

Nick Hocking

Letting the Skyfall or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love James Bond

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.¹ (Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*, p.153)

Whoever's behind this, whoever's doing it – he knows us. He's one of us. He comes from the same place as Bond, a place you say doesn't exist: the shadows.² (M [Judi Dench], explains a catastrophic security breach at MI6 to the head of the UK government's Intelligence and Security Committee in *Skyfall*, dir. by Sam Mendes)

What better example of the Freudian death drive than an autoimmune problem? The self is attacking the self.³ (Darian Leader and David Corfield, *Why Do People Get Ill? Exploring the Mind-body Connection*, p.224)

I

'Let the Sky-fall..!' I'm ashamed to say I became fascinated by this movie, in which James Bond finds himself “enjoying death” after MI6, his symbolic masters, have written his obituary, believing him killed in action in Turkey, the old imperial boundary between civilisation and its shadowy discontents. Before the opening titles have even rolled, a bungled operation to recover sensitive data files from a homosexual cyberterrorist has culminated in Bond taking a bullet meant for his 'swarthy' assailant, fired by his black, female co-agent on the orders of their female boss.⁴ Racism, homophobia, sexism. Tick, tick, tick. Watching it for the first time I was furious and unnerved that a film like this could still be produced and consumed as light entertainment. The usual symptomatic exclusions of the Bond franchise are hysterically insistent in *Skyfall*, but for this very reason Sam Mendes' attempt to give Bond's psyche a thorough airing results in a fascinating proof of the defence mechanisms of the franchise, and of British patriotism itself in a period of profound economic and cultural upheaval.

In this paper I attempt a reading of *Skyfall* that also critically interrogates Lee Edelman's attempt to fuse the figures of Jacques Lacan's ‘sinthome’ and the ‘Homosexual’ in an ethical form of Queer oppositionality. I follow critics such as Nina Power in seeing a certain reification of Lacan's subversive concept in Edelman's work, and go on to suggest

that reading the psycho-drama of *Skyfall* according to Jacques Derrida's logic of autoimmunity allows a greater (though rather uncertain) chance that both critic and text might reproduce their symptomatic protocols otherwise, without the ossifying assurance that their meaning and/or pleasures will be underwritten by the (non)existence of perfect accord between self and other.

Certainly, the film makes an interesting limit case for the cultural logic of 'reproductive futurism' which Edelman famously outlines in *No Future*. On the one hand, it seems to support Edelman's claims about the imaginary defences we erect in the name of the future. Briefly, reproductive futurism names a cultural fantasy which allows the social order to avoid confronting the lack of meaning, the fragmentation and division at the heart of our sense of ourselves as social subjects. That unattainable meaning is believed to be only temporarily deferred into the future, where the guarantee of its fulfilment is represented by the figure of the innocent child, for whose future happiness and security all political causes of left and right are fighting. Following Lacan, Edelman argues that reproductive futurism must above all deny its own death drive: that meaningless drift of desire through the materiality of the undead letter of the law; 'a movement beyond the pleasure principle, beyond the distinctions of pleasure and pain, a violent passage beyond the bounds of identity, meaning and law.' (NF, p.25) Reproductive futurism denies its implication in this uncanny, mortifying process by splitting off its death drive into the figure of the Queer: it therefore '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'. (NF, p.39) In response, Edelman argues, those communities which find themselves thus abjected must embrace an ethical position of queer oppositionality which fully assumes this figural association between the death drive and the category of homosexuality. For this Queer (anti)subjectivity he coins the term *sinthomosexual*, a portmanteau which plays on Lacan's *sinthome*, the term he used in his final seminars for a particular, unique symptom which is at the core of any subject and which ensures their access, not to a fully meaningful place in the symbolic order, but to enjoyment, *jouissance*. Edelman announces that *sinthomosexual* should assume a properly ethical stance by disrupting any faith in a "final signifier" that will make meaning whole at last [...] and insisting on access to *jouissance* in place of access to sense.' (NF, p.37)

This profound shift, from *believing in* the meaning of one's neurotic symptom to *identifying with* that symptom, recognising it as the basic structure of your identity, is what

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Lacan was apparently aiming at with his concept of the *sinthome*. Lacanian critics from Slavoj Žižek to Edelman accord the concept a decisive subversive power when applied to cultural analysis, a power which is regularly contrasted with the insufficiency of deconstructive readings which are said to remain fixated on the 'discursive' effects of ideology without touching 'the last support of the ideological effect [...] the nonsensical, pre-ideological kernel of enjoyment'.⁵ In Žižek's view, which Edelman keenly endorses in *No Future*, the decisive step in an effective critical reading must be to 'articulat[e] the way in which an ideology, implies, manipulates, produces' (SO, p.140) this minimal structure within which a subject experiences desire. *Skyfall* struck me as inviting such a critical procedure, but inviting it a little too keenly, much like the movie's villain, who willingly allows himself to be captured by the MI6 to penetrate the weakness in the British security apparatus and return to the quasi-maternal figure, Judi Dench's M, in an obscene moment of incestuous eroticism and death.

II

At the time of its cinema run, Stephen Wright wrote an interesting article (one of few critical readings of the film that I have come across) discussing the Bond character's "psychotic misogyny" through a Lacanian reading focused on the foreclosure of the symbolic Father function in Bond's backstory. Though this reading often falls victim to the old psychoanalytic fallacy of treating the central character as a clinical case history, Wright makes an observation which is decisive for my reading: the film is 'uncanny in speaking to its own dynamics'. Sadly he then pulls back from the idea that the makers of such a deeply reactionary movie could actually be one step ahead of its radical psychoanalytic critics:

I'd be fairly sure that Sam Mendes and Barbara Broccoli didn't come up with a detailed storyboard that centred around the Name of the Father or a Žižekian commentary on Lacan. But in trying to make Bond speak beyond his own image of the sexually magnetic, suave, hi-tech, self-contained superspy, they have unwittingly revealed something (something which has also been immensely profitable for them).⁶

'Wittingly' inflicted or not (I cannot share Wright's certainty that no one could make a movie like *Skyfall*, or find ballast for their desires by entering into its fantasy space, if they'd had the intelligence and patience to read Lacan's seminar on *The Psychoses*), the uncanny feeling Wright got from the film, his reflex anti-bourgeois rejection of it (they were just uncultured chancers who got lucky and made a fortune: nothing like us, the good sons of Lacan, with our PhDs and precarious employment patterns!), and likewise the fascinated disgust I felt on my first viewing, all seem to fit a classic Freudian interpretation of the uncanny sensation. I do not

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refer to the insight, via Schelling, that what 'ought to have remained secret and hidden [...] has come to light'⁷. No, no. For we define ourselves by our ability to bring to light the repressed material hidden in plain sight in popular texts. I refer to 'the fear of going blind', which in Freud's reading of Hoffmann's 'The Sand-Man' has an 'intimate connection with the father's death'. (TU, p.230) What if *Skyfall* speaks not only to the Lacanian version of the Oedipal logic, but also, more fundamentally, to what Žizek calls the 'kernel of Enjoyment' which forms the ultimate support for our ideological, and Oedipal fixations? What angle of vision does that leave the critic? If, as Sara Ahmed argues, 'criticality as an ego ideal offers a fantasy of being seeing', and if therefore our critical positions both support a fantasy of 'omniscience' and allow us to misrecognise our 'complicity' in the structures we critique⁸, is it any wonder that this movie should afflict the critical gaze with 'the fear of going blind'?

This paper will explore some of these implications which Wright chooses to ignore. In particular, I am interested in the way in which the movie enacts the shift proper to Lacan's notion of 'traversing the fantasy' in relation to deeply conservative dreams about British identity: exposing the nostalgic belief in British imperial greatness to ridicule, revealing the exploitative logic behind it, and synecdochally associating it to Bond's aging body and the outdated methods of Judi Dench's septuagenarian head of MI6, then ultimately reconnecting its audience to their enjoyment of a British nationalism shorn of any neurotic need to make sense or to justify its claims to cultural superiority. Again Wright is astute in highlighting M's kitsch porcelain bulldog as a 'pivotal image' in the film. After an explosion destroys the iconic MI6 building, forcing the security apparatus underground (returning to the site of WWII operations and of course symbolically reconnecting with the psyche), Bond sees the Bulldog in its usual position on M's new desk and expresses his disgust that this piece of tourist tat should have survived when so much of real value has been destroyed or lost – but of course at this point in the movie Bond is officially unfit for duty! At the movie's close Bond gladly receives the bulldog from M as a posthumous gift, and at that moment he is no longer caught in labyrinthine underground tunnels. He stands silhouetted in black against a shimmering rooftop view of Westminster's imperious skyline from the domed towers of the Old War Office in the near right of the screen to the Houses of Parliament in the far distance, his gaze (and the viewers') directed towards a single union flag placed harmoniously between the two. His ability to resume his official position within the state apparatus and within an iconic scene of enduring British power is bizarrely contingent on this cheap, and degradingly commodified object. In Lacanian terms, it makes sense to think of the Bulldog as the ultimate embodiment

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of *Skyfall's* sinthome. As Adele's equally imperious theme song had promised us, after the sky falls, 'we [whoever "we" might be] will stand tall' – by unashamedly embracing our sinthome. Is this in fact an effective means to reproduce the old symbolic exclusions of British patriotism? And what kind of critical leverage remains to us against the ideological tug of this (arguably new) mode of populist ideology?

III

It is easy to see echoes of the defensive logic of reproductive futurism in the Bond franchise, though homosexuals are by no means the only abjected figures against which the consistency of the hero is constructed, tested and reaffirmed. *Skyfall's* plot concerns an originally anonymous cyberterrorist who is 'outing' various British agents who are under deep cover in dangerous political regimes. Echoes of Chelsea Manning and Wikileaks are perhaps unavoidable, especially when we discover the non-normative sexuality by means of which the film gives legible body and identity to the mysterious threat which otherwise figures only as a meaningless but fatal eruption of encrypted signifiers into the glare of tele-technological society. 'The controversy around the Ministry of Defence has escalated today, as images of the Hussein assassination continue to circulate,' announces BBC newsreader Huw Edwards from a TV screen in the corner of a livid civil servant's office. James Bond's declared mission is to recover the data which would shatter the symbolic, everyday identity of these agents of the British state. But truthfully it is to halt the 'circulation' of incriminating images by fixing them unambiguously to 'an enemy'.

Eventually he successfully traces this amorphous, non-local disruption in the cybernetic system of international espionage back to a determinable location, and assigns a face to the anonymous terrorist threat. Then we discover a joyfully camp villain, indubitably an Edelmanly sinthomosexual, played by the actor Javier Bardem (famously half of a heterosexual Hollywood couple in real life, as if it is necessary in the context of the Bond franchise for audiences to suspend their belief in male homosexuality). What is new in the Bond imaginary is how explicitly Queer, in every sense, this villain is, and how much his character is able to draw out the queer aspects of this mawkishly post-colonial bastion of British cinema. The movie figures the sinthomosexual, contains this figure, and enjoys the spectacle of it, as well as the titillation of recognising something of its fractured hero in his uncanny double. This repressed part of Bond and the culture of which he is emblematic is not simply exposed but cathartically reincorporated into Bond's ego, so that ultimately he and

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his sinthomosexual side can 'get back to work' for the British establishment.

Bardem's Raoul makes his debut in what is probably the key scene in the film, and certainly the most entertaining. It is the archetypal Bond scene in which the supervillain reveals himself after Bond has penetrated his inner-sanctum and been captured in the process. Prone, tied, and seemingly defeated, Bond still does not submit to the perverse mastery of his nemesis. The best-remembered example of this scene was in *Goldfinger* (whose famous exchange – 'Do you expect me to talk?', 'No, Mr Bond, I expect you to die.' – is surely cinema's most pointed example of the hero's desire for Habermasian Communicative Rationality withering in the presence of the villain's death drive). In that movie a laser beam moved mercilessly towards Sean Connery's groin, resulting in a moment of castration (or penetration) anxiety where the representative of pure evil idiotically lets his guard down at exactly his moment of triumph, allowing himself to display his desire for a (non)future of death, destruction, and global chaos. In the Bond movies of times past, the villain's pathological (or at least clumsily plotted!) desire to spill the beans all over Bond's prone body would mean he witlessly shifts the advantage of true knowledge to Bond, who is then able to escape and use the shadowy information he's gained to overcome the threat to a Western, male, British, heterosexual social structure.

By contrast, in this movie the villain's mode of torture takes the form of desublimated erotic flirtation: Raoul sensuously undoes Bond's shirt, and tenderly strokes gym-hardened pectorals typical of twenty-first century specularised masculinity. Admittedly, while his actions bring the queerness of the Bond movie out from the shadows, tradition is still honoured to the dead letter as he duly does pour out tantalising information to Bond: who he is, what he wants, how he operates. Filling us in on the technical aspects of his plan. Defusing the uncanny threat of the Other by repeating it as coherent narrative. But, before Bond's diligent researches are rewarded with fresh intelligence, Raoul tells him a good old-fashioned story, as he strolls delicately towards the camera in a tremulously steady long shot, sensuous, gentle lips and blazing eyes gradually coming into our view for the first time. But his voice is already prominent, echoing around the cinema auditorium way ahead of his image. And the voice is telling the story of his childhood, the summers on his grandmother's island, which had seemed an unstained paradise until the threat of contagion loomed. The story seems like the most personal, private, *individual* of recollections, but as its speaker comes into view we realise that its intent is to radically desubjectify its hearer, and simultaneously to illuminate the autoimmune logic of state security. It goes like this:

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Raoul: One summer we went for a visit and discovered the place had been infested with rats. They'd come on a fishing boat and gorged themselves on coconut. So how do you get rats off an island, hmm? My grandmother showed me. We buried an oil drum and hinged the lid. Then we wired coconut to the lid as bait, and the rats would come for the coconut – donk-donk-donk-donk-donk, they would fall into the drum. And after a month we had trapped all the rats. But what did you do then? Throw the drum into the ocean? Burn it? You *just leave it*. And they begin to get hungry. And one by one, they start eating each other. Until there are only two left; two survivors. And then what – do you kill them? No. You take them, and release them into the trees. And now they don't eat coconut anymore. Now they only eat rat. [Raoul has been in long shot, walking slowly from the far end of the room with Bond seen from behind tied to a chair in the front left of the shot. Now Raoul stands over Bond and us in a close-up shot from Bond's height, but slightly to his right.] You have changed their nature. The two survivors, this is what she made us.

Bond: I made my own choices.

Raoul: Hm, you think you did. That's her genius. We are the last two rats. We can either eat each other. [Teasing, enquiring gaze into Bond's eyes] Hmmm? Or we can eat everyone else.' [He is stroking Bond's neck now.]

As he caresses Bond he taunts him, 'What's the regulation to cope with this? Oh, well, there's a first time for everything.' Bond may or may not be bluffing when he whispers back, 'Who says it's my first time?' (Though Bond is an ex-navy man, and my time working in a military bar has taught me that homoerotic *practices* between men are far more widespread and tacitly accepted in the armed forces than the individuating notion of *being* a homosexual, which is still frequently stigmatised with varying degrees of subtlety.)

But, just as the homoerotic dynamic which had always been displaced by the crudest of metaphors in this type of scene has been fully revealed to us, in its 'real' nature – the tender caress and the promise of fellatio – we suddenly discover that the threat of Bardem's queerness does not reside essentially in what he may do with Bond's crotch. Unfazed, Bardem responds to Bond's come-on with disdain; 'All that physical stuff, so dull, so dull. [he unties Bond] Chasing spies – So old-fashioned!'

So Raoul offers up another vision of the 'queer' threat, a secondary revision if you like, but now it sounds like the same spiel given by two dozen earlier Bond villains: 'If you wanted you could pick your own assignments as I do. Name it. Name it. Destabilise a multinational by manipulating stocks. Pip – easy. Interrupt transmissions from a spy satellite over Kabul. Pop – done. Ummm... rig an election in Uganda, all to the highest bidder.' His ability to figure the death drive is now related primarily to his queering of information systems: a cyber intelligence hacker and a homosexual to boot! It may be said, in support of Edelman's position, that it is Raoul's sexuality which most obviously materialises and

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subjectivises the more abstract evils of the other terms. And Raoul asks Bond to *choose* pure pleasure over the illusory sense of duty, just as the *sinthome* allows Lacan to provide a kind of authentic ground for the subject in the real of its desire and therefore to 'specify the decision-making process of the subject'⁹ who can now 'choose' between belief in or identification with his symptoms. Choosing to go on believing in the elusive meaning of the symptom is clearly not the option that a Lacanian is rooting for; 'It can barely be considered an identity, since it shifts continuously through the chain of signifiers – hence the typical hysterical question: "Who am I?"' By contrast, an *Edelmanly* heroic identification with the brute force of the symptom ensures that, 'through identification with the letter, fixating the *jouissance*, the subject acquires a Real identity, connecting it to the Real of its being.' (VD, p.68)

IV

However, who is to say that the hysterical mode with its incessant, unreasonable faith in the symbolic would be the wrong option, particularly for those of us who would like to reshape the prevailing symbolic rather than succeed from it? Bruce Fink, for example, argues that the only way to rescue Lacan from the deconstructive critique of his phallogocentric system, is to read Lacan 'hysterically', i.e. as someone who has chosen on the side of belief rather than an identity fixed in the Real:

[W]e can adopt an hysterical stance – one perhaps closer to Lacan's own – and say that Lacan himself does not view his own texts as constituting any kind of finished theory or system. [...] He sees his own work as grappling with certain problems and as trying ever anew to forge new concepts and schemas by which to get a handle on the Freudian Field, and he does not want his terms to be taken out of context and put to foreign uses.¹⁰

Could we say that not only has Edelman betrayed Lacan by taking the signifier 'sinthome' from its assigned place and putting it to 'foreign' use, but in so doing he has also committed himself, against the letter of his own thesis, to continue the hysterical search for adequate signifiers for our subjective positions?

Is the *sinthomosexual*, then, less a polymorphously perverse threat to the status quo, than an hysterical response to it? And hasn't Edelman's work been enthusiastically received, challenged and explored for exactly that reason? In *The Ticklish Subject* Zizek includes an interesting discussion of the political consequences of the 'pathological' psycho-sexual forms in their relation to homosexuality which, though written several years before Edelman's *No*

Future, works as well as a critique of that book as it does of its intended target, Michel Foucault. It is also a fine example of autoimmunitary defence, since it arguably undermines Zizek's own tendency to take what he calls the 'pervert's position', 'claiming to possess knowledge of what provides jouissance to the Other'.

Firstly, according to Edelman, Zizek emphatically denies any definitive correlation between homosexuality and the (dis)organisation of the socially sanctioned (straight) subject; 'for Lacan [which in Zizek's writing tends to translate as, "in reality..."], there is no direct correlation between forms of sexual practice (gay, lesbian, straight) and the "pathological" subjective economy (perverse, hysterical, psychotic).' Rather, for a gay, straight, bi, or asexual subject the decisive anchor for their social being would be the particular mode of relation to the object of their desire, to the familiar Other. Thus, Zizek claims that the fact of same sex desire does not yet constitute a subject position (whether Queer, gay, or sinthomosexual), rather it is the mode of enjoyment through which the subject then registers its (same sex) object. For example, 'there is definitely a perverse homosexuality (the masochist or sadist pretending to possess knowledge about what provides jouissance to the Other); but there is also a hysterical homosexuality (opting for it in order to confront the enigma of "What am I for the Other? What does the other want from me?")'¹¹.

Zizek offers a challenge to what he takes to be the 'perverse' economy of Queer Studies following in a Foucauldian tradition. His infamous claim is that Foucauldian genealogies of sexuality fail to allow for the necessarily unaccountable dimension of the Freudian unconscious, and as a consequence are unable to adequately address the question of agency and resistance to hegemonic power formations. For want of space, I will not pursue the detail of this dispute except to point out that Zizek locates the seeds of resistance in the hysteric's relentless need to question their conditions of existence, as opposed to the pervert's hedonistic enjoyment of 'false subversion', and one example he gives of this is extremely apposite for our reading of Raoul's role in *Skyfall*:

[...] It is interesting to note how, when one describes new phenomena one as a rule overlooks their predominant hysterical functioning and prefers the allegedly more 'radical' perverse or psychotic functioning. Say in the case of cyberspace, we are bombarded with interpretations which emphasise how cyberspace opens up the possibilities of polymorphous perverse playing with and permanent reshaping of one's symbolic identity, or how it involves a regression to the psychotic incestuous immersion in the Screen as the maternal Thing that swallows us, depriving us of the capacity of symbolic distance and reflection. It can, however, be argued that the most common reaction of all of us when we are confronted with cyberspace is still that of hysterical perplexity, of permanent questioning: 'How do I stand with respect to this

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anonymous Other? What does it want from me? What game is it playing with me?'
(TS, pp.249-250)

In *Skyfall*, and here we return to the idea of the sinthomosexual, we soon discover that the film has invited Bond to make this false choice between jouissance and belief, allowing us to fall into the same misapprehension as Foucault or Edelman – we want to see Raoul as polymorphously perverse. As Bond defied the threat of his homosexual object choice, Raoul shifted the ground discursively to his mastery of illicit cybertech knowledge and the power this gives him over the Other. But this is a bluff. We soon learn that at this stage he is merely playing at mastery, he wants Bond to capture him and carry him into the heart of MI6 where he will confront Judi Dench's M; hysterically, he will do anything to communicate with her.

Furthermore, the trouble with the idea of the sinthomosexual is that Bond, as agent of the British state and its regulations, as well as the audience for this movie, can clearly assimilate the 'Real' physicality of Raoul's sexuality. The hero's response, '[w]ho says this is my first time?' cleverly ossifies the notion of queerness as a sexual (non)identity. The British state has, I claim, no essential terror of homosexual acts; arguably the Left's only significant achievement in the neoliberal era has been the incomplete but nonetheless dramatic progress made against homophobia both in public policy and on the ideological level of 'common sense'.¹² What 'always' incites panic is the traumatic disjuncture proper to all stable identities, which can no longer be split off and assigned to the 'homosexual Other' once that signifier has ceased to objectify a particular subject. Hence the broad support for gay marriage, and the emergence of what Halberstam, Munoz and Eng designate 'Queer liberalism'¹³. It is only when Bond's countermove in the seduction scene comes less in the form of liberal tolerance than as a suggestive flirtation with what Leo Bersani has called the 'potentially revolutionary inaptitude – perhaps inherent in gay desire – for sociality as it is known'¹⁴, that Raoul's speech, and with it the film's signification of his 'queerness', starts to slide onto issues of geopolitics, information networks, post-colonial guilt. I leave open the question of whether this should be viewed as a belated displacement of homophobic anxiety which has been pushed to the very limit of its audience's tolerance for purposes of dramatic tension, or as a wake-up call to those who believe that their sexuality is inherently threatening to liberal state power, though I personally incline towards the latter reading. If we read Raoul as a sinthomosexual, our reading perhaps can go no further than the former position, from which viewpoint his sexuality is a scandal which must be disguised in the discourses of nation, self-presence, etc. To disrupt the reproduction of the British hero it should then be enough for the critic to

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home in on and to resist this metonymic sliding away from the dimension of sexual trauma underlying his identity (see Wright's reading above) since 'sexualization *equals* phantamization, which *equals* assuming the passive position of impotence, humiliation and pain.' (TS, p.283) Yet, mightn't this recourse to a foundational heuristic of sexualization itself be an instance of what Derrida refers to as the 'autoimmunitary reactivity' against 'the dislocation, expropriation, delocalisation, deracination, disidiomatisation and dispossession (in all their dimensions, particularly sexual – *phallic*) that the tele-techno-scientific machine does not fail to produce'?¹⁵

V

More interestingly, the overdetermination of Raoul's sexuality by his illicit control of cyberinformation networks connects him with the new type of so-called 'terrorist' sketched by Derrida in an interview he gave in the wake of 9/11. A shadowy figure who inflicts symbolic wounds on the American, liberal-capitalist hegemony less by physical force than by the 'deconstructive' violence they figure against the whole conceptual and technological apparatus which maintains the dominant power. As Derrida puts it:

the "total" threat, no longer comes from a state but from anonymous forces that are absolutely unforeseeable and incalculable. [...] it threatens what is supposed to sustain world order, the very possibility of a world and of any worldwide effort [*mondialisation*] (international law, a world market, a universal language, and so on), what is thus put at risk by this *terrifying* autoimmunitary logic is nothing less than the existence of the world [...] When Bush and his associates blame "the axis of evil," we ought both to smile at and denounce the religious connotations, the childish stratagems, the obscurantist mystifications of this inflated rhetoric. And yet there is in fact, and from every quarter, an absolute "evil" whose threat, whose shadow, is spreading. Absolute evil, absolute threat, because what is at stake is nothing less than the *mondialisation* or the worldwide movement of the world, life on earth and elsewhere.¹⁶

Two associations, two uncanny doublings. Firstly, I think we can say, without too much queering of the evidence, that Raoul the rogue agent represents the kind of 'absolute evil' Derrida is describing: a product of the deterritorialisation of a knowledge-based semio-capitalist order, whose 'shadow' spreads across the fantasy space of *Skyfall* as it does across the prevailing authorities – be they states, financial institutions, or pedagogic disciplines. And then there is Derrida's metaphor of autoimmunity – the pathologically-derived idea that unitary bodies (be they persons, states, or systems of thought) respond to the threat of contagion or destabilisation rather like Raoul's grandmother with her rats, not simply by

trying to exterminate or deport the threat, but instead to 'produce, invent, and feed the very monstrosity they claim to overcome'. They produce the very thing which threatens them, in order to inoculate themselves against it, thereby 'reproducing, and regenerating the very thing they seek to disarm'. (AI, p.99) But, another doubling here, this 'total threat' which the USA and its allies name 'terrorism' mirrors Derridean deconstruction to the extent that it attaches itself to the dominant, phallogocentric body of knowledge, and destabilises the contradictions and violent repressions which sustain it. Perhaps uncomfortable with the proximity of his own work to his diagnosis of the absolute threat, Derrida categorically opposes himself to the symbolic violence of Al-Qa'ida:

What appears to me unacceptable in the “strategy” (in terms of weapons, practices, ideology, rhetoric, discourse, and so on) [...] is, above all, the fact that such actions and such discourse open onto no future, and in my view, have no future. If we are to put any faith in the perfectibility of public space and of the world juridico-political scene, of the “world” itself, then there is, it seems to me, nothing good to be hoped for from that quarter. (AI, p.113)

In a recent article, Lee Edelman has critiqued Derrida, and the aforementioned quote in particular, for its complicity with the fantasy of reproductive futurism. Edelman accuses Derrida of projecting the nihilism of Deconstruction into the symbolic figure of Osama Bin Laden, of positioning himself on the side of 'the Good' in identification with the juridico-political order, betraying the original ethical violence of Deconstruction. Edelman concludes that Derrida has revealed himself as a dissimulating liberal (but then, aren't we all, sometimes?), and excludes him from the club of truly radical thinkers. Edelman's 'Derrida' is a craven figure who

acknowledges here no future but an evolutionary one, which is also to say an evolution precisely toward the condition of the One, toward an “absolute law” associated with “universal sovereignty” that utopically moves toward the perfection of justice, political order, and the “world” we know. Lacan, like Badiou, like the queer, like the figure of “bin Ladenism” adduced by Derrida (and unlike bin Laden himself), denies this evolutionary model in favor of the death drive's creation *ex nihilo*, refusing the instinct of conservation that by anticipating the future prevents it, allowing it recognition only in a form already known.¹⁷

I agree with Edelman that Derrida is disavowing the proximity of deconstruction and the symbolic violence of terrorism which he sketches. Though perhaps this is an understandable, even a respectful gesture, given that he was speaking in New York a few short weeks after the 'deconstruction' of the Twin Towers.¹⁸ Furthermore, in the context of our discussion it is extremely relevant that Derrida talks about belief ('faith') in the perfectibility of the social order, not as an ontological ground (the level of the Real which Edelman kindly maps for us)

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but as a 'strategy'. 'Faith' for Derrida is always 'without [...] any ground or foundation', 'foreign to teleology [...] heterogeneous and rebellious, irreducible, to law, to power, and to the economy of redemption.'¹⁹ A faith, then, which refuses to masquerade as knowledge of the future. This faith, we could say, is rooted in a queer response to the kind of choice which faces the Lacanian analysand at the end of their analysis. Given the privileged option to ground one's being in the *sinthome*, the 'Real of its being', and enjoy access to *jouissance* without shame, a Derridean chooses instead an empty belief in the future, tying him/herself to the vicissitudes of the symbolic. Verhaeghe and Declercq could easily be discussing the deconstructed self when they pity the analysand who has reached the end of analysis and still chooses to *believe* in the symbolic dimension of their symptoms; 'it can barely be considered an identity because it shifts continuously through the chain of signifiers' (VD, p.68). Furthermore, if, as they claim, '[b]elief in the symptom or letter is typical for the beginning of an analysis, not for the final phase' (VD, p.67), then surely it is only in choosing belief that one defies the teleological logic of a final destination?

But maybe 'choice' is a misleading term in this context. It is arguably true that a consciously chosen belief would be indistinguishable from an identification.²⁰ Belief is irreducible to conscious choice in the Derridean framework, as it also appears to be for Lacanians (though inconsistently), who after all do hold that 'the non-duped err'.²¹ Yet the standard Lacanian dogma is that analysis (cultural and clinical) culminates in traversing the symptom, this being 'the ultimate aim of psychoanalytic treatment [...] to undo the ultimate "passionate attachment" that guarantees the consistency of his/her being, and thus to undergo what Lacan calls "subjective destitution"'. (TS, p.266) And Žižek himself describes this as a 'choice', though he acknowledges that the process is 'not without its ambiguities' even in Lacan's own work (TS, p.295). There is a proviso that one is knowingly making a forced choice, i.e. making oneself the subject of an action which *de jure* and *de facto* is determined by one's drive fixations, whether one likes it or not: 'the only – but crucial and highest – freedom I am granted in drive is the freedom to choose the inevitable, freely to embrace my Destiny, which will happen to me in any case.' (TS, p.299) Nevertheless, in making the forced choice one apparently creates the possibility of the drives being satisfied otherwise, because one is no longer reliant on the foundational fantasy in the same manner:

[W]hen drive subjectifies itself, when the subject sees itself as the dreadful Thing, this other subjectivisation is, on the contrary, signalled by the sudden onset of *silence* – the idiotic babble of *jouissance* is interrupted, the subject *disengages* itself from its flow. (TS, p.305)

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It is this 'choice' to 'embrace my Destiny' which, from the Derridean perspective, ties Lacanian theory back into the 'economics of redemption'. Žižek would perhaps not disagree, in as much that he claims the advantage of the additional level of the Lacanian critique vis-à-vis other post-structuralisms (i.e. the articulation of the level of obscene enjoyment underpinning the imaginary and symbolic dimensions of social order) means that 'Lacan leaves open the possibility of a radical rearticulation of the entire symbolic field by means of an *act* proper, a passage through symbolic death.' (TS, p.262) It is my claim that *Skyfall* stages such an '*act* proper', but the outcome is not a radical, revolutionary jolt towards new forms of affective and symbolic organisation; it is a revitalised quasi-Fascistic fantasy which is newly resistant to our critical antibodies. This brings us back to the notion of 'choice' in Derrida, in terms of which it would be strictly nonsensical to talk of choosing *identification* with the symptom, as the auto-immune symptom cannot be hypostatised and isolated from context in such a way that one can say 'I am *this* Monster': in the context of *Skyfall*, what does it really mean to say that the viewer identifies with Raoul or, for that matter, with Bond? Derrida's notion of autoimmunity, then, also *forces* a choice, but it is the choice to continue the difficult process of 'self-contesting attestation [which] keeps the auto-immune community alive, which is to say, open to something other and more than itself.' (FK, p.87)

As we have seen, autoimmunity is also thematised in *Skyfall*, but unlike the standard Žižekian-Lacanian critical frame adopted by Edelman, with its notion of drive as destiny, autoimmune effects clearly cannot find their telos in its narrative closure, where Bond chooses the subjectification of his death drive in the symbolic order of the British security network. Since auto-immunity invites us to consider the biological, social and psychological mechanisms by which a body 'protects itself against its self-protection by destroying its own immune system' (FK, p.80), it incites critical theory to see both the dangers and possibilities in this uncanny mimetic relation between radical theory and popular conservative fantasy without thereby succumbing to defensive talk of commercial co-optation, or jubilatory talk of the imminent demise of 'capitalist realism'²².

VI

Lest I appear to be identifying with Derrida against Lacan (I am. But as Jane Gallop has noted, it's hard to avoid the compulsion to identify with one or the other when our parents fall out²³), I should point out that Lacanian writer and analyst Darian Leader has written interestingly on the symbolic dimension of the very biology of human immune responses.

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While recognising the dangers of 'grafting' metaphors onto the science of immune functioning, per Susan Sontag's well-known polemics against the metaphors of illness, Leader is interested in how 'the language of self and non-self, recognition and rejection, identity and foreignness, suggests that the terms of psychological theory have been translated right onto the cellular structure of the body.' (LC, p.223) He argues that autoimmune disorders such as arthritis and diabetes may have a psychological component routed in problems of identification, or differentiation of self from other, and takes particular interest in a surprising coincidence of left-handedness and autoimmune disorders. What if, Leader asks, we think about handedness in relation to the manner in which we are captured as infants by the gaze of the other?

Surely the question of handedness will, in some instances, be linked to the way that such identifications occur. If you identify with the person facing you in the sense of literally seeing them as a mirror image, your left will be their right, if they are right-handed. But if you identify with the point from which they are looking at you, left and right are preserved. [...] If someone has identified at an unconscious level with someone else and feels hostility towards that person [...] it would seem logical that the hostility would be directed back towards themselves. (LC, p.226)

Doesn't the very attempt to be convincingly 'Leftist' by choosing to identify with the monster (the excluded, marginalised, oppressed) therefore suggest the opposite identification might also be at work? With this sinister thought in mind, let's look at Edelman's remarks on political subjectivity. I think he wilfully misreads the Derridean conception of the 'future' in labelling it a conservative, evolutionary one. Indeed, it goes to the heart of my issue with the concept of reproductive futurism that Edelman conflates conservatism with an 'evolutionary model' – a pairing which would be hard to map onto any ideological history of social conservatism or religious creationism, especially in the bible belt of the USA whose reactionary elements provide so much of the empirical and anecdotal support for Edelman's theory. Evolution, of course, is not a steady march of progress; it proceeds via the unanticipated appearance of queer forms in the cycles of reproduction: species, ideas, communities, individuals evolve (metaphorically in some cases) only if they have the capacity to adapt themselves to things which appear to be out-of-place, foreign, disturbing our comfortable orientations.

Opening oneself to the unexpected always means opening oneself to the future, as Edelman himself acknowledges when he says in his paper on Derrida that he would want to be (but of course cannot wholly be) someone who 'let[s] the future be by being what lets the future.' Yet, for me, Edelman's refusal of any future-oriented political modality does not

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represent a challenge to the structural violence of normativity. Indeed, Edelman seems to welcome a particularly poisonous kind of conservative discourse. I do not suggest that such figures do not exist in reality or represent an insignificant minority worldwide (would it were so!), only that Edelman's *sinthomosexual* requires the fascinated gaze of the bigot to assure the integrity of 'his' being. I'll quote him at ungainly length here since his homogenised discussion of the political consciousnesses of right and left wing subjects is worth dwelling on:

[T]he 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 realise the social subject. Conservatives acknowledge this radical potential, which is also to say, this radical *threat* ['threat' is proudly italicised in the text] of queerness more fully than liberals, for conservatism pre-emptively imagines the wholesale rupturing of the symbolic fabric, whereas liberalism conservatively clings to a faith in its limitless elasticity. (NF, pp.13-14)

The cleanliness of this division, and the uncritical dogmatism with which he identifies an archetypal conservative logic and a complementary liberal one, somewhat belies his assertion that queerness 'can never define an identity; it can only ever disturb one' (NF, p.17). If that proposition were true, Edelman's vision of politics would have to be a wearily straight one. Anyway, he continues straight on along this dividing line, but as he does so one should note the slippage from a contrast of binary conservative and liberal psycho-caricatures to a supposedly complementary division between *the left* and *the right*;

The right [...] better sees the inherently conflictual aspect of identities, the constant danger that they face in alterity, the psychic anxiety with which they are lived; but the left better recognises 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 point of view 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 reproduce ourselves. (NF, p.14)

It hardly seems necessary to point out historical instances where agents of the political right have disavowed the tensions inherent to the social order, splitting off the antagonistic element into some marginal group, and projecting a vision of social harmony into a utopic future where that queer stain has been wiped clean. But I would suggest that, against the avowed intention of his argument, Edelman does not want to shatter a social imaginary in which male-male sexuality is condemned, and those identified as queer attacked symbolically and physically; he too wants to fix the (male) homosexual subject in the righteous posture of

the martyr to Truth, to the truth of the Lacanian Real. Affecting requisite irony, he hammers home the final lines of *No Future* with violent declaratives, before assuring us that the threat-cum-promise of the future actually 'is always happening', now, in the present progressive:

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. (NF p.154)

So Edelman invites the blows to keep on coming – sacrifice me, make my queer undead text into your scarecrow, fixing me forever as a symbol of radical threat to a structure which can never radically change. What such a posture avoids, for surely it is the immobile posture of the scarecrow that Edelman desires, is the anxiety which the openness of a future aspect exposes us to in the present. It is when we speak of the future that the impossibility of assuring our position haunts us, whether that position be framed as symbolic, imaginary or real. As Derrida puts it; 'It is the future that determines the unappropriability of the event, not the present or the past.' *No Future*, then, must also mean no alarms and no surprises.²⁴ The blows which the social order 'will always' reign down on the figure of its own death drive become numbing in Edelman's formulation, rather than a sharp pain which may jolt us to care, to resist, to fight, to protect, to unite, to break away – maybe to enjoy our subjection, but *hopefully* to change it.

VII

To return to the Bond movie, I have argued that in a limited sense it is possible to read *Skyfall* through the prism of sinthomosexuality. To do so we have all the tools for critique neatly laid out and we have only to find examples of the figural position of homosexuality as the container for the queer, evil, death-bringing doubling Bond, who must be killed so that Bond can return to 'life', fully invested in his symbolic role once again. All this fits neatly with the idea that reproductive futurism always treats the queer as a security threat, to be eliminated by any means. However, one should remember that the movie firmly establishes Bond's own queer side (which is sometimes heavily alluded to in Ian Fleming's writing, but hitherto occluded in the movies), Raoul shows Bond an image of himself 'barely held together by your pills and your drink' (to which Bond buoyantly adds, 'Don't forget my pathetic love of country'), and reads Bond his psychological evaluation, concealed from him by MI6, which states that he is officially unfit for duty due to his physical frailty and his 'pathological rejection of authority, based on unresolved childhood trauma'.

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Queer as Bond is, unmarried, without children or relatives of any kind – the movie continually reminds us of this – these are the very qualities for which the secret service values him. As Raoul's parable has it, he is a rat who has been trained to desire the flesh of other rats, and therefore to desire the death of the entire plague which the rat community represents. The movie makes this logic absolutely explicit. What option for Bond then, when the symbolic material which holds him together, along with pills and drink, no longer functions; when he can recognise that his love of the signifier Britain is 'pathetic'? Even if he identifies with the Real of his drives, as Raoul invites him to do, surely his murderous drives have been organised around the master signifier 'Pax Britannica'. So what can he do at the end of the film but return to work for the state?

Sure enough, following the death of the queer double, it is as if Bond is able to wash away the stain of queerness, and for that matter of non-productivity. Prior to the encounter with Raoul, Bond had disappeared from his professional role, officially killed on active duty in Turkey; when he returns to defend his country, his only comment on his absence is that he had been 'enjoying death'. Only after the death of Raoul is Bond really back. The film ends with him receiving a file containing his latest assignment from the new head of MI6 (in keeping with the reactionary trajectory of the film, it is a man once again, replacing Judi Dench's maternal M, who died in Bond's arms in the final showdown between Bond and his queer double. In this as in much else the film retrenches a post-feminist fantasy, and backtracks on the ambiguous concession which the franchise was forced to make to shifting gender roles by casting Dench as an ice maiden Head of MI6 in the 1990s).

But when his new boss asks Bond the question which a capitalist order will always demand of us, above and beyond anything we might do with our genitals, 'Are you ready to get back to work?', Bond's reply reveals that he has not committed the one cardinal sin of the Lacanian dogma which Lee Edelman cites so fervently; he has not ceded his desire: 'With pleasure, M. [cut from two shot of M and Bond, to a close up of Craig's inscrutable face] With pleasure.' His reply is accompanied with a facial twitch which is equal parts respectful smile and half ironic smirk. Patriotic pride is so deeply instilled in his psyche that recognising its absurdity only heightens Bond's libidinal fidelity. In the shadowy realms of his obscene capacity to enjoy bringing death, Bond needs Britain, needs Britain's desire for him. At the end of the film he is able to reconcile his queerness to his position within the institution that uses his perverse death drive to maintain itself against similar rogue elements – and a caption flashes up on screen: '50 years: James Bond will return'.

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Does the death of the queer villain signal a retreat from the Real of *jouissance* that the movie had been shamelessly displaying, into the comfort of reactionary fantasy? Another case of capitalism co-opting the dangerous thrills which its antagonists provide while outsourcing and off-shoring their abnormal taint – like the Spanish grandmother who turns the encroaching rats against themselves. Will Bond always return, as the death drive of the Symbolic Order, to keep the *sinthomosexual* at bay and out there?

Perhaps not. The explicit figuration of the death drive and (sint)homosexuality in this movie is not a confirmation of the unalterable symbolic exclusions of reproductive futurism, but a disturbing yet brilliant aesthetic decision to breath new life into an outdated franchise by stripping back its symbolic carapace and leaving it to stand as a meaningless yet intensely cathected sign of a destitute imperial mythology. An aesthetic decision that is historically and geographically specific. Not just flaunting its *sinthomosexuality*, *Skyfall* also shows its audience around the (sint)home counties circa 2012!

Nina Power has argued that Edelman can only ignore the instability of the symbolic order by abstracting it from history and the contradictions of political praxis through the figure of the *sinthomosexual*, 'reifying sexuality as something that 'refuses' meaning, Edelman oddly substantializes it'²⁵, missing the fact that 'what is even less thinkable than queer negativity is the social itself, comprised as it is of the unstable split between the public and the private.' (NRF, p.14) Likewise, eschewing a reading of the movie focused on the way the *sinthomosexual* supposedly disrupts the fundamental fantasy, we see an autoimmune logic at the heart of Bond's triadic relationship with Raoul and the British security edifice which encourages us to believe that this very public/private, inside-outside split must be coming apart in order for a movie like *Skyfall* to emerge, barely held together by Bond's pills and drink and its disillusioned view of transgressive violence and sexuality. What would be truly transgressive would be a Bond movie in which the hero (or the creative team) not only recognised that everything Bond fights for has been stripped of meaning, leaving only the compulsive repetitions of the death drive, but then attended faithfully to the shifting boundaries of identity, the self attacking the self, yes, but more radically threatening the delimitations of self and other, of foreign body and interior defences such that if 'autoimmunity is more or less suicidal, [...] more seriously still it threatens always to rob suicide itself of its meaning and supposed integrity.' (R, p.45)

Read this way, can one see hysterical, autoimmunitary modes of errant social reproduction at war inside the body of the film that its narrative frame scarcely contains? As

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critical readers we should perhaps avoid the desire to give an omniscient answer to this question, lest we succumb to penetration anxiety. The experience of consuming *Skyfall* generated a good deal of anxiety in me; writing about it for your eyes, only more so. It is a dangerous text, perhaps more so than many more overtly radical artistic responses to the contemporary decline of nation states and symbolic authorities. A dangerously insistent symptom, resistant to both medication and ready-made critical analyses, it will not let up until we make some profound lifestyle changes. *Skyfall* should not be interpreted presumptuously, nor dismissed – for the moment, it should be carefully attended to. It's available now on DVD, Blu Ray and digital download.

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- 1 Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2004), p. 153. Further references to this edition, henceforth abbreviated 'NF', are given after quotations in the text.
 - 2 *Skyfall*, dir. by Sam Mendes (Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 2012).
 - 3 Darian Leader and David Corfield, *Why Do People Get Ill? Exploring the Mind-body Connection* (London: Penguin, 2008), p. 224. Further references to this edition, henceforth abbreviated 'LC', are given after quotations in the text.
 - 4 How explicitly Raoul is presented as 'homosexual' may be is a contentious point, but as I will argue, the movie is initially unambiguous about his sexual interest in Bond.
 - 5 Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, 2nd edn (London: Verso, 2008), p. 140. Further references to this edition, henceforth abbreviated 'SO', are given after quotations in the text.
 - 6 Stephen Wright, 'Skyfall and Bond's psychotic misogyny', *Overland Literary Journal* (2012) <<http://overland.org.au/2012/11/skyfall-bonds-psychotic-misogyny/>> [accessed 28 May 2014].
 - 7 Sigmund Freud, 'The Uncanny', *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XVII (1917-1919): An Infantile Neurosis and Other Works* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1955), p. 240. Further references to this edition, henceforth abbreviated 'TU', are given after quotations in the text.
 - 8 Sara Ahmed, *On Being Included: Racism and Diversity in Institutional Life* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2012), p. 179.
 - 9 Paul Verhaeghe and Frederic Declercq, 'Lacan's goal of analysis: *Le Sinthome* or the feminine way', in *Essays on the final Lacan. Re-inventing the symptom*, ed. by L. Thurston (New York: The Other Press), pp. 59-83 (p.64). Further references to this paper, henceforth abbreviated 'VD', are given after quotations in the text.
 - 10 Bruce Fink, *Lacan to the Letter: Reading Écrits Slowly* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), pp. 66-67.
 - 11 Slavoj Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject: The Absent Centre of Political Ontology* (London: Verso, 1999), p. 249. Further references to this edition, henceforth abbreviated 'TS', are given after quotations in the text.
 - 12 Let's briefly consider the recent revelations about the humiliating and intimidating treatment inflicted by UK immigration officials upon LGBT individuals seeking asylum from persecution. It seems to me entirely plausible that a Conservative-led Home Office desperate to reduce immigration figures is privately willing to

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endorse any form of prejudice in order to intimidate and deter asylum claimants with questions such as 'What is it about men's backsides that attracts you?' and implausible assessment criteria causing people to go so far as to submit video evidence to try to 'prove' their sexuality. However, I would note that when this became public knowledge it was felt necessary for the Home Secretary to order a review into the processing of such claims, and to issue a statement distancing government policy from its supposed misapplication. It was 'disappointing' she declared, 'that inappropriate questions appear to have been asked. We are committed to treating all asylum claimants with respect and dignity and we want to continue to improve on current practice in this area.' (Press Association, 'Theresa May orders review of gay asylum claim handling', *Guardian*, 29 March 2014, <<http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2014/mar/29/theresa-may-gay-asylum-claim-handling?INTCMP=ILCNETTXT3487>> [accessed 15 July 2014]). Without remotely endorsing the government's policy, nor the rhetoric of this statement, I think one cannot not airily dismiss the official admission that such a procedure was 'inappropriate', especially in a discursive context where the government and right-wing press feel they can routinely demonize asylum claimants. Indeed, while the aggressive tactics used by these Home Office employees were undoubtedly tinged with a disgusted fascination which indicates that the figure of 'the homosexual' can still be a *residual* container for excessive, illegitimate and dangerous pleasure, I'd suggest that the harassment was more immediately motivated by the sedimented association between 'asylum seeker' and 'bogus': the null hypothesis being that *as immigrants* these people were likely to 'fake' their homosexuality, in a shameless attempt to take jobs and benefits away from 'legitimate' British homosexuals!

- 13 See Eng et al, 'What's Queer about Queer Theory Now?' in *Social Text*, 84-85 (2005), 1-18.
- 14 Leo Bersani, *Homos* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 76.
- 15 Jacques Derrida, 'Faith and Knowledge', in *Acts of Religion* (London: Routledge, 2002), p.81. Further references to this edition, henceforth abbreviated 'FK', are given after quotations in the text.
- 16 Jacques Derrida, 'Autoimmunity: Real and Symbolic Suicides – A Dialogue with Jacques Derrida', in *Philosophy in a Time of Terror: Dialogues With Jurgen Habermas And Jacques Derrida* by Giovanna Borradori (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2004), pp. 85-136 (pp. 98-99). Further references to this edition, henceforth abbreviated 'AI', are given after quotations in the text.
- 17 Lee Edelman, 'Against Survival: Queerness in a Time That's Out of Joint', *Shakespeare Quarterly* 62:2 (Summer 2011) <http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/shakespeare_quarterly/v062/62.2.edelman.html> [accessed 1 Nov 2013]. Further references to this paper, henceforth abbreviated 'AS', are given after quotations in the text.
- 18 Interviewed in a different context Derrida described his own 'heroic phantasm' as follows:

When I was very young - and until quite recently - I used to project a film in my mind of someone who, by night, plants bombs on the railway: blowing up the enemy structure, planting the delayed-action device and then watching the explosion or at least hearing it from a distance. I see very well that this image, which translates a deep phantasmic compulsion, could be illustrated by deconstructive operations, which consist in planting discreetly, with a delayed-action mechanism, devices that all of a sudden put a transit route out of commission, making the enemies movements more hazardous. But the friend, too, will have to live and think differently, know where he's going, tread lightly. (Jacques Derrida and Maurizio Ferraris, *I Have A Taste For The Secret* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2002), pp. 51-52)
- 19 Jacques Derrida, *Rogues: Two Essays on Reason* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005), p. xiv, p. xv.

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Further references to this edition, henceforth abbreviated 'R', are given after quotations in the text.

- 20 I am grateful to and threatened by the editors, who have raised this crucial objection to my argument.
- 21 See, for example, Slavoj Žižek, 'How the Non-Duped Err', *Qui Parle*, 4 (Fall 1990), 1-20.
- 22 While this term has a longer history, I follow the usage adapted in Mark Fisher's *Capitalist Realism* (Winchester: Zero Books, 2009). Fisher defines it as '[t]he attitude of ironic distance proper to postmodern capitalism [...] supposed to immunize us against the seductions of fanaticism [...] analogous to the deflationary position of a depressive who believes that any positive state, any hope, is a dangerous illusion.' p. 5.
- 23 'Derrida's critique of Lacan made me feel like the child of divorcing parents; if they were opposed, then I had to choose; if I had to choose then I had to lose [...] Through my panic I could not help but see that they were indeed not together; I could not both bring them together and be where they were; we could not all three be together.' Jane Gallop, *Anecdotal Theory* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2002), p. 95
- 24 I ought to give a citation here, but if Edelman doesn't give credit to John Lydon, when the poor man has been reduced to making butter commercials to fund his recent artistic output, why should I cite bands who can afford the radical gesture of a pay-what-you-want album release?
- 25 Nina Power, 'Non-Reproductive Futurism. Rancièrè's rational equality against Edelman's body apolitic', *borderlands ejournal* 8:2 (2009), <http://www.borderlands.net.au/vol8no2_2009/power_futurism.pdf> [accessed 1 Nov 2013], p. 13. Further references to this paper, henceforth abbreviated 'NRF', are given after quotations in the text.

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