

Fuck the Kids!

Lee Edelman's "No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive" develops and expands Lacan's concept of the *sinthome* in order to examine and polemicize the adversarial relationship between *sinthomosexuality* and reproductive futurity. Edelman's concept of *sinthomosexuality* combines the Lacanian term *sinthome*, with homosexuality, understood as a cultural figure opposed to both life and futurity. The focus of Edelman's polemic is reproductive futurism, in which the child is the focal point, symbolizing the negation of the past and the fulfillment of the future. Reproductive futurism is the belief that "the child remains the perpetual horizon of every acknowledge politics, the fantasmatic beneficiary of every political intervention" (Edelman 2). This belief is embedded within political discourse, and motivated by the desire to create purposeful futures for our children. Reproductive futurism preserves the absolute privileges of heteronormativity, by casting out the possibility of queer resistance, and rendering any alternative unthinkable (Edelman 2). Within the core of reproductive futurism, the child emblemizes the future by "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" (Edelman 37).

In footnote 10 of "No Future" Edelman explains why his definition of the *sinthomosexual* is masculine-centric, stating that his "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" (Edelman 165). Moreover, he acknowledges that the principle examples in his book focus on male *sinthomosexuality* because our culture most frequently imagines "*sinthomosexuality* as embodied by machine-like men

who stand outside the 'natural' order of sexual reproduction”(Edelman 165). In addition, he argues that the overwhelming prevalence of cultural representations of masculine-centric sinthomosexuals “reflects, no doubt, a gender bias that continues to view women as 'naturally' bound more closely to sociality, reproduction, and domesticating emotion” (Edelman 165). Furthermore, he argues in depictions of women who fail to embrace and adhere to these natural attributes, and thus closely assimilate “the sort of fatality the sinthomosexual embodies, such refusals are themselves most often 'explained' by reference to the intense fixation of their emotional attachments” (Edelman 165). Finally, he states that “any number of female characters might be considered in terms of sinthomosexuality [...] to engage them here would necessitate a parsing of the category to identify their differences from sinthomosexuality” (Edelman 166). With specific reference to “The Leather Daddy and the Femme” a queer erotic narrative by Carol Queen, in this paper I will further Edelman’s exploration of sinthomosexuality, in order to demonstrate how Edelman’s argument regarding sinthomosexuality does accommodate multiple intersections of gender and sexual identification. Additionally, such an exploration of gendered and sexual differences would further elaborate the adversarial relationship between reproductive futurism and sinthomosexuality, and demonstrate the fluidity of sinthomosexuality as both a structural position and subjectivity. However, it is important to note that these subjectivities must present a threat to the Symbolic order through non-normative sexual practices and identities, embracing the sort of fatality the sinthomosexual embodies through their rejection of the fantasy of reproductive futurism, thus manifesting an engagement with the death drive and access to jouissance.

In contrast to the significance of the child in reproductive futurism, sinthomosexuality “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” (Edelman 37). The sinthome is impervious to analysis, is jouissance itself, and connects us to the Real, which Lacan declares is the death drive (Edelman 38). The death drive emerges in consequence to the Symbolic and refers to “the inarticulate surplus that dismantles the subject from within” (Edelman 9). Sinthomosexuality “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”” (Edelman 74). Like the death drive, the sinthomosexual refuses “the immobility of sexualization to which we are delivered by Symbolic law and the promise of sexual relation” (Edelman 74). Sinthomosexuality breaks down the force of the Real, by scorning and rejecting the reification that turns sexed subjects and petrified identities into monoliths. Within the adversarial relationship between sinthomosexuality and reproductive futurism, Sinthomosexuality represents then the site of confrontation between the fantasy of futurism and the insistence of jouissance, rendering the fantasy of futurism in relation to the death drive (Edelman 38) The sinthomosexual is a subject that rejects reproductive futurism and whose subjectivity is singularly dependent on a particular node of enjoyment and fixation on its own jouissance.

Edelman’s argument regarding the structure of the subject is grounded in psychoanalytic theory and integrates the fundamental concepts of Lacan’s three orders, the Imaginary, the Symbolic and the Real. The structural orders interdependence and interaction between the Real, the Symbolic, and the Imaginary are employed through

Lacan's theory of the Borromean Knot. The fourth addition to the triad, the sinthome ties together a knot that constantly threatens to come undone. The sinthome provides the organization of a subject's access to jouissance, which is essential for the subject's vitality. Within psychoanalysis identity formation is constituted through the Imaginary, which upholds this image of the whole self, which is continuously affirmed and validated through the structure of language in the Symbolic. Our identities are also subject to drives, which threaten to destabilize and disfigure our Imaginary and Symbolic identities. As outlined by Edelman the sinthomosexual denies the fantasy of futurism, and through their rejection of Symbolic meaning evoke and embrace the drive of jouissance. The sinthomosexual embodies the jouissance of the Real that is internal to the Symbolic order. The Lacanian concept of jouissance is described as akin to the death drive, and entails "a movement beyond the pleasure principle, beyond the distinctions of pleasure and pain, a violent passage beyond the bounds of identity, meaning, and law." (Edelman 25) Like the death drive, jouissance represents an outside to reproductive futurity, with the capacity to disfigure the symbolic. Through the sinthomosexuals access to jouissance and embodiment of a future negating drive, the sinthomosexual represents a threat to reproductive futurism, and a threat to the Symbolic order. Through this rejection of the fantasy, the sinthomosexual chooses to identify with the lack, in order to access pure jouissance. The death drive manifests itself in two different forms of jouissance: in the first "it gets attached to a particular object or end...congealing identity around the fantasy of...fulfillment by means of that object."(Edelman 25) In the second form jouissance evokes the death drive to the extent that it "tears the fabric of Symbolic reality as we know...unraveling the solidarity of every object... 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.” (Edelman 25) The figure of the child is bound within the first drive, and bound in the second is the figure of the queer. Both figures represent the polemic between reproductive futurism and sinthomosexuality.

"The Leather Daddy and the Femme," is a queer erotic narrative that exemplifies the queering of both sexual and gender identity through the representation of subjectivities that present a threat to the Symbolic order through non-normative sexual and gender identities and erotic practice. Throughout the narrative Carol Queen demonstrates the contradictions that occur between the sexual acts a subject engages in and the subjects sexual identity, disrupting the conventional understandings of sex, gender and sexual identity, and sexuality. The narrative begins with what appears to be a young queer boy cruising for a leather daddy, the daddy accepts the proposition and the two travel separately to his home. The two then begin to engage in sexual intercourse. The boy's character tells us: "any second now he could realize that I was no ordinary boy, and that gave me a great rush of adrenaline" (Queen 41). The leather daddy soon becomes aware of the queer boys biological sex: "A little too much pussy under that boy-drag. A man wouldn't want to get himself...confused" (Queen 41). However, the boy's biological sex does not hinder their sexual encounter, and the two continue to engage in non-normative heterosexual intercourse.

During this time the queer boy posits his personal desire for wholeness within his identity: "I really want the men I fuck to turn me over and see the whole me: the woman in the boy, the boy in the woman" (Queen 43). Explaining the difficulty of negotiating gender and sexual identity and representation. The queer boy then goes to the bathroom

to “grow up,” and returns to the bedroom as a femme-fatal. The two proceed to engage in heterosexual, non-reproductive sex symbolized by the daddy’s use of a condom. Once they had finished, the two “lay together in a tangle of sweaty limbs, not man and woman, just animals, two sated animals” (Queen 46). The next morning while the daddy is in the shower, the femme fatal retrieves a dildo and harness from her bag, fastened them and joins the daddy for a morning fuck in the shower. The strap-on represents the epitome of non-reproduction, simulating a phallus while lacking phallic reproductive capabilities. However, to the femme it represented a tool through the use of which she could access an excess of non-normative erotic acts and forms of pleasure. “Strapping on a cock means strapping on a new kind of responsibility [...] I’m glad I don’t have it all the time” (Queen 47). Again, the two engage in a range of non-normative sexual acts, beginning with the femme receiving fellatio from the daddy, followed by the daddy receiving anal sex from the femme.

Throughout their entire sexual experience, the daddy and the femme/queer boy present a categorical gender fuck, in which sexual and gender identity are based on desire rather than biology, as clearly articulated by the queer boy: “Fuck sex differences, fuck ‘men are...’ and ‘women are...’”(Queen 51). The non-normative sexual acts and gender fluidity and identity depicted in this narrative, correlate with the non-normative sexual acts and sexual/ gender identity attributed to sinthomosexuality. Both subjects represent multiple sexual and gender identities, engage in non-reproductive sexual acts for the purpose of pleasure rather than reproduction through their use of contraceptives and dildos. Therefore rejecting the fantasy of reproductive futurism and presenting a threat to the Symbolic order. Both subjects choose to reject the monolithic identity imposed on

sexed bodies and normative stasis, undoing representation, and demonstrating sexual mobility and difference. Rather than engaging with the heteronormative discourse of reproductive futurism, they instead negate futurity by accessing pure jouissance in the Real, and evoking the death drive. The subjects like the sinthomosexual scorn the belief in the final signifier, rejecting the materialized meaning the child symbolizes and endangering the fantasy of survival, in effect dismantling the Symbolic meaning and Symbolic order (Edelman 37). Finally, sinthomosexuality, like queer theory and queer subjectivities “breaks down the mortifying structures that give us ourselves as selves and does so with all the forces of the Real that such forms must fail to signify” (Edelman 74).

Edelman conceptualizes the queer –including the queer subjects presented in Queen’s work- as residing in the structural position of the sinthomosexual, presenting a viable threat against reproductive futurism and disfiguring the Symbolic due to their non-normative sexualities/subjectivities and unnatural access to jouissance. The queer embodies the remainder of the real, and “exposes sexuality’s inevitable coloration by the drive.” (Edelman 27) Additionally, Edelman argues the structural position of sinthomosexual will always pose a threat to the order of things, and the structural position of the sinthomosexual in the Real must remain in order for the Symbolic to function. Heteronormativity through political rhetoric and symbolic language of reproductive futurism disavows access to jouissance and sinthomosexuality, casting homosexuality as a space of alienation and lack, akin to death. Thus, sinthomosexuality stands symbolically in opposition to reproductive futurism, standing between heterosexual optimism and its realization. Moreover, Edelman infused the sinthome with homosexuality not because of sexuality, rather in order to employ its contemptible connotation and its end to fantasy

and futurity. Sinthomosexuality is neither a fixed gender nor sexual identity; rather the sinthomosexual is a structural position, standing in the place of the drive, rejecting the fantasy of futurity, presenting a viable threat to the Symbolic order. Sinthomosexuality can be embodied by multiple intersections of gender and sexual identities, however these identities must explicitly challenge the symbolic order, and thus be considered non-normative.

Work Cited

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