scenic space until we seem to become it, until we seem so fully at one with the *setting* of our fantasy, the *frame* wherein we get to see what is where we are not, that the subject of fantasy, Lacan asserts, where this fantasy space is concerned, though "frequently unperceived . . . is always there."[3]

Is *always* there. Transformed into setting, hence, literally, mise-en-scène, the Lacanian subject of fantasy takes the place of place itself, merging so fully with the sense of reality imbuing the imagined scene that even its absence as an *actor* in that scene portends neither loss of presence nor the absence of the consciousness that lets it "know" itself. Instead, as Slavoj Žižek writes, "In [fantasy] I find myself reduced to the evanescent point of a thought contemplating the course of events during my absence, my non-being."[4] To be there *always*, though unperceived, to inhabit the space of perception as such and thus to become the witness to one's absence, one's disembodiment: such fantasy presumes a reality guaranteed, not threatened, by time, sustained by the certainty that a "course of events" is bound to continue its course in due course long after we are gone. And isn't it, then, an effort to fill what Lacan calls the lack in the Other—the place of the absent signifier from every signifying chain and hence of the very division around which the subject itself takes shape—through a stop-gap identification with the empty place of

the gaze in a gesture of hopeless optimism for which we're always compelled to opt: an optimism hung on the slender thread of a future for which we would lay down our lives in order to flesh out the fatal blank, the impossible Real, of that gaze?

Sinthomosexuality, on the other hand—denying the appeal of fantasy, refusing the promise of futurity that mends each tear, however mean, in reality's dress with threads of meaning (attached as they are to the eye-catching lure we might see as the sequins of sequence, which dazzle our vision by producing the constant illusion of *con*sequence)—offers us fantasy turned inside out, the seams of its costume exposing reality's seamlessness as mere seeming, the fraying knots that hold each sequin in place now usurping that place. The *sinthome*—a term, as Lacan explains in Seminar 23, that he takes from an "old way of writing what was written later as 'symptom' "[5]—speaks to the singularity of the subject's existence, to the particular way each subject manages to knot together the orders of the Symbolic, the Imaginary, and the Real. But by calling attention to the status of the word as an archaic form of writing—thus inflecting it in the direction of the letter rather than of the signifier as bearer of meaning—Lacan, who will subsequently describe the sinthome as "not ceasing to write itself," implies from the outset its relation to the primary inscription of subjectivity and thus to the constitutive fixation of the subject's access to jouissance.[6] Though it functions as the necessary condition for the subject's engagement of Symbolic reality, the sinthome refuses the Symbolic logic that determines the exchange of signifiers; it admits no translation of its singularity and therefore carries nothing of meaning, recalling in this the letter as the site at which meaning comes undone.

As the template of a given subject's distinctive access to jouissance, defining the condition of which the subject is always a symptom of sorts itself, the sinthome, in its refusal of meaning, procures the determining relation to enjoyment by which the subject finds itself driven beyond the logic of fantasy or desire. It operates, for Lacan, as the knot that holds the subject together, that ties or binds the subject to its constitutive li-

bidinal career, and assures that no subject, try as it may, can ever "get over" itself—"get over," that is, the fixation of the drive that determines its jouissance. Explaining the sinthome's centrality to the subject's accession to the Symbolic, Dominiek Hoens and Ed Pluth observe, "The subject is able to take its place in the Symbolic order by means of an element heterogeneous to that order. Yet this element is also included in the Symbolic in some way. This order is, then, ultimately grounded in something that is not of the order itself. From the point of view of the subject, one can say that the condition of the possibility of being a subject implies that it must stick to a certain *sign* that cannot be integrated into the Symbolic order, even though it is not completely alien to the Symbolic."[7]

Such a "sign," as Hoens and Pluth make clear, does not operate as a signifier, since it can't be exchanged for another one that purports to make good its lack. It accedes to no equivalent, to no translation, and thus to no meaning. Instead, it denotes "an *isolated* signifier/sign taken out of the Symbolic order" (8): a "pure sign," a site of singularity and hence of nonexchangeability that fixes us as definitively, and as meaninglessly, as a fingerprint. If this singularity alone effects our access to the Symbolic, it also, as Hoens and Pluth make clear, "puts the whole order into question and is thus a pure negation of what the order stands for" (9). This antithetical grounding, whereby the structure of Symbolic reality rests on what also serves to negate it, informs the process of signification by which the subject strives to make sense of itself in the face of a limit—an internal limit, not one that confronts it from without—encountered in the sinthome's, and in the *sinthomosexual*'s, senseless jouissance.

For the sinthome "is literally our only substance," as Žižek rightly asserts, "the only positive support of our being, the only point that gives consistency to the subject."[8] As the subject's "only substance," though, the sinthome, like a catachresis, brings the subject into being at the cost of a necessary blindness to this determination by the sinthome—a blindness to the arbitrary fixation of enjoyment responsible for its consistency. Disavowing the meaningless fiat of such a catachrestic sinthome, the

subject misreads its identity as a metaphor instead, one that names its relation to an Otherwhose positivity seems to guarantee Symbolic reality itself. Such a subject, who would thereby mistake the sinthome for a site of potential meaning, can be said to "believe in" its sinthome (as opposed to identifying with it), which, as Paul Verhaeghe and Frédéric Declercq point out, "is to believe in the existence of a final signifier, S_2, to reveal the ultimate signification and sense of S_1. The condition for this is the guarantee that the Other has no lack." The Lacanian formula for such a belief, as Verhaeghe and Declercq observe, "consists in adding three dots (. . .) to the letter: S_1. . . ."[9] Consonant with what I am arguing here, this ellipsis itself should be understood as the defining mark of futurism, inscribing the faith that temporal duration will result in the realization of meaning by way of a "final signifier" that will make meaning whole at last. Sinthomosexuality, by contrast, scorns such belief in a final signifier, reducing *every* signifier to the status of the letter and insisting on access to jouissance in place of access to sense, on identification with one's sinthome instead of belief in its meaning.

Proust, in a well-known passage from the *Recherche*, describes a "game wherein the Japanese amuse themselves by filling a porcelain bowl with water and steeping in it little pieces of paper which until then are without character or form, but, the moment they become wet, stretch and twist and take on colour and distinctive shape, become flowers or houses or people, solid and recognisable."[10] This figure for figure's ability to conjure a universe out of itself simultaneously bespeaks the *dis*figuration or *undoing* of reality so important to de Man: the dissolution of everything we understand as "solid and recognisable" insofar as it proves to be an effect of something (language, for de Man; the sinthome, for Lacan) without intrinsic meaning, like the pieces of paper that originally appeared "without character or form." If the sinthome thus names the element through which we "take on . . . distinctive shape," and if, like figure, it assures our access to a "recognisable" world by allowing us, as Lacan explains, to "choose something . . . instead of nothing (radical psychotic autism, the destruction of the symbolic universe),"[11] then it is also

the case that whatever exposes the sinthome as meaningless knot, denying our blindness to its functioning and destabilizing the ground of our faith in reality, effects a disfiguration with possibly catastrophic consequences—consequences Žižek characterizes as "pure autism, a psychic suicide, surrender to the death drive even to the total destruction of the symbolic universe."[12]

Glossing Lacan's description of the sinthome as "not ceasing to write itself" ("ne cessant pas de s'inscrire"), Roberto Harari discusses the sinthome, belief in which forestalls this "total destruction of the symbolic universe," in terms of what is "necessary" for the survival of the subject: " 'That which does not cease to write itself' alludes to a theoretical constellation that returns inexorably, incessantly. In the last instance, the necessary is that which must not be gotten rid of; if it comes away, it must be tied back in—it's necessary, one cannot hide it. In colloquial terms, we could say 'I can't live without it,' or 'it's part of my life, it's irreplaceable.' Here, of course, we are not referring to any intersubjective relations; it is a question of 'Without that—entailed by my way of dealing with it—I cannot live. It is necessary for me.' A nodal category, in sum, illuminated by Seminar 24."[13]

Harari goes on to evoke the sinthome as "an uncoupled One, outside any sequence; it answers to no integration, no context, no history, no full or anticipated meaning."[14] Impervious to analysis and beyond interpretation, the sinthome—as 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 unsymbolizable 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."[15] I am calling sinthomosexuality, then, the site where the fantasy of futurism confronts the insistence of a jouissance that rends it precisely by *rendering* it in relation to that drive. Sinthomosexuality also speaks, as neologistic signifier, to the "sin" that

continues to attach itself to "homosexuality" (a "sin," as I argue in chapter 3, that can make the *sinthomosexual* into something of a s[a]in[t]) and materializes the threat to the subject's faith that its proper home is in meaning, a threat made Real by the homosexual's link to a less reassuring "home": the sinthome as site of a jouissance around and against which the subject takes shape and in which it finds its consistency. By way of this infelicitous term, I mean to suggest that homosexuality, understood as a cultural figure, as the hypostatization of various fantasies that trench on the antisocial force that queerness might better name, is made—that is, both called forth and compelled—to carry the burden of sexuality's demeaning relation to the sinthome, the burden of what Lacan describes as the *absence* of a sexual relation: the absence, that is, of a complementarity to naturalize relations between the sexes insofar as all sexuality suffers the mark of the signifier as lack. Thus, homosexuality is thought as a threat to the logic of thought itself insofar as it figures the availability of an unthinkable jouissance that would put an end to fantasy—and, with it, to futurity—by reducing the assurance of meaning in fantasy's promise of continuity to the meaningless circulation and repetitions of the drive. Lacan, moreover, himself makes clear the risk at which such jouissance puts reproductive futurism when he observes that "the end of jouissance—as everything Freud articulates about what he unadvisedly calls 'partial drives' teaches us—the end of jouissance does not coincide with what it leads to, namely, the fact that we reproduce."[16]

That risk informs the cultural fantasy that conjures homosexuality, and with it the definitional importance of sex in our imagining of homosexuality, in intimate relation to a fatal, and even murderous, jouissance —a fantasy that locates homosexuality in the place of the sinthome, constructing it always as what I call *sinthomosexuality*. For example, in 1997, while Andrew Cunanan, quondam gay club kid turned serial killer of (mostly) gay men, held the U.S. media in a rapt fascination that promised its own sort of jouissance, Gary Bauer, of the Family Research Council, opined that "those who practice homosexuality embrace a culture of death" and Peter A. Jay, a regular contributor to a column in the *Baltimore*

Sun, echoed this phrase (itself a commonplace in anti-abortion polemics) to draw what seemed an obvious link to Cunanan's murderous rampage: "For half a century at least, male homosexual life in the United States has been a culture of death. . . . Sooner or later, a product of that culture was going to take violence on the road. . . . There will be other young men who have come face to face with the knowledge that their own lives are blighted and doomed . . . and now want to experience the rush of killing *in more traditional ways*" (emphasis mine).[17] Concurring in this notion that murderousness inhabits the traditional, if not traditionally familial, repertoire of gay values, Larry Kramer, writing in the *New York Times*, gave voice to his hope for a transformation that would literally revitalize gay culture: "Allowing sex-centrism to remain the sole definition of homosexuality is now coming to be seen as the greatest act of self-destruction. There is a growing understanding that we created a culture that in effect murdered us, and that if we are to remain alive it's time to redefine homosexuality as something far greater than what we do with our genitals."[18]

But can anyone, Larry Kramer included, believe that such acts of redefinition, however intent they may be on obscuring the realities of "what we do with our genitals"—by labeling us as "artistic" perhaps, or as a "gentle, loving people," or maybe just as possessed of a fabulous instinct for color and style—would alter the all-pervasive fantasy within which our meaning is always a function not only of what we *do* with our genitals but also of what we *don't* do: a function, that is, of the envy-, contempt-, and anxiety-inducing fixation on our freedom from the necessity of translating the corrupt, unregenerate vulgate of fucking into the infinitely tonier, indeed sacramental, Latin of procreation? It is not, after all, mere coincidence that Bauer's evocation of sex-obsessed homosexuals willfully "embrac[ing] a culture of death" should follow, in his view logically, from his meditation on the spiritual significance that quickens the month of June in the West: "Traditionally, June is a month jam-packed with weddings," he tells his readers, "a time to celebrate the abundance of God's love and His special plan for procreation. 'Male and female He created them,' the Book of Genesis says, and through this

natural pairing of one man and one woman a family is created and the hope of a new generation is carried forward."[19]

"A family is created": like Freud's "a child is being beaten" (which no doubt must follow in the fullness of time), the phrase strategically elides the agency by which this end is achieved. No fucking could ever effect such creation: all sensory experience, all pleasure of the flesh, must be borne away from this fantasy of futurity secured, eternity's plan fulfilled, as "a new generation is carried forward." Paradoxically, the child of the two-parent family thus proves that its parents *don't* fuck and on its tiny shoulders it carries the burden of maintaining the fantasy of a time to come in which meaning, at last made present to itself, no longer depends on the fantasy of its *attainment* in time to come. June may remain the privileged season for Bauer and his flock to extol what they see as the "hope of a new generation," but it is always open season on those who would fly in the face of the mandate that they "suffer the little children" and who force the world, in consequence, to brood upon the abyss, which appears to be less engaging than cooing over the fledgling brood in the nest: less engaging, that is, unless one can manage to coo and brood at once, like opponents of women's abortion rights displaying their fetal photos like favorite snapshots from family albums and brandishing them all the more avidly when the fetus, after abortion, most clearly resembles a fully-formed child. Such acts of fetishization by those intent on affirming "life," acts that make visible the morbidity inherent in fetishization as such, are by no means outside the central currents of social and cultural discourse. To the contrary, they allow us access to the very logic that drives that discourse: a logic not for June alone but truly for all seasons, and never more clearly visible than in the season in which, throughout the West, we are ordered, each and every one, to attend to the birth of the Child.

Take, for example, Tiny Tim—or even, with a nod to the spirit of the late Henny Youngman, "Take Tiny Tim, *please!*" His "withered little hand,"[20] as if in life already dead, keeping us all in a stranglehold as adamant as the "iron frame" supporting his "little limbs" (94); his "plaintive

little voice" (99) refusing any and every complaint the better to assure its all-pervasive media magnification, in the echoes of which, year in and year out, God blasts us, every one; his "little, little" (125) figure parading its patent vulnerability with the all-too-sure conviction of embodying the ruthless spiritual uplift, the obligatory hope for the future to come, imposed by the celebration of Christmas, "when its mighty Founder," as Dickens pointedly reminds us, "was a child himself" (104); and his "patient and . . . mild" (125) disposition so thoroughly matching the perfect humility of its coercive self-display that his father with "tremulous" voice recalls how Tiny Tim "hoped the people saw him in the church, because he was a cripple, and it might be pleasant to them to remember upon Christmas Day, who made lame beggars walk, and blind men see" (94).

Very pleasant indeed. And more pleasant by half than remembering, instead, who made lame beggars lame (and beggars) and who made those blind men blind. But then, *A Christmas Carol* would have us believe that we know whom to blame already, know as surely as we know who would silence the note of that plaintive little voice and require that the "active little crutch" (94) kick the habit of being leaned on. For the inexplicable sufferings of the world, which smolder through the text like its dense brown fog, rise, in the story's logic, like acrid smoke from a sodden faggot: rise, that is, from the one whose stingy, reclusive, and anticommunitarian ways express themselves fully when he stands exposed as that criminal by criminals themselves reviled: as the dreaded pedocide. "Secret, and self-contained, and solitary as an oyster" (46), Scrooge may owe his representation to the traditional iconography of the miser as filtered through the lens of a liberal critique of emergent industrial capitalism, but the sins of the counting house count for little in the course of Dickens's text until they are made to account metonymically for the death of that little, little child for whose threatened absence from the merry-making of Christmases Yet to Come the jury need not even leave the box in order to find Scrooge guilty as charged of what the indictment would no doubt characterize as "futuricide" by "hum-buggery."

Others, those more invested than I in a reading practice that defines its goal as setting the record straight about authors and characters who are not, might dwell on Scrooge's choice not to marry in favor of partnership with Jacob Marley (like himself, a bachelor businessman) whose name he declines to paint over even after his partner's death and to which he continues to answer just as if it were his own: "It was all the same to him" (46). They might point to the implicit anality in the text's depiction of that partnership and cite the lament of Marley's ghost that he never allowed his spirit, in life, to rove "beyond the narrow limits of our money-changing hole" (61); they might point to the ghost's remark to Scrooge—"I have sat invisible beside you many and many a day" (63)—or to Scrooge's comment on the bond that once connected him to his fellow apprentice, Dick Wilkins: "He was very much attached to me, was Dick" (75). They might even point to the charwoman's representation of Scrooge as a "wicked old screw" who deserved that his worldly goods be stolen from the very bed of his corpse because, as she puts it derisively, he wasn't "natural in his lifetime" (115). And in light of all this, such critics might claim that Scrooge has need of a rainbow flag, not a Christmas tree, with which to spruce up his home. In proposing that Scrooge be viewed, instead, as a canonical literary instantiation of *sinthomosexuality*, I make no pretense of revealing an "identity" encoded in the text. Rather, I want to attend to the potent effects of the cultural fantasy linking Scrooge to the fate of Tiny Tim as surely as the sinthome is linked to the historical consistency of the subject, or as queer sexualities are linked to the conceptual coherence of heterosexual desire.

Scrooge, after all, as a bachelor in a text that declares "a bachelor . . . a wretched outcast" (103) while pausing to limn its narrator, with an almost palpable defensiveness, as "man enough" (82) to have been turned on by the bountiful charms of Belle's beautiful daughter, exudes from the outset a mode of enjoyment alien to that of the community at large and alien, more importantly, to the very concept of community at all. "It was the very thing he liked," Dickens writes, insisting on Scrooge's disengagement from every form of human fellowship and every act of social

intercourse: "To edge his way along the crowded paths of life, warning all human sympathy to keep its distance, was what the knowing ones call 'nuts' to Scrooge" (47). If this form of enjoyment effectively makes him seem nutty to those around him, the pleasure Scrooge takes, what turns him on, comes in part from refusing to use his nuts to drop acorns from the family tree. Indeed, his every enjoyment betrays the logic of such a refusal, the exquisite pain of a negation so great that he almost seems to rebuff the very warm-bloodedness of mammalian vitality, as if, like a textbook-perfect example of the death drive according to Freud, he aimed to return to the icy, inert immobility of a lifeless thing: "The cold within him froze his old features, nipped his pointed nose, shrivelled his cheek, stiffened his gait; made his eyes red, his thin lips blue; and spoke out shrewdly in his grating voice. A frosty rime was on his head, and on his eyebrows, and his wiry chin. He carried his own low temperature always about with him; he iced his office in the dog-days; and he didn't thaw it one degree at Christmas" (46).

Place beside this description of Scrooge a passage from Lacan's Seminar 23, *Le sinthome*, where he remarks, in the course of discussing the foreclosure of meaning in the Real, "It sets everything on fire, the Real. But it's a cold fire. The fire that burns is a mask, if I might put it this way, of the Real. The Real of it is to be looked for on the other side, the side of absolute zero."[21] Scrooge, like an incarnation of the Real's cold fire nearing absolute zero, threatens a shutdown of life's vital machinery by exposing it *as* machinery, by denying the spiritualization that would bathe it in the warmth of Symbolic meaning and deliver it to the midwives we're compelled to become in the order of reproduction. Such refusal to embrace the genealogical fantasy that braces the social order cannot, as *A Christmas Carol* makes clear, be a matter of public indifference. For the point of the tale, and hence of its status as the text that enjoys the cultural distinction, above all others in our literary canon, of an annual ritual of repetition that supplants as much as it supplements the season's more properly sacred rites, is that Scrooge, as *sinthomosexual*, denies, by virtue of his unwillingness to contribute to the communal real-

ization of futurity, the fantasy structure, the aesthetic frame, supporting reality itself. He realizes, that is, the jouissance that derealizes sociality and thereby threatens, in Žižek's words, "the total destruction of the symbolic universe."

"Keep Christmas in your own way, and let me keep it in mine," Scrooge urges his nephew, Fred; "Keep it!" the nephew counters, "But you don't keep it." "Let me leave it alone, then," his exasperated uncle responds (48). Neither nephew nor text can consent, however, to leave Scrooge alone to leave Christmas alone, for Christmas here stands in the place of the obligatory collective reproduction of the Child, the obligatory investment in the social precisely as the *order* of the Child, which demands our collective assent to the truth that the Child exists to make flesh. Even more: it demands that our collective assent be affirmed by naming, humiliating, and then, at its whim, redeeming the one who won't give it—affirmed, that is, by the structural mandate that he who refuses the Child *be* refused, providing the occasion for communal access to the negativity of a jouissance for which, as its embodiment, the *sinthomosexual* must, in the first place, be projectively reviled. If, as the terroristic adage of our culture's long children's hour proposes, "it takes a village to raise a child," then, we might add, it takes, albeit perversely, a villain too: a Scrooge, a *sinthomosexual*, on whom to project the force of the death drive and the obtrusion of the Real, which can never be acknowledged as the engine driving the reproduction of the social itself.

The pleasurable fantasy of survival (Tiny Tim, as Dickens, in a last-minute addition to the manuscript, writes, does "NOT die" [133]), requires, therefore, more than anything else, the survival of a fantasy: the fantasy, for instance, that Tiny Tim, futurity's fragile figure, does *not* excite an ardent fear (or is it a fearful ardor?) to see him, "as good as gold . . . and better" (94), at last cash in his chips; the fantasy, in fact, that Scrooge, not we, must answer for such a fantasy; and, equally self-serving, the fantasy, perhaps the most pleasurable of them all, that the pleasure we derive from Scrooge's "salvation" through punitive abjection shares nothing with the sadomasochistic enjoyment Scrooge figures

within the text. *A Christmas Carol* thus engages a truth about the nature of neighborly love far removed from the surfeit of communal goodwill its conclusion appears to endorse. Scrooge, the self-denying miser—living alone, and in darkness, on gruel—extends to his neighbors, however unneighborly it no doubt makes him appear, the same self-denying enjoyment to which he readily submits as well.[22] In this he enacts the negativity both Freud and Lacan discerned in the commandment to love one's neighbor as oneself; he unleashes, that is, *as the love of his neighbor*, the force of a primal masochism like that of the superego asserting its singular imperative, "Enjoy!"[23] What might seem to bespeak narcissistic isolation from everyone around him—his self-delighting stinginess, his solipsistic rejection of comforts, no less for others than for himself—instantiates, then, a death drive opposed to the ego and the world of desire. It expresses, that is, the will-to-enjoyment perversely obedient to the superego's insatiable and masochistic demands.

"Whoever attempts to submit to the moral law," Lacan informs us, "sees the demands of his superego grow increasingly meticulous and increasingly cruel."[24] Thus, Scrooge's death, when revealed by the spirit of Christmas Yet to Come, far from rescuing Tiny Tim, assures his death as well. For the miser's grave serves to *realize* the negativity, the cruel enjoyment, the jouissance of the "neighborly love" to which his days on earth were devoted, expressing the triumph of the death drive and reifying the fatality he always embodied. Scrooge's persistence, therefore, *as* Scrooge, as the child-refusing *sinthomosexual* whom the spirit of Christmas Yet to Come exposes as a life-denying black hole, must be understood as determining that there can be no future at all. For Scrooge turns Christmas Yet to Come, like the spirit who ushers it in, into nothing but a "spectral hand and one great heap of black" (111). He uncovers with this the vivifying fantasy of reproductive futurism as merely the illusion by which we fill out the place of the Other's gaze, the traumatic obtrusion of the Real that's evoked by the spectre's "Unseen Eyes" (113).[25] As "Scrooge" thus names the "wicked old screw" who screws, or fucks with, the future, so *A Christmas Carol*, like the *sinthomophobic* culture that it re-

flects, must, to preserve the fantasy that lives with our Tiny Tims, give a turn of the Scrooge that turns him toward the promise of futurity by turning him into "a second father" (133) to the boy who "did NOT die." With this act of conversion, like those alleged by "ministries of hope" that promise "life" to those grown sick-to-death of being queer, *A Christmas Carol* is able to resurrect both Scrooge and Tiny Tim by liberating the Santa the sinthomosexual would deny.[26]

Only by thus renouncing ourselves can queers escape the charge of embracing and promoting a "culture of death," earning the right to be viewed as "something far greater than what we do with our genitals." *A Christmas Carol*, with astonishing clarity, spells out just how we gain that "right" when we learn that Scrooge, now family-friendly and blissfully pro-natalist, subsequently had (alas, poor Marley) "no further intercourse with Spirits, but lived upon the Total Abstinence Principle, ever afterwards" (134). By accepting this peter-less principle, we might eventually gain acceptance as the "social equals and responsible citizens" that Larry Kramer and others have demanded we become; we might find ourselves, like Scrooge, reborn, made over as "second father[s]" to the future, permitted to perform our part in the collective adoration of the Child and so to reinforce the fantasy always figured by Tiny Tim. But we might do well to recall that Lacan, toward the end of his career, maintained that by moving beyond, by traversing "the fundamental fantasy," we confront the meaningless spur or nub of our access to jouissance, the Thing that holds the drive, indecipherably, in a fixed rotation around it. And faced with this sinthome, itself the limit of every analysis and beyond interpretation, the subject, he proposed, must come at last to identify with it. The subject, that is, must accept its sinthome, its particular pathway to jouissance, as its "Real identity, connecting it to the Real of its being" (68), in the words of Verhaeghe and Declercq. This, I suggest, is the ethical burden to which queerness must accede in a social order intent on misrecognizing its own investment in morbidity, fetishization, and repetition: to inhabit the place of meaninglessness associated with the sinthome; to figure an unregenerate, and unregenerating, sexuality

whose singular insistence on jouissance, rejecting every constraint imposed by sentimental futurism, exposes aesthetic culture—the culture of forms and their reproduction, the culture of Imaginary lures—as always already a "culture of death" intent on abjecting the force of a death drive that shatters the tomb we call life. The death drive as which the queer figures, then, refuses the calcification of form that is reproductive futurism, since the Lacanian death drive, as Žižek observes, "is precisely the ultimate Freudian name for the dimension traditional metaphysics designated as that of *immortality*—for a drive, a 'thrust,' which persists beyond the (biological) cycle of generation and corruption, beyond the 'way of all flesh.' In other words, in the death drive, the concept 'dead' functions in exactly the same way as '*heimlich*' in the Freudian *unheimlich*, as coinciding with its negation: the 'death drive' designates the dimension of what horror fiction calls the 'undead,' a strange, immortal, indestructible life that persists beyond death."[27]

Such immortality pertains to what the Symbolic constitutively forecloses: not reality, not the subject, not the future, not the Child, but the substance of jouissance itself, the Lacanian lamella, on which the *sinthomosexual* lives and against which social organization wields the weapon of futurity to keep the place of life empty—merely a hollow, inanimate form—the better to sustain the fantasy of its endurance in time to come. The death drive's "immortality," then, refers to a persistent negation that offers assurance of nothing at all: neither identity, nor survival, nor any promise of a future. Instead, it insists both on and as the impossibility of Symbolic closure, the absence of any Other to affirm the Symbolic order's truth, and hence the illusory status of meaning as defense against the self-negating substance of jouissance.

Make no mistake, then: Tiny Tim survives at our expense in a culture that always sustains itself on the threat that he might die. And we, the *sinthomosexuals* who, however often we try to assert that we're "more" than what we do with our genitals, are nonetheless convicted from the outset of stealing his childhood, endangering his welfare, and, ultimately, destroying his life, must respond by insisting that Tiny Tim is

always already dead, mortified into a fetish animated only by the collective fantasy wherein he *doesn't* rise up and ask in reproach, "Father, don't you see I'm burning?"[28] Because there isn't now, and never has been, much doubt about who killed him, because his death can always be traced to the *sinthomosexual's* jouissance, why not acknowledge our kinship at last with the Scrooge who, unregenerate, refuses the social imperative to grasp futurity in the form of the Child, for the sake of whom, as the token of accession to Imaginary wholeness, everything else in the world, by force if needed, must give way?

And so it does, unfailingly, especially when that force directs its aim at actual, flesh-and-blood children, provoking the violence they're made to suffer in the name of a God who, some report, urged *us* to suffer *them*: the institutional violence, for example, of a near universal queer-baiting intended to effect the scarification (in a program of social engineering whose outcome might well be labeled "Scared Straight") of each and every child by way of antigay immunization. Might not the narrative of *A Christmas Carol*, with its scarification of Scrooge, serve as a sort of booster shot administered once a year? For Scrooge himself must not *be* Scrooge lest Tiny Tim should die. The not-yet-repentant Scrooge, therefore, who identifies with his sinthome, must disappear at the end of the text only to reappear elsewhere in the ranks of Dickensian pedophobes. Consider, for example, Monsieur the Marquis as described in *A Tale of Two Cities*: his face itself a death mask, lacking the slightest sign of life, except, we are told, for "two compressions, or dints" where his nose was "pinched at the top of each nostril," and these, the only indices of vitality he betrayed, "persisted in changing colour sometimes, and they would be occasionally dilated and contracted by something like a faint pulsation; then they gave a look of treachery, and cruelty, to the whole countenance."[29] The fatal drive evinced by these flickering pulsations of his nostrils find its literalization when his speeding carriage accidentally drives over a child in the street. Unmoved by the desperate father's grief, Monsieur the Marquis observes the crowd that gathers slowly around him, looking to him like nothing so much as "rats come out of their

holes" (114). Responding at last to their sullen presence, he offers a virtuoso display of the narcissism, the anticommunal enjoyment, that constitutes the hallmark of the future-killing queer, contemptuously declaring, before flinging a coin as recompense for the death, "It is extraordinary to me . . . that you people cannot take care of yourselves or your children. One or the other of you is for ever in the way. How do I know what injury you have done my horses?" (114).

In Dickens's version of talion law, the Marquis, like the child he runs over, must die, whereas Scrooge, converted to futurism through his life-changing vision of a futureless future, is granted the very gift of life he gives to Tiny Tim. But granted it only insofar as he gives that life to Tiny Tim, becoming a "second father" to the boy by renouncing the intolerable narcissism that futurism projects onto those who will not mirror back its own Imaginary form. For the *sinthomosexual's* narcissism is a narcissism unto death, exposing a duality or division internal to narcissism itself. Just as the projection of the sinthome onto those condemned as *sinthomosexuals* enacts the *sinthomatic* drive of reproductive futurism, so the *sinthomosexual's* association with narcissistic satisfaction, in light of the self-satisfaction afforded by futurism's repudiation of narcissism, betrays an awareness that something internal to narcissism itself resists its libidinal investment in the ego as a form. Narcissism, then, like jouissance, names two contradictory states, one of which shelters the ego from the other's self-destructive effects.

As Jean Laplanche and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis observe in *The Language of Psychoanalysis*, Freud proposed two radically different interpretations of narcissism, first arguing that it marked the subject's cathexis of the ego as an object and later insisting on the priority of an objectless narcissistic state.[30] Ironically, in his final theory, Freud's initial interpretation is hypostatized as *secondary* narcissism, while his second interpretation comes to identify the narcissism he characterizes as primary. These antithetical renditions of narcissistic libidinal cathexis bisect narcissism at the very point where the question of the object emerges, and therefore where the question of the ego's privilege as an object is at stake. Pri-

mary narcissism acknowledges no separation of ego and id. As a result, it carries into the heart of all subsequent elaborations of narcissistic love a resistance to the ego's autonomy, a reminder of something other than, incompatible with, the supremacy of Imaginary form. Secondary narcissism, on the other hand, makes an idol of the ego, but only by means of an Imaginary identification of the ego with the Other, an identification that secures the fixity and coherence of the ego's form while activating aggressive energies to defend the integrity thus attained. This secondary narcissism becomes the pervasive understanding of narcissism as such, against which Joan Copjec importantly recalls the Lacanian response: "Since something always appears to be missing from any representation, narcissism *cannot* consist in finding satisfaction in one's own visual image. It must, rather, consist in the belief that one's own being exceeds the imperfections of its image. Narcissism, then, seeks the self beyond the self-image, with which the subject constantly finds fault and in which it constantly fails to recognize itself. What one loves in one's image is something *more* than the image ('in you more than you'). Thus is narcissism the source of the malevolence with which the subject regards its image, the aggressivity it unleashes on all its own representations."[31]

We might then, with a nod to Lacan, express the double dynamic at work in narcissism as follows: *narcissism is always a narcissism of the Other.* By this I mean not only that the Other, conceptualized as the obstacle to our own coherence, seems always to occasion the narcissistic aggression around which the subject takes shape, but also that narcissism bespeaks the ascription to the ego of recognizable and defensible form only insofar as narcissism is invested from the outset, which is to say, primally, in the nondifferentiation of ego and id, in the unsymbolizable Real of the drive that imperils the ego as object. In a series of readings indispensable for their insights into the relations of psychoanalysis and form, Leo Bersani proposes that "sexuality would be that which is intolerable to the structured self," because, as he goes on to assert, "sexuality—at least in the mode in which it is constituted—could be thought of as a tautology for masochism."[32] This responds to Freud's own assertion in

his *New Introductory Lectures* that "masochism is older than sadism, and that sadism is the destructive instinct turned outward." To which Freud then goes on to add: "It really seems as though it is necessary for us to destroy some other thing or person in order not to destroy ourselves, in order to guard against the impulsion to self-destruction."[33] What Freud calls "self-destruction" here names the undoing of the ego's organization, its undoing *as* an organization, by returning to its continuity with the id through the collapse of "secondary narcissism" into its "primary" condition. Hence narcissism's first paradox: it loves Otherness too well, beyond all reason, beyond all pleasure, even unto death. And from this there follows a second paradox: narcissism, construed as libidinal investment in the formalized ego it cathects, by means of which the self attempts to assure its own preservation, comes nonetheless to designate a life-denying economy, a Scrooge-like self-containment, marked by a fatal rejection of the energies on which social survival depends.[34] Might this, then, be the place to recall that Freud's earliest invocation of narcissistic investment occurs in the context of theorizing the origins of gay male sexuality?[35]

Not, of course, that we needed Freud to establish this connection: Plato's Athenian Stranger already suggests as much in the *Laws*, when, notwithstanding his stated belief that "somehow every one is *by nature* prone to that which is likest to himself" (emphasis mine), he insists that "the intercourse of men with men, or of women with women, is *contrary to nature*" (emphasis mine)—and contrary to nature despite the fact that such practices, scorned for what he sees as their defining self-indulgence, enact what the Athenian characterizes as the "lawless *natures*" of men (emphasis mine).[36] With this paradox, similar to those informing our understanding of narcissism, the Stranger reads as unnatural submission to the lawlessness of one's nature; equally important, he does so by asserting that same-sex desire, ineluctably, opens onto the threat of societal death by "destroying the seeds of human increase" (§838). Nature here is less the ground for arbitrating sexual values than the rhetorical effect of an effort to appropriate the "natural" for the ends

of the state.[37] It is produced, that is, in the service of a statist ideology that operates by installing pro-procreative prejudice as the form through which desiring subjects assume a stake in a future that always pertains, in the end, to the *state*, not to *them*. Hence, the Athenian Stranger insists not only on the central importance of "laws that would master the soul of every man, and terrify him into obedience" (§839), scaring the subject straight just as Dickens's spirits terrified Scrooge, but also on practices intended to inculcate social and cultural values (including the abjection of same-sex desire and anything viewed as narcissistic) that the Stranger would like to see "sanctioned by custom and made law by unwritten prescription" (§841).[38] The narcissism associated with homosexual desire thus becomes, for Plato no less than for Freud, the basis for social survival by being severed from itself, undergoing transvaluation from primary to secondary, from life-negating to vital, insofar as it is able to dissociate itself, at least nominally, *from* itself (changing its name from narcissism to "heterosexuality," "altruism," "civic-mindedness," or, most prized of all, "parental love"). Perhaps, then, in a cultural moment that offers no respite from the ideological tropism turning our eyes toward the light of a future suspended before us like a hypnotist's watch,[39] we might ask ourselves how and to what effect the primal negativity that Scrooge must renounce for the sake of Tiny Tim, and thus for redemptive faith in futurism, *returns*, albeit in altered form, as the unacknowledged energy of futurism itself.

How better to engage such a question as it follows from my reading of *A Christmas Carol* than by turning to a text that turns to the event following Christmas by a week and repeating, though this time in secular form, futurity's condensation in the Child: a text that turns on the literalization of the figurative New Year's baby, who turns, in turn, a solitary, miserly, misanthropic man, a bachelor properly linked with those I've described as *sinthomosexuals*, away from his backward turn of mind and the sterility of his (be)hindsight, toward the prospect of a future in which his narcissism can find its proper stake.[40] Who could evince more pointedly the deathly shriveling of vital forces, the closed economy of

the backward gaze, than George Eliot's Silas Marner, a man whose very name sounds the sigh ("alas") of a mourner turned toward the past as he licks the wounds of his endless grief—or endlessly grieves in order to have a reason to lick his wounds. But as Eliot's narrative skein unravels, Raveloe's weaver must, like Scrooge, be purged of what the novel describes as "the repulsion [he] had always created in his neighbors" as a result of "his general queerness."[41] Toward that end, the author deploys her plot to weave him into the social text, making him give up his worship of gold for the golden curls of the child that he finds on his hearth, precisely on New Year's Eve, as the assurance not only of *his* future, but also of hers and ours as well.

Not that Eliot depicts this golden child as a golden calf: that role, of course, is assigned to Marner's stash of hoarded coins, which, prior to their disappearance, had "kept his thoughts in an ever-repeated circle, leading to nothing beyond itself" (125). The child he discovers on New Year's Eve and names Hephzibah—Eppie, for short—allows him to escape his fixation on both the accumulated coins he would obsessively handle, insistently count and touch, and on those about which he only dreamed "as if they had been unborn children" (21). Such "unborn children" they might well be, for the refusal of normative engagement with the social that leads him to bestow his affections upon such figurative children alone usurps the reproductive imperative that requires his literalization of that figure lest future children remain "unborn." Like Scrooge, whose realization of the death drive would abolish the future in the form of Tiny Tim, Marner, in his scorn for the interconnections of which the social fabric is woven, poses, as the following passage makes clear, a threat not only to his own well-being, but also to the social order's—a threat to our faith in its consistency and, in consequence, to its survival, for the assurance of which nothing quite does the trick like the image of the innocent Child: "In old days there were angels who came and took men by the hand and led them away from the city of destruction. We see no white-winged angels now. But yet men are led away from threatening destruction: a hand is put in theirs, which leads them forth

gently towards a calm and bright land, so that they look no more backward; and that hand may be a little child's" (131). If Marner, through the allegedly compassionate intervention of Eliot and Eppie combined, becomes, in his meek and modest way, a pillar of the social order instead of the implicit counterinstance adduced in the text as a pillar of salt, it is only because the threat of that salt, with which Eliot has no beef, cures him. After all, at the moment on New Year's Eve when Marner first opens his cottage door he does so to look to the past, not the future, still clinging to the hope of his money's return rather than looking ahead. But Eliot effects a narrative stroke that permits her to show him as if he'd been struck by the biblical fate inflicted on those who turned, against the angel's command, ass-backward to gaze at Sodom, called here, with an aptly ambiguous genitive, "the city of destruction." With his hand on the latch of the still open door, "he was," the narrator informs us, "arrested," though not, of course, by a Raveloe vice cop, but, instead, by one who is playing the *nice* cop: that is, by the benevolent authority of the author, who rebukes the regressive narcissism of his solitary ways and leads him "to a calm and bright land," which is to say, to the future. Toward that end, when she suddenly has him "arrested . . . by the invisible wand of catalepsy," Eliot tells us that he stands "like a graven image, with wide but sightless eyes" (100).[42] In this state of suspended animation, appropriate emblem of the *sinthomosexual*'s intended suspension *of* animation, Marner, now the image of those lifeless images engraved on the coins he had prized as life, is given another chance *for* life, a prospect of rebirth, and given it in the form of the Child who crawls implausibly through his open door with all the salvific contrivance befitting a pint-sized deus ex machina.

But the narrative machinery that draws this diminutive deity to the weaver's door is engaged, paradoxically, to effect his release from the "ever-repeated circle," the compulsion to repeat, that Eliot's novel identifies quite explicitly *as* machinery. Having turned his back on humankind, the weaver, through years of solitude, has become an extension of his loom itself, which, "as he wrought in it without ceasing, had in its turn

wrought on him, and confirmed more and more the monotonous craving for its monotonous response" (42). That loom is clearly defined in the text as a machine for producing sameness, which allows it to serve as a figure for the repetitive insistence of the sinthome, or even for its embodiment in sinthomosexuality: "The livelong day he sat at his loom, his ear filled with its monotony, his eyes bent close down on the slow growth of sameness in the brownish web, his muscles moving with such even repetition that their pause seemed as much a constraint as the holding of his breath" (21). The novel that bears Silas Marner's name may recoil from the weaver's enactment here of something truly inhuman, something meaningless and mechanistic, that replaces volition and agency with subjection to the drive.[43] It may, that is, recoil or turn back from this turning back toward a sameness that, like Sodom, seems to make us all worth no more than our salt in the end. But no less than "recoil" can avoid the trace of the "cul" with which it's informed can the novel avoid repeating the weaver's repetitions at his loom.

Precisely through the machinery of its plot, after all, Eliot's text implicitly plots its likeness to that machinery. As justly, then, as Silas Marner, accused of theft in Lantern Yard, could say to his one-time friend, William Dane, "You have woven a plot to lay the sin at my door" (14), so, too, could he charge George Eliot with a similar weaving of her own, a weaving that lays at his doorstep the sin of ensnarement by, and entanglement in, the "slow growth of sameness in the brownish web" that he spins, "like a spider" (16), from himself, but that also lays at his doorstep, and literally, the Child intended to free him from its narcissistic skein. Although Eliot traces Marner's "sin" to the mechanistic, and therefore inhuman, logic he instantiates in directing his energies so monotonously to his loom, she can hardly escape its taint herself, having "woven a plot" that depends on an equally relentless narrative machinery. What else, we might ask, is Eliot's famous web of human relations if not a sort of Rube Goldberg machine in which the pulling of the tiniest string over there reverberates with unexpected consequence for someone over here? What, after all, are the chances—how astronomical must be the odds—that a

near-sighted, nearly friendless man, still mourning the theft of his long-hoarded gold, would suffer a cataleptic fit in his doorway one frigid New Year's Eve at the very moment that a golden-haired child, attracted by the light from his wide-open door, should toddle away from the corpse of her mother, frozen in the snow onto which she'd collapsed in an opiated haze, and seat herself silently before the hearth, where the near-sighted man, his seizure now past, could mistake her bright hair for his gold?

Whatever the chances, it's Chance alone, the god of novelistic contrivance, that thereby gives Marner his second chance, which is all the more worthy of our attention here in that Eliot's novel *repudiates* Chance in favor of natural sequence, excoriating those who rely on Chance as prone to narcissistic indulgence: "Favourable Chance is the god of all men who follow their own devices instead of obeying a law they believe in. . . . The evil deprecated in that religion [of Chance], is the orderly sequence by which the seed brings forth a crop after its kind" (74). It is, of course, literally a religion of Chance that dooms Marner as a youth in Lantern Yard when the "narrow religious sect" (9) he belongs to determines that he is guilty of theft by means of the drawing of lots: "*The lots declared that Silas Marner was guilty*" (13). But there's not too much difference when, many years later, Eliot contrives to allot him the chance—through a logic of Chance that cannot be concealed in the costume of "orderly sequence"—to affirm his own innocence through that of the Child whose improbable, and even unnatural, appearance by the glow of his hearth on New Year's Eve will have the effect of thawing his heart and claiming him for nature once more.

But here is the nub of the matter. *Silas Marner*, while endorsing the "orderly sequence by which the seed brings forth a crop after its kind," and with it the narrative necessity inseparable from reproductive futurism, introduces its privileged emblem, the promise condensed in the image of the Child, as a figure of naturalization: as a figure, to be sure, of nature, but one that reads nature itself as a figure that language must posit in order to designate something that's absent from nature as such (not for nothing does the Child enter Marner's life as a wholly *unnatural*

supplement). And what's missing from nature, what the figure of naturalization attempts to secure, is the system of values, the moral economy, that Marner, like all social subjects, is made to value *as nature itself*—the system of values the novel, however fantastic or queer the machinery by which it "brings forth" that implausible end, must characterize as "orderly," as part of the natural order, and not, therefore, as requiring to be posited at all.

The novel, then, as if "naturally," offers us Eppie, in her relation to Marner, as the material embodiment of futurism, a proper "New Year's Baby" who affirms the endless renewal of time. She was, we are told, "an object compacted of changes and hopes that forced his thoughts onward, and carried them far away from their old eager pacing toward the same blank limit—carried them away to the new things that would come with the coming years" (125). Now, at what we are wont to call the "dawn" of a new millennium, could anything seem more certain than that "the coming years" will come? That the movement of life is forward? That those who embrace "the same blank limit"—narcissistically, repetitively—destroy, as Plato's Athenian claimed, "the seeds of human increase"? But if narcissism, as I've argued, is always a narcissism of the Other, if the weaver's monotonous turnings back speak less to his self-enclosure than to his openness to an Otherness, however self-negating, that Lacan associates with *das Ding*, "the mythical object whose encounter would bring about full satisfaction of the drive,"[44] then the nature the novel poses in opposition to that narcissism, the nature borne by the new-born, intends a defense against that Otherness. Even as the seed meant to save us from the *sinthomosexual*'s repetitive investment in the Same brings forth a crop that the logic of nature ordains to be "after its kind," so the weaver's love for Eppie, intended to open him to difference, more precisely, as the novel acknowledges, "blent them into one" (130). Doesn't this very avowal of the One, this faith in heteroreproduction's capacity to affirm and secure Symbolic closure, anticipate the self-deconstructing words by which Marner (and the novel) will announce the triumph of a now thoroughly naturalized futurism over the narcissistic

economy of *sinthomosexuality*: "I've come to love her as myself" (181)? He comes to love her, in other words, not only in the way he *formerly* had been able to love himself, but also in a way that allows him figuratively to love himself still *in her*. "Love," Lacan writes, "while it is true that it has a relationship with the One, never makes anyone leave himself behind."[45] Why marvel that reproductive futurism repeats what it poses as passing beyond? Old Mr. Lammeter at the novel's end instructs us in what we need to know about the real relations secured by nature's stylization in the image of the Child: "Things look dim to old folks; they'd need have some young eyes about 'em, to let 'em know the world's the same as it used to be" (182).

To "know the world's the same": though purporting to be wed to the value of difference in heterosexual combination and exchange, futurism merely perpetuates Lammeter's tenacious will to sameness by endlessly turning the Other into the image of itself, endlessly protecting the fantasy space in which it is *always* there. Narcissism, on the other hand, construed in terms of sterility and a nonproductive sameness, takes in and takes on, perhaps too well, the Other it loves to death, pushing beyond and against its own pleasure, driving instead toward the end of forms through the formalism of the drive. Freud, as the century just ended began, already advised us that parental love demands to be viewed as "nothing but the parents' narcissism born again."[46] But the ostensible self-evidence, throughout our culture, of the difference between narcissism, on the one hand, and the selflessness we associate with the care and nurturing of children, on the other, between the figures of *sinthomosexuality* and the sinthomatic drive to produce and abject them, makes clear, as the twenty-first century starts, that what's finally at issue in the production of the Child and the future it serves to figure, for Silas Marner, for Scrooge, and for all who must live under futurism's gun, is the *style* by which a culture enacts its sinthome while disavowing it.

Only such stubborn disavowal can account for the imputation to the *sinthomosexual* of the fatality of the Same, a sameness at odds with the jouissance to which the *sinthomosexual* figures access, even though *sin-*

thomosexuality insists on the *constancy* of such an access, the persistent availability of this jouissance closed off by reproduction. For the "speaking body," Lacan proposes, "can only manage to reproduce thanks to a misunderstanding regarding its jouissance. That is to say that it only reproduces thanks to missing what it wants to say, for what it wants to say (*veut dire*)—namely, as French clearly states, its meaning (*sens*)—is its effective jouissance. And it is by missing that jouissance that it reproduces."[47] As reproduction makes clear that jouissance has been missed—has been spoiled or, better, fucked up—so jouissance can only fuck up the very logic of reproduction, the logic by which, as Lammeter explains, old folks "need have some young eyes about 'em, to let 'em know the world's the same." Futurism thus generates generational succession, temporality, and narrative sequence, not toward the end of enabling change, but, instead, of perpetuating sameness, of turning back time to assure repetition—or to assure a logic of resemblance (more precisely: a logic of metaphoricity) in the service of representation and, by extension, of desire.[48] Given this inertial investment in the sameness that's abjected as *sinthomosexuality*, futurism—the substrate of politics—encrypts within every political faction a sort of nonpartisan conservatism, a will to preserve identity, a compassion responsive to the Imaginary order's identificatory imperative. But it does so beneath the banner of openness to the difference of the Other, ignoring the fact that it values such difference only to overcome it, to realize the regressive fantasy to which all futurism clings: the Imaginary vision of whatever it is that we (think that we) desire. From this springs a final paradox: homosexuality, though charged with, and convicted of, a future-negating sameness construed as reflecting its pathological inability to deal with the fact of difference, gets put in the position of difference from the heteronormativity that, despite its persistent propaganda for its own propagation through *sexual* difference, refuses homosexuality's difference from the value of difference it claims as its own.

This paradox determines the trajectory of a recent essay by Jean Baudrillard that was published under the deliberately inflammatory title,

"The Final Solution." Baudrillard asserts that the human species is confronting a life-and-death crisis around the question of reproduction, more specifically, around its determination by way of sameness or difference. But a vortex of contradictions engulfs his use of these various terms, occasioning, or rather *seeming* to occasion, a transvaluation of values in accordance with which they appear to signify against our expectations: "There is something occulted inside us: our deaths. But something else is hidden there, lying in wait for us within each of our cells: the forgetting of death. In our cells our immortality lies in wait for us. It's common to speak of the struggle of life against death, but there is an inverse peril. And we must struggle against the possibility that we will not die. At the slightest hesitation in the fight for death—a fight for division, for sex, for alterity, and so for death—living beings become once again indivisible, identical to one another—and immortal."[49]

Far from speaking, with the *sinthomosexual*, for the death drive and its disarticulation of forms, Baudrillard remains an advocate here of reproductive futurism, explicitly enlisting this notion of death, this resistance to immortality, *against* the force of the death drive, which he assimilates to, and disavows as, the paradigm of sameness: "The death drive, according to Freud, is precisely this nostalgia for a state before the appearance of individuality and sexual differentiation, a state in which we lived before we became mortal and distinct from one another" (6). He may trumpet what he calls here the "fight for death" in thus opposing himself to the death drive, disparaged as eternal pursuit of the Same and hence as immortality, but opprobrium, in Baudrillard's argument, still attaches to the death drive only insofar as it constitutes a *mortal threat* to the survival of the human—insofar, that is, as its sameness might make human difference different. The immortality for which he reproves it, then, threatens the human precisely with a *death* he would have us fight *against*. It names the endless negation of form, and so of what, for Baudrillard, defines the value of "difference": that is, our distinctly human identity.

As he sketches an evolutionary movement from "the absolute conti-

nuity found in the subdivision of the same—in bacteria—to the possibility of life and death" (7), by which latter phrase he indicates the attributes of sexual reproduction, Baudrillard, complicit with tendencies of scientific discourse in general, celebrates the triumph of sexed reproduction over genetic duplication in a teleological narrative that itself reduplicates the Freudian account of genitality's triumph over the various "partial" drives. Naturalizing this trajectory from the replication he associates with genetic immortality to the procreation made possible by encountering sexual, and therefore genetic, difference, Baudrillard sounds the note of futurism's persistent love song to itself, its fantasy of a dialectic capable of spinning meaning out of history, and history out of desire:

> Next [after the evolutionary moment of bacterial replication], the egg becomes fertilized by a sperm and specialized sex cells make their appearance. The resulting entity is no longer a copy of either one of the pair that engendered it; rather, it is a new and singular combination. There is a shift from pure and simple reproduction to procreation: the first two will die for the first time, and the third for the first time will be born. We reach the stage of beings that are sexed, differentiated, and mortal. The earlier order of the virus—of immortal beings—is perpetuated, but henceforward this world of deathless things is contained within the world of the mortals. In evolutionary terms, the victory goes to beings that are mortal and distinct from one another: the victory goes to us. (7)

Or goes to "us" so long as "we" don't identify—or get identified by others—with the regressive "order of the virus," of immortal sameness or repetition, that threatens "us" with the sort of death Baudrillard refuses to embrace (a death through viral replication like that associated with what was referred to, twenty years ago, as "the gay plague"): "This is the revenge taken on mortal and sexed beings by immortal and undifferentiated life forms. This is what could be called the final solution" (8). Thus death, the corollary of difference, can function as a value for Baudrillard in the context of individual identities alone (because this, after

all, allows for the Couple's dialectical survival in the "*third*"); it retains its negative valence where the species itself is concerned.[50] The latter's impulse to immortality, to perpetuating its self-perpetuation through the mechanics of genetic exchange, must resist the backward appeal of "involution," which signifies, for Baudrillard, the regressive "nullification of differences" (8). It must, that is, remain *the same* in its difference from the lethal sameness it condemns for its nullification of difference, thus affirming as constant the One of the Couple and the fantasy of the sexual relation as the "duality that puts an end to perpetual indivision and successive iterations of the same" (9).

Unless, of course, such iterations of the same put an end to it instead. And that, according to Baudrillard, is precisely what "sexual liberation" intends:

> The first phase of sexual liberation involves the dissociation of sexual activity from procreation through the pill and other contraceptive devices—a transformation with enormous consequences. The second phase, which we are beginning to enter now, is the dissociation of reproduction from sex. First, sex was liberated from reproduction; today it is reproduction that is liberated from sex, through asexual, biotechnological modes of reproduction such as artificial insemination or full body cloning. This is also a liberation, though antithetical to the first. We've been sexually liberated, and now we find ourselves liberated from sex—that is, virtually relieved of the sexual function. Among the clones (and among human beings soon enough), sex, as a result of this automatic means of reproduction, becomes extraneous, a useless function. (10)

The meaning of "sex," which Baudrillard had identified earlier as a mode of reproduction ("sexed, differentiated, and mortal") distinct from that of "deathless things" (such as viruses and bacteria) by virtue of its mingling of genes to create "new and singular combination[s]," undergoes an important mutation here. How else to explain his odd characterization of artificial insemination as "asexual" and (continuous in this

with cloning) as reproduction "liberated from sex"? For whatever the mechanism by which it's achieved—and "artificial" seems largely a diacritical term intended to naturalize the procreative function of heterosexual intercourse—insemination, the fertilization of egg by sperm, defines the very principle of sexual reproduction for Baudrillard. But the evolutionary argument for genetic combination (the essay's original meaning of "sex") has morphed, as it often seems to do, into a panicky offensive against reproduction without heterogenital copulation (the subsequent meaning of "sex"). What can the lament for the putative loss of the sexual function mean, therefore, if not its very opposite: that heterosexuality, stripped of its ancient reproductive alibi, must assume at last the despiritualized burden of its status *as sexual function*, as *sinthomosexuality*; that in the face of what Baudrillard calls "automatic" or "biotechnological" modes of reproduction, it must recognize the "extraneous" element in sex that is never extraneous to sex and that marks it as a "useless function," as a meaningless and unrecuperable expense, or even, as Jacques Derrida has written with regard to *différance*, "as expenditure without reserve, as the irreparable loss of presence, the irreversible usage of energy, that is, as the death instinct."[51]

Like Faron, the narrator of *The Children of Men*, for whom sex in a world without procreation—without "the hope of posterity, for our race if not for ourselves"—becomes "almost meaninglessly acrobatic," Baudrillard recoils in horror before this "useless" sexuality. And a "useless function" for Baudrillard, as his use of the same phrase elsewhere suggests, means one that refuses meaning: "At the extreme limit of computation and the coding and cloning of human thought (artificial intelligence), language as a medium of symbolic exchange becomes a definitively useless function. For the first time in history we face the possibility of a Perfect Crime against language, an aphanisis of the symbolic function."[52] Aphanisis, the term Ernest Jones introduced to identify the anxiety-inducing prospect of the disappearance of desire, refers in the passage from Baudrillard to the fading or, more ominously, to what he describes as the "global extermination of meaning" (70), the unraveling of the braid in

which reproductive futurism twines meaning, desire, and the fantasy of (hetero)sexual rapport. At the same time, though, it also evokes the subsequent use of the word by Lacan, for whom it refers instead to the fading or disappearance of the *subject*, whose division the signifier effects in such a way that "there is no subject without, somewhere, *aphanisis* of the subject." Lacan will then go on to add, "There is an emergence of the subject at the level of meaning only from its *aphanisis* in the Other locus, which is that of the unconscious."[53] Meaning, that is, against whose aphanisis Baudrillard's jeremiad is launched, always already entails, for Lacan, the aphanisis of the unconscious: "When the subject appears somewhere as meaning, he is manifested elsewhere as 'fading,' as disappearance" (218). Appalled by the imminence of a "final solution," the liberation from sexual difference intended by the force of "perpetual indivision and successive iterations of the same," Baudrillard holds fast to the meaning whose "global extermination" *sinthomosexuality* is always imagined to effect and whose Symbolic exchange jouissance would reduce to a "definitively useless function."[54] And he does so in the hope of perpetuating the temporal movements of desire, of shielding himself from the unconscious and the iterations of the drive, and securing, through futurity, through the victory of narrative duration over irony's explosive negativity, a ground on which to stand: "The stakes," he warns, "are no longer only that 'history' is slipping into the 'posthistorical,' but that the human race is slipping into the void" (19).

And all because (heterosexual) sex has "become extraneous, a useless function," has become, that is, void of content once the inspiriting meaning it carried—both like, and in the form of, a Child—has vanished into the unregenerate materiality of the signifier.[55] For "the signifier," as Lacan declares in his interpretation of "The Purloined Letter," "is not functional"; it exceeds its use-value in the service of signification and, especially as localized in what the essay punningly engages as "the letter," it brings us back to the Real, to the fatality of "what remains of a signifier when it has no more signification."[56] Apostrophizing just such a signifier, Lacan, in his reading of Poe's short story, makes clear just what

remains: "nothing, if not that presence of death which makes a human life a reprieve obtained from morning to morning in the name of the meanings whose sign is your crook" (51). Baudrillard, like Silas Marner and Scrooge, may walk through the valley of the shadow of death, but with meaning as his shepherd he shall always want, desiring from morning to morning the continuation of the reprieve by which he perpetuates the fantasy space essential to his desire. "We see no white winged angels now," George Eliot observes. "But yet men are led away from threatening destruction: a hand is put in theirs, which leads them forth gently towards a calm and bright land, so that they look no more backward; and that hand may be a little child's." Or rather, though that Child be as helpless as Eppie, as delicate as Tiny Tim, it must be the hand of a "little child" that lifts us into the future and thereby saves us, in the words of Baudrillard, from "slipping into the void" of all that is "backward" or "involuted," of all that he condemns as "successive iterations of the same" that are, themselves, precisely what old Mr. Lammeter knows we value in the Eppies and Tiny Tims who embody reproductive futurism.

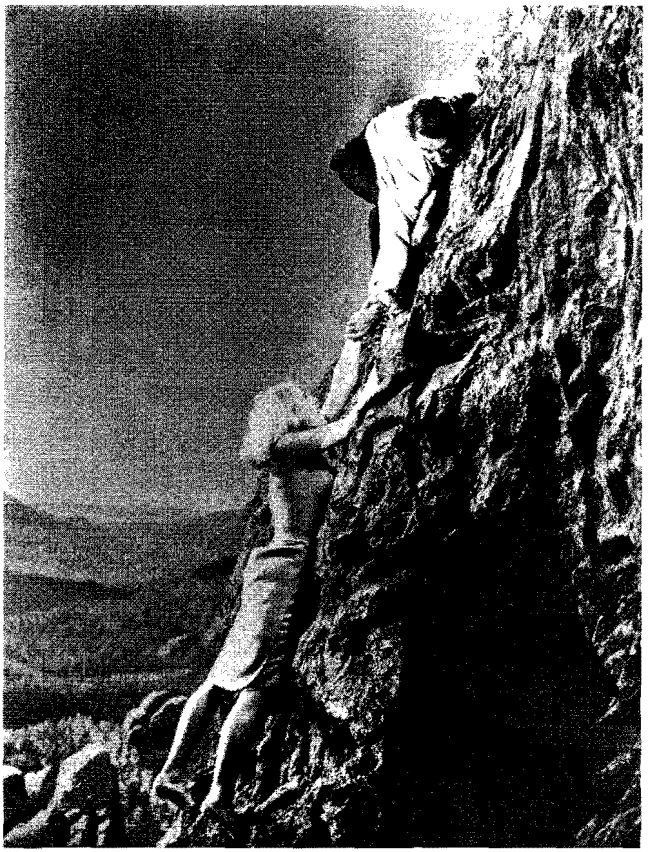
As those faces of Eppie and Tiny Tim turn their eyes to us once more, soliciting the compassion that always compels us to want to keep them safe (in the faith that they will confer on us the future's saving grace), let me end with a reference to the "Fourteen Words," attributed to David Lane, by which members of various white separatist organizations throughout the United States affirm their collective commitment to the common cause of racial hatred: "We must secure the existence of our people and a future for white children."[57] So long as "white" is the only word that makes this credo appalling, so long as figural children continue to "secure [our] existence" through the fantasy that we survive in them, so long as the queer refutes that fantasy, effecting its derealization as surely as an encounter with the Real, for just so long must sinthomosexuality have a future after all. For what keeps it alive, paradoxically, is the futurism desperate to negate it, obedient in that to the force of a drive that is futurism's sinthome.

3. COMPASSION'S COMPULSION

Compassion can be a touchy subject, touching, as it does, on what touches the heart by seeming to put us in touch with something other than ourselves while leaving us open, in the process, to being read as an easy touch. Not that some anticompassionate lobby takes arms against the emotion, mounting a campaign of aversion therapy meant to bring out the latent "ouch" in compassion's electric "touch." What makes compassion so touchy is, rather, the *absence* of such a lobby, the fact that every hardening of the heart against compassion's knock presents itself as hard-headed reason intent on denying *false* compassion to keep the way clear for the true. For just as compassion confuses our own emotions with another's, making it kissing cousin to its morbid obverse, paranoia, so it allows no social space that isn't already its own, no ground on which to stand outside its all-encompassing reach. From ruthlessness to schadenfreude, its antonyms proliferate, but who would make

his home in the sterile landscape they call forth? What future could one build upon their unforgiving slopes when communal relations, collective identities, the very realm of the social itself all seem to hang on compassion's logic—though that logic, in turn, as Kant insists, may hang on the formal abstraction of compassion's tender touch until it becomes the vise-like grip of duty's iron fist. That fist may then curl back inside compassion's velvet glove, but only the better to pack the punch that, even when stopping us dead in our tracks, always stops us in the name of "love."

If compassion in this takes love's name in vain, it's vain to think compassion *outside* the register of love. One could, for example, cite Augustine, who observes, in *On Christian Doctrine*, that the fifth of the seven steps to wisdom (he calls it the "counsel of compassion") involves, along with a cleansing of the soul, diligence "in the love of [one's] neighbor."[1] I prefer, however, to cite Ronald Reagan, a traditionalist of compassion himself, by way of introducing a text that addresses compassion and its politics—the futurism to which Silas Marner and Scrooge were ultimately converted—in order to engage the figure called forth to embody its negation. "We shall reflect the compassion that is so much a part of your makeup," President Reagan declared in his first inaugural address. "How can we love our country, and not love our countrymen," he asked rhetorically, "and loving them," he then asserted, "reach out a hand when they fall."[2] Let me freeze-frame that figure of compassion—its defining feature, its distinctive touch—so as to focus on the outstretched hand evoked by the President who, according to a number of Republican intellectuals and politicians, deserves to join the four already honored on Mount Rushmore. Now, with that image firmly in mind, let us cut to Mount Rushmore itself (see figure 5), where this figure of speech will be literalized and its emotional claim—to which Reagan supposed that resistance was all but unthinkable—will receive an unexpected response from one who refuses compassion's compulsion as if he had taken to heart in advance the doctrine for which another Reagan is famous: "Just say no."



I refer, of course, to Leonard (Martin Landau), the sadistic (and tellingly fashion-conscious) agent of America's cold war enemies in Alfred Hitchcock's *North by Northwest* (1959). Dedicated "secretary" and loyal right arm to his superior, Phillip Vandamm (James Mason), Leonard—with obvious pleasure—arranges the various acts of violence that his boss's plans demand. As pitiless and persistent as the crop-dusting plane that terrorizes Roger Thornhill (Cary Grant) in the film's most famous sequence, Leonard—unmoved by sympathy, deaf to claims of human fellowship—materializes the force of negation, the derealizing insistence of jouissance, from which Scrooge and Silas Marner were led by the hand of a little child. Pursuing the film's protagonists, in the movie's climactic scene, across the massive presidential faces at Mount Rushmore's national shrine, Leonard brings to a head, as it were, Hitchcock's concern throughout the film with the characteristically "human" traits that conduce to sociality, traits to which, as *sinthomosexual*, Leonard stands opposed: compassion, identification, love of one's neighbor as oneself. Aptly, therefore, the scene, unfolds on a stage that consists of lifeless rock endowed with human form, invoking the tension between the *appeal* of form—and hence of the formal identity by which the subject imagines itself—and the rock of the Real that resists whatever identity the subject imagines. These carvings, moreover, literalize, as if attempting to make proper, the rhetorical catachresis by which we are able to speak of a mountain's "face." In the process, they bring us face to face with the similar catachresis that produces, but also disfigures—returns to its status, that is, *as* figure—the human face as the face of everything we recognize as human.[3]

So, when Roger Thornhill extends his hand (see figure 6) to lift Eve Kendall (Eva Marie Saint) from the craggy ledge to which she holds after Leonard has pushed her from the monument's face to her all but certain death, his act of compassion on the stony cliff redeems the stony-heartedness (or so we are meant to think) that Eve and the American intelligence officials for whom she is working displayed in permitting Leonard to set Thornhill up to be killed by the crop-dusting plane. But

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hardness of heart is hardly a charge to which the government's top cops cop. Even when fully informed about Thornhill's thorny situation, when he knows, that is, that his opposite number has mistaken this smooth-talking advertising man for George Kaplan (a fictional agent invented to "divert suspicion" from his "real Number One," this very same Eve Kendall, engaged in various acts of espionage "right under [the enemy's] nose"), the head of American intelligence, known as the Professor (Leo G. Carroll), announces to his colleagues that Roger Thornhill will have to fend for himself.[4] Questioned about the morality of such a refusal of any intervention on Thornhill's behalf—"Aren't we being just a wee bit callous?" an agency official asks—the Professor indignantly dismisses all such charges out of hand: "No, my dear woman, we are *not* being callous. . . . We created George Kaplan . . . for a *desperately important reason.* If we make the slightest move to suggest that there *is* no such agent as George Kaplan . . . then Number One . . . will immediately face suspicion, exposure, assassination, like the two others who went before" (46). With so calculated a lesson in compassion—that it commits us to a calculus, a quantification of the good—the Professor attempts to plant his feet securely on moral high ground, while justifying pulling the rug out from under Thornhill's in the process. On Mount Rushmore's *literal* high ground, though, when Leonard—once again, literally—plants his foot to the same effect (similarly targeting Thornhill to take the necessary fall), treading on the fingers with which Thornhill precariously clings to the monument's face, the callousness the Professor so lightly shrugged off now attaches to Leonard with a vengeance, so that he, with the crack of a bullet fired by a government marksman from above, can take the fall at last not only for Thornhill, but also for the Professor himself and, perhaps, for the film as well.

But shed no tears for Leonard. Though a victim of compassion's compulsory disavowal of its own intrinsic callousness, a sacrifice to its claim to hold the other in love's embrace, Leonard refuses compassion, or refuses at any rate its fantasy, insofar as he incarnates the radical force of *sinthomosexuality*, the positioning of the queer as a figure for the sub-

ject's unthinkable implication in the Real as evinced by the meaningless jouissance made available through the sinthome. In *sinthomosexuality*, the structuring fantasy undergirding and sustaining the subject's desire, and with it the subject's reality, confronts its beyond in the pulsions of the drive whose insistent circulation undoes it, derealizing the collective logic of fantasy by means of which subjects mean, and giving access, instead, to the jouissance, particularized and irreducible, that registers the unmasterable contingency at the core of every subject as such. All sexuality, I've argued, is *sinthomosexuality*, but the burden of figuring that condition, the task of instantiating the force of the drive (always necessarily a partial drive, one incapable of totalization) that tears apart both the subject's desire and the subject *of* desire, falls only to certain subjects who, like Leonard, serve as fall guys for the failure of the sexual relation and the intolerable reduction of the subject to the status of sinthome. Such *sinthomosexuals* fall because they fail to fall in love, where love names the totalizing fantasy, always a fantasy of totalization, by which the subject defends against the disintegrative pulsion of the drive.[5] As Jacques-Alain Miller observes, "Perversion is the norm of the drive. Thus, what is problematic is the existence of a sexual drive toward the opposite sex. Lacan's thesis here is that there is no drive toward the opposite sex; there is only a drive toward the libido object, toward partial satisfaction qua object. To take a person, a whole person as an object, is not the role of the drive, it leads us to introduce love."[6]

But love, Lacan argues, with its orientation toward the wholeness of a person, only reproduces (and in more ways than one) the subject's narcissistic fantasy in the face of the originary wound inflicted by the fact of "sexed reproduction," a fact that produces the living being at the cost of sufficiency unto itself. Love expresses the subject's pursuit "not of the sexual complement," according to Lacan, "but of the part of himself, lost forever, that is constituted by the fact that he is only a sexed living being, and that he is no longer immortal."[7] Love, therefore, like fantasy, seeks to regain that lost immortality, and to do so, fantasmatically, by translating sexed reproduction, through which immortality was lost, into the very

mode and guarantee of its future restoration. The future assured by, so as to assure, the continuity of sexed reproduction establishes the horizon of fantasy within which the subject aspires to the meaning that is always, like the object of desire, out of reach. *Sinthomosexuality*, by contrast, affirms a constant, eruptive jouissance that responds to the inarticulable Real, to the impossibility of sexual rapport or of ever being able to signify the relation between the sexes. It stands in the place of the drive that is, for Lacan, "profoundly a death drive and represents in itself the portion of death in the sexed living being."[8] *Sinthomosexuality*, then, like the death drive, engages, by refusing, the normative stasis, the immobility, of sexuation to which we are delivered by Symbolic law and the promise of sexual relation. Scorning the reification that turns the sexed subject into a monolith, a petrified identity, in an effort to evade the impossibility, the Real, of sexual difference, *sinthomosexuality* breaks down the mortifying structures that give us ourselves *as* selves and does so with all the force of the Real that such forms must fail to signify.[9] With no sympathy for the subject's desires and no trace of compassion for the ego's integrity, with no love insofar as love names the subject's defense against dissolution, *sinthomosexuals*, like the death drive they are made to represent—and made to represent insofar as the death drive both evades and undoes representation—endanger the fantasy of survival by endangering the survival of love's fantasy, insisting instead on the machine-like working of the partial, dehumanizing drives and offering a constant access to their surplus of jouissance.[10] As such, they might well be characterized by the words attributed to François Abadie, formerly mayor of Lourdes and a senator aligned with France's Radical Left before he was expelled from the Party for articulating, in the pages of *Le Nouvel Observateur*, his repugnance at "those I call the gravediggers of society, those who care nothing [for] the future: homosexuals."[11]

This conflation of homosexuality with the radical negativity of *sinthomosexuality* continues to shape our social reality despite the well-intentioned efforts of many, gay and straight alike, to normalize queer sexualities within a logic of meaning that finds realization only *in* and *as*

the future. When the *New York Times Magazine*, for example, published in 1998 an issue devoted to the status items specific to various demographic groups, Dan Savage found in a baby's gurgle the music to soothe the gay male beast: "Gay parents," he wrote, "are not only making a commitment to our political future, but to the future, period. . . . And many of us have decided that we want to fill our time with something more meaningful than sit-ups, circuit parties and designer drugs. For me and my boyfriend, bringing up a child is a commitment to having a future. And considering what the last 15 years were like, perhaps that future is the ultimate status item for gay men."[12] The messenger here may be a gay man, but the message is that of compulsory reproduction as inscribed on the anti-abortion billboard I mentioned in chapter 1: choose life, for life and the baby and meaning hang together in the balance, confronting the lethal counterweight of narcissism, AIDS, and death, all of which spring from commitment to the meaningless eruptions of jouissance associated with the "circuit parties" that gesture toward the circuit of the drive. This fascism of the baby's face, which encourages parents, whether gay or straight, to join in a rousing chorus of "Tomorrow Belongs to Me," suggests that if few can bring up a child without constantly bringing it up—as if the future secured by the Child, the one true access to social security, could only be claimed for the other's sake, and never for one's own—then that future can only belong to those who purport to *feel* for the other (with all the appropriative implications that such a "feeling *for*" suggests). It can only belong to those who accede to the fantasy of a compassion by which they shelter the infant future from *sinthom*osexuals, who offer it none, seeming, instead, to literalize one of Blake's queerest Proverbs of Hell: "Sooner murder an infant in its cradle than nurse unacted desires."[13]

Who would side with such "gravediggers of society" over the guardians of its future? Who would opt for the voiding of meaning over Savage's "something more meaningful"? What might Leonard teach us about turning our back on what hangs in the balance and deciding—despite the rhetoric of compassion, futurity, and life—to topple the scales

that are always skewed, to put one's foot down at last, even if doing so costs us the ground on which we, like all others, must stand? To figure out how we might answer that question, let's think about Leonard as a figure, one metonymically figured in *North by Northwest* by the terra-cotta figurine ("a pre-Columbian figure of a Tarascan warrior" [90], according to the screenplay, that is referred to throughout the Mount Rushmore episode simply as "the figure" [e.g., 138]), which contains, like a secret meaning, the secrets on the microfilm hidden inside it. In Leonard, to be sure, the figure of the *sinthomosexual* is writ large-screen, never more so than during what constitutes his anti–Sermon on the Mount, when by lowering the sole of his shoe he manages to show that he has no soul, thus showing as well that the shoe of *sinthomosexuality* fits him—and that he's wearing it—insofar as he scorns the injunction to put himself in the *other's* shoes. But the gesture by which he puts his stamp on *sinthomosexuality*—by stamping on the fingers with which Thornhill holds fast to the monument's ledge with one hand while he holds fast to Eve with the other—constitutes, as the film makes clear, a response to an appeal, even if his mode of response is intended to strike us as unappealing (see figure 7).

After giving Eve the "vicious shove" that sends her down the mountainside to almost "certain death" (145), Leonard seems to back away (see figures 8 and 9), the figure now firmly in hand. Thornhill, by contrast, takes *Eve* in hand as the ridge on which she had come to rest collapses beneath her feet, leaving her hanging from Thornhill's arm as he struggles at once to cling to the cliff and to the life that he now holds dear (see figures 10 and 11). Unable to save himself without plunging Eve into the void, unable to lift her up without intervention from above, he calls out in anguish to Leonard, calling him back to the fated encounter from which, in possession of the precious figure at last, he was ready to move away. "Help," and then again, "help me," groans Thornhill, his face as ashen as those on the monument itself. The sincerity that banishes banter here, the almost shocking plaintiveness as plainness displaces wit, identify this as a moment of categorical transformation, as if, through

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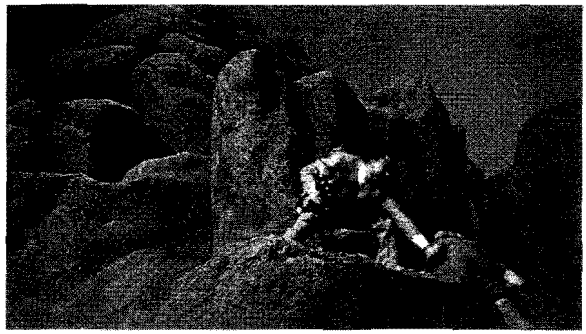
the love he bears for Eve and by which he bears her up, Thornhill himself were born again, and borne away from the verbal games, the Madison Avenue wittiness and delight in linguistic play, that threatened to earn him the epithet, "a very clever fellow," that served as the villain's epitaph in *Strangers on a Train*. As Thornhill's compassionate passion spirits the spirit of play away, Leonard, as if himself now inspired by Bruno, that "very clever fellow" from Hitchcock's earlier film, is moved to reply to Thornhill's call by calling upon the callousness that Bruno brought to bear on Guy when he kicked at the fingers by which Guy held on to the merry-go-round-gone-mad (see figures 12 and 13). Deliberately trampling on Thornhill's hand, Leonard now channels Bruno as if responding thereby to the earnestness with which Thornhill tunes Bruno out. Might not this exchange of attributes, this transference at the moment of Thornhill's unexpectedly heartfelt appeal, lead us to wonder just what Thornhill wants when he calls out to Leonard for help?

No doubt he solicits compassion, as does Hitchcock here as well: the protracted notes of Hermann's score, their weightiness reinforced by the rolling thunder of percussion, add weight to Thornhill's predicament as he waits for Leonard to act, all the while bearing the full weight of Eve, who depends on him literally now. The reduction of Hitchcock's palette to an almost monochromatic slate, the blue-gray shade evocative of rock and rigor mortis, gives visual point to the near complete encroachment of the void by drawing us into the depths that seem to swallow Thornhill and Eve. And the patent literalization here of the concept of suspense—already patented in Hitchcock's name after *Young and Innocent*, *Saboteur*, *To Catch a Thief*, and *Vertigo*—names this as a moment where mise-en-scène serves to indicate Hitchcock's hand in the scene as he forces his viewers to suffer the pain of the other as their own, to feel on their pulse the visceral sense of the characters' suspense.

Such control of the viewers' emotions produces compassion but doesn't reflect it. Dining with Ernest Lehman, who wrote the screenplay for *North by Northwest*, Hitchcock reportedly whispered across the table with delight: "Ernie, do you realize what we're doing in this picture? The



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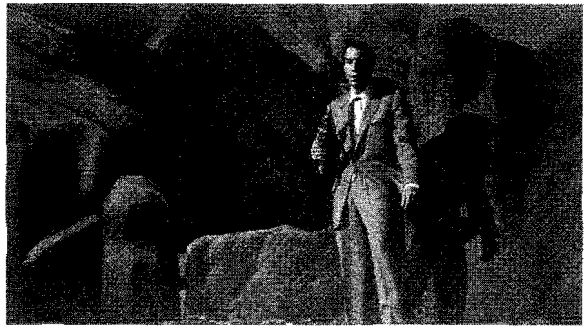

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audience is like a giant organ that you and I are playing. At one moment we play *this* note on them and get *this* reaction, and then we play *that* chord and they react *that* way. And someday we won't even have to make a movie—there'll be electrodes implanted in their brains, and we'll just press different buttons and they'll go 'ooooh' and 'aaaah' and we'll frighten them, and make them laugh. Won't that be wonderful?"[14]

The machinery of cinema envisioned here turns audience members into machines themselves, receptacles for stimuli that compel their performance of automatic, predetermined responses. Enacting a scenario worthy of Sade, this cinema without need of a movie would deny any agency to its viewers, reducing them merely to some, and not to *the* sum, of their parts. With this quasi-pornographic fantasy of manipulating people through electrical stimuli, Hitchcock, always eager to maximize directorial control, imagines a cinema of neuronal compulsion exempt from the burden of having to deal with subjectivity at all. This view of the end of cinema, understood in its double genitive sense, reads the spectator's sense of compassion, of emotional investment in the image on screen, with so little compassion of its own, that it fully acknowledges film as a form of Imaginary entrapment in which the filmmaker mobilizes identification with a totalizing image as surely "implanted in [viewers'] brains" as electrodes themselves would be. Hitchcock's fantasy, in other words, speaks less to his futuristic anticipation of what cinema might become than to his actual understanding of what narrative cinema always already is. His version of cinema models as much as it mirrors the subject's imagined sense of wholeness or integrity, leaving that subject helpless before the coercions of the image, helpless to *let go* of the image that gives it the image of itself. When Hitchcock, then, like Thornhill, seems so genuinely to call forth compassion, when he moves the viewer to pain at the imaged threat to the image as such, he does so while invoking a jouissance that responds to something mechanical—beyond volition, automatic—at the very heart of the experience that compels us to compassion: the jouissance of passing beyond the limit of the human and dissolving into the drive that insists beyond the subject's desire. He

therefore calls upon Leonard, *sinthomosexual* and director surrogate, to step right up to the challenge and answer Thornhill's call for compassion by putting his best foot forward and helping Thornhill learn to let go.

Thornhill may not intend his plea to be answered in quite this way, but our sense of what Thornhill is asking for is what Leonard's act suspends. That Thornhill's initial entreaty, "Help," becomes, almost at once, "Help me," suggests neither lack of commitment to Eve nor the limits of his compassion. Thornhill's anguished suspense, after all, like that of the spectator as well, speaks to his identification with Eve, suspended as she is from the face of the cliff and pulling him into danger as he tries to pull her out. "Help me" must mean, then, "Help me help her," and therefore "Help us" as well, or even "Help me change 'me' to 'us'; help me be joined to her." As such, his plea's sincerity attests to the seriousness of coupling and the earnestness always imposed by futurism's reproductive logic (not for nothing is the woman named Eve). Leonard, of course, is far from wild about this importance of being earnest or this strange request that comes to him, almost literally, out of the blue, to drop his stance of enmity, and the figure he took from Eve, lest Thornhill, in dropping Eve, drop something more precious than all his tribe: the fantasy of heterosexual love, and the reproductive Couple it elevates, as delivering us from the pull of the Real and the absence of sexual rapport by delivering us, dialectically, from a knowledge with which we can't live: the knowledge that, to quote Lacan, "the living being, by being subject to sex, has fallen under the blow of individual death."[15]

Despite that blow, the *sinthomosexual* opposes the fantasy that generates endless narratives of generation. Hearing, to borrow Joel Fineman's phrase, "the sound of O" in Thornhill—the "O" that parades as Thornhill's initial to the extent that it stands for nothing—Leonard refuses the tragedy of desire that Thornhill's cry portends.[16] To the contrary, Leonard, linked as he is to the figure full of microfilm, *North by Northwest*'s MacGuffin (Hitchcock's term for an object invested with "vital importance" in the narrative, though it "is actually nothing at all"[17]), might interpret Thornhill's tragedy as his newfound sincerity in the face of this

threat to Eve and thus as his *ceasing* to stand for nothing, his turning away from the empty "O" that turns the globe to rot, in order to stand for the law of desire to which we properly owe our standing as subjects of the Symbolic. Leonard thus stands opposed to the desire for which Thornhill solicits support by standing on the hand that Leonard refuses to lift in order to help him—or, to inflect that last phrase differently, refuses to lift the *better* to help him: to help him slip free of fantasy and the clutches of desire, free of the hold by which love holds off his access to jouissance while offering, instead, the promise of totalization and self-completion, the Imaginary One of the Couple and its putative sexual rapport, in a future that's unattainable because always still to come.[18]

Lacan affords us some guidance here through his gloss on the legend of St. Martin, whose response to a certain beggar who asked for his help on a cold winter's day was to cut his own warm cloak in two and give half to the man who had nothing. "Saint Martin shares his cloak, and a great deal is made of it," Lacan observes in invoking this touchstone of compassion. "We are no doubt touching a primitive requirement in the need to be satisfied there, for the beggar was naked. But perhaps over and above that need to be clothed, he was begging for something else, namely that Saint Martin either kill him or fuck him. In any encounter there's a big difference in meaning between the response of philanthropy and that of love."[19] The love Lacan refers to here, the love that surpasses philanthropy (etymologically, the "love of man"), disdains the Imaginary structure informing the inevitably narcissistic love we take for love itself. What Lacan calls love in this passage exceeds all feel-good forms of altruism with which we're wont to identify compassionate identification, the compassion that, Lacan points out, reinforces the ego's narcissism. "My egoism is quite content with a certain altruism," he declares, "altruism that is situated on the level of the useful." And he adds, to make this clearer still: "What I want is the good of others provided that it remain in the image of my own" (187). Lacan, however, distinguishes all such altruism, philanthropy, and compassion from the kind of love the beggar may actually have been soliciting from the saint: "It is in the na-

ture of the good to be altruistic. But that's not the love of thy neighbor" (186). Instead, at the heart of the neighborly love that Augustine associated with the "counsel of compassion," Lacan perceives the function of "malignant *jouissance*" (187). And this alone, Lacan insists, explains why Freud, confronted with the biblical injunction to "love one's neighbor," "retreats in understandable horror" (193).

Lacan, of course, is thinking of *Civilization and Its Discontents*, where Freud, having noted with understatement that "men are not gentle creatures," questions the imperative to "love one's neighbor," since, for most human beings, in his view, "their neighbor is for them not only a potential helper or sexual object, but also someone who tempts them to satisfy their aggressiveness on him, to exploit his capacity for work without compensation, to use him sexually without his consent, to seize his possessions, to humiliate him, to cause him pain, to torture and kill him."[20] One might hear in this a faint echo of Kant, who, maintaining "that our species, alas! is not such as to be found particularly worthy of love," insists that love, as a feeling, cannot be imposed upon us as duty, since what we do by constraint of duty is not, it follows, done from love. The commandment to love one's neighbor, therefore, cannot, as Kant puts it, "mean, 'Thou shalt first of all love, and by means of this love (in the first place) do him good'; but: '*Do good* to thy neighbor, and this beneficence will produce in thee the love of men.' "[21] Lacan draws out the extent to which such a translation of "love one's neighbor," though appearing to support a compassionate love with its roots in the Imaginary—by virtue of which "I imagine [others'] difficulties and their sufferings in the mirror of my own"—has the effect, to the contrary, of rupturing the subject's Imaginary totalization, the image of self-completion that "love" as fantasy would sustain, by installing the abstract logic of duty as the submission to moral law, whereby pathos becomes pathological and reason the logical path.[22] In this way the command to love one's neighbor unleashes its negativity against the coherence of any self-image, subjecting us to a moral law that *evacuates* the subject so as to *locate* it through and in that very act of evacuation, permitting the realization, thereby, of a freedom

beyond the boundaries of any image or representation, a freedom that, like the ground of God's power, according to Lacan, ultimately resides in nothing more than "the capacity to advance into emptiness" (196). Kant's duty to conform to moral law without any pathological motive, for the sake of duty alone, thus trenches, and this marks the central point of Lacan's elaboration of Kant with Sade, on the question of jouissance: "When one approaches that central emptiness, which up to now has been the form in which access to *jouissance* has presented itself to us, my neighbor's body breaks into pieces" (202). Here, in this access to jouissance, paradoxical though it may seem, psychoanalysis encounters the innermost meaning of the commandment to "love one's neighbor," which, as Lacan is quick to remind us, "may be the cruelest of choices" (194).

Thus Leonard, the *sinthomosexual*, by pressing his foot onto Thornhill's hand, attempts to impress upon Thornhill the fact that by breaking his hold on the cliff Leonard gives him the break for which he's been asking: the neighborly love sufficient to break him open with jouissance and launch him into the void around and against which the subject congeals. In the earnestness of Thornhill's cry, Leonard hears what Saint Martin was deaf to in the shivering beggar's plea: a request, beyond what the subject knows, for something beyond his desire. If that meant for Lacan, where the beggar was concerned, that "Saint Martin either kill him or fuck him," then Leonard, as reified obstacle to (hetero)sexual rapport, enacts in his dealings with Thornhill the one as displacement of the other.[23] Treading on Thornhill's fingers beneath the eyes of America's patriarchs, standing in for Symbolic law, Leonard can hardly fail to assume an allegorical aspect, as if he embodied an iconic response to the question posed by Lacan: "Does it go without saying that to trample sacred laws under foot . . . itself excites some form of *jouissance*?"[24] Bound to the law, whose potential transgression both elicits and inflames it, desire as lack always lacks what it takes to let go of the law that it tramples precisely to the extent that it lacks what it takes to dare to let go, tout court. But Leonard, by going beyond transgression and so beyond the law, engages jouissance that is unconstrained by fantasy or desire. For the

sinthomosexual, who figures the unrestricted availability of jouissance, the continuous satisfaction that the drive attains by its pulsions and not by its end, threatens the subject inhabiting the temporality of desire, the subject who clings to the *nonsatisfaction* that *perpetuates* desire and finds its defense against jouissance in the narrative dilation that endlessly begets the future by always deferring it.[25] Thus aligned with the law's prohibitions that keep its object out of reach, desire is desire for no object but only, instead, for its own prolongation, for the future itself as libidinal object procured by its constant lack. Paradoxically, then, Lacan's *objet a*, the object/cause of desire, does not partake of desire itself; instead, it consists of the jouissance that desire must keep at a distance insofar as desire *relies* on that distance, on that lack, for its survival. *Sinthomosexuality*, by contrast, brings into visibility the force of enjoyment that desire desires to put off. In doing so, the *sinthomosexual* reveals, unendurably to the subject of the law, enjoyment's infiltration of, its structural implication in, the very law of desire that works to keep jouissance at bay.

Sinthomosexuality, in other words, finds something *other* in the words of the law, enforcing an awareness of something else, something that remains unaccounted for in the accounts we give of ourselves, by figuring an encounter with a force that loosens our hold on the meanings we cling to when, for example, we cry for help. The force thus figured is figured in the film by Leonard's relation, as I suggested before, to what the film describes as "the figure," itself a mere reification of the empty core around which it is shaped and whose "contents," inserted to fill that void, determine what it "means." In this sense, the figure seems to operate primarily as a figure for figure as such and not, as various readers of the film—including Raymond Bellour—have argued, as a figure for Eve, or for Eve as a figure for the "threatening body" of the mother.[26] Thornhill, in the scene at the auction house, fully cognizant that Eve has betrayed him, may refer to her, contemptuously, as "this little piece of—sculpture" (90), but the figure that comes to figure figure's murderous duplicity passes—or rather is transferred, in a movement that *literalizes* "metaphor" while *instantiating* metonymy—into Leonard's hands from

Eve's when the two of them struggle on Mount Rushmore. It thus makes him, not her, the figure of figure in the scene. This act of transference, in other words, reinterprets the metaphoric spiritualization of difference, the transformation of two into One, as the random slippage of metonymy into which every One must fall.[27] Unlike the metonomy as which Lacan is known for having defined desire, however, this exposure of the metonymic substrate on which metaphoric meaning always rests undoes the substitutive structures of identification and so of love, and thus destroys the very place from which the subject is able to desire—the place from which the subject *takes* its desire through identification with the Other.

As a "gravedigger of society," one who "care[s] nothing [for] the future," Leonard, the *sinthomosexual*, annuls the temporality of desire, leaving futurity, like the reproductive Couple charged with the responsibility of bearing it, "suspended, interrupted, disrupted," in the words de Man uses to characterize the impact of irony on narrative.[28] Leaving the "intelligibility of (representational) narrative disrupted at all times," inducing, as de Man says elsewhere, "unrelieved *vertige*, dizziness to the point of madness," irony, with its undoing of identity and refusal of historical progression, with its shattering of every totalized form (and of every form *as* totalization), names the figure as which Leonard's relation to the terra-cotta figure figures him.[29] The shot of the broken clay figure adduced just after Leonard is shot, substituting the destruction of that object for the shattering of his body at the end of its fall, thus portrays, in the *sinthomosexual*'s fate, the fatality he would inflict: the dissolution effected by jouissance, before which, as Lacan asserts, "my neighbor's body breaks into pieces." The Tarascan figure thus literally embodies—by endowing with the image *of* a body—the central and structuring emptiness it is intended to contain. And true to the radical groundlessness that irony effects, we can never decide if the pieces of film that emerge when that figure breaks open (see figure 14) are the precipitates of its emptiness—images, that is, of this hollowing-out, this vacancy that always inhibats the image as Imaginary lure—or images, instead, of the fantasy precipitated to *counter* such an emptiness: the fantasy of the image

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as negating such a vertiginous negativity, as filling the void with the fantasy structure that constitutes desire. For the strips of film, like *North by Northwest*, image the emptying-out of the image, the escape from its illusory "truth"; at the same time, though, and precisely by *imaging* the emptying-out of the image, they substantialize it once again, regenerating the Imaginary fantasy of a totalizing form.[30]

But note in this a paradox: this emptiness internal to the figure, and into which it breaks, suspending by means of irony all totality and coherence, expresses the *presence* of jouissance, the insistence of the drive, and the access, therefore, to the perverse satisfaction of which the drive is assured, while desire as enabled by fantasy, though aiming to fill that emptiness by according it a substance and a form, only substitutes *absence* for presence, endless pursuit for satisfaction, the deferral that conjures futurity for the stuff of jouissance. This, one might say, is the irony of irony's relation to desire. For just as compassion allows no rhetorical ground outside its logic, no place to stand beyond its enforced Imaginary identifications—by virtue of which, whatever its object or the political ends it serves, compassion is *always* conservative, always intent on preserving the image in which the ego sees itself—so irony's negativity calls forth compassion *to negate it* and thereby marks compassion and all the components of desire, its defining identifications as well as the fantasies that sustain them, with the negativity of the very drive against which they claim to defend.[31]

What in our current moment evinces this irony of compassion more clearly than the reading of homosexuality as always *sinthomosexuality*? Consider, for example, Pope John Paul II's unambiguous affirmation in July 2000 that those of us outside the heterosexual norm deserve, as he put it, to be treated "with respect, compassion, and sensitivity." No sooner had the Pontiff spoken those words than he felt it important to let us know that "homosexual persons who assert their homosexuality," who do not, that is, repress or deny their sexual orientation, suffer an "objective disorder." They possess what he called an "inclination . . . toward an intrinsic moral evil." This, he compassionately proceeded to

declare, precludes the possibility of any legitimate claim to "civil legislation . . . introduced to protect behavior to which no one has any conceivable right."[32] One could easily imagine how some might dismiss such "compassion and sensitivity" out of hand. Certain that the Church, in its vigilant program to sniff out "moral evil," is simply, in this particular instance, barking up the wrong tree, they might well decline to accept such accounts of our sexual inclination. But the decline of civilization itself, in the opinion of the Church, would be guaranteed if many twigs or—heaven help us!—twigs in general were bent as we're inclined. For if "no one has any conceivable right" to engage in "homosexual acts," it is only insofar as "homosexual acts" lead no one to conceive; they violate natural law, so-called, the Catechism asserts, to the extent that they inevitably close off "the sexual act to the gift of life."[33] That gift, understood by the Church as the gift of compassion par excellence, despite the doctrine of celibacy to which its own priests still are pledged, compels its continued repudiation of homosexual acts. Only, from such a perspective, a deeply *misguided* sense of compassion leads "well-intentioned" persons to act "with a view to changing civil-statutes and laws" in response to "the pro-homosexual movement['s] . . . deceitful propaganda." The Church, by contrast, as the Vatican puts it, "can never be so callous," and therefore, as a letter of admonition to Catholic Bishops maintained, deviation from official Church doctrine where homosexuality is concerned, even "in an effort to provide pastoral care[,] is neither caring nor pastoral."[34] A similar sentiment was expressed in a statement attributed to Concerned Families of Maryland, a nonsectarian organization devoted to the implementation of "family-friendly" social policies: "There is more compassion," the statement averred, "in truth than [in] deception, and more compassion in denouncing homosexuality than [in] endorsing it."[35]

That compassion can look like callousness, then, and callousness like compassion, that the bleeding-heart sob sister's tears can destroy what her tough-talking, tough-love-promoting twin's invective purports to redeem, suggests that compassion and callousness differ only by *decree*, as the Professor inadvertently demonstrated near the outset of *North by*

Northwest. This irony must be lost, however—it's incumbent that it be lost—on all who would stand with Saint Peter's heir on the rock of compassionate love. And lost on them most through the loss of the Leonards, and of all the *sinthomosexuals*, whose loss is perceived as none at all since they represent loss itself: represent, more precisely, loss *of* self, of coherence, of life, and of heirs. "Gay activism is wholeheartedly determined," writes Father John Miller, the author of *Called by Love* and editor of the *Social Justice Review*, "to do battle against human life." Therefore, Father Miller insists, "Mistaken compassion must not allow us to 'grant' civil rights to gays. . . . We have every natural, God-given right to discriminate against immoral, unhealthy, ugly, society-disturbing behavior."[36] This negation of the negativity, the jouissance, of the *sinthomosexual* epitomizes the logic of compassion to which we are constantly "called by love." In the process, it determines dialectic, in its temporal elaboration, as always what Lacan would call a "dialectic of desire."[37] Or, to put that somewhat differently, the fantasy on which desire subsists needs dialectic as temporalization, as the production of narrative sequence moving toward an always unrealized end. Desire, that is, in opposition to the *sinthomosexual* who figures the drive, necessitates the emergence of fantasy precisely to screen out the drive's insistence. That fantasy, always experienced as the very reality in which we live, installs the law's prohibition as a barrier to protect against jouissance and opens the space of desire to an infinite future of failed pursuit through which desire, like Faust, refuses its satisfaction or enjoyment, prolonging itself by negating the satisfaction at which it aims and only through that negation engaging the enjoyment it refuses to know.[38]

The relation of desire's dialectic, with its endless unfolding of futurity, to the *sinthomosexual*'s death drive, with its enjoyment that is always "*at hand*," echoes the relation of allegory to irony as elaborated by de Man.[39] Allegory, as de Man explains it in "The Rhetoric of Temporality," enacts "the tendency of . . . language toward narrative, the spreading out along the axis of an imaginary time in order to give duration to what is, in fact, simultaneous within the subject" (225). Hence, as he goes

on to assert, "allegory exists entirely within an ideal time that is never here and now, but always a past or an endless future" (226). Irony, on the other hand, reduces time to "one single moment" (225) that allows "neither memory nor prefigurative duration" (226). It is, instead, de Man insists, "instantaneous like an 'explosion,' " a characterization to which he adds the telling phrase, "and the fall is sudden" (225). If compassion for others, in Reagan's view, moves us to "reach out a hand when they fall," could we think of compassion in terms of allegory's logic of narrative sequence, which resists, while carrying forward—through and as the dilation of time—the negativity condensed in irony's instantaneous big bang? In that case this version of compassionate love, intended to buck up the order of desire whose form is reproductive futurism, would allegorize, to the profit of dialectic, the expense of the unrecuperable irony that compassion necessarily abjects in whomever it reads as *sinthomosexual*, whomever it sees as a threat to the law (understood as the law of desire) by figuring an access to jouissance that gives them more bang for their buck.[40]

Consistent with such a translation of irony into the narrative order of allegory, by means of which such irony is both exceeded and carried over at once, exceeded, that is, by an excess of the negativity that is thereby negated in it, *North by Northwest* gets rid of the *sinthomosexual* with a bang of its own, the irony of which gets voiced in the mordant comment that Leonard's shooting provokes from his superior, Vandamm. "That wasn't very sporting," he chides the Professor, "using *real* bullets." Leonard's insistence on the Real thus gives way to a fantasmatic reality as the film dismisses irony with this brief ironic epitaph, discarding, along with Leonard, Thornhill's single most obvious trait, or the trait that could only be obvious so long as he himself remained single. Married—and that marriage occurs, we might say, in the gesture that has him drop irony so as to keep from dropping Eve—he drops, as if it were casually, one last line to mark his change. "I'm sentimental," he affirms to Eve in the final words of the film, his body now falling all over hers as she, permitted to do so at last, falls backward onto the bed. We need not accept that this

statement expresses a wisdom hard-won by escaping the force field of irony's negations; we need not, in fact, accept that this statement lacks irony itself. But the irony, then, would be Hitchcock's, or *North by Northwest*'s, instead of Thornhill's, and would ironize the sentimentality to which Thornhill lays claim at the end of the film by ironizing the claim of sentiment, which is allegory's claim as well, to have superseded irony—to have pulled itself up by its bootstraps from under the *sinthomosexual*'s boot to assure thereby the survival, in the future unfolded by desire, of the ego's Imaginary unity, which compassion is always compelled to conserve.

Could any film image more elegantly the conservation of such an image or render more economically the dialectic of desire as it reinterprets the fatal fall into the abyss of jouissance as an endless fall forward through time designed to keep jouissance at bay? Hanging from the face of the cliff inscribed with those blindly staring faces—imaging the founding fathers and, with them, the faith that the law of the father, by closing the door on jouissance, can serve as a shelter and guarantee for the image we take as our own—the Couple procures its future, and ours, by enacting the dialectic through which the self purports to find itself, in another phrase from de Man, "standing above its own experiences."[41] Thus, the scene on Mount Rushmore can only conclude, the escape from the threat of the death drive embodied by Leonard can only take place, through a sequence combining the acts of suspending, annulling, and raising up. No sooner has the death drive that Leonard drives home been suppressed by the force of the law than the film suppresses all reference to agencies other than those of the Couple. Closing in tightly on Thornhill and Eve, their faces the privileged sites of Imaginary totalization in the film, the camera compels a suspension of logic as Thornhill lifts Eve to safety, single-handedly in more ways than one, by lifting her body from the face of the cliff directly into the upper berth of a bedroom coach on a train (see figures 15–20). As Eve is borne up and into the berth that the future itself may be born, the film enacts a dialectic of continuity through disconnection, achieving, like allegory in the words of de Man,

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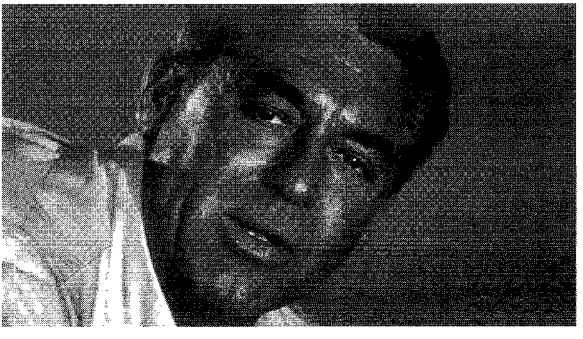

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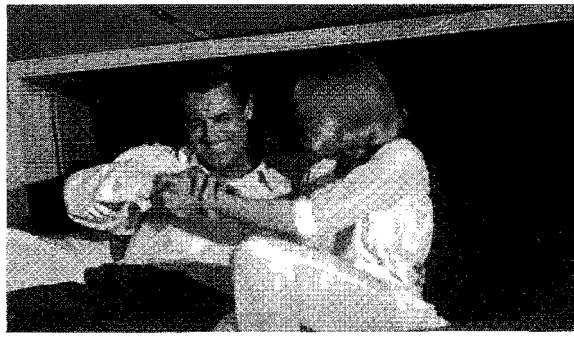

"the illusion of a continuity that it knows to be illusionary," and granting the reproductive Couple the prolongation of its desire across, but also by means of, a break like that of anacoluthon.[42]

The genuine strangeness of this moment, which often occasions a laughter compounded of disappointment and relief, centers on Hitchcock's willfulness—or even his perversity—in arranging the Couple's escape from the void through a sequence that reinstalls that void at the center of its structure. Though the reproductive Couple's joined hands join hands with Hitchcock's cinematic technique to figure the logic of continuity here, this sequence flaunts the *discontinuity* of what its continuity editing joins. The temporal and spatial violations involved in the syntax of this movement, which conflates the particulars of an all-but-impossible rescue from the cliff with the act, both more plausible and more mundane, of lifting Eve into the berth, coincide with the film's violation of naturalism's insistence on the synchronization of sound as the words on the audio track *cease* to coincide with the movements of Thornhill's lips. Out of this gap thus opened in the "reality" of the film, which responds to the ruptures of space and time (divided between events on the cliff and on the train) that close-ups and editing conceal, a voice that comes from somewhere else—the voice, to be sure, of Thornhill but coming from somewhere beyond his image, coming, in fact, from the very future that he labors to bear in the body of Eve—delivers them into that future with four simple words: "Come along, Mrs. Thornhill." With this the film successfully lifts us *all* into that future. To the extent that it carries us forward, though, like the train onto which the happy Couple is magically transported, the engine driving that movement here is fantasy alone: the fantasy, first and foremost, that this whole scene is *not* a fantasy but, rather, a return precisely to what is plausibly mundane; the fantasy, then, that futurity, the temporality of desire, can effectively structure our reality by denying the pressure of the Real. Thornhill's bandaged fingers may carry Leonard's imprint still (and the screenplay, following Thornhill's last words, calls them to our attention), but the film, only able to come to a close by opening onto desire, desires its way to sur-

vival by casting Leonard, once it has cast him out, as a dream from which it awakens—unlike Joyce's Stephen Dedalus—*into* history, temporality, and the cycles of reproduction.

This is the compassionate destiny destined to keep the romantic Couple from ever reaching its destination. For that end, whatever the subject may hope, is not to be won through the realization of (hetero)-sexual rapport, through a union with the "opposite" sex it imagines might complete it. Indeed, as Paul Verhaeghe writes, "Whatever efforts the subject makes to join his or her body via the Other of language, he or she will never succeed, because the gap [between jouissance and the Other] is precisely due to this Other of language."[43] That gap, in other words, is coextensive with the subject "*qua* living being" destined to suffer, as a consequence of the fact of "sexed reproduction," an irreparable loss of what nothing in the Symbolic is sufficient to restore: "the part of himself, lost forever, that is constituted by the fact that he is only a sexed living being, and that he is no longer immortal"—no longer, in other words, whole, complete, or sufficient unto himself.[44] This primal or originary lack precludes the One of sexual relation, the reconstitution of unity anticipated by reproductive coupling across the divide of "sexual difference." Lacanian sexual difference, as Joan Copjec rightly remarks, "is a real and not a symbolic difference," and Žižek, drawing on Ernesto Laclau, makes clear just what that means: "To put it in Laclau's terms—sexual difference is the Real of an antagonism, not the Symbolic of a differential opposition: sexual difference is not the opposition allocating to each of the two sexes its positive identity defined in opposition to the other sex (so that woman is what man is not, and vice versa), but a common Loss on account of which woman is never fully a woman and man is never fully a man—'masculine' and 'feminine' positions are merely two modes of coping with this inherent obstacle/loss."[45] This loss or lack of the Real accounts for the emergence of the subject of the drive, but the Symbolic order repeats and displaces that lack in the lack that constitutes the subject of desire. Isn't this precisely the fate foretold in the familiar Lacanian anecdote about two children, brother and

sister, turned, by the signifiers that translate sexual difference from the Real to the Symbolic, into strangers on a train? "For these children," Lacan informs us, "Ladies and Gentlemen will be henceforth two countries toward which each of their souls will strive on divergent wings, and between which a truce will be the more impossible since they are actually the same country and neither can compromise on its own superiority without detracting from the glory of the other."[46] Seeking restitution in the order of the Symbolic for a loss that they suffer in the Real, a loss from which the drive emerges as the structurally "excessive, 'unreal' remainder that produces an ever-present jouissance,"[47] these children, like Thornhill and Eve, are destined to book their own berths on the train called Desire, which leads, as it does in Williams's play, to an end informed by the train of births that procures its endless locomotion.[48]

North by Northwest will appear, then, to have taken its hero on a journey, to have moved him by teaching him how to be moved, to have brought him, as Raymond Bellour suggests, "from an ignorance to a knowledge," recalling in this the narrative logic of temporal succession whereby allegory sorts out and distributes sequentially, in an effort to make intelligible, the incompatible pressures that irony condenses in every instant.[49] The film's last shot would seem to confirm such a triumph of allegorization by flattering the "knowingness" of an audience always happy to give a hand—as much to itself as to the film—when the phallic symbol it failed to see coming comes handed to it like a gift (see figure 21).

Hitchcock never tired of pretending to reveal what that last shot meant: "There are no symbols in *North by Northwest*," he told *Cahiers du Cinéma*. "Oh yes! One. The last shot. It's a train entering the tunnel after the love scene between Grant and Eva Marie Saint. It's a phallic symbol. But you mustn't tell anyone."[50] As symbol of the Symbolic here, of the law of the father as the law of desire barring access to jouissance, and hence of the normative faith in the One of the reproductive Couple, the phallic symbol would put its seal on the overcoming of irony. But to the extent that it does so by founding its order of meaning on the meaningless signifier that always comes from the field of the Other, impelling us there-

after to seek a "return" to a fantasmatic coherence by riding the rails, like the brother and sister Lacan adduces in his fable, toward the part of ourselves forever lost and displaced into "Ladies" or "Gentlemen," to that extent the phallic symbol reinstates the very irony, the simultaneity of contradictions, the intolerable "dizziness to the point of madness," that its constant promise of "meaning" constantly means it to transcend. Those children, as realizations themselves of reproductive futurism—into which, as surely as night follows day, they are doomed to be railroaded too—image the only answer permitted to the question of desire by a signifying chain whose closure arrives in a future definitionally deferred: a future they, as children, may serve to figure for a time, but one they will have to figure out how to sustain in time to come. The mise-en-abîme that reproductive futurism is thereby compelled to effect—propelled by desire, guaranteed by the phallus, and figured by the Child—would defend against the abyssal irony it negates and preserves at once. But in doing so, it exposes the compassion for which Saint Martin provides the model, the compassion that nothing dares to resist in the social field of desire, as merely another name for the symbolic mandate of castration: the law that we, like Saint Martin's beggar, solicit for the wool it pulls over our eyes in order to blind us to the jouissance that would knock them right out of our heads.

Leonard, the *sinthomosexual*, loves his neighbor enough to say no, to give him the kick that he's begging for and from which he gets his kicks. Unlike Roy Batty (Rutger Hauer) in *Blade Runner* (1982), a later *sinthomosexual* who faces a similar moment of truth when Rick Deckard (Harrison Ford), the adversary pursuing him to his death, hangs pitifully over the void, Leonard, more fully embodying the machinery of the drive than his android brother, resists, in extremis, the lure of any redemptive humanization. Not for him an identification with the image of the Other, nor any sentimentality over the form of the totalized self; not for him the elegies Batty intones in the wake of rescuing Deckard, nor such tokens of transcendent survival as the dove that flies upward at Batty's death, equating thereby his last act of compassion with a now fully humanized

soul. Leonard's sole act is to grind his sole, like a brand, into Thornhill's flesh, crushing the hand toward which, unmoved, he refuses to reach out his own.[51] Moved only by the death drive's compulsion, instead, he gets to the heart of the plea for help by helping the other to get in touch with his ways of getting off. Batty's altruistic gesture, then, like Saint Martin's act of compassion, may earn the spiritual seal of approval implied by the wings of the dove, but Leonard's exemplifies the difference "between the response of philanthropy and that of love."

The *sinthomosexual*, then, as saint? Saint Leonard, as Martin Landau plays him, usurping Saint Martin's place? But the *sinthomosexual* won't offer a blessed thing by way of salvation, won't promise any transcendence or grant us a vision of something to come. In breaking our hold on the future, the *sinthomosexual*, himself neither martyr nor proponent of martyrdom for the sake of a cause, forsakes *all* causes, *all* social action, *all* responsibility for a better tomorrow or for the perfection of social forms. Against the promise of such an activism, he performs, instead, an act: the act of repudiating the social, of stepping, or trying to step, with Leonard, beyond compulsory compassion, beyond the future and the snare of images keeping us always in its thrall. Insisting, with Kant, on a freedom from pathological motivation, on a radical type of selflessness no allegory ever redeems, the *sinthomosexual* stands for the wholly impossible ethical act. And for just that reason the social order, repeating in the form of compassion the negativity it abjects, proves incapable of standing him. Instead, that order continues to fill its constitutive gap with futurism, elaborating allegorically, in the temporality of narrative sequence, the contradictory tensions of its relation to the Real and thus to the drive as the residue that haunts it with jouissance. The future serves as a placeholder, then, to maintain, while seeming to overcome, the Symbolic's incompleteness, but the *sinthomosexual* erupts from within as the obstacle to such a fantasy of eventual totalization, and, therefore, as an obstacle to fantasy as such.

In this sense, the *sinthomosexual* embodies intelligibility's internal limit and situates his ethical register outside the recognizably human.

To gain a better purchase on this, consider for a moment a recent work whose orientation toward futurism, bespeaking its passionate commitment to a politics of compassion, commits it to repeating the refusal it aims explicitly to refuse. Judith Butler, in writing *Antigone's Claim*, sets out, like Thornhill as he takes Eve's hand (in a double sense) on Mount Rushmore, to forestall an impending injury by resisting the repetition of the logic responsible for causing Antigone's death. Denying the assertion that Symbolic law necessitates such repetitions, insisting, rather, that the law depends on the *appearance* of such a necessity, Butler sets out to rewrite that past in order to rescue Antigone from the tomb in which she's been buried alive—and buried not only by Creon, but also, as Butler suggests, by readers including Hegel and Lacan. Condemned in every instance for crossing, in life, the boundary of life and death, for passing beyond the space of social recognition and viability, Antigone figures for Butler "the unlivable desire with which she lives."[52] Antigone, that is, comes to allegorize the steady pressure of a catachresis that moves her beyond intelligibility and so toward new forms of social relation, or even, as Butler expectantly writes, toward "a new field of the human, achieved through political catachresis, the one that happens when the less than human speaks as human, when gender is displaced, and kinship founders on its own founding laws" (82).

So figured, Antigone makes her claim on behalf of all whom the laws of kinship consign to what Butler, after Orlando Patterson, describes as "social death" (73):

> When the incest taboo works *in this sense* to foreclose a love that is not incestuous, what is produced is a shadowy realm of love, a love that persists in spite of its foreclosure in an ontologically suspended mode. What emerges is a melancholia that attends living and loving outside the livable and outside the field of love, where the lack of institutional sanction forces language into perpetual catachresis, showing not only how a term can continue to signify outside its conventional constraints but also how that shadowy form of signification takes its

toll on a life by depriving it of a sense of ontological certainty and durability within a publicly constituted political sphere. (78)

Antigone lays claim, in the powerful voice that Butler's argument gives her, to a proper place in the order of things, though that place must exceed all propriety, to a "livable" life in the "political sphere," though that life won't affirm the Symbolic. Rejecting the perpetual melancholia of loving "in an ontologically suspended mode," this Antigone refuses to be deprived, by the normative and normalizing logics of social legitimation and cultural intelligibility, of the "ontological certainty and durability" that she demands, "in spite of its foreclosure," as the prerogative of her love. Resolute in her transgressiveness, she emerges, awful and triumphant, from her silent tomb in Butler's last sentence, determined to rearticulate the law whose unvarying repetition would sentence her and all her unkinned kind to a death-in-life forever: "She acts, she speaks, she becomes one for whom the speech act is a fatal crime, but this fatality exceeds her own life and enters the discourse of intelligibility as its own promising fatality, the social form of an aberrant, unprecedented future" (82).

What is promised both *in*, and in the form *of*, this "aberrant, unprecedented future" is nothing less than a Symbolic without exclusion or foreclosure, a Symbolic whose newly articulated norms would embrace, and thereby restore to life, those whom Butler characterizes as "dying, yes, surely dying from a lack of recognition, dying, indeed, from the premature circumscription of the norms by which recognition as a human can be conferred, a recognition without which the human cannot come into being but must remain on the far side of being, as that which does not quite qualify as that which is and can be" (81). Butler's claim never seems more compelling nor demurral more inhumane; but never does she sound more committed to "ontological certainty and durability," to the cause of the human as *capable* of coming fully into being through some *proper*, as opposed to "premature," "circumscription of the norms." As a result, her "radical sexual politics" (75) seems all too familiarly liberal

and her engagement with psychoanalysis all too "American," as Lacan might say, in its promise to provide the excluded with access to a livable social form. That form, of course, is the future that Antigone's "promising fatality" would procure: a form that translates fatality into the means, not the end, of life insofar as fatality here comes to mean the rearticulation of meaning through a transformation of the signifier's capacity to mean. She may enter "the discourse of intelligibility as its own promising fatality," but Antigone, in fact, neither promises nor desires an end to intelligibility. To the contrary, she promises the endless entrance *into* intelligibility of all that has been excluded. The "discourse of intelligibility," in other words, continues to reign supreme; it merely expands to accommodate what it formerly disallowed. Thus, Butler's faith in its ever-widening horizon of inclusiveness, the liberal version of futurism's realization of meaning in time, reproduces, though from the political left, the fantasmatic security effected at the end of *North by Northwest* when the film dispatches Leonard, who refuses to "come into being" as "human," while it patches, with Hitchcock's "phallic symbol," the gap his refusal gestures toward in intelligibility as such.

Antigone's "promising fatality," then, the dissension said to *enter* discourse through her speech act's "fatal crime," opens the possibility of signifying what signification had denied. With such an act, according to Butler, "the human has entered into catachresis" because Antigone, though definitionally excluded from the "public sphere of the human," "speaks in its language" nonetheless, altering and enlarging the meaning that the signifier "human" is able to convey, until, as Butler tells us, "we no longer know its proper usage" (82). Except, of course, insofar as the human remains bound to the notion of futurity as the site of its endless realization through and as catachresis. But if this is the "promising fatality" for which Butler's Antigone wants to speak, it would seem to *preclude* the "aberrant, unprecedented future" that Butler intends. For the promise of such a "fatality" animates language *from the outset* in the constitutive catachresis by means of which language posits meaning while concealing the meaningless machinery of its own linguistic positing.

Catachresis, in other words, constrains *all* words to be always already other. But that otherness, disruptive though the meanings toward which it transports our words may be, necessarily means reassuringly for us as subjects of the Symbolic insofar as we read it as signaling the necessary production of *future* meanings and thus as affirming the identity of the future with the *promise* of meaning itself.

So Antigone may well depart from her tomb at the end of Butler's argument, returning to life in the political sphere from which she was excluded, but she does so while preserving the tomb itself as the burial place for whatever *continues* to insist outside of meaning, immune to intelligibility now or in any future yet to come. She emerges from her tomb, that is, only to claim, for those condemned to unlivable lives on account of unintelligible loves, "new schemes of intelligibility" that would make them, as Butler scruples to note, "legitimate and recognizable" (24). This Antigone, it follows, comes out (with all the implications of that phrase) only by coming *back* to the intelligibility that she, like Leonard, renounced, confirming, in the process, the legitimacy of the institutions of legitimation, however much what counts as legitimate must undergo change with time. Ironically, Butler's reading thus buries Antigone once more—or buries in her the *sinthomosexual* who refuses intelligibility's mandate and the correlative economy that regulates what is "legitimate and recognizable." Just as the law in *North by Northwest* is compelled to get rid of Leonard, so Butler's reading expels the Antigone who turns no face to the future but takes to heart the meaning of her name, "construed as 'anti-generation'" (22). Like the "aberrant, unprecedented future" to which she stakes her political claim, Butler's Antigone, far from transforming Symbolic law, *repeats* it—and repeats it, in fact, as nothing less than the law of repetition by which our fate is bound to the fate of meaning through signification whose continued functioning always relies on reproductive futurism.

Small wonder, then, that her subversive act, her "rearticulation of the norm" (76), while promising to open what Butler calls a radical "new field of the human," returns us, instead, to familiar forms of a

durable liberal humanism whose rallying cry has always been, and here remains, "the future." And since nothing is ever less "aberrant, [or] unprecedented" than the "future," which functions as the literal end toward which *Antigone's Claim* proceeds, we should not be surprised that the phrase itself reiterates, rather than rearticulates, an earlier use of the term. In the course of responding to Lacan's account of Antigone's "death-driven movement" across the barrier of the Symbolic, Butler identifies exactly what the "duty imposed by the symbolic is," and she does so by quoting Lacan: " 'to transmit the chain of discourse in aberrant form to someone else' " (52). With this Antigone's "aberrant . . . future" proves orthodox after all. Undermining its claim to be aberrant and unprecedented at once, it transmits, in the *requisite* aberrant form, as futurity *always* demands—in the form, that is, whose aberrant quality is therefore anything but and whose future repeats its precedents precisely by virtue of being "unprecedented"—the Symbolic chain of discourse, in which, as everyone knows (and this, of course, is precisely *what* everyone knows), intelligibility must always take place.

But what if it didn't? What if Antigone, along with all those doomed to ontological suspension on account of their unrecognizable and, in consequence, "unlivable" loves, *declined* intelligibility, declined to bring herself, catachrestically, into the ambit of future meaning—or declined, more exactly, to cast off the meaning that clings to those social identities that intelligibility abjects: their meaning as names for the meaninglessness the Symbolic order requires as a result of the catachresis that posits meaning to begin with. Those figures, *sinthomosexuals*, could not bring the Symbolic order to crisis since they only emerge, in abjection, to support the emergence of Symbolic form, to metaphorize and enact the traumatic violence of signification whose meaning-effacing energies, released by the cut that articulates meaning, the Symbolic order constantly must exert itself to bind. Unlike Butler's Antigone, though, such *sinthomosexuals* would insist on the unintelligible's unintelligibility, on the internal limit to signification and the impossibility of turning Real loss to meaningful profit in the Symbolic without its persistent remain-

der: the inescapable Real of the drive. As embodiments of unintelligibility, of course, they must veil what they expose, becoming, as figures for it, the means of its apparent subjection to meaning. But where Butler's Antigone conduces to futurism's logic of intelligibility by seeking no more than to widen the reach of what it allows us to grasp, where she moves, by way of the future, toward the ongoing legitimation of social form through the recognition that is said to afford "ontological certainty and durability," *sinthomosexuality*, though destined, of course, to be claimed for intelligibility, consents to the logic that makes it a *figure* for what meaning can never grasp. Demeaned, it embraces de-meaning as the endless insistence of the Real that the Symbolic can never master for meaning now or in the "future."

That "never," Butler would argue, performs the law's instantiation, which always attempts to impose, as she puts it, "a limit to the social, the subversive, the possibility of agency and change, a limit that we cling to, symptomatically, as the final defeat of our own power" (21). Committed as she is to intelligibility as the expanding horizon of social justice, Butler would affirm "our own power" to rearticulate, by means of catachresis, the laws responsible for what she aptly calls our "moralized sexual horror" (71). Such a rearticulation, she claims, would proceed through "the repeated scandal by which the unspeakable nevertheless makes itself heard through borrowing and exploiting the very terms that are meant to enforce its silence" (78). This, of course, assumes that "the unspeakable" intends, above all else, to speak, whereas Lacan maintains, as Copjec reminds us, something radically different: that sex, as "the structural incompleteness of language" is "that which does not communicate itself, that which marks the subject as unknowable."[53] No doubt, as Butler helps us to see, the norms of the social order do, in fact, change through catachresis, and those who once were persecuted as figures of "moralized sexual horror" may trade their chill and silent tombs for a place on the public stage. But that redistribution of social roles doesn't stop the cultural production of figures, *sinthomosexuals* all, to bear the burden of embodying such a "moralized sexual horror." For that horror

itself survives the fungible figures that flesh it out insofar as it responds to something in sex that's inherently unspeakable: the Real of sexual difference, the lack that launches the living being into the empty arms of futurity. This, to quote from Copjec again, "is the meaning, when all is said and done, of Lacan's notorious assertion that 'there is no sexual relation': sex, in opposing itself to sense, is also, by definition, opposed to relation, to communication."[54] From that limit of intelligibility, from that lack in communication, there flows, like blood from an open wound, a steady stream of figures that mean to embody—and thus to fill—that lack, that would stanch intelligibility's wound, like the clotting factor in blood, by binding it to, encrusting it in, Imaginary form. Though bound therefore to be, on the model of Whitman, the binder of wounds, the *sinthomosexual*, anti-Promethean, unbound, unbinds us all. Or rather, persists as the *figure* for such a generalized unbinding by which the death drive expresses at once the impossible excess and the absolute limit both of and within the Symbolic.

On the face of Mount Rushmore, as he faces the void to which he himself offers a face, Leonard gestures toward such an unbinding by committing himself to the *sinthomosexual*'s impossible ethical act: by standing resolutely *at*, and *on*, and *for* that absolute limit. Alenka Zupančič, in *Ethics of the Real*, notes that what Kant called the ethical act "is denounced as 'radically evil' in every ideology," and then describes how ideology typically manages to defend against it: "The gap opened by an act (i.e., the unfamiliar, 'out-of-place' effect of an act) is immediately linked in this ideological gesture to an *image*. As a rule this is an image of suffering, which is then displayed to the public alongside this question: *Is this what you want?* And this question already implies the answer: *It would be impossible, inhuman, for you to want this!*"[55] The image of suffering adduced here is always the threatened suffering of an image: an image onto which the face of the human has coercively been projected such that we, by virtue of losing it, must also lose the face by which we (think we) know ourselves. For "we are, in effect," as Lacan ventriloquizes the normative understanding of the self, "at one with everything that depends on the

image of the other as our fellow man, on the similarity we have to our ego and to everything that situates us in the imaginary register."[56] To be anything else—to refuse the constraint, the inertia, of the ego as form—would be, as Zupančič rightly says, "impossible, inhuman." As impossible and inhuman as a shivering beggar who asks that we kill him or fuck him; as impossible and inhuman as Leonard, who responds to Thornhill by crushing his hand; as impossible and inhuman as the *sinthomosexual*, who shatters the lure of the future and, for refusing the call to compassion, finally merits none himself. To embrace the impossibility, the inhumanity of the *sinthomosexual*: that, I suggest, is the ethical task for which queers are singled out. Leonard affords us no lesson in how to follow in his footsteps, but calls us, beyond desire, to a *sinthomosexuality* of our own—one we assume at the price of the very identity named by "our own." To those on whom his ethical stance, his act, exerts a compulsion, Leonard bequeaths the irony of trying to read him as an allegory, as one from whom we could learn how to act and in whom we could find the *sinthomosexual*'s essential concretization: the formalization of a resistance to the constant conservation of forms, the substantialization of a negativity that dismantles every substance. He leaves us, in short, the impossible task of trying to fill his shoes—shoes that were empty of anything human even while he was wearing them, but that lead us, against our own self-interest and in spite of our own desire, toward a jouissance from which everything "human," to have one, must turn its face.

4. NO FUTURE

In an op-ed piece in the *Boston Globe* that was published to coincide with Mother's Day in 1998, Sylvia Ann Hewlett and Cornel West announced their campaign for what they called a "Parent's Bill of Rights," a series of proposals designed, in their words, to "strengthen marriage and give greater electoral clout to mothers and fathers." To achieve such an end—an end both self-serving (though never permitted to appear so) and redundant (what "greater electoral clout" could mothers and fathers *have*?)—the essay sounded a rallying cry that performed, in the process, and with a heartfelt sincerity untouched by ironic self-consciousness, the authors' mandatory profession of faith in the gospel of sentimental futurism:

> It is time to join together and acknowledge that the work that parents do is indispensable—that by nourishing those small bodies and

growing those small souls, they create the store of social and human capital that is so essential to the health and wealth of our nation.

Simply put, by creating the conditions that allow parents to cherish their children, we will ensure our collective future.[1]

Ignore for a moment what demands to be called the trans*parency* of this appeal. Ignore, that is, how quickly the spiritualizing vision of parents "nourishing and growing . . . small bodies and . . . small souls" gives way to a rhetoric affirming instead the far more pragmatic (and politically imperative) investment in the "human capital . . . essential to the health and wealth of our nation." Ignore, by so doing, how the passage renominates those human "souls" as "capital" without yielding the fillip of Dickensian pathos that prompts us to "cherish" these "capital"-ized humans ("small" but, like the economy in current usage, capable of being grown) precisely insofar as they come to embody this thereby humanized "capital." Ignore all this and one's eyes might still pop to discover that only political intervention will "allow," and the verb is crucial here, "parents to cherish their children" so as to "ensure our collective future"—or ensure, which comes to the same in the faith that properly fathers us all, that our present will always be mortgaged to a *fantasmatic* future in the name of the political "capital" that those children will thus have become.

Near enough to the surface to challenge its status as merely implicit, but sufficiently buried to protect it from every attempt at explicitation, a globally destructive, child-hating force is posited in these lines—a force so strong as to *disallow* parents the occasion to cherish their children, so profound in its virulence to the species as to put into doubt "our collective future"—and posited the better to animate a familial unit so cheerfully mom-ified as to distract us from ever noticing how destructively it's been mummified. No need to trick out that force in the flamboyant garments of the pedophile, whose fault, as "everyone" knows, defaults, faute de mieux, to a fear of grown women—and thus, whatever the sex of his object, condemns him for, and to, his failure to penetrate into the circle of

heterosexual desire. No need to call it names, with the vulgar bluntness of the homophobe, whose language all too often is not the bluntest object at hand. Unnamed, it still carries the signature, whatever Hewlett and West may intend, of the crime that was named as not to be named ("*inter christianos non nominandum*") while maintaining the plausible deniability allowing disavowal of such a signature, should anyone try to decipher it, as having been forged by someone else. To be sure, the stigmatized other *in general* can endanger our idea of the future, conjuring the intolerable image of its spoliation or pollution, the specter of its being appropriated for unendurable ends; but one *in particular* is stigmatized as threatening an end to the future itself. That *one* remains always at hand to embody the force, which need never be specified, that prohibits America's parents, for example, from *being able* to cherish their children, since that *one*, as we know, intrudes on the collective reproduction of familialism by stealing, seducing, proselytizing, in short, by *adulterating* those children and putting in doubt the structuring fantasy that ensures "our collective future."

I've already defined this child-aversive, future-negating force, answering so well to the inspiriting needs of a moribund familialism, as *sinthomosexuality*, a term that links the jouissance to which we gain access through the sinthome with a homosexuality made to figure the lack in Symbolic meaning-production on account of which, as Lacan declares, "there is no sexual relation." Designating a locus of enjoyment beyond the logic of interpretation, and thus beyond the correlative logic of the symptom and its cure, the sinthome refers to the mode of jouissance constitutive of the subject, which defines it no longer as subject of desire, but rather as subject of the drive. For the subject of desire now comes to be seen as a symptomatic misprision, within the language of the law, of the subject's sinthomatic access to the force of a jouissance played out in the pulsions of the drive. Where the symptom sustains the subject's relation to the reproduction of meaning, sustains, that is, the fantasy of meaning that futurism constantly weaves, the sinthome unravels

those fantasies by and within which the subject means. And because, as Bruce Fink puts it, "the drives always seek a form of satisfaction that, from a Freudian or traditional moralistic standpoint, is considered perverse," the sinthome that drives the subject, that renders him subject of the drive, thus engages, on a figural level, a discourse of what, because incapable of assimilation to heterosexual genitality, gets read, as if by default, as a version of homosexuality, itself conceived as a mode of enjoyment at the social order's expense. As Fink goes on to observe: "What the drives seek is not heterosexual genital reproductive sexuality, but a partial object that provides *jouissance*."[2] *Sinthomosexuality*, then, only means by figuring a *threat* to meaning, which depends on the promise of coming, in a future continuously deferred, into the presence that reconciles meaning with being in a fantasy of completion—a fantasy on which every subject's cathexis of the signifying system depends. As the shadow of death that would put out the light of heterosexual reproduction, however, *sinthomosexuality* provides familial ideology, and the futurity whose cause it serves, with a paradoxical life support system by providing the occasion for both family and future to solicit our compassionate intervention insofar as they seem, like Tiny Tim, to be always on their last legs.

The agent responsible for effecting their destruction has been given many names: by Baudrillard, a "global extermination of meaning"; by Hewlett and West, whatever refuses to "allow parents to cherish their children"; by François Abadie, "homosexuals" as "the gravediggers of society"; by psychoanalytic theory, the death drive and the Real of jouissance. Just as the Lacanian sinthome knots together the Imaginary, Symbolic, and Real, so *sinthomosexuality* knots together these threats to reproductive futurism. No political catachresis, such as Butler proposes, could forestall the need to constitute, then, such a category of *sinthomosexuals*. For even though, as Butler suggests, political catachresis may change over time the *occupants* of that category, the category itself, like Antigone's tomb, continues to mark the place of whatever refuses intelligibility. Catachresis, moreover, cannot assure the progressive redistribution of meaning. To the extent that the rearticulation of the signifier, and

therefore the reach of a term like "human," supplements *without* effacing the prior uses to which it was put, no historical category of abjection is ever simply obsolete. It abides, instead, in its latency, affecting subsequent significations, always available, always waiting, to be mobilized again. Catachresis can only *formalize* contestation over "the proper," repeating the violence at the core of its own always willed impositions of meaning. *Sinthomosexuality* presents itself as the realization of that violence exactly to the extent that it insists on the derealization of those meanings, occupying the place of what, in sex, remains structurally unspeakable: the lack or loss that relates to the Real and survives in the pressure of the drive. Because the Child of the heteroreproductive Couple stands in, at least fantasmatically, for the redemption of that loss, the *sinthomosexual*, who affirms that loss, maintaining it as the empty space, the vacuole, at the heart of the Symbolic, effectively destroys that Child and, with it, the reality it means to sustain.[3] Nor could any *sinthomosexual*, whatever the revisions of sociocultural norms catachresis may entail, escape the coils of the twisted fate that ropes him into embodying such a denial of futurity, such a death blow to meaning's survival in the figure of the Child, simply by virtue of being, or having been, someone's Child himself.

On October 12, 1998—the evening of the death of Matthew Shepard, a twenty-one-year-old gay man then enrolled at the University of Wyoming who was lured from a bar by two straight men and taken in the dark to a deserted spot where he was savagely beaten, pistol-whipped, and then tied to a wooden fence and abandoned to the brutal cold of the night (from which he would not be rescued until some eighteen hours later, when he was discovered, already comatose, by a bicyclist who thought the limp, bloody body lashed to a post was a scarecrow)—on that evening of Matthew Shepard's death a hospital spokesman, "voice choked with emotion," made the following statement to the national press: "Matthew's mother said to me, 'Please tell everybody who's listening to go home and give your kids a hug and don't let a day go by without telling them you love them.' "[4] These words of a grieving mother, widely

reported on the news, produced a mimetic outpouring of grief from people across the country, just as they had from the spokesman whose own voice choked as he pronounced them. But these words, which even on the occasion of a gay man's murder defined the *proper* mourners as those who had children to go home to and hug, specified the mourning it encouraged as mourning for a threatened familial futurity—a threat that might, for many, take the form of Matthew Shepard's death, but a threat that must also, for others, take the opposite form: of Shepard's *life*.[5]

Thus, even as mourners gathered to pray at the bier of a mother's slain child, others arrived at his funeral to condemn a "lifestyle" that made Matthew Shepard, for them, a dangerous bird of prey. An article printed in the *New York Times* speculated that the symbolic significance, for the killers, of leaving his body strung up on a fence might be traced to "the Old West practice of nailing a dead coyote to a ranch fence as a warning to future intruders."[6] The bicyclist who mistook him for a scarecrow, then, would not have been far from the mark; for his killers, by posing Shepard's body this way, could be understood to be crowing about the lengths to which they would go to scare away other birds of his feather: birds that may seem to be more or less tame—flighty, to be sure, and prone to a narcissistic preening of their plumage; amusing enough when confined to the space of a popular film like *The Birdcage* (1996) or when, outside the movies, caged in the ghettos that make them available for ethnographic display or the closets that enact a pervasive desire to make them all disappear—but birds that the cognoscenti perceive as never harmless at all.[7] For whatever apparent difference in species may dupe the untrained eye, inveterate bird-watchers always discern the tell-tale mark that brands each one a chicken-hawk first and last.

In an atmosphere all atwitter with the cries that echo between those who merely watch and those who hunt such birds, what matter who killed Cock Robin? The logic of *sinthomosexuality* justifies that violent fate in advance by insisting that what such a cock had been robbing was always, in some sense, a cradle. And that cradle must endlessly rock, we've been told, even if the rhythm it rocks to beats out, with every blow of the beat-

ing delivered to Matthew Shepard's skull, a counterpoint to the melody's sacred hymn to the meaning of life. That meaning, continuously affirmed as it is both in and as cultural narrative, nonetheless never can rest secure and, in consequence, never can rest. The compulsive need for its repetition, for the drumbeat by which it pounds into our heads (and not always, though not infrequently, by pounding in a Matthew Shepard's) that the cradle bears always the meaning of futurity and the futurity of meaning, testifies to something exceeding the meaning it means thereby to assure: to a death drive that carries, on full-fledged wings, into the inner sanctum of meaning, into the reproductive mandate inherent in the logic of futurism itself, the burden of the radically negative force that *sinthomosexuality* names.

Only the dumbest of clucks would expect such a story about the stories by which familial ideology obsessively takes its own pulse to assume a conspicuous place among cultural narratives valued for parroting the regulatory fantasy of reproductive futurism. What would induce a social order that hawks that ideology to foul its own nest with texts that explore how the fact of this iterative parroting speaks, regardless of intention or will, to the structuring mechanism of a death drive within its life-affirming thematics? Yet such a text might just *feather* the nest it seems ordained to foul if the tensions of form and content it *describes* were projected, in turn, *onto* it: if, that is, its efforts to resist the imperative of futurism were reduced to the status of ill-conceived themes in a work viewed as worthy of attention on account of its technical achievement alone; or, better still, if the challenge it poses to dominant reproductive ideology could plausibly be made to serve the cause of naturalizing futurity. Though the survival of the stories in which they appear may demand that Silas Marner and Scrooge be converted by a Child, and that Leonard, for not converting, be, eventually, destroyed, a story resistant to Symbolic survival through reproductive futurism might still survive if its narrative thematics, like Leonard, could be discarded and its formal properties, like Scrooge or Marner, could conduce to Imaginary form. And where better to look for that rara avis among privileged cultural nar-

ratives—for the text that could help us confront the relentless reproduction of reproductive ideology—than to Hitchcock's tour de force, *The Birds* (1963).

Reviewing the film with enthusiasm in the pages of the *New York Times*, Bosley Crowther, establishing the terms by which the film would be praised and dismissed for years, distinguished between what the film had to say and the way in which it said it: "Whether or not it is intended that you should find significance in this film, it is sufficiently equipped with other elements to make the senses reel. Mr. Hitchcock, as is his fashion, has constructed it beautifully, so that the emotions are carefully worked up to the point where they can be slugged."[8] This tension between the film's technique and its questionable "significance," found an echo in a letter that Hitchcock received on the film's initial release. It reads, as quoted by Robert Kapsis: "Sir, I'm quite unhappy to inform you of my disappointment with your latest production, *The Birds*. I had counted on your usual excellent direction and I was not let down, but your finish can only be described as useless."[9] Recalling Baudrillard's complaint that sex, in the era of biotechnological reproduction, "becomes extraneous, a useless function," the writer interprets Hitchcock's film, despite its skillful direction, as refusing to embrace the reproduction of meaning and thereby becoming, like sex without procreation according to the narrator of *The Children of Men*, "almost meaninglessly acrobatic." In fact, in a phrase whose ambiguity the author of the letter may not have intended, he leaves undecidable to what he refers in describing the film's "finish" as "useless," suspending its meaning between the uselessness of the director's polished technique and the uselessness of the film's deliberately disorienting conclusion. In either case, the "finish" fails not simply, as many maintain to this day, because the film is open-ended (suggesting a dizzying array of possible futures beyond its frame), but, more significantly, because it declines to affirm as certain any future at all.

Hitchcock himself presented the film as a triumph of technique, immodestly declaring it, on just that ground, "probably the most prodigious job ever done."[10] But even while remarking on the technical difficulties

that the film both posed and overcame, he defended it against critical objections that it seemed to lack "significance" or some clear thematic point, by pitching the film as a warning to those who might contemplate crimes against nature. "Basically, in *The Birds*, what you have is a kind of an overall sketchy theme of everyone taking nature for granted," he explained before summarizing his own interpretation: "Don't mess about or tamper with nature."[11] If something in this reading sticks in one's craw, it's not simply the simplification, but also, and more pressingly, the clear contradiction between this would-be embrace of the natural, on the one hand, and the significance attached to the technical manipulation of reality by the camera, on the other. Neither in theme nor in visual practice does *The Birds* sing Mother Nature's praise; nor do mothers and children receive from the film the extorted tribute that sentimentality would grant them as "their due." *The Birds*, to the contrary, comes to roost, with a skittish and volatile energy, on a perch from which it seems to brood—dispassionately, inhumanly—on the gap opened up within nature by something inherently contra naturam: the death drive that haunts the Symbolic with its excess of jouissance and finds its figural expression in *sinthomosexuality*.

Like swallows returning to Capistrano, critics of Hitchcock's film return to the question its various characters pose: What do the bird attacks mean? "What do you suppose made it do *that*?" wonders Melanie Daniels (Tippi Hedren) after the first gull gashes her head. "What's the matter with *all* the birds?" asks Lydia Brenner (Jessica Tandy) following a full-scale assault on the children celebrating her daughter's eleventh birthday. "Why are they doing this, the birds?" young Cathy (Veronica Cartwright) inquires of her older brother, Mitch (Rod Taylor), echoing the question that an overwrought mother poses to Melanie in the wake of an attack on the center of Bodega Bay: "Why are they doing this? Why are they *doing* this?" But why, we might ask, need we still ask why? Some time ago Robin Wood observed that "the film itself is quite insistent that either the birds can't be explained or that the explanation is unknown." He then went on to argue, persuasively, that the birds "are a concrete

embodiment of the arbitrary and the unpredictable, of whatever makes human life and human relations precarious, a reminder of the fragility and instability that cannot be ignored or evaded and, beyond that, of the possibility that life is meaningless and absurd."[12] This largely compelling account of the film, to which I will return, rightly resists the impulse to localize the meaning of the attacks, but in doing so it refuses as well to localize the contexts within which this very refusal of meaning takes place. The narrative that raises meaninglessness as a possibility, after all, necessarily bestows a particular meaning on such meaninglessness itself. By deploying, in other words, a given figure, such as, in this instance, the birds, as the signifier intended to materialize the general "possibility that life is meaningless," the text necessarily gestures toward a *specific* threat to meaning and suggests particular strategies by which one might manage to ward it off.

Though Wood, then, astutely identifies the birds with "whatever makes human life and human relations precarious," there is something else that he needs to observe: they come from San Francisco, or, at any rate, it's in San Francisco that we first see them flit through the air. And another thing: they seem to display a strong predilection for children. When Mrs. Bundy (Ethel Griffies), the butchly tailored and tweedy bird-lover who knows the perfect time for The Tides—conveniently making her entrance as Melanie, talking to her father by phone, is providing an account of the schoolhouse attack—dismisses out of hand the notion that the birds could have mounted such a raid, she turns to Melanie and demands of her with unconcealed condescension: "What do you think they were after, Miss . . . ?" "Daniels," Melanie informs her, before delivering her icily calm response: "I think they were after the children." "For what purpose?" Mrs. Bundy presses, and Melanie, after a pause fully worthy of the governess in James's *The Turn of the Screw*, accepts the challenge and rises to it, enunciating each syllable precisely: "To kill them." To be sure, the objects of avian violence most gruesomely visualized in Hitchcock's film—Dan Fawcett, Annie Hayworth, even Melanie Daniels herself—are not exactly spring chickens; but the threat of the

birds achieves its most vividly iconic representation in the two crucial scenes where they single out young children to attack.

Their first all-out assault, their first joint action, as it were, takes place at the party thrown in honor of Cathy Brenner's eleventh birthday, the prospect of which gave Mitch—who subsequently passed it on to Melanie—the idea of presenting his sister with a pair of lovebirds as a gift.[13] Though a single gull had already struck Melanie on the forehead the day before, the choice of the children's party for this first fully choreographed attack suggests the extent to which the birds take aim at the social structures of meaning that observances like the birthday party serve to secure and enact: take aim, that is, not only at children and the sacralization of childhood, but also at the very organization of meaning around structures of subjectivity that celebrate, along with the day of one's birth, the ideology of reproductive necessity.[14] Like Bruno Anthony (Robert Walker) in *Strangers on a Train*, who punctures the balloon of cuteness that hangs like a halo above one annoying child (see figures 22–27) and has no compunction about casually tossing a second, and even more troublesome tot, to what might well have proven his death, the birds beset the children with an unconstrained aggression that reflects and displaces the aggression adults aggressively punish in children.

So when Cathy, blindfolded to play her part in the game of blindman's buff, is stunned by the first glancing blow from a bird, she assumes without hesitation that she's been struck by another child and calls to the others, more in pique than in pain, "Hey, no touching allowed!" (see figures 28–30). As dozens of birds then swoop down with hoarse cries, inducing a sort of echoing screech in the children, who panic and run, the film implies that the ravaging birds are too like the children to like them too much, or to like them as more than the objects of a murderous, and murderously derealizing, drive.

Hitchcock stresses this aggressive echoing (and this echoing aggression) as determining the relation between children and birds from the opening scene of the film. Though the camera, from the outset, frames Tippi Hedren, whom Hitchcock "discovered" and groomed for this film,

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the audience first gets to feast on her face when she turns toward the camera in response to what critics conventionally call a "wolf whistle." But the source of that whistle, significantly, is less a sheep than a lamb in wolf's clothing, a cheeky young boy whose age we might put, to hazard a guess, at eleven. Melanie, expecting some loutish lothario as she wheels about to confront him, flashes a smile of relief and surprise when she sees that this would-be cock of the walk is no more than a featherweight bantam (see figures 31–35). Charmed by his boyish bravado, the crowing of a youngster sufficiently cocky at eleven to augur with absolute certainty a full-fledged prick by twenty-one, Melanie, failing to see the incipience of that straight male sense of entitlement for which she will want, in a matter of minutes, somehow to clip Mitch Brenner's wings, responds to this sexually freighted call by hearing its amorous coo in the key of a prepubescent chirp. Her smile acquits the act of what she grasped as its aggression (about which, though prepared to squawk, she wasn't really ruffled) when she thought it the sonorous panting of one more accustomed to wearing long pants.

No sooner has her face lit up—her anger defused, her defenses let down—at the vision of the Child, than Melanie hears the whistle return, multiplied a hundred times over, but coming from somewhere else.[15] A cut to Melanie's point of view now shows us the sky in long shot and in it a virtual cloud of gulls, whose calls seem to mock the boy's whistle as these birds of a feather, neither sowing nor reaping, noisily cruise San Francisco. In reverse shot, that cloud crosses Melanie's face, her joy in the boy eclipsed by the cries of the languidly circling gulls, their harsh and guttural echo stripping the whistle of its charm, as if their taunt were targeting both the woman and the boy. Or targeting, instead, what the film had allowed the two to perform together: a pantomime of erotic tension resolved in the figure of the Child (who gives such tension the meaning that relieves it of all taint), by reading the constitutive friction—the determining aggression—inherent in eros as the agency that generates meaning and the Child in a single blow, breeding thereby a happy heterosexual economy in which the Child means "meaning" for adults,

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who can only attain it by virtue of participating in the labor of giving (it) birth (see figures 36–38).[16]

This sequence, then, like an egg, contains the film in embryonic form, with Melanie caught between a libidinal energy redeemed through the figure of the Child, the heterosexualized version of eros traditionally served sunny-side up, and the disarticulation that scrambles it in the figure of the birds: the arbitrary, future-negating force of a brutal and mindless drive. It may be the boy in this scene who whistles, but through him, and through its investment in him, we can hear reproductive futurism trying to whistle past the graveyard. And just as the boy's sweet tweet is cheapened by the echoing cheep of the birds, so the reassuring meaning of heterosexuality as the assurance of meaning itself confronts in the birds a resistance, call it *sinthomosexuality*, that fully intends to wipe the satisfied smile off Melanie's face. By yoking her thus to the birds through the boy, this sequence might well be construed as the egg from which Melanie's story emerges, but this scene, however primal within the logic of the film, refers to a moment *outside* the film and marks, as would an umbilicus, a distinctly nonavian origin that Hitchcock's film reproduces so as to generate *The Birds*.

Donald Spoto has written an account of the moment to which this sequence harks back, the moment when Hitchcock first noticed the blonde he thereafter took under his wing: "One morning . . . Hitchcock and Alma [his wife] were watching the NBC network's *Today* show. He saw a commercial featuring an attractive, elegant blond who passed across the screen and smiled, turning amiably in response to a little boy's wolf-whistle. . . . That morning, he told his agents to find out who she was, and that afternoon an appointment was made for her."[17] The commercial, for Sego, a diet drink meant to account for the numerous backward glances, signs of a different kind of hunger, bestowed on the blonde by the various men she passes on the street, resolves itself more pointedly than Spoto's account suggests. For Hedren, holding a bag of groceries as she stops to admire the fashions displayed in the window of a store, stands with her back to the camera when the sound of the wolf-whistle puts her on

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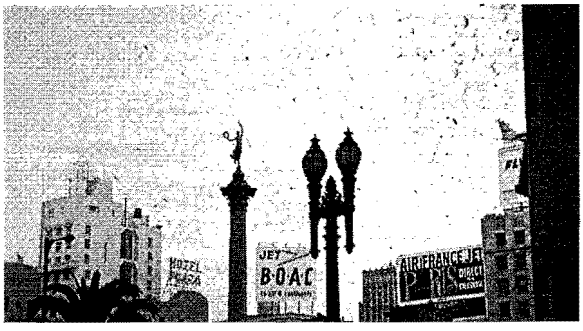
DAVIDSON'S PET SHOP


JET
B·O·A·C
AIR FRANCE JET
DIRECT

DAVIDSON'S PET SHOP

notice that she's on display herself. She starts to turn, but before we're allowed a glimpse of her expression, the camera cuts to an insert shot of the whistle's unlikely source: a boy, to be sure, as Spoto notes, eleven years old, more or less, but crucially—and this Spoto doesn't report—the boy is portraying *her son*. Sitting in the car (like Melanie's, a convertible) where his mother had left him waiting while she went to take care of her chores, the child gets his mother's attention by offering the tribute of a man, then deflecting its erotic implications by flashing the guileless grin of a boy. Hedren's broad smile in response to the joke allows her, and the audience of the commercial as well, to bask in the innocent glow of the Child, ignoring the fact that the boy takes the place—one he'll soon enough fully assume—of the numerous men whose heads Hedren turned as she passed them just moments before (see figures 39–42).

And no head turned with more interest than Hitchcock's when Hedren came into view, enacting the narrative logic at work in the commercial's ideology: a logic wherein the permissibly "innocent" whistle of the Child resolves the explicitly sexual energies (understood as more threatening, more aggressive) that the commercial nonetheless, and at the same time, undertakes to promote and inflame.[18] Hitchcock, a model spectator here —in more than one sense of the phrase—identifies with, and reproduces, the youngster's bird-like trill of desire; like the boy, he too responds to the vision of Hedren by sounding a call, summoning her to the meeting that ultimately led to her starring role in *The Birds*. In the film, though, when Hitchcock introduces her in a version of the scene that introduced her to him, he then proceeds to complete that scene by inserting a shot of the birds. Not that they haven't been heard from already: their cries thread their way through the audio track from before, one might say, its beginning. Though a visual fade-out separates the opening credits from the narrative proper, the clamor of the birds persists as a bridge of sound between the two. When the film fades in (through the blue-green filter that announces its dominant tones), the sights and sounds of San Francisco command our full attention. The birdcalls, though continuous, become mere background to the scene

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until, as if they were prompted by Melanie's endorsement of the Child—her endorsement of the Child's dissimulation of heterosexuality *as* sexuality—the gulls parrot back the boy's whistle as materialized agents of sexual threat.

Bringing out, in the process, the relentless aggression and insistence of the libidinal drives—drives that the Child as embodiment of reproductive futurism serves to mask; bringing out the violent erotics at the heart of a Hitchcockian compulsion that repetitively rehearses, deprived of its grace, the Child's expectant grace note, the birds enact the process of bringing or coming out per se, shedding invisibility here and demanding, having been present before, to be recognized, to be seen. Like Marion the Librarian in *The Music Man*, Melanie Daniels might be moved to exclaim: "There were birds/ In the sky/ But I never saw them winging/ No, I never saw them at all/'Til there was you"[19]—words no less apt to be voiced at a second blonde Marion's moment of truth, when her highway to happiness abruptly dead-ends on her taking for the simple-minded innocence of a Child, and thus reading as redemptive, the wounded-sparrow twitchiness she encounters in Norman Bates. More hawk than sparrow, but birdlike himself, of course, Norman puts the lie to the avian analysis he offers while chatting with Marion: "I think only birds look well stuffed because, well, because they're kind of passive to begin with."[20] But *The Birds*, like *Psycho*, portrays the revenge (which thereby reinforces the fantasmatic threat) of those conceptualized as "passive" by depicting the activist militancy that attends their coming out—especially when that activism takes the form, as with Leonard in *North by Northwest*, of an "impossible, inhuman" act.[21]

One might, to be sure, object that Hitchcock's favored cinematic strategy, a distinguishing feature of his camera's unremitting epistemological investigations, consists in his bringing out this latency, some might call it a queerness, that inhabits things that otherwise tend to pass without remark: a pair of scissors, a household key, a dangling piece of rope.[22] As enacted in *The Birds*, however, this coming out, the seed for countless interpretations of what it means, refuses the promise of mean-

ing condensed in the seed that is the Child; nor would it be flying too far afield to suggest that the birds, by coming out, give the bird to the fantasy of reproduction as the seedbed of futurity through its meaningful sublation of the otherwise meaningless machinery of the drive. What Butler calls the "heterosexual matrix" may tempt us, with Susan Lurie, to consider the birds as phallic part-objects, or, alternatively, with Slavoj Žižek, as the maternal superego in visible form. By resisting the appeal of such couplings, however, heterogenitality's either/or, we might manage to kill those two birds with one stone and suggest that the birds in Hitchcock's film, by virtue of fucking up—and with—the matrix of heterosexual mating, desublimate the reproductive rites of the movie's human lovebirds, about which, as about the products of which, they don't give a flying fuck.[23] They gesture, that is, toward the death drive that lives within reproductive futurism, scorning domestication in the form of romance, which is always the romance of the Child.

But one thing in this must be perfectly clear: my point is not to equate the birds with homosexuality nor to suggest that they be understood as "meaning" same-sex desire. Neither is Hitchcock's film, as I read it, an allegory of gay coming-out. Insofar as the birds bear the burden of *sinthomosexuality*, which aims to dissociate heteronormativity from its own implication in the drive, it would, in fact, be more accurate to say that the meaning of homosexuality is determined by what the film represents in *them*: the violent undoing of meaning, the loss of identity and coherence, the unnatural access to jouissance, which find their perfect expression in the slogan devised by Hitchcock himself for the movie's promotion, "*The Birds* is coming."[24]

Though participating in the narrative covenant of futurity through its promise of something, in Wordsworth's phrase, "evermore about to be," this slogan, at the same time, points to a radical coming without reserve that expends itself improvidently, holding nothing in trust for tomorrow and refusing therefore all faith in the sort of narrative intelligibility that Hamlet, for instance, defers to when he forbears from deferring his fate: "Not a whit, we defy augury. There is a special providence in the

fall of a sparrow. If it be now, 'tis not to come; if it be not to come, it will be now; if it be not now, yet it will come. The readiness is all" (V. ii. 220–224). The falling sparrows of Hitchcock's film—and the film will specify sparrows as the birds that fall from the Brenners' chimney like a living stream of soot or waste, turning meaning, wherein we think we live, into chaos and filth and death—decline, in their present progressive coming, in the constancy of the jouissance as which they now come out, to "be not to come," in Shakespeare's words, since coming becomes their being.[25] Exposing the latent impropriety informing the structures of the proper, embedding grammatical violation in the very logic of grammar itself, "*The Birds* is coming" anticipates the film's libidinal economy by confounding our anticipation of simple syntactic or narrative sense. The catchphrase fucks with the copula, meaning that meaning comes apart, thus advertising the threat of *The Birds* to the narrative teleology of the subject, always constituted at the *expense* of jouissance, at the cost of the violent involuntarity, the pulsive pressure of a coming, in the throes of which the subject of meaning could only come apart too.[26] Trenching as it does on this trench in the subject that jouissance hollows out, the slogan alludes to a fissure that sunders the syntax of social reality just as the slogan itself seems to sunder the agreement of subject and verb. "Coming" thus comes into conflict with the subject's predication of a future to come, and *The Birds*, as the site of this conflict, no less than the birds that flesh it out, claws at our faith in the future, at the generative grammar of generation, by coming instead at the death drive, in the grip of which, insofar as we come, we thereby come to naught—or come, which may come to the same in the end, to a place like Bodega Bay.

What a perfect spot for a pair of lovebirds to build their little nest. Defined, as if allegorically, in opposition to San Francisco, the sophisticated urban center described by Cathy, quoting her brother, Mitch, as "an anthill at the foot of a bridge," Bodega Bay might stand for the concept of natural beauty as such were it not for the fact that its natural settings have the peculiar habit of metamorphosing into clearly unnatural cinematic effects. Time and again, and at pivotal moments, its vistas get flattened

into obvious sets or derealized by filmic artifice, as, for example, when Melanie is crossing the lake to the Brenner farm, or when she and Mitch share their thoughts and a drink before the gulls interrupt Cathy's party, or when Melanie and Annie, having opened the door to discover a lifeless bird, gaze up toward the light of the moon that ought to have kept it from losing its way, or when Melanie, catching sight of a crow as it glides toward its perch near the school, follows its downward descent and discovers the playground now covered with birds. At the heart of each of these episodes lies an avian annunciation that brings with it no glad tidings, no miraculous conception. Instead, boding ill for Bodega Bay and for those whose abode it is, these birds expose the misconception on which its reality rests: the misconception that conception itself can assure the endurance, by enacting the truth, of the Symbolic order of meaning and preserve, in the form of the future, the prospect of someday redeeming the primal loss that makes sexual rapport impossible and precludes the signifying system from ever arriving at any closure.

For the politics of reproductive futurism, the only politics we're permitted to know, organizes and administers an apparently self-regulating economy of sentimentality in which futurity comes to signify access to the realization of meaning both promised and prohibited by the fact of our formation as subjects of the signifier. As a figure for the supplementarity, the logic of restitution or compensation, that sustains our investment in the deferrals demanded by the signifying chain, the future holds out the hope of a final undoing of the initiating fracture, the constitutive moment of division, by means of which the signifier is able to pronounce us into subjectivity. And it offers that hope by mobilizing a fantasy of temporal reversal, as if the future were pledged to make good the loss it can only ever repeat. Taking our cue from de Man's account of Walter Benjamin's "The Task of the Translator," we might note that the future can engage temporality only in the mode of figuration because futurity stands in the place of a linguistic, rather than a temporal, destiny: "The dimension of futurity," according to de Man, "is not temporal but is the correlative of the figural pattern and the disjunctive

power which Benjamin locates in the structure of language." That structure, as de Man interprets it, requires the perpetual motion of what he calls "a wandering, an *errance*," and "this motion, this errancy of language which never reaches the mark," is nothing else, for Benjamin, than history itself, generating, in the words of de Man, "this illusion of a life that is only an afterlife." [27] Confusing linguistic with phenomenal reality, that illusion, which calls forth history from the gap of the "disjunctive power" internal to the very "structure of language," names the fantasy of a social reality to which reproductive futurism pledges us all.

It is just such a violent reduction of reality to the status of an illusion, the result of approaching history, with de Man, as a rhetoric or poetics rather than as the ongoing dialectic of meaning's eventual realization through time, that is brought to bear on Bodega Bay in the figure of the birds. Not that I wish to define them as merely the sliding of the signifier, as if, become truly incapable now of distinguishing a hawk from a handsaw, Hamlet replied to Polonius, when asked what he's reading, "Birds, birds, birds." But I do want to argue that Hitchcock's birds, in the specificity of their embodiment, resist, both within and without the film, hermeneutic determination—and they do so by carrying, in the figural atmosphere through which they wing their way, the force of a poetics never fully contained by a hermeneutic claim, where "poetics," as the term is used by de Man, identifies a "formal procedure considered independently of its semantic function." [28] Expressing this surplus of "formal procedure" that inhabits and exceeds (and so threatens to confound) the imperative to generate meaning, the birds may persistently beat against, but are destined nonetheless to fly *through* and not *from*, the medium of meaning in which they come only to mean its degeneration. Though our faith in social reality makes that reality seem as natural as the very air we breathe, the radical excess that the birds connote, like the constant iteration and accumulation of heterosexualizing narratives—social and political narratives no less than literary or aesthetic ones—bespeaks a drive that eludes all efforts to formulate its meaning.[29] The formal insistence of the drive, in fact, has the effect of *de*forming meaning inso-

far as it shows how the absolute privilege accorded the "semantic function" serves as the privileged mechanism for maintaining the collective "illusion of a life." Expressing the unintelligibility of this formal mechanism or drive, the birds usher in the collapse of an ideologically naturalized reality into the various artificial props that are jerry-rigged to maintain it.

If this appears to impose on *The Birds* a weight of linguistic implication beneath which the film itself must collapse, then perhaps we ought to bear in mind that Melanie, as she proudly announces to Mitch, is actually enrolled at Berkeley in a course on General Semantics. Still more to the point, the film begins as she's heading toward Davidson's Pet Shop, where she expects to find a mynah bird she has ordered as a gift for her aunt—a practical joke of a gift, we soon learn, since her aim is to shock her "straight-laced" aunt by teaching the bird a few "four-letter words" that Melanie has picked up at school. In narrative terms, the mynah bird will prove to be a red herring, but only because it undergoes a symbolic exchange with the lovebirds in the aftermath of the exchange of words between Melanie and Mitch. Like the mynah bird whose place they take, the lovebirds—a variety of parrot, though very few lovebirds are able to talk—are made to signify the signifying potential inherent in the "natural"; they reflect, that is, the human determination to make the world answer to, and in, the voice of the subjects addressing it. By doing so they confirm *as* natural the order of meaning itself, which coincides, though not coincidentally, with the heterosexualizing logic that renders the world and the subject intelligible through the promise of their mutual completion in the One of sexual rapport.

It should come as no surprise, therefore, that Melanie's lovebirds most clearly perform the naturalization of human meaning at the moment when the film strategically seems to personify them as children. I refer to the sequence where Melanie is on her way to Bodega Bay, the wheels of her sportscar squealing as she takes each turn in the road too fast. The camera directs our attention to the lovebirds beside her in their cage, their bodies tilting left and right each time the car rounds a curve (see

figure 43). Always earning the laugh it solicits, this passage shows us the lovebirds in the connotative plumage of their smallness and dependency: it reads them, that is, much as Melanie reads the whistling boy: as "cute." But the ideological labor of cuteness, though it falls most often to the smallest, imposes no insubstantial burden in a culture where cuteness enables a general misrecognition of sexuality (which always implicitly endangers ideals of sociality and communal enjoyment) as, at least in the dominant form of heterosexual reproduction, securing the collective reality it otherwise threatens to destroy.[30] Visually framed as children, then, and serving as figures for the romantic ideology that turns lovers into children themselves to explain (which is also to say, to elide) how children are produced (consider the fate of Cupid, who, despite his passionate involvement with Psyche, we image as prepubescent), the lovebirds, shadowed by the mynah bird whose narrative place they take, are thereby made to speak the truth of a General Semantics. They mean here as figures *of* meaning—of, more precisely, the domestication, the colonization, of the world *by* meaning—insofar as their cuteness both echoes and reinforces the meaningfulness of the Child about which even the dumbest animals are "naturally" able to speak.

But how could these lovebirds, whose very name weds them not just to each other but also, and in the process, to the naturalization of heterosexual love, anticipate the rapacious violence with which their fine feathered friends will divorce themselves—unexpectedly, out of the blue—from the nature they're made ideologically, and so unnaturally, to mean? How else but with the eruption, or, as I've called it, the coming out, of something contra naturam always implicit in them from the start, something we might catch sight of, for instance, in the question that Cathy blurts out (one camouflaged only in part by its calculated alibi of cuteness), which demands that the lovebirds speak their compulsory meaning louder still: "Is there a man and a woman? I can't tell which is which."[31] Melanie, to whom she directs this question, deflects it with an uncomfortable laugh and a dismissive, "Well, I suppose." But what if her supposition were wrong? Or what if, more disturbing still, her

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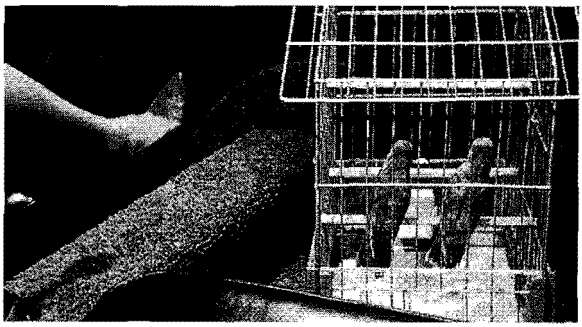

answer were *literally* true: what if the structuring principle, the world-making logic of heterosexual meaningfulness were merely a *supposition*, merely a *positing*, as de Man would say, and not, therefore, imbued with the referential necessity of a "meaning"? After all, as de Man reminds us, "language posits and language means . . . but language cannot posit meaning."[32]

Cathy's question could *only* mean by casting a shadow of doubt on the subjectifying principle that collocates meaning itself with the structures of sexual difference—the principle, for example, first sounded in the whistle by which both the boy and the movie read sexual difference as self-evident. No birdbrain, Cathy must understand that the lovebirds, in their sameness, their apparent interchangeability, resist, or suggest a resistance to, this heterosexual dispensation by suggesting the unintelligibility inherent in sexual difference itself. We might even hear in her question an unintentional echo of Proust, whose narrator in *Sodom and Gomorrah* remarks, while watching Charlus and Jupien strike poses in an effort to maneuver their mutual cruise into a somewhat more intimate docking, "One might have thought of them as a pair of birds, the male and the female, the male seeking to advance, the female—Jupien—no longer giving any sign of response to this stratagem, but regarding her new friend without surprise . . . and contenting herself with preening her feathers."[33] For Proust's anatomically indistinguishable lovebirds, "male" and "female" are positional attributes deprived of any self-evidence for the reader from the start (occasioning the necessity of specifying Jupien by name as the "female" bird); yet the preening positional presence—partly peacock, partly vulture—introduced by the very possibility of imagining two lovebirds of the same sex hovers already in the atmosphere that Cathy's question, despite its "innocence," threatens to make heavy. For that question, simply cuckoo when asked of a heterosexual pairing, parrots what everyone wonders where same-sex couples are concerned, the meaning of all such couplings being coupled to the meaning that heterosexuality alone is permitted to determine and confirm.

If these lovebirds, as in the molting season ("a particularly dangerous time," as Melanie says to a skeptical Mitch), were imagined, with Cathy's query, to drop their beads and their feathers at once, as what could they possibly come out in the collective fantasy life of America circa 1963 but members of that reprehensible tribe of ever-lurking predators, looking like scavenging crows in the standard dark raincoats of their kind, who gather in public parks and school playgrounds waiting until the moment is ripe to pick up some innocent kid for the peck that everyone, even the pecker himself, perceives as the kiss of death? Birds of ill omen condemned to such fruitless matings on the wing, these raptors who famously feed on the young they're unable themselves to produce may merit the title "degenerate" for such antipathy to generation and for their practice, instead, of a jouissance indifferent to social survival. Not that the scene at the schoolhouse, perhaps the most famous in the film, is meant to "mean" allegorically any scenario such as this. The crows, unlike the mynah bird, resist the demand that they speak to us; no stool pigeons, they won't talk.[34] If they fly in the face of meaning, though, they do so on wings unable to shed the meanings with which they're feathered, wings that beat to the steady, relentless rhythm of the drive ("Don't they ever stop migrating?" a weary Annie Hayworth asks) and reduce the hope of futurity to nothing but empty repetition, the promise of reproduction to the constant coming of jouissance, as if to affirm the value, above all else, of a bird in the hand.

Whatever else we may learn by going to school at Hitchcock's schoolhouse, then, we must surely be struck by the structure of this brilliantly realized scene of instruction—struck, that is, by the strictness with which, in a masterstroke, he constructs it by restricting the play of his camera to patterns of formal repetition. Throughout his career in film, of course, Hitchcock engendered anxiety by rhythmically cutting between images of people or things that were certain to cause an explosion, sometimes literally, when they converged. This sequence seems to allegorize such a rhythmic repetition by producing a rhyme or analogy between, on the one hand, the director's formal control (increasing the level of

tension by cutting repeatedly from shots of Melanie, shown in increasingly tighter close-up, to shots of the birds as they gather on the jungle gym behind her) and, on the other, the thematization that such a formalism elicits (visualizing that notion of increase through the multiplication of the crows). As the cigarette, from which Melanie distractedly takes deep, occasional drags, burns down, like the lighted fuse of a bomb, time and hope for the future both going up, as we watch, in its smoke, more and more birds, indistinguishable, all as similar to each other as clones, alight as the visual antitypes to the reproductive future that the children, as figures of increase themselves, should signify and assure.

Heard but not seen in this sequence, though, the children, turned into songbirds now, triangulate Melanie's relation to the crows, lending their voices to a score that serves, in no small part, to underscore the formal repetitions of the scene. The verses they sing perversely veer from sense to nonsense, back and forth, with no clear sense of direction, mixing narrative fragments that allude to a failure of heterosexual domesticity ("I married my wife in the month of June"; "She combed her hair but once a year"; "With every stroke she shed a tear"; "I asked my wife to wash the floor"; "She gave me my hat and showed me the door") with incremental repetitions of insistent, suggestive, and ultimately meaningless sounds ("Ristle-tee, rostle-tee, now, now, now"; "Ristle-tee, rostle-tee, hey donny dossle-tee, rustical-quality, ristle-tee, rossle-tee, now, now, now"). The formula of the song (or its lack thereof) makes it, in principle, endless: verses repeat out of order, nonsense syllables expand and contract. For just that reason it has the effect of marking time in this scene: of measuring and prolonging the deferral of Melanie's mission to the schoolhouse (she has come to pick up Cathy and so to put Lydia's mind at ease) and to identify such deferral with temporality itself. The order of narrative futurity for which the children have come to stand thus stands, with this song, exposed as bound to a structure of repetition—a structure that, as the formal support of the meaning of social reality, is always necessarily inaccessible to the reach of any such meaning itself. Its formal excess, unaccounted for in meaning's domestic economy, be-

trays—like the children's song, or the crows—the intractable force of a drive that breaks, again and again, like the pulsating waves in which the bird attacks seem to come, against and within the reality that meaning attempts to erect against it.[35] Perhaps, then, we shouldn't be too surprised that when Melanie turns and discovers the crows, massed as if striving to materialize the Kantian mathematical sublime, Hitchcock frames her reaction shot against a thoroughly derealized background, evoking with this the derealization effected by the birds as they bring out the repetition compulsion, the violence intrinsic to the drive, that Symbolic reality closets in itself while projecting it onto *sinthomosexuals*, who are thus made to figure jouissance (see figures 44–53).

Out to get the children, then, by coming, and coming out, the birds, when they flock from their playground perch, seem to darken the sky like a stain. They emerge, as Hitchcock shoots the scene, as if from the school itself to suggest the unacknowledged ghosts that always haunt the social machinery and the unintelligibility against which no discourse of knowledge prevails (see figures 54 and 55). As horrified youngsters shriek and flail, racing to return to the shelter they still think their parents and home can provide, the birds bear down with talon and beak, pecking and scratching at eyes and skin, clearly out for blood (see figures 56 and 57). "Ristle-tee, rostle-tee, now, now, now" comes back with a vengeance here, unpacked, in these winged chariots not content to hover near, as the full-fledged force of the death drive that its repetition bespeaks. Rereading this scene at a pivotal moment in his career-long ambivalence about *The Birds*, Robin Wood described it as localizing the ostensible "weakness" of the film in "the perfunctory treatment of the children . . . Hitchcock's notable failure to respond to the notion of renewed potential they and the school might have represented, his reduction of the concepts of education and childhood—the human future—to the automatic reiteration of an inane jingle."[36] Though distorted by its blindness to the *point* of reducing the "human future" to "automatic reiteration," a blindness inseparable from its own "automatic reiteration" of the logic that always tops our ideological charts (let us call that

logic "poptimism" and note that its locus classicus is Whitney Houston's rendition of the secular hymn, "I believe that children are our future," a hymn we might as well simply declare our national anthem and be done with it), Wood's observation picks up, nonetheless, on what other readings ignore: Hitchcock's reduction of childhood, education, reality, and the future itself to the status of mere machinery, of automatic reiterations—which is to say, their reduction to the meaningless pulsions of the drive.[37]

If the bird attacks, as many suggest, seem colored by desire, enacting as sexual aggression the experience of sexuality itself, then they mark the place where sexuality and the force of the death drive overlap, exposing what Jean Laplanche calls "a kind of antilife as sexuality, frenetic enjoyment [jouissance], the negative, the repetition compulsion."[38] In this they bespeak what regimes of normativity, of sexual meaningfulness, disavow: the antisocial bent of sexuality as such, acknowledged, and then as pathology, only in those who are bent themselves. "Sexuality in the context of family and procreation has natural limits," claims Alan Keyes, conservative radio talk show host and occasional candidate for the Republican presidential nomination. "It has built into it constraints, responsibility, discipline and so forth." "Restraint," by contrast, Keyes opines, "goes counter to the whole idea of sexuality that's involved in homosexuality itself, which is to say sexuality freed from constraint, freed from convention, freed from the context and limitations of procreation."[39] Dissociating reproductive pleasure from the frenzied shock of jouissance, the joys of procreation from the "violent liveness" of what, after Lauren Berlant, we should characterize as "live sex," Keyes, defending the comic book version of heterosexuality (to be sure, the only version that has ever been given us to read), posits sexuality as hetero to normative heterosexual practice, linking access to "frenetic enjoyment," the loss of control in jouissance, to a homosexuality that is made to appear as *sinthomosexuality*.[40] For sexuality itself now carries the sinthome's intolerably de-meaning mark.

Thus the birds in their coming lay to waste the world condensed in

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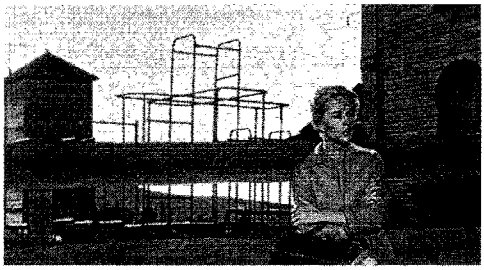

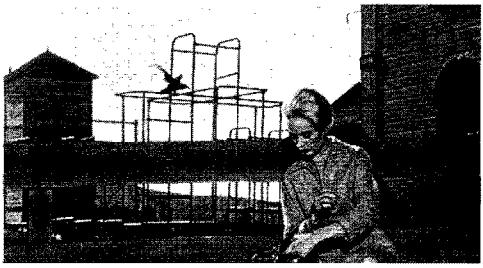

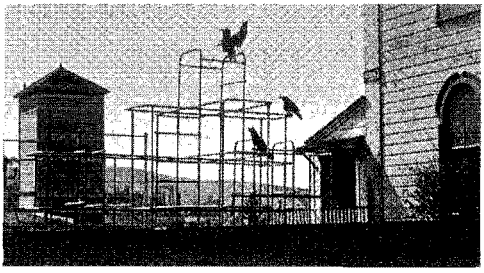

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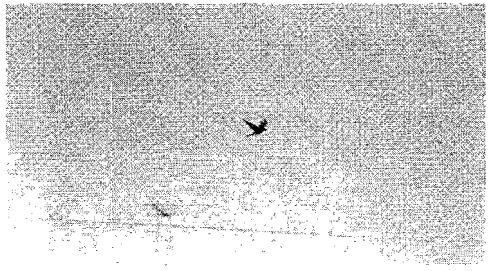

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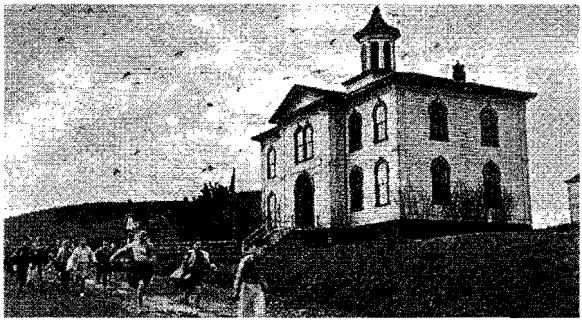

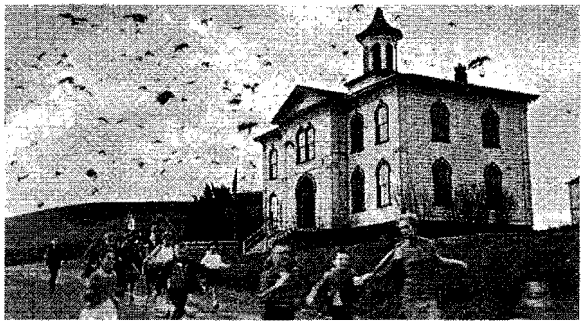

Bodega Bay because they, like the "Homosexual Generation" Ken Worthy wrote of as "driven and driving" in a book from 1965, "so hate the world that will not accept them that they, in turn, will accept nothing but the destruction of that world."[41] "Driven and driving": a perfect description of the family at the end of the film. In a landscape that pulses with volatile birds, they pack themselves into Melanie's car, still clinging, albeit desperately, to hope, that thing with feathers, in the form of the lovebirds that Cathy cannot bear to leave behind: hope, that is, for the future—for the *reproductive* future—that Cathy and the lovebirds together would, in another context, affirm.[42] It may be just such a future that the family, driven from domestic security by the birds, is driving toward at the end; but the film's insistently "useless" finish will offer us only the image of driving, or even of drive itself, while the soundtrack supplies, in Hitchcock's words, a "monotonous low hum . . . a strange artificial sound, which in the language of the birds might be saying, 'We're not ready to attack yet, but we're getting ready. We're like an engine that's purring and we may start off at any moment' "(see figures 58–60).[43]

Should we ask, with other critics, at what this Hitchcockian engine is driving, we might be torn between interpreting the birds, with Wood, as "a concrete embodiment of the arbitrary and unpredictable," or, with Žižek, as "the incarnation of a fundamental disorder in family relations." But such alternatives come together in the film as they come together in the logic of heterosexual familialism as well. For Hitchcock's anatomy of "family relations," especially as Žižek depicts it, should strike us as mechanically predictable in accounting for the mechanicity driving the birds: "The father is absent, the paternal function . . . is suspended and that vacuum is filled by the 'irrational' maternal superego, arbitrary, wicked, blocking 'normal' sexual relationship."[44] Like the momism as which it will not come out, this reading, promoted by the film itself, blames the mother for the terror that descends with the birds insofar as it also blames her for "blocking [her son's] 'normal' sexual relationship." Though this has the merit of seeing the birds, like Leonard, Silas Marner, and Scrooge, as reified obstacles to the dominant fantasy of

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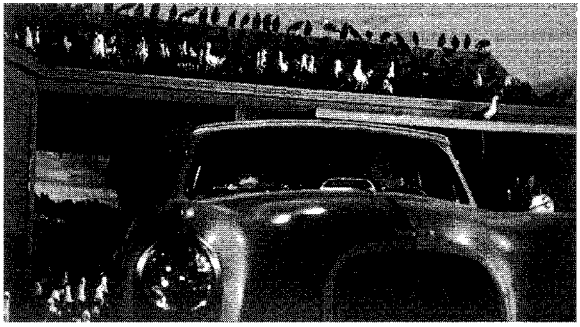

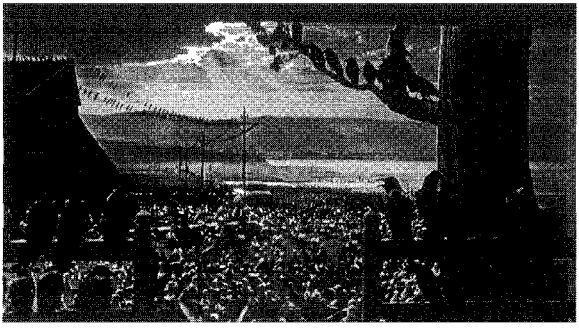

(hetero)sexual rapport, we haven't, apparently, progressed very far from the pseudo-psychology popularly hawked at the time that the film was made, a psychology epitomized by the following instance of that era's received ideas: "Kinsey has given us a brutal picture of the homosexual's mother, listing, a. her overpossessive love of him during his infancy and early childhood, and b. her underlying hatred of his wife, no matter how wise, devoted, and long-suffering the latter may be."[45] This mass-market version of gay etiology might afford us some interpretive purchase on the film by allowing us at last to make sense of the ascot Mitch wears beneath his sweater and letting us catch the full force of her drift when Annie wistfully muses out loud, "Maybe there's never been anything between Mitch and *any* girl" (see figure 61). But the birds don't alight in Hitchcock's film because Mitch is light in the loafers.[46] They come because coming is what they do, arbitrarily and unpredictably, like the homosexuals Keyes condemns for promoting "a paradigm of human sexuality divorced from family and procreation, and engaged in solely for the sake of . . . sensual pleasure and gratification."[47] They come, that is, to trace a connection, as directly as the crow flies, between "disorder in the family" and the rupture, the radical loss of familiarity, unleashed by jouissance. It is not, therefore, that the birds themselves *mean* homosexuality, but that homosexuality inflects how they figure the radical refusal of meaning. Whatever voids the promissory note, the guarantee, of futurity, precluding the hope of redeeming it, or of its redeeming us, must be tarred, and in this case, feathered, by the brush that will always color it queer in a culture that places on queerness the negativizing burden of sexuality—sexuality, that is, as sinthome, as always *sinthomosexuality*: sexuality as the force that threatens to leave futurity *foutu*.

Cathy, Eppie, Tiny Tim, the constantly multiplying children of Eve with the hopes that get put in their outstretched hands and the dreams that get read in their always wide eyes: dare we see, in the end that's forbidden to be one, this endless line of children—a genetic line, a narrative line, stretched out to the crack of doom—as itself the nightmare of history from which we're helpless to awake? For these "innocent" children,

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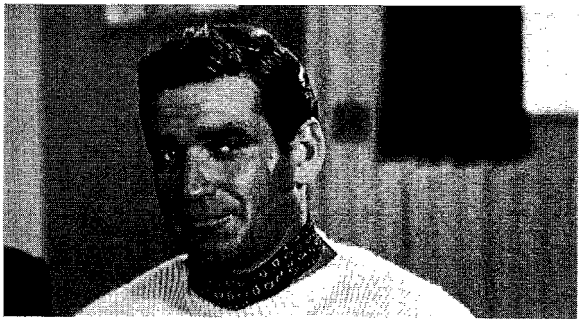

who blind us to futurism's implication in the blindness of the drive, reproduce a collective fantasy—one that touches, in refusing the negativity it opposes to the nature these children affirm, the depths of that negativity in the violence that informs the refusal itself.

Doesn't Benjamin, in his "Conversations with Brecht," seem to recognize something similar when he recalls his response to Brecht's telling him

> that life, despite Hitler, goes on, there will always be children. . . . But then, still as an argument for the inclusion of the "Children's Songs" in the *Poems from Exile*, something else asserted itself, which Brecht expressed as he stood before me in the grass, with a passion he seldom shows. "In the fight against them nothing must be omitted. Their intentions are not trivial. They are planning for the next thirty thousand years. Monstrous. Monstrous crimes. They stop at nothing. They hit out at everything. Every cell flinches under their blows. That is why not one of us can be forgotten. They deform the baby in the mother's womb. We must under no circumstances leave out the children." While he spoke I felt a force acting on me that was equal to that of fascism; I mean a power that has its source no less deep in history than fascism.[48]

Its sources in history no less deep because not *different from* those of fascism, this "force" that acts on Benjamin, this unidentified "power," might well be seen as what I've called "the fascism of the baby's face," which subjects us to its sovereign authority as the figure of politics itself (of politics, that is, in its radical form as reproductive futurism), whatever the face a particular politics gives that baby to wear—Aryan or multicultural, that of the thirty-thousand-year Reich or of an ever expanding horizon of democratic inclusivity. Which is not to say that the difference of those political programs makes no difference, but rather that both, *as political programs*, are programmed to reify difference and thus to secure, in the form of the future, the order of the same. And this, as we saw

in *North by Northwest*, occasions the emergence of history through the dialectic of desire, producing a temporalization that generates, like the "structure of allegory" according to de Man, narrative as the constant movement of and toward intelligibility.[49]

Such a history, though, as Lacan and de Man, in their quite different ways, understand, "pertains strictly to the order of language," whose "permanent disjunction" or determining lack effects the "illusion of a life" in response to the interminable movement toward the closure of meaning in the Symbolic. If this is the history to the survival of which we must always, as humans, be pledged, or the history through which, catachrestically, we first hope to win recognition *as* human, then we might do well to recall de Man's words on Benjamin's concept of history: "It is this errancy of language, this illusion of a life that is only an afterlife, that Benjamin calls history. As such, history is not human, because it pertains strictly to the order of language; it is not natural, for the same reason; it is not phenomenal, in the sense that no cognition, no knowledge about man, can be derived from a history which as such is purely a linguistic complication; and it is not really temporal either, because the structure that animates it is not a temporal structure." [50]

Rather than expanding the reach of the human, as in Butler's claim for Antigone, we might, with Leonard and the birds, insist on enlarging the *inhuman* instead—or enlarging what, in its excess, in its unintelligibility, exposes the human itself as always misrecognized catachresis, a positing blind to the willful violence that marks its imposition. "There is, in a very radical sense," writes de Man in the essay on Benjamin, "no such thing as the human. If one speaks of the inhuman, the fundamental non-human character of language, one also speaks of the fundamental non-definition of the human as such." This erasure of the human is implied, for de Man, in Benjamin's notion of *reine Sprache*, which, though commonly interpreted in terms of the sacred or divine, designates for Benjamin, according to de Man, "a language completely devoid of any kind of meaning function, language which would be pure signifier, which

would be completely devoid of any semantic function whatsoever."[51] Putting a permanent end to Melanie's hope of a General Semantics, such a *reine Sprache*, such an absolutely inhuman and meaningless language, could only sound to human ears like the permanent whine of white noise, like the random signals we monitor with radio telescopes trained on space, or perhaps like the electronically engineered sound with which Hitchcock ends *The Birds*.

In what he called a "monotonous low hum," whose drone might recall the "monotonous response" of Silas Marner's loom, in the "strange artificial" sound that brings Hitchcock's film to its "useless" "finish," we hear, if not the siren song, then the birdcall of futurity. The engine revs; the machine purrs on; the family drives through danger; and something implacable, life-negating, inimical to "our" children, works to reduce the empire of meaning to the static of an electric buzz. We, the *sinthomosexuals* who figure the death drive of the social, must accept that we will be vilified as the agents of that threat. But "they," the defenders of futurity, buzzed by negating our negativity, are themselves, however unknowingly, its secret agents too, reacting, in the name of the future, in the name of humanity, in the name of life, to the threat of the death drive we figure with the violent rush of a jouissance, which only returns them, ironically, to the death drive in spite of themselves. Futurism makes *sinthomosexuals*, not humans, of us all.

We shouldn't dismiss as coincidence, then, that the catchphrase best expressing our current captivity to futurism's logic and serving as a bridge between left and right in the American political scene, is one that *sinthomosexuals*, like Hitchcock's birds, could endorse as well: "Leave no child behind." In repeating it, though, *sinthomosexuals* bring out what's "impossible, inhuman" within it: a haunting, destructive excess bound up with its pious sentimentality, an overdetermination that betrays the place of the kernel of irony that futurism tries to allegorize as narrative, as history. The political regime of futurism, unable to escape what it abjects, negates it as the negation of meaning, of the Child, and of the

future the Child portends. Attempting to evade the insistent Real always surging in its blood, it lovingly rocks the cradle of life to the drumbeat of the endless blows it aims at *sinthomosexuals*. Somewhere, someone else will be savagely beaten and left to die—sacrificed to a future whose beat goes on, like a pulse or a heart—and another corpse will be left like a mangled scarecrow to frighten the birds who are gathering now, who are beating their wings, and who, like the drive, keep on coming.

NOTES

1. THE FUTURE IS KID STUFF

1 James Bennet, "Clinton, in Ad, Lifts Image of Parent," *New York Times*, 4 March 1997, A18, New England edition.

2 Donna Shalala, "Women's Movement," 150th Anniversary of the First Women's Rights Convention, Seneca Falls, New York, 17 July 1998, http://www.hhs.gov/news/speeches/sene.html. Note also the fundraising slogan of the National Abortion and Reproductive Rights Action League (NARAL): "For our daughters, our sisters, and our granddaughters."

3 Such a fantasy of substantialized and oppositional identities characterizes the Lacanian Imaginary stage, as distinct from the Symbolic order's wholly differential system of signifying relations.

4 Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E. B. Ashton (New York: Continuum, 1994), 325.

5 He writes, for example, in Seminar 17: "Ce que la vérité, quand elle surgit, a de résolutif, ça peut être de temps en temps heureux—et puis, dans d'autres cas, désastreux. On ne voit pas pourquoi la vérité serait forcément toujours béné-

fique." Jacques Lacan, *Le Seminaire, livre XVII, L'envers de la psychanalyse* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1991), 122.

6 "Je dis toujours la vérité: pas toute, parce que toute la dire, on n'y arrive pas. La dire toute, c'est impossible, matériellement: les mots y manquent. C'est même par cet impossible que la vérité tient au réel." Jacques Lacan, *Télévision* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1974), 9.

7 Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan. Book VII: The Ethics of Psychoanalysis, 1959–1960*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Dennis Potter (New York: Norton, 1992), 24.

8 In this context, another quotation from Adorno's *Negative Dialectics* might be useful: "If negative dialectics calls for the self-reflection of thinking, the tangible implication is that if thinking is to be true—if it is to be true today, in any case—it must also be a thinking against itself. If thought is not measured by the extremity that eludes the concept, it is from the outset in the nature of the musical accompaniment with which the SS liked to drown out the screams of its victims" (365).

9 Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan. Book II: The Ego in Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis, 1954–1955*, ed. Jacques Alain-Miller, trans. Sylvana Tomaselli (New York: Norton, 1991), 326.

10 Suzanne Barnard, "The Tongues of Angels: Feminine Structure and Other Jouissance," in *Reading Seminar XX: Lacan's Major Work on Love, Knowledge, and Feminine Sexuality*, ed. Suzanne Barnard and Bruce Fink (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002), 173.

11 See, for example, Phillipe Ariès, *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life*, trans. Robert Baldick (New York: Vintage Books, 1962); Lawrence Stone, *The Family, Sex, and Marriage in England, 1500–1800* (New York: Harper and Row, 1977); and James Kincaid, *Child Loving: The Erotic Child and Victorian Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1992) and *Erotic Innocence: The Culture of Child Molesting* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1998).

12 P. D. James, *The Children of Men* (New York: Warner Books, 1994), 10, 13.

13 Walter Wangerin Jr., "O Brave New World, That Has No People In't! *The Children of Men*," *New York Times Book Review*, 28 March 1993, 23.

14 "Narcissism!" the cry will go up. "Who, after all, more self-denying, more willing to sacrifice, than a parent? Who more committed to hours of work without ever getting paid?" Not paid? Consult the ledger book of social approbation. Tax codes, baby registries, the various forms of parental leave: these, of course, all pale before the costs of raising a child. But pro-natalism's payoff isn't primarily measured in dollars or sense. It's registered in the universal confirmation of one's standing as an adult and in the accrual of social

capital that allows one a stake in the only future's market that ever really counts.

15 The lines preceding this read: "One might have imagined that with the fear of pregnancy permanently removed, and the unerotic paraphernalia of pills, rubber and ovulation arithmetic no longer necessary, sex would be freed for new and imaginative delights. The opposite has happened. Even men and women who would normally have no wish to breed apparently need the assurance that they could have a child if they wished" (James, *The Children of Men*, 167).

16 See Barbara Johnson, "Apostrophe, Animation, and Abortion," in *A World of Difference* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), 184–199.

17 Donald Wildmon, "Hope '97 Tour to Counter Pro-Homosexual Philosophy in American Culture," *American Family Association Action Alert*, 25 February 1997, http://www.cfinwed.com/HEADLINE.HTM.

18 Consider, in this regard, the controversy that followed Senator Rick Santorum's remarks to the Associated Press in April 2003 linking homosexuality with bigamy, incest, and the endangerment of the family. An op-ed piece in the *New York Times* taking issue with Santorum's comments could refute him only by echoing the discourse of familial values and reproductive futurism: "But gays and lesbians are more than just sons and daughters. We're moms and dads, too. My boyfriend and I adopted a son five years ago, and we plan to adopt again. As more same-sex couples start families, it's going to be harder for Republicans like Mr. Santorum to say we are somehow a threat to the American family." Dan Savage, "G.O.P. Hypocrisy," *New York Times*, 25 April 2003, A33.

19 There are many types of resistance for which, in writing a book like this, it is best to be prepared. One will be the defiantly "political" rejection of what some will read as an "apolitical" formalism, an insufficiently "historicized" intervention in the materiality of politics as we know it. That such versions of politics and history represent the compulsory norm this book is challenging will not, of course, prevent those espousing them from asserting their "radical" bona fides. A variant will assail the bourgeois privilege (variously described, in identitarian terms, as "white," "middle-class," "academic," or, most tellingly, "gay male") by which some will allege that my argument here is determined. That many of those proposing this reading will themselves be "white," "middle-class," and "academic"—and, perhaps, not a few "gay males"—will not disturb the ease with which such "determination" is affirmed. I have somewhat greater sympathy for those who might be inclined to dismiss the book for its language (which they'll call jargon), for its theoreti-

cal framework (which they'll view as elitist), for its difficulty (which they'll see as pretension), or for its style (which they'll find to be tortuous). These objections at least have the virtue of acknowledging a frustration of desire in the face of what is experienced as overpresence of a drive. "Somewhat greater" though it may be, however, my sympathy for even this form of response has its limits as well, I confess.

20 Martin Charnin (lyrics) and Charles Strouse (music), "Tomorrow," from *Annie* (1977).

21 See Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, "Some Binarisms (1)," in *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 128.

22 Lauren Berlant, *The Queen of America Goes to Washington City* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1997), 1.

23 Quoted by Kevin Sack in "Officials Look for Any Links in Bombings in Atlanta," *New York Times*, 2 February 1997, A13, New England ed.

24 Judith Butler, "The Lesbian Phallus and the Morphological Imaginary," in *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 62.

25 Lacan, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis, 1959–1960*, 212.

26 Paul de Man, *Aesthetic Ideology*, ed. Andrzej Warminski (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 179, 181.

27 Barbara Johnson, *The Wake of Deconstruction* (Cambridge, Mass.: Basil Blackwell, 1994), 98.

28 Thus Lacan observes that Freud "doesn't hesitate to make the point in *Civilization and its Discontents* that there is nothing in common between the satisfaction a *jouissance* affords in its original state and that which it gives in the indirect or even sublimated form that civilization obliges it to assume." See Lacan, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis, 1959–1960*, 199–200.

29 Lacan, *The Ego in Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis, 1954–1955*, 211.

30 Lee Edelman, *Homographesis: Essays in Gay Literary and Cultural Theory* (New York: Routledge, 1994), xv.

31 Ryan Slattery, "Cardinal Law Urges Menino to Veto Bill Giving Benefits to City Workers' Partners," *Boston Sunday Globe*, 17 March 1996, 68.

32 "Pope Warns Against 'Inauthentic' Version of Family," 26 January 2003, http://www/foxnews.com/story/0,2933,76598,00.html.

33 See John Brenkman's response to my original formulation of this argument: "Queer Post-Politics," *Narrative* 10 (2002): 177.

34 Guy Hocquenghem, *Homosexual Desire*, trans. Daniella Dangoor (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1993), 138, 147.

2. *SINTHOMOSEXUALITY*

1 The first two syllables of the word, therefore, should be pronounced as in the French *sinthome*, but the subsequent syllables should be pronounced as they would be in English. Hence: "san-TUM-o-SEX-u-al" and "san-TUM-o-sex-u-AL-ity."

2 As cited in Jean Baudrillard, *The Vital Illusion*, ed. Julia Witwer (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 87n. The quotation originally appeared in Elias Canetti, *Crowds and Power*, trans. Carol Stewart (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1984), 227.

3 Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan. Book XI: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Norton, 1981), 185.

4 Slavoj Žižek, " 'The Thing That Thinks': The Kantian Background of the Noir Subject," in *Shades of Noir*, ed. Joan Copjec (New York: Verso, 1993), 222.

5 "C'est une façon ancienne d'écrire ce qui a été, ultérieurement, écrit 'symptôme.' " Jacques Lacan, *Le Sinthome* (typescript of Seminar 23, 1975–76, University of Texas at Austin), 1. The translation is mine.

6 Reading this process of fixation in relation to Freudian theory's anticipation of Lacan's account of the sinthome, Paul Verhaeghe and Frédéric Declercq observe the priority of these definitive fixations over repression and its symptomatic traces: "A psychoanalytic cure removes repressions and lays bare drive-formations. These fixations can no longer be changed as such; the decisions of the body are irreversible. This is not the case for the positions of the subject toward the drive processes; these can be revised. There are two possibilities: whether the subject now accepts a form of jouissance that he earlier refused, or he confirms this refusal." Paul Verhaeghe and Frédéric Declercq, "Lacan's Analytic Goal: *Le sinthome* or the Feminine Way," in *Re-inventing the Symptom: Essays on the Final Lacan*, ed. Luke Thurston (New York: The Other Press, 2002), 63.

7 Dominiek Hoens and Ed Pluth, "The *sinthome*: A New Way of Writing an Old Problem?" in Thurston, *Re-inventing the Symptom*, 7. All subsequent references are to this edition; page numbers will be cited parenthetically.

8 Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (New York: Verso, 1989), 75.

9 Verhaeghe and Declercq, "Lacan's Analytic Goal," 67. All subsequent references are to this edition; page numbers will be cited parenthetically.

10 Marcel Proust, *Remembrance of Things Past*, trans. C. K. Scott Moncrieff and Terence Kilmartin (New York: Vintage Books, 1982), 1: 51.

11 Quoted in Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, 75.

12 Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, 75.

13 Roberto Harari, *How James Joyce Made His Name: A Reading of the Final Lacan*, trans. Luke Thurston (New York: The Other Press, 2002), 122–123.

14 Ibid., 125.

15 Lacan, *Le Sinthome*, 134. The translation is mine.

16 Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan. Book XX: On Feminine Sexuality, the Limits of Love and Knowledge 1972–73, Encore*, ed. Jacques Alain-Miller, trans. Bruce Fink (New York: Norton, 1998), 120.

17 Gary Bauer, "Family Research Council Fundraising Appeal Letter from Gary Bauer," 2 June 1997, http://www.bridges-across.org/ba/frc970602.htm; Peter A. Jay, "After the Holocaust, Still Playing with Fire," *Baltimore Sun*, 20 July 1997.

18 Larry Kramer, "Gay Culture, Redefined," op-ed, *New York Times*, 12 December 1997, A23.

19 Bauer, "Family Research Council Fundraising Appeal Letter."

20 Charles Dickens, *A Christmas Carol*, in *The Christmas Books, Volume 1* (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin, 1985), 97. All subsequent citations from *A Christmas Carol* are to this edition and will be cited parenthetically.

21 Lacan, *Le Sinthome*, 130. The translation is mine.

22 Lacan, for instance, writes: "And what is more of a neighbor to me than this heart within which is that of my *jouissance* and which I don't dare go near? For as soon as I go near it, as *Civilization and Its Discontents* makes clear, there rises up the unfathomable aggressivity from which I flee, that I turn against me" (Lacan, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis, 1959–60*, 186).

23 Lacan, *On Feminine Sexuality*, 7.

24 Lacan, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis, 1959–60*, 176.

25 Such a relation to the Other, however, must be read through the lens that Joan Copjec insists on when she issues her corrective to the conceptualization of the gaze in theories of film: "When you encounter the gaze of the Other, you meet not a seeing eye but a blind one. The gaze is not clear or penetrating, not filled with knowledge or recognition; it is clouded and turned back on itself, absorbed in its own enjoyment. The horrible truth, revealed to Lacan by Petit-Jean, is that *the gaze does not see you*. So, if you are looking for confirmation of the truth of your being or the clarity of your vision, you are on your own; the gaze of the Other is not confirming; it will not validate you." Joan Copjec, *Read My Desire: Lacan Against the Historicists* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1995), 36.

26 "Ministries of hope": the very name betrays the opposition between futurism as anticipation of temporal redemption and homosexuality as meaning's dead end.

27 Slavoj Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject: The Absent Centre of Political Ontology* (New York: Verso, 2000), 294.

28 The allusion, of course, is to the dream Freud famously recounts of the father who falls asleep after sitting by the body of his son who has died. See Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1991), 5: 509–511.

29 Charles Dickens, *A Tale of Two Cities* (New York: Vintage, 1990), 113. All subsequent references are to this edition and will be cited parenthetically.

30 See the entry for "Narcissism" in J. Laplanche and J.-B. Pontalis, *The Language of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (London: Hogarth Press, 1983), 255–257.

31 Copjec, *Read My Desire*, 37.

32 Leo Bersani, "Sexuality and Esthetics," in *The Freudian Body: Psychoanalysis and Art* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 38, 39. Bersani, significantly, goes on to ask, in "Freud's New World," a later essay in this volume, "Must we now conceive of sado-masochism as a form of narcissism?" (89).

33 Sigmund Freud, *New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis*, in *The Standard Edition*, 22: 105.

34 Consider in this regard Freud's discussion of the "narcissistic" nature of both germ cells and malignant neoplasms in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, in *The Standard Edition*, 18: 50. Later in the same text Freud asserts: "Our argument had as its point of departure a sharp distinction between ego-instincts, which we equated with death-instincts, and sexual instincts, which we equated with life instincts. (We were prepared at one stage to include the so-called self-preservative instincts of the ego among the death instincts; but we subsequently corrected ourselves on this point and withdrew it)" (53).

35 In a note added in 1910 to *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, Freud evokes narcissistic object choice to describe male homosexuals who, identifying with their mother, "take *themselves* as their sexual object." In *The Standard Edition*, 7: 145.

36 All citations from Plato's *Laws* are taken from the translation by Benjamin Jowett, *The Dialogues of Plato*, in *Great Books of the Western World*, vol. 7, ed. Robert Maynard Hutchins, (Chicago: Encyclopedia Brittanica, 1952): 707, 646, 736. I recognize that the words translated by Jowett as "nature" are not, in all cases, identical. But this translation economically makes a point about the *naturalization* of nature as the work of ideology, which we thus can see at work in the translation's deployment of "nature" itself.

37 For a similar argument, though produced toward different ends and with

a different set of values, see Randall Clark, "Is Sodomy Unnatural? (And What's Wrong with That?): Plato's Response to John Finnis and Martha Nussbaum," published by the Claremont Institute, http://adnetsolfp2.adnetsol.com/ssl_claremont/publications/apsa98/apsa98_clark.cfm.

38 Jowett, *The Dialogues of Plato*, 737, 738.

39 The hypnotic fantasy of futurity, binding us to our collective social reality, is linked, of course, to the hypnotic power we are made to affirm in infants. Consider, for example, this allusion to the doxa that infants exert a galvanic force: describing the enduring appeal of "punch bowls" at parties and festive celebrations, Amanda Hesser writes, "People gravitate toward punch bowls and surround them, as they do a newborn." "Dip into the Past," *New York Times*, 15 December 1999, D1.

40 For a discussion of "(be)hindsight," see my *Homographesis*, 179–183.

41 George Eliot, *Silas Marner: The Weaver of Raveloe* (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin, 1996), 77, 83. Subsequent references are cited parenthetically.

42 At the same time that Marner suffers his cataleptic rigidification, Molly, Eppie's mother, succumbs to a death described in a similar way: "The complete torpor came at last" (ibid., 108). Her addiction to opium evinces a repetition compulsion equivalent to that enacted in Marner's union with his machine.

43 That the monotonous and repetitive task has a quasi-masturbatory insistence reinforces the association of sinthomosexuality with a nonproductive jouissance.

44 Slavoj Žižek, *Tarrying with the Negative: Kant, Hegel, and the Critique of Ideology* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1993), 37.

45 Lacan, *On Feminine Sexuality*, 47.

46 Sigmund Freud, "On Narcissism: An Introduction," in *The Standard Edition*, 14: 91.

47 Lacan, *On Feminine Sexuality*, 120–121.

48 Though desire, as Lacan reminds us, may function metonymically, we misrecognize it as a metaphor, as the representation of what bears within it the essence or truth that will fill out our lack. Hence, as we will see in chapter 3, the exposure of desire as *mere* metonymy has the effect of seeming to undo it.

49 Jean Baudrillard, "The Final Solution," in *The Vital Illusion*, ed. Julia Witwer (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 5–6. All subsequent references to this volume appear in parentheses.

50 In the muddle of his argument, which plays fast and loose with the critical terms it introduces, Baudrillard explicitly denies this claim, arguing that, in its folly, "humankind puts an end to natural selection, a process that implies,

according to the laws of evolution, the death of any given species—including its own." But then he goes on to write: "By ending natural selection, humankind contravenes symbolic law, and in so doing effectively risks its own disappearance" (ibid., 18). But, by the terms of his argument, doesn't this mean that humankind's "ending [of] natural selection" must take place within the *framework* of natural selection? Hence the risk "of its own disappearance," the risk that Baudrillard decries in the biotechnological experiments to which he alludes, comports with the mandate of evolution that embraces unproblematically "the death of any given species." This is the death that Baudrillard is unwilling to accept, even if "evolution," the figure of the nature that his argument *naturalizes*, will.

51 Jacques Derrida, "Différance," in *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 19.

52 Jean Baudrillard, "The Murder of the Real," in *The Vital Illusion*, 69. Subsequent references are cited parenthetically.

53 Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, 221. Subsequent references are cited parenthetically.

54 Baudrillard seems explicitly to deny this: "Life 'means' nothing, not even human life; if it is precious, it's not as a value but as a form, a form that exceeds all individual and collective value" ("The Final Solution," 28). But his subsequent insistence that the "Perfect Crime" is impossible because language itself must always be "the best deterrent against the global extermination of meaning" clearly establishes his own investment in the preservation of that meaning. And he follows this insistence on the survival of meaning with the phrase, "So the game is not over," a clear echo of the phrase with which, at the conclusion of "The Final Solution," he equally envisions the survival of the species: "But this game is not over yet. We can count on fierce resistance from the mortal creatures that we are, a resistance that springs out of the depth of the species, its vital exigency, its refusal of any final solution" (30). The vital exigency that resists the destruction of the species, on the one hand, and language's deterrence of the global extermination of meaning, on the other, thus occupy analogous places in Baudrillard's argument. He may claim that "life 'means' nothing; not even human life," but human life and meaning prove homologous for him.

55 As Lacan writes in "The Agency of the Letter in the Unconscious," "the pretentions of the spirit would remain unassailable if the letter had not shown us that it produces all the effects of truth in man without involving the spirit at all." Jacques Lacan, *Écrits: A Selection*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Norton, 1977), 158.

56 Jacques Lacan, "Seminar on 'The Purloined Letter,'" trans. Jeffrey Mehlman, in *The Purloined Poe: Lacan, Derrida, and Psychoanalytic Reading*, ed. John P. Muller and William J. Richardson (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988), 40, 51.

57 See, for example, the information provided by the Anti-Defamation League's Web site: adl.org/hate_symbols/numbers_14words.html.

3. COMPASSION'S COMPULSION

1 Saint Augustine, *On Christian Teaching*, trans. R. P. H. Green (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), book II, chapter 7, section 11, pp. 34, 35.

2 Ronald Reagan, "First Inaugural Address," in *Speeches of the American Presidents*, 2d ed., ed. Janet Podell and Steven Anzouin (New York: H. W. Wilson, 2001), 873.

3 I take this use of "disfiguration" from the work of Paul de Man, for whom it signifies the reduction of a perceptual reality to a rhetorical construct. See, for example, the essays collected in *The Rhetoric of Romanticism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984). For a fuller account of disfiguration and the face, see my essay "Imagining the Homosexual: *Laura* and the Other Face of Gender," in *Homographesis*.

4 Ernest Lehman, *North by Northwest: The MGM Library of Film Scripts* (New York: Viking, 1972), 45, 46. All subsequent references to this screenplay are to this edition and will be cited parenthetically.

5 This is not to say that those persons who are read as figures of *sinthomosexuality* are themselves incapable of love, but only that the figure of the *sinthomosexual* materializes the anxiogenic force of a compulsion whose mechanical quality is posed against the spiritualizing—and therefore "humanizing"—ideology of "love."

6 Jacques-Alain Miller, "On Perversion," in *Reading Seminars I and II: Lacan's Return to Freud*, ed. Richard Feldstein, Bruce Fink, and Maire Jaanus (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 313.

7 Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, 205. Earlier in this volume, Lacan differentiates the fundamental narcissism of love from the function of the drive when he notes that he himself has come close to what Freud "articulates when he distinguishes between the two fields, the field of the drives on the one hand, and the narcissistic field of love on the other, and stresses that at the level of love, there is a reciprocity of *loving* and *being loved*, and that, in the other field, it is a question of a pure activity *durch seine eigene Triebe*, for the subject" (200).

8 Ibid., 205.

9 For a fuller account of this logic in relation to the death drive, see Richard Boothby, *Death and Desire: Psychoanalytic Theory in Lacan's Return to Freud* (New York: Routledge, 1991). On the impossibility of sexual difference: it is important to remember that the fantasy of sexual relation rests on the belief that sexual difference marks the site of a complementarity that can fill the subject's constitutive lack. This attempt to turn the Real of sexual difference, its resistance to any structure of intelligibility, into the possibility of sexual relation, and thus into the ground of the subject's putative access to meaning's totalization, allows it to undergird the dominant logic of reproductive futurism. It follows, therefore, that any insistence on the Real of sexual difference, and consequently on the *impossibility* of sexual rapport, must comport with the negativity that *sinthomosexuality* always signifies.

10 Some readers may reasonably be tempted to ask if the *sinthomosexual* must always be male. As my insistent refusal of identity politics should be taken to suggest, the *sinthomosexual* has no privileged relation to any sex or sexuality—or even, indeed, to any species, as chapter 4 makes clear. My principal examples in this book, however, with the exception of chapter 4, focus on male *sinthomosexuals* because our culture most frequently imagines, and our artists most frequently depict, *sinthomosexuality* as embodied by machine-like men (and often, in science fiction, they are replaced by machines as such) who stand outside the "natural" order of sexual reproduction. (The movement between man and machine can be charted by considering the following *sinthomosexuals*: Aldous Huxley's Mustapha Mond; James Cameron's Terminator; and H. G. Wells's sexless, and hence parasitic, Martian invaders in *The War of the Worlds*.) The overwhelming prevalence of male *sinthomosexuals* in cultural representation reflects, no doubt, a gender bias that continues to view women as "naturally" bound more closely to sociality, reproduction, and domesticating emotion. Even in representations of women who fail to embrace these "natural" attributes and thus find themselves assimilated to the sort of fatality the *sinthomosexual* embodies, such refusals are themselves most often "explained" by reference to the intense fixation of their emotional attachments. Thus, while any number of female characters might be considered in terms of *sinthomosexuality* (Du Maurier's—and Hitchcock's—Mrs. Danvers, for instance, or Ben Ames Williams's Ellen Berent in his novel, *Leave Her to Heaven*, which became the basis for John Stahl's film), to engage them here would necessitate a parsing of the category to identify their differences from *sinthomosexuality* as I discuss it here. (These female characters, for instance, are determined by socially legible desires—typically in the form of obsessive "love"—rather than by the refusal of sociality and desire. Katharine, in Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew*, might be a noteworthy

counterexample.) Valuable as the exploration of such gendered differences would be, I have chosen not to engage it here lest the introduction of taxonomic distinctions at the outset dissipate the force of my larger argument against reproductive futurism.

11 "Party Ousts 'Phobe French Senator," *Yahoo News*, 3 August 2000, http://dailynews.yahoo.com/h/po/20000803/co/2000903002.html.

12 Dan Savage, "The Baby," *New York Times Magazine*, 15 November 1998, 95.

13 William Blake, "The Marriage of Heaven and Hell," in *The Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, ed. David Erdman (Garden City, N.J.: Doubleday, 1965), 37.

14 Cited in Donald Spoto, *The Dark Side of Genius: The Life of Alfred Hitchcock* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1983), 440.

15 Lacan, *Four Fundamental Concepts*, 205.

16 With this reference to Joel Fineman's analysis of Othello, I mean to suggest that Thornhill, who, like Othello, is associated with the "O" of desire—though *North by Northwest* explicitly affirms the "nothing" for which that "O" stands—becomes a figure through whom our faith in desire, our confidence in its world-making logic, can be confirmed as the ground of futurity. Hence the matchbook on which that "O" is displayed, and that earlier led him to assert that it, and, by extension, he, stood for nothing, becomes the means by which he later warns Eve of the threat to her life itself. At that moment, he fills the "O" with the sound of the desire that he had earlier denied. See Joel Fineman, "The Sound of 'O' in *Othello*: The Real of the Tragedy of Desire," in *The Subjectivity Effect in Western Literary Tradition: Essays Toward the Release of Shakespeare's Will* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1991), 143–164.

17 Alfred Hitchcock, cited in François Truffaut, *Hitchcock*, revised ed. (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1985), 138.

18 In contrast to this Imaginary One, or the One of sexual rapport, I am proposing here a One outside the logic of totalization: the One of the *sinthome*, about which Roberto Harari writes as follows: "Lacan posits—in another strange aphorism, from Seminar 19—that 'There is One,' in isolation, but no universe. For this one is no longer an index of itself: it is not the mark of totality, of the unification inherent in 'personality.' It does not even refer to a trait allowing partial identification in the Other. Better still—we are no longer dealing with the one that can be counted, situated in a problematic of repetition. This is why 'There is One' can be said to invoke the *One of the sinthome*, thus indicating a marginal instance, since it can be neither totalized nor added up. Situated elsewhere, on another edge, it operates as the support of the speaker. We could define it as an uncoupled One, outside any sequence; it answers to no integration, no context, no history, no full or an-

ticipated meaning. It therefore persists in an awkward, troubling manner." Harari, *How James Joyce Made His Name*, 125–126.

19 Lacan, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis 1959–1960*, 186. Subsequent references are cited parenthetically.

20 Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, in *The Standard Edition*, 21: 109, 111.

21 Immanuel Kant, *Introduction to the Metaphysical Elements of Ethics*, trans. Thomas Kingsmill Abbott, in *Great Books of the Western World*, vol. 42: *Kant* (Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica, 1952), 376.

22 Lacan, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, 187. Subsequent references are cited in parentheses.

23 Ernest Lehman's screenplay introduces Leonard as follows: "A man is playing croquet all by himself in the fading light. His name is LEONARD. Later, we will see him at closer range and perhaps be slightly repelled. He is about thirty, but looks much younger, for he has a soft baby-face, large eyes, and hair that falls down over his forehead. His attitudes are unmistakably effeminate" (11). Note that the mutually substitutive relation of killing and fucking can also be seen in the enactment by Leonard of the "murder" of Vandamm with Eve's blank-filled gun.

24 Lacan, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, 195.

25 See, for example, Jacques-Alain Miller's formulation of this aspect of Lacan's thought: "What Freud calls the drive is an activity which always comes off. It leads to sure success, whereas desire leads to a sure unconscious formulation, namely, a bungled action or slip: 'I missed my turn,' 'I forgot my keys,' etc. That is desire. The drive, on the contrary, always has its keys in hand." "Commentary on Lacan's Text," in *Reading Seminars I and II: Lacan's Return to Freud*, 426.

26 Raymond Bellour, "Symbolic Blockage," trans. Mary Quaintance, in *The Analysis of Film*, ed. Constance Penley (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 2000), 191.

27 The figure is linked to Leonard before this final struggle. It is he, of course, who directs Vandamm's attention to it in the auction house, and it appears in the frame a number of times while Leonard, with Eve's gun behind his back, enacts what his boss first interprets as his jealousy of her.

28 Paul de Man, "The Concept of Irony," in *Aesthetic Ideology*, 184.

29 Ibid., 179, n. 21; Paul de Man, "The Rhetoric of Temporality," in *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism*, 2d ed. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), 215. Subsequent references will be cited parenthetically.

30 To the extent, of course, that these pieces of film refer to *North by Northwest* itself, they point to its own oscillation between the reinforcement and the rupturing of Imaginary form.

31 When Lacan calls attention to the subject's retreat from jouissance and the transgression it entails, he gestures as well toward the logic according to which altruism, the realization of compassion, would necessarily carry with it the trace of the negativity it negates: "We retreat from what? From assaulting the image of the other, because it was the image on which we were formed as an ego. Here we find the convincing power of altruism. Here, too, is the leveling power of a certain law of equality—that which is formulated in the notion of the general will. The latter is no doubt the common denominator of the respect for certain rights—which, for a reason that escapes me, are called elementary rights—but it can also take the form of excluding from its boundaries, and therefore from its protection, everything that is not integrated into its various registers" (*The Ethics of Psychoanalysis, 1959–1960*, 195). The *sinthomosexual* figures what must be excluded from protection, denied certain "elementary rights," insofar as it threatens the boundaries securing the form of the social subject and thereby denies the authority of social organization or the "general will": the will, that is, to articulate itself in an image whose totalization must be secured precisely by means of the meaning that futurity affirms.

32 "Some Considerations Concerning the Catholic Response to Legislative Proposals on the Non-Discrimination of Homosexual Persons," June 1992 letter to American bishops, http://www.polarnet.ca/~prince/dignity/rights.html.

33 "Chastity and Homosexuality," in *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist Press, 1994), 2357, p. 566.

34 Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons (October 1986), sections 9, 15, http://www.polarnet.ca/~prince/dignity/halloween.html.

35 "Homosexuality," Concerned Families of Maryland, http://www.us2000.org/cfmc/poshomosex.htm. The nonsectarian nature of this group reflects the universality of the dogma of reproductive futurism: "We believe the family is the heart of our nation and the key to any true progress to restoring our moral bearings and building a better future for our children."

36 Reverend John Miller, "Homosexuality: What? How? Dangers and Remedies," *Social Justice Review*, http://www.txdirect.net/users/dgreaney/homosex.htm, pp. 3, 5.

37 See Lacan's essay, "The Subversion of the Subject and the Dialectic of Desire in the Freudian Unconscious," in *Écrits: A Selection*. Note especially the oft-

cited penultimate sentence of this essay: "Castration means that *jouissance* must be refused, so that it can be reached on the inverted ladder of the Law of desire" (324).

38 See Johann Wolfgang Von Goethe, *Faust: A Tragedy*, trans. Walter Arndt (New York: Norton, 2001), 47:

> You heard me, there can be no thought of joy.
> Frenzy I choose, most agonizing lust,
> Enamored enmity, restorative disgust.
> Henceforth my soul, for knowledge sick no more,
> Against no kind of suffering shall be cautioned.
> I mean to savor to my own self's core,
> Grasp with my mind both highest and most low,
> Weigh down my spirit with their weal and woe,
> And thus my selfhood to their own distend,
> And be, as they are, shattered in the end. (part 1, lines 1765–1775)

39 I take this phrase from Jacques-Alain Miller, who writes of "the pervert" that "he has an immutable, constant share that is always ready to use—it is *at hand*, an *at hand* enjoyment." "On Perversion," in *Reading Seminars I and II: Lacan's Return to Freud*, 310.

40 Note that Lacan traces the dialectic of history back to the advent of Christianity: "It is also Christianity that associates that death [of God in the crucifixion of Christ] with what happened to the Law; namely, that without destroying the Law, we are told, but in substituting itself for it, in summarizing it, and raising it up in the very movement that abolishes it—thus offering the first weighty historical example of the German notion of *Aufhebung*, i.e., the conservation of something destroyed at a different level—the only commandment is henceforth 'Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself' " (*The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, 193).

41 De Man, "The Concept of Irony," 177.

42 De Man, "The Rhetoric of Temporality," 226.

43 Paul Verhaeghe, "Lacan's Answer to the Classical Mind/Body Deadlock: Retracing Freud's *Beyond*," in Barnard and Fink, *Reading Seminar XX*, 135.

44 Lacan, *Four Fundamental Concepts*, 205.

45 Copjec, *Read My Desire*, 201; Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject*, 272.

46 Lacan recounts this anecdote in "The Agency of the Letter in the Unconscious": "A train arrives at a station. A little boy and a little girl, brother and sister, are seated in a compartment face to face next to the window through which the buildings along the station platform can be seen passing as the

train pulls to a stop. 'Look,' says the brother, 'we've arrived at Ladies!'; 'Idiot!' replies his sister, 'Can't you see we're at Gentlemen' " (*Écrits*, 152).

47 Suzanne Barnard, "The Tongues of Angels: Feminine Structure and Other Jouissance," in Barnard and Fink, *Reading Seminar XX*, 173.

48 That the train is the vehicle of temporal, and hence of narrative, dilation may be underscored by the fact that the train on which Thornhill encounters Eve is expressly identified as the *Twentieth-Century*, inscribing its function in the registers of time and space at once (see Lehman, *North by Northwest*, 48).

49 Bellour, "Symbolic Blockage," 81.

50 Cited in ibid.

51 The trope of the extended hand, or its refusal, figures in any number of representations of *sinthomosexuals*. Perhaps the most concise summation of its part in the logic of reproductive futurism can be found in Disney's *The Lion King* (directed by Roger Allers and Rob Minkoff, 1994). Viewers will recall the moment when Scar, the connotatively queer brother of the Lion King, Mustafa, finds his sibling clinging to a cliff while thousands of frenzied wildebeests are rampaging below. Holding his brother's paws in his own, Scar lays out his plan to take over the kingdom and then, releasing his grip, lets Mustafa fall to his death. The unwed Scar now assumes the throne and the consequences are dramatic: the fertile land becomes a landscape of death, ruled by the *sinthomosexual* Scar and his carrion-eating hyenas. This condition of morbidity persists until the eventual restoration of Simba, Mustafa's son and rightful heir, who returns to the kingdom with Nala, who is destined to be his queen. The film finds its apt conclusion, therefore, by affirming the continuity of the "Circle of Life." It repeats the opening sequence, which depicted the celebration of Simba's birth, but this virtually identical sequence celebrates the birth of Simba's son. With such an emphasis on repetition, we see once again the compulsion to sameness in reproductive futurism that old Mr. Lammeter remarked in *Silas Marner*. It is, of course, this sameness that futurism abjects in the *sinthomosexual*.

52 Judith Butler, *Antigone's Claim: Kinship between Life and Death* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 23. All subsequent page references are from this edition and will appear parenthetically.

53 Copjec, *Read My Desire*, 206, 207.

54 Ibid., 207.

55 Alenka Zupančič, *Ethics of the Real: Kant, Lacan* (New York: Verso, 2000), 95.

56 Lacan, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, 196.

4. NO FUTURE

1 Sylvia Ann Hewlett and Cornel West, "For Mothers, It's No Paradise," *Boston Sunday Globe*, 10 May 1998, C7. My quarrel with this article, I want to make clear, is not with the particular suggestions it offers for improving the lives of underpaid working women and mothers; it is a quarrel, instead, with the ideology invoked to naturalize and promote those suggestions.

2 Bruce Fink, *A Clinical Introduction to Lacanian Psychoanalysis: Theory and Technique* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997), 211.

3 In *Seminar VII* Lacan tells his audience, "And one of you, in explaining to me what I am trying to show in *Das Ding*, referred to it neatly as the vacuole." He then goes on to observe: "Where, in effect, is the vacuole created for us? It is at the center of the signifiers—insofar as that final demand to be deprived of something real is essentially linked to the primary symbolization which is wholly contained in the signification of the gift of love." See Lacan, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, 1959–1960, 150.

4 "Murder Charges Planned in Beating Death of Gay Student," 12 October 1998, CNN Interactive, http://www/cnn.com/US/9810/12/wyoming.attack.03.

5 It is worth noting, in this context, that less than two weeks after Shepard's murder, the *New York Times* reported on an effort in Fort Collins, Colorado (where the hospital in which Shepard died was located), to list sexual orientation as a protected category in its antidiscrimination ordinance. The article included the following sentence describing one of the responses provoked by the distribution of materials supporting that addition to the law: " 'I was handing out stickers on a parade route, and one boy held out his hand for one,' recalled Bob Lenk, spokesman for the group promoting the ordinance change. 'His mother said, "You put that on him and I'll break your arm." ' " James Brooke, "Anti-Bias Effort Roils City Where Gay Man Died," *New York Times*, 28 October 1998, A16.

6 James Brooke, "Gay Man Dies from Attack, Fanning Outrage and Debate," *New York Times*, 13 October 1998, late ed., A17.

7 Consider, for example, the following passage, which appeared in *i.e.*, an online Web magazine published by the Family Research Council the same month that Matthew Shepard was killed: "Homosexuality is not merely about a harmless personal preference. It is about a lifestyle that involves having sex with another person of the same gender. More often than anyone would like to admit, it's about promiscuity—and even violence. It is about unnatural, unsafe, and unhealthy behavior." Laurel L. Cornell,

"Coming Out of Homosexuality: What's This All About," October 1998, http://www.frc.org/ie/ie98j.html.

8 Bosley Crowther, "*The Birds*: Hitchcock's Feathered Friends Are Chilling," *New York Times*, 1 April 1963, 53.

9 Robert E. Kapsis, *Hitchcock: The Making of a Reputation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 65.

10 Alfred Hitchcock, "It's a Bird, It's a Plane, It's . . . *The Birds*," originally published in *Take One* 1, no. 10 (1968): 6–7; reprinted in *Hitchcock on Hitchcock*, ed. Sidney Gottlieb (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 315.

11 Alfred Hitchcock, interviewed in "Just One Hitch," also cited in Camille Paglia, *The Birds* (London: British Film Institute, 1998), 88.

12 Robin Wood, "*The Birds*," in *Hitchcock's Films Revisited* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), 153, 154.

13 In his otherwise numbingly faithful adaptation of *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* (2001), Chris Columbus, the director, deviates from the letter of J. K. Rowling's text in an early scene that directly alludes to Hitchcock's film. Raised by his Aunt and Uncle Dursley, monsters of normativity (the novel's first sentence: "Mr. and Mrs. Dursley, of number four, Privet Drive, were proud to say that they were perfectly normal, thank you very much" [1]), and led to believe that his parents were killed in a car crash during his infancy, when, in fact, they were wizards murdered by the evil Lord Voldemort (a *sinthomosexual* no matter what the future volumes in the series may reveal), young Harry, like Cathy Brenner, finds something left for him unexpectedly as his eleventh birthday draws near: in Harry's case, a letter, which the Dursleys manage to seize and burn before he is able to read it. This purloined letter, a copy of which, arriving at Privet Drive the next day, encounters a similar fate, turns into three more the following day and twelve more after that. The novel, unlike Columbus's film, says nothing about the agency by which these letters appear, though it does provide, by way of allusion, a basis for the filmmaker's decision about how that omission should be redressed:

> "No post on Sundays," [Mr. Dursley] reminded them cheerfully as he spread marmalade on his newspapers. "No damn letters today—"
>
> Something came whizzing down the kitchen chimney as he spoke and caught him sharply on the back of the head. Next moment, thirty or forty letters came pelting out of the fireplace like bullets. The Dursleys ducked, but Harry leapt into the air trying to catch one. (41)

If the letters take the place of the invading sparrows that spill down the chimney of the Brenner house on the evening of Cathy's eleventh birthday, the movie cannily seizes on this to explain their arrival in the first place. For

the director, in a series of interpolated scenes, shows owls, atypically flying by day, that carry the letters to the Dursleys' home and then perch on nearby rooftops and cars as if waiting for a response. Before the chimney disgorges its multiple missives that fateful Sunday morning, Harry, catching a glimpse of something fluttering past the window, draws back the curtain to see what it is. At just that moment the director, instead of inserting the anticipated shot depicting Harry's point of view, cuts to a long shot of Harry seen at the window, but from its other side, and framed by the Dursleys' house, lawn, and car, all covered, like Hitchcock's jungle gym, by a plethora of birds. Quotations from J. K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* (New York: Scholastic, 1998).

14 That birthday celebrations are determined by the ideology of reproductive necessity is underscored by a sentence that appeared, in an unrelated context, in the pages of the *New York Times*. Evoking the genocidal terror enforced by the Khmer Rouge, an article on Cambodian photography during the years of the Pol Pot regime begins by differentiating the photographic record left by that dictatorship and the uses to which photography is normally put in the Western World: "There are no wedding pictures here. No babies. No birthdays." Seth Mydans, "Khmer Rouge Photography: Smiles Were Rare," *New York Times*, 24 January 1999, section 4, p.5. The trajectory evoked by this sentence is that of the organizing (and heterosexually insistent) narrative that shapes the connection for us between meaning and subjectivity. While Cathy's eleventh birthday, then, might be read by some as marking the onset of sexual maturation (a possibility that would be reinforced by her desire for lovebirds as a gift), my point is not that this *particular* birthday asserts the link between subjectivity and the reproductive imperative, but rather that birthday rituals as such perform the indissociability of subjectivity from reproductive futurism. Put otherwise: birthdays should be understood as marking not only the date of our birth, but also the *rite* of birth itself, the celebration of reproduction.

15 The vision of the child here is heartening, of course, not only because it substitutes the "innocent" child for the "lecherous" adult, thus purging heterosexuality of the taint of sex through a form of metaleptic reversal in which cause is replaced by effect, but also because the child, by thus displacing the heterosexual male adult, is reassuringly heterosexualized even at the moment of this displacement.

16 In the so-called Final version of the script, Annie Hayworth, when she admits to Melanie her own unhappy history with Mitch, delivers a speech, not included in the film, that evokes her commitment to the children she teaches in Bodega Bay, describing them as the source of meaning in her life, indeed,

as her raison d'être: "I'll go into that classroom on Monday morning, and I'll look out at twenty-five upturned little faces, and each of them will be saying, 'Yes, tell me. Yes, please give me what you have.' (pause) And I'll give them what I have. I haven't got very much, but I'll give them every ounce of it. To me, that's very important. It makes me want to stay alive for a long long time." *The Birds*, script by Evan Hunter, 26 January 1962, shot sequence 202.

17 Donald Spoto, *The Dark Side of Genius: The Life of Alfred Hitchcock* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1983), 474.

18 Like Melanie Daniels, the woman in the commercial is framed, of course, as complicit with these aggressive energies of eros; she has, after all, "provoked" them by using the diet drink the commercial is selling.

19 *The Music Man*, words and lyrics by Meredith Wilson, opened on Broadway in 1957 and was released as a film in 1962.

20 *Psycho* (1960), directed by Alfred Hitchcock; screenplay by Joseph Stefano.

21 Mrs. Bundy, echoing Norman Bates, says to Melanie in The Tides: "Birds are not aggressive creatures, Miss. They bring beauty to the world." This calls to mind a similar assessment of another airy creature: "Oh Mary, it takes a fairy to make something pretty," as Emory announces in Mart Crowley's *The Boys in the Band* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1968), 102.

22 See under "bird" in the Random House Dictionary of the English Language (second edition, unabridged), definition 4: "*Slang.* a person, esp. one having some peculiarity: *He's a queer bird.*"

23 Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 5, 35–78, 151 n.6; Susan Lurie, "The Construction of the 'Castrated' Woman in Psychoanalysis and Cinema," *Discourse*, no. 4 (winter 1981): 52–74; Slavoj Žižek, "Les Oiseaux: Le surmoi maternel," in *Tout ce que vous avez toujours voulu savoir sur Lacan sans jamais oser le demander à Hitchcock*, ed. Slavoj Žižek (Paris: Navarin Éditeur, 1988), 197–207. Both Lurie's and Žižek's articles are important interventions in the critical debate around *The Birds*. My point is not to diminish their value, but to locate the heterosexualizing binarism on which the effort to read the filmic text so frequently finds itself stuck.

24 Evan Hunter, the screenwriter for *The Birds*, recalls what happened when Hitchcock announced his promotional slogan to the advertising staff at Universal:

> "Gentlemen," he said, "here's how we'll announce the movie. Are you ready?"
>
> There was a moment of suspenseful silence, the master at work. Spreading his hands wide on the air, Hitch said, "*The Birds* is coming!"

It was pure genius. A seemingly ungrammatical catchphrase that combined humor and suspense.

One of Universal's young advertising Turks said, "Excuse me, Mr. Hitchcock, sir?"

Hitch turned to him.

"Don't you mean 'The birds *are* coming,' sir?" (Evan Hunter, *Me and Hitch* [Boston: Faber and Faber, 1997], 76–77).

25 Falling from the chimney like dirt or shit, like parodic reversals of Santa Claus, with his more successfully sublimated gifts, these birds enact Hitchcock's phobic fantasy about uncleanliness and waste. The salesman in The Tides will excoriate birds in general as "messy" creatures and the metalepsis that reads the birds, the source of waste that drops from the sky, as a trope of waste themselves (dropping out of the sky and into visibility in the film), is central to Hitchcock's text. Spoofing *The Birds* in *High Anxiety* (1977), Mel Brooks understands this intuitively as he graphically depicts the plague of birds producing a plague of shit. For a fuller consideration of Hitchcock's relation to questions of waste and anality, see my essays "Piss Elegant: Freud, Hitchcock, and the Micturating Penis," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 2, nos. 1–2 (1995): 149–177 and "*Rear Window*'s Glasshole," in *Out-Takes: Essays in Queer Theory and Film*, ed. Ellis Hanson (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1999), 72–96.

26 That notion of coming as coming apart will be represented most clearly in Melanie's fate. She suffers her psychological breakdown, her dissociation from symbolic meaning, as a result of her decision to remain in Bodega Bay for Cathy's party. Perhaps, in this context, it is useful to recall the words with which Cathy begged Melanie to stay: "Oh, won't you come? Won't you please come?"

27 Paul de Man, "Conclusion: Walter Benjamin's 'The Task of the Translator,'" in *The Resistance to Theory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 92.

28 De Man, *The Rhetoric of Romanticism*, 268.

29 By using the term "heterosexualizing" I do not mean to suggest that these narratives, in any simple, unmediated way, produce the heterosexual desire within which particular subjects locate their specific erotic investments; rather, I argue that these narratives produce heterosexuality as the dominant mode of ideological self-recognition *for heterosexual and nonheterosexual subjects alike*. They set forth the logic that enables the subject to imagine its own reality, affording a social trajectory that polices the possibilities of alternative experiences, by establishing a narrative template that articulates reality

as the arena for a mandatory movement toward the subject's "realization," a movement that both presupposes and procures a fundamental allegiance to futurity.

30 For a superb and profoundly influential analysis of the anticommunalism of eros, see Leo Bersani's *Homos* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1995), esp. 151–181.

31 The sex of a lovebird is so difficult to determine that some authorities suggest only DNA testing can settle the question with certainty.

32 Paul de Man, "Shelley Disfigured," in *The Rhetoric of Romanticism*, 117.

33 Marcel Proust, *In Search of Lost Time*, trans. C. Scott Moncrieff and Terence Kilmartin, revised by D. J. Enright (New York: Modern Library, 1993), 4: 8.

34 Whatever they might have to say would surely include something about the status of Jim Crow laws and the integration of American schools in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Such a racializing implication of the birds, however, is specific to this sequence, for the oddity that prompts Mrs. Bundy to reject the possibility of a "bird war" is that elsewhere birds of different feathers turn out to be flocking together (as we see at the end of the film).

35 Making preparations to flee the house that has been under seige by the birds, Mitch turns on the car radio and hears a news report that ends by asserting: "It appears that the bird attacks come in waves, with long intervals between. The reason for this does not seem clear as yet."

36 Robin Wood, "Retrospective," in *A Hitchcock Reader*, ed. Marshall Deutelbaum and Leland Poague (Ames, Iowa: Iowa State University Press, 1986), 39–40.

37 It is surely not insignificant that this sequence ends after Melanie and Cathy, having rescued a girl knocked down by the ravaging crows, lead her to the shelter of an unlocked car. Cars and driving have been, and will be, a recurrent image in the film—the image of the constancy of drive itself.

38 Jean Laplanche, *Life and Death in Psychoanalysis*, trans. Jeffrey Mehlman (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), 124.

39 Alan Keyes, *The Alan Keyes Show*, radio transcript from Friday, 10 July 1998, http://alankeyes.com/071098.html.

40 Berlant, *The Queen of America Goes to Washington City*, 73.

41 Ken Worthy, *The Homosexual Generation* (New York: L.S. Publications, 1965), 184.

42 Fleeing her home at the end of *The Birds*, Cathy Brenner takes nothing that belonged to her past but the lovebirds that figured her future: the lovebirds she dreamed of in her canopied bed before Hitchcock laid bare the nightmarish ease with which even the sweetest, the most innocent pecks give way to the brutal aggressiveness of heartless little peckers. Conveying the lovebirds from house to car in the cage they must never leave, she bears

them across a threshold not, as we tend to think, between past and future but rather between the familiar, familial structures futurity rests on and the aversive avian uncertainties aimed at tearing those structures apart. This act of transporting or carrying across, evoking the etymology of "metaphor," suggests that futurity functions for us precisely *as* a metaphor: a transference aiming to master the fearful proximity of what we can't know by giving that hole in our knowledge an Imaginary form. But reproductive futurism, the temporal continuity promised through the pairing of the lovebirds, is itself, I've suggested, the lovebirds's cage: the radically circumscribed fantasy space of the always already known that makes the future the only thing we're ever permitted to see—makes it, in fact, the very site from which we see *ourselves* by filling up the void of the gaze where the Real, the Symbolic's hollow core, threatens to void us, too. Futurism thus casts its investment in repetition as reproduction, a value it then affirms against the pulsive iterations of the drive, the narcissistic returns of "sameness," the *sinthomosexual*'s jouissance. Only in the shelter secured by this cage does reality seem to be seamless, its bars appearing to bar the trauma of an encounter with the Real. But the Real, as Hitchcock's film makes clear, insists nonetheless in the form of the birds that fly in nature's face, clawing and pecking at the order of forms with its constant promise of meaning: the birds that even within their cage still carry the tag of the Real.

Though struck by a gull herself when the children at her party come under attack, Cathy's love for the lovebirds—her longing to take them under her wing—preserves the hope of a future that she must embody no less than they. By contrast, recall Faulkner's portrait of the *sinthomosexual* as a young boy. Already, at five, under a physician's care ("undersized, weak, and with a stomach so delicate that the slightest deviation from a strict regimen fixed by the doctor would throw him into convulsions") and the object of an all-determining prognosis ("he will never be a man, properly speaking"), Popeye, in *Sanctuary*, runs off on the day that a "children's party," much like Cathy's perhaps, is given on his behalf. (William Faulkner, *Sanctuary: The Corrected Text* [New York: Vintage Books, 1993], 308).

He flees through a bathroom window but not without first, as Faulkner pauses to note, leaving something to remember him by: "On the floor lay a wicker cage in which two lovebirds lived; beside it lay the birds themselves, and the bloody scissors with which he had cut them up alive" (309). Rejecting the figural enactment of metaphor by which Cathy affirms futurity, Popeye puts in the place that he vacates, as a substitute or trope for himself, the visual image of contiguity, unmotivated by any necessity: the wicker cage and, "beside it," the bloody scissors and lifeless birds.

But even so radical an undoing of metaphor (the spiritualizing relation whose governing logic of matching, coupling, and generating meaning is condensed in the mated birds) can no more escape its destined recuperation as a metaphor for Popeye (or for the *sinthomosexual* as such) than his destruction of the lovebirds can prevent his being associated, metonymically, with birds himself. From the outset of the novel, when he crouches in the bushes as Horace Benbow drinks from the spring, Popeye's occulted presence encounters an echo in the scene: "Somewhere, hidden and secret yet nearby, a bird sang three notes and ceased" (4). And when Horace catches a glimpse of Popeye ("His face had a queer, bloodless color, as though seen by electric light . . . he had that vicious, depthless quality of stamped tin"), the echo sounds more insistently: "Behind him the bird sang again, three bars in a monotonous repetition: a sound meaningless and profound" (4). Like Silas Marner's "monotonous craving for [the] monotonous response" of his loom, the bird's "monotonous repetition" evokes the machine-like, desubjectivizing aspect of the *sinthomosexual*'s jouissance—the antipathy to "natural" meaning intrinsic, like the bird, to nature itself—that casts a queer light on Popeye's face and marks it with the "vicious, depthless quality" associated with industrial manufacture and such commodities as cheap "stamped tin." Like the stupid or meaningless repetition of sound in the juxtaposition of "sound" and "profound," the song of the bird, and thus Popeye, too, confounds the social order of meaning by assimilating the value enshrined in "profound," the depth in which truth claims to make its home, with its obverse, with everything "depthless" or "meaningless," as if—with a nod to "De Profundis," Wilde's letter from Reading Gaol—we suddenly found the fundament at the foundation of the profound.

Sanctuary focuses on nothing so much as Popeye's profound implication in this machinery of de-meaning—unless it's the specification of sexuality as the field in which he performs that de-meaning most effectively, pulling around himself all the more tightly the noose of meaning that compels him to mean the impediment to meaning's reproduction. His repeated association with "viciousness" ("his hat jerked in a dull, vicious gleam in the twilight" [7]; "Popeye looked about with a sort of vicious cringing" [7]; "he performed it with a sort of vicious petulance" [137]) reminds us that "vicious" and "vice" both derive from *vitium*, Latin for fault, defect, flaw. But the most titillating flaw to which the novel alludes, the sexual defect made visible in the "corn-cob [that] appeared to have been dipped in dark brownish paint" (283), makes flesh the fatality, the mindless machinery, with which *sinthomosexuality* contaminates the heterogenital making of flesh. While Temple Drake, Popeye's victim ("You got a boy's name, ain't

you?" [147], Reba Rivers observes), may express her contempt for Popeye's failure to perform like a "man" in his assault ("Come on. Touch me. Touch me! You're a coward if you dont [*sic*]" [218]), his unnaturalness seems to enfold her as well when she imagines, even while Popeye's hand is "jerking inside her knickers" (220), that *she* has become a man herself, endowed with what the corncob stands for: "Then I thought about being a man, and as soon as I thought it, it happened. It made a little plopping sound, like blowing a little rubber tube wrong-side outward. It felt cold, like the inside of your mouth when you hold it open. I could feel it, and I lay right still to keep from laughing about how surprised he was going to be" (220). But Popeye's surprise should not be ours insofar as this hallucinatory change of sex, while accentuating the defectiveness of Popeye's masculinity (even Temple is more of a man than he), also registers the homosexual inflection of *sinthomosexuality*, the indissociability of same-sex desire from its threat to reproductive futurism.

The morbidity that Popeye embodies (even alive he "might well have been dead" [308]), the Scrooge-like chill of his flesh ("Then it touched me, that nasty little cold hand, fiddling around inside the coat where I was naked. It was like alive ice" [218]), the absence of vital force to which the prosthetic corncob speaks, come together in the pathos-inducing image for which, at least metonymically, Popeye must pay in the end: not the shooting of Tommy, the desecration of Temple, or the mob violence against Lee Goodwin, but, beyond these, the deathliness of Ruby's infant ("never more than half alive" [117]) that signals most efficiently the danger he portends. Though Popeye, of course, has no literal responsibility for the illness of the child, he embodies the "evil" whose outcome the infant's cadaverous torpor conveys: "It lay in a sort of drugged immobility, like the children which beggars on Paris streets carry, its pinched face slick with faint moisture, its hair a damp whisper of shadow across its gaunt, veined skull, a thin crescent of white showing beneath its lead-colored eyelids" (116). And Faulkner reinforces the connection between the *sinthomosexual* and the destruction of the child when Benbow plumbs the depths of Popeye's "evil" in the void of a youngster's eyes, themselves as leaden in death as the "lead-colored" eyelids of Ruby's son: "Perhaps it is upon the instant that we realise [*sic*], admit, that there is a logical pattern to evil, that we die, he thought, thinking of the expression he had once seen in the eyes of a dead child, and of other dead: the cooling indignation, the shocked despair fading, leaving two empty globes in which the motionless world lurked profoundly in miniature" (221). To which it seems almost redundant to add: "profoundly," but also meaninglessly.

The *sinthomosexual* who stops the world, who exposes the Real in reality

and shatters the totalized significations, all the meanings that metaphor generates, into the shards of material signifiers only metonymically linked, destroys, by revealing the promiscuous conjunctions of signifiers without benefit of marriage, all faith in the redemptive possibility of their meaning-producing rapport. The thematic extension of the wound thus inflicted on the viability of any thematics is the *sinthomosexual*'s insistence on the lack of a *sexual* rapport, on the absence of any natural or instinctive relation between the sexes, of any complementarity, any access to meaning between them. Incarnating the impediment to the fantasy of a futurism that's consecrated to and by the child conceived as its realization, the *sinthomosexual* blights both the child ("He's going to die" [62], Temple mutters, looking at Ruby's sickly son) and the heterosexual couple's integrity as the synthesis redeeming Symbolic difference by repressing jouissance. For the *sinthomosexual*, like jouissance, makes the sexual relation impossible, obtruding with the force of the Real on the fantasy of the reciprocal fulfillment of male and female in the One of the Symbolic couple. This explains why Reba Rivers, the madam who voices the naturalizing doxa of heterosexuality ("A young man spending his money like water on girls and not never going to bed with one. It's against nature" [255], she proclaims), rejects Popeye not for murder or rape, but rather for the sexual parasitism that binds him like a shadow (or the shadow of something worse) in too intimate a union with other men, thus casting the shadow of depthlessness, of a meaningless automatism, over them and, more disturbingly, over (hetero)sexual rapport.

The novel, with the aid of Miss Reba, graphically renders this perverse relation in the unnatural pairing of Popeye and Red (the prosthetic corncob come to life—or life reduced to the corncob), whom he brings, to her horror, into Reba's house to satisfy Temple's sexual needs and, in doing so, Popeye's as well. "The two of them," Reba announces to her friends with regard to Temple and Red, "would be nekkid as snakes, and Popeye hanging over the foot of the bed without even his hat took off, making a kind of whinnying sound" (258). Whinnying, jerking, losing himself in mechanical contortions, Popeye enacts the jouissance forbidden by, and impossible within, the order of reproduction. This third who intrudes on the privacy of the Couple, who lurks behind the straight man's back, usurps the place of the child to destroy what the latter is adduced to confirm: the privileged access of heterosexual coupling to the authenticity of nature itself. Not for nothing does Benbow's success in getting Reba to help him learn the truth about Popeye depend on his willingness to play the trump card of sentimental futurism: " 'Have you got children?' She looked at him. 'I don't mean to pry into your affairs,' he

said. 'I was just thinking about that woman. She'll be on the streets again, and God only knows what will become of that baby' " (211).

43 Quoted in Truffaut, *Hitchcock*, 297.

44 Slavoj Žižek, *Looking Awry: An Introduction to Jacques Lacan through Popular Culture* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1991), 99.

45 Worthy, *The Homosexual Generation*, 44.

46 Not only for his eagle eye where sartorial style is concerned, but also for his exemplary insights into Hitchcock's style more generally, I am delighted to express deep gratitude for my ongoing conversations with D. A. Miller.

47 Keyes, *The Alan Keyes Show*.

48 Walter Benjamin, *Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1978), 218.

49 De Man, "The Rhetoric of Temporality," 225.

50 De Man, "Conclusion: Walter Benjamin's 'The Task of the Translator,' " 92.

51 Ibid., 96–97.

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Lee Edelman is Professor of English at Tufts University.

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