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Perversion and Nonknowledge as Technique for Madness

Summary:

This article conjoins Lacan's *Seminar* discussions of perversion with Bataille's notion of *nonknowledge* at the core of being. It shows how Lacan's critique of commonplace mis-readings of nonknowledge, likened to *Talking to Brick Walls*, reveals precisely psychoanalytic knowledge, of the polymorphous-perverse truth of *jouissance*, here at stake. It intervenes on Lacan's linking of Bataille's *inner-experience*, that "God is a whore," to Schreber's persecutory delusion, to restore eroticism to a technique for managing madness—one that involves an easing of the strictures of Western metaphysics.

Introduction

It is 1971 in the chapel of Sainte-Anne hospital where Lacan (2011/2017) invokes Bataille's notion of "non-knowledge" (p. 9), reminiscing about days gone by as a junior doctor while delivering a fresh series of talks, the first three of which are now collected under the provocative title *Talking to Brick Walls (Je parle aux murs)*.^[2] But it is *not* that the proverbial "brick walls" being targeted here are Bataille's own—nor is it solely those of Lacan's (2011/2017) followers who, despite their "good will," had been misreading Bataille along with "the mystics" (p. 9). Rather, it is the psychiatric profession, both then and now—and the "junior doctors," "asylum interns," the "doctors who are currently interns" (Lacan, 2011/2017, p. 3)—as the course of this article will show.

This article will eventually coalesce Lacan's (1994/2020) Seminar discussions of perversion into a clarification of Bataille's easily misunderstood notion of nonknowledge, but will do so firstly via the comments in *Talking to Brick Walls* directed initially at the *passion for ignorance* Lacan (2011/2017) detects between "these walls" (p. 4), or *ears*, of the hospital of Sainte-Anne. The aim will then become to recover the *inner-experience* Bataille theorises as a technique for uncovering our unconscious perversity, through an erotic affirmation which takes it *from nonknowledge to knowledge*, which I suggest can be of value also as a psychoanalytic technique for managing madness.

Lacan's Brick Walls

Lacan's (2011/2017) polemic against the "doctors" opens with an insistence on the "distance that lies between work and knowledge," likely referring to the distance between psychoanalytic knowledge, which he is "promising" (p. 3) to supply, and the ordinary knowledge, consciousness, or conscientiousness required to function amidst the order of things as a now split subject. But soon enough Lacan is also invoking how a kind of "ignorance may be considered a passion" here and how, "between these walls" of Sainte-Anne,

where he used to dwell “round about 1925–6,” well “as far as ignorance is concerned, the interns were over their heads in it” (p. 4).

“It was doubtless a group effect,” Lacan (2011/2017, p. 4) will add, referring to the *Group Psychology* articulated by Freud (1921/2001d) of follow the leader, or their pet ideology, through the process of identification or introjection of an external object “*in the place of their ego-ideal*” (pp. 93–5, p. 116). But although this invokes for Lacan (2011/2017) how “ignorance is a passion,” this, perhaps counter-intuitively, “does not make it of lesser worth” or necessarily a “deficiency” (p. 4). A strangely positive sense of ignorance thus also purports to be opening up here to Lacan, who proceeds now to somehow have it “linked to knowledge,” as a “way of establishing knowledge, of turning it into established knowledge” (p. 4).

This requires an explanation for us today, where ignorance is a charge or invective that denotes precisely the opposite of knowledge. But not always so, Lacan (2011/2017) recalls, where in order to be a good doctor it was once proper and “normal” for one to “display an ignorance that was, so to speak, consolidated” (p. 5). To illustrate this, Lacan (2011/2017) goes further back in history to the time of Nicolaus Cusanus in the mid-15th century, where the term “*docta ignorantia*” meant literally a *learned ignorance*, as the “highest form of knowledge”—and Lacan implores that we here, too, must once again start from this “correlation between ignorance and knowledge” (p. 5). This is because rather than being aware of the present limits of science or knowledge, and open in some non-committal, un-dogmatic way to what we might remain ignorant of beyond them, Lacan’s sense is that for some time now, in particular, “ignorance in medicine has not been sufficiently learned” but surviving instead on “superstition” (p. 5).

A strong charge is Lacan (2011/2017) here levelling, “after forty-five years” since he was last found “frequenting these walls” of Sainte-Anne (p. 5), suggesting something of a *foreclosure*—“*Verwerfung*, the fact of rejecting, outside all the fields of the symbolic” (p. 90)—of the unconscious, in pointing to how the “degree of passionate ignorance that reigned back then” was not just unlearned but “unmentionable” (pp. 5–6). Later Lacan (2011/2017) suggests it is the coupling of science with Calvinism that rejects “castration,” how part of us is split-off as unconscious concerning “matter of love” (p. 91), in linking all to the accumulation of ever more goods or profits as the master’s discourse “turned into the discourse of the capitalist” (p. 90)^[3]—such that even “psychiatric hospitals” became a place where “the capitalist discourse is perfectly coherent with itself” (p. 101). Since then, Lacan (2011/2017) can at least “commend” the work of Henri Ey as a kind of “civiliser of this ignorance,” although not without risking “irony” in immediately pointing to how, “as Freud noted, civilisation doesn’t remove the discontent” but rather “quite the contrary” (p. 6).

Civilisation, in short, is to be preferred over barbarism, but in its taming of the latter and what Lacan (2011/2017) calls the “spectacular” levels of ignorance involved, it can still entail a kind of repression which leads to the discontents, the “being *ill at ease*” (p. 6), that could benefit from psychoanalysis. And it is thus for Lacan (2011/2017) that on its own the “antipsychiatry” movement currently in tow, “regardless of the illusions” that some of it maintains, resolves nothing of the “question of the mentally ill” or “psychoses” (p. 7), which would involve *undoing* the “exclusion” of the question of “what madness means” through an “analysis of discourse” (p. 89)—while in any case the “liberation from the psychiatrist” is still “a long way off” (p. 7).

This is because psychiatrists remain in the dominant place to “effectively perform a social service,” Lacan (2011/2017) laments with passing reference to “Foucault’s book, *History of Madness*” (p. 7)—conjuring thoughts of correcting, disciplining, schooling the soul by playing *trial-and-error* on the brain with tiny pills—while psychoanalysis itself for Lacan has also “improved nothing” with regards to the channels of knowledge or “particular seat of knowledge” involved here (p. 8). And it is only now, moreover, on this rather sombre but realist note, that Lacan (2011/2017) finally turns to analyse the notion of “non-knowledge” (p. 9) in his friend Bataille.

Lacan's Nonknowledge

Stuart Kendall (2007), for one, records that while Bataille's first marriage with Sylvia ended, they nevertheless remained "close enough for Bataille to spend summer vacations with Sylvia and her second husband, Bataille's friend Jacques Lacan, at his country home" (p. 116). And indeed, initially when Lacan (2011/2017) turns to *nonknowledge*, it is to rebuke *not* Bataille but those of his own "followers" who, despite the "good will," having heard such of Lacan's commentary discussed on knowledge's historically distorted "correlate of ignorance," had risked here a further "misunderstanding" (p. 9). "I don't know what got into some of them," Lacan (2011/2017) remarks, "it was something literary of course," and "lying around in the writings of Georges Bataille, for instance" (p. 9), suggesting it was also elsewhere . . .

"I'm referring to non-knowledge," Lacan (2011/2017) explains, which Bataille "gave a lecture on" and is "perhaps lying around in two or three spots in his writings," but—and this is the point—"goodness knows he didn't have a field day with it" (p. 9). For with this latter stress Lacan is correctly pointing out that nonknowledge is neither the essence nor mainstay of Bataille's whole oeuvre—spanning over three decades of creative intellectual work—but nor is it an extreme scepticism pushed into mysticism, as I will now show.

In fact, Lacan (2011/2017) continues, on the day of the nonknowledge lecture Bataille gave in the "Salle de géographie [geography room] in Saint-Germain-des-Près," which Lacan notes one is generally "familiar with because it's a place of culture," Bataille actually got up and stood there in a deliberate Dadaist silence, he "didn't utter a single word" (pp. 9–10). But this for Lacan "was not a bad way of making a display of non-knowledge," even though "people jeered" as they grew impatient, for "they were wrong to, because," Lacan adds, with a hint of sarcasm, "non-knowledge is all the rage nowadays," which one can find "all over the place in the mystics," where it is "even with them that it means something" (p. 10).

Being quick to give nonknowledge *meaning*, however, risks saying too much, positing knowledge where there is none, or mere conjecture, dubious speculation, at best—constituting the kind of distorted, inflated *imaginary* of the mystics that psychoanalysis must needs pair back. This is why Lacan can admire Bataille's preferred stance of silence in the face of this, a veritable *silence of the real*. Not just for the mystics, moreover, as Lacan (2011/2017) goes on to explain what a distorted view of nonknowledge can also "serve to rally" and "recruit by way of clientele, crass ignorance, for example"—whereas cognate manifestations such as "sloth" and "institutionalisation," in the "concentration camps" of the "university system," are even "welcome, because they're all the rage" which, Lacan observes, gives itself over to "a whole lot of mimicry" (pp. 10–11).

In the end, then, for Lacan (2011/2017), this nonknowledge introduces a "lasting confusion on a delicate subject" in psychoanalysis, which is what Lacan calls the "palpable frontier between truth and knowledge" (p. 11)—having noted that the "difference between knowledge and truth" (p. 10), as stipulated in his 1965–66 *Écrits* article "Science and Truth" (p. 69), led some of his followers to conclude that "if truth is not knowledge, then it's non-knowledge" according to an "Aristotelian logic" of "all that is not black is non-black" (p. 10). But this is not to say for Lacan that suddenly non-black has no spectrum relation at all with black, by way of an excluded middle, or, moreover, that nonknowledge has none with knowledge, which is why Lacan (2011/2017) insists on placing nonknowledge *not* with error but as "truth" (p. 10). And this is very much the truth of the unconscious for Lacan, which, he reminds us, while it is somewhat barred, is governed not by any mysticism or feigned, fashionable ignorance or scepticism but is, rather, through metaphor and metonymy, displacement and condensation, an analytically decipherable *rebus*, "*structured like a language*" (p. 11, p. 17).

Bataille's Inner Experience

Lacan's (1966/2006b) stress in "Science and Truth" is that with knowledge and truth, "the division in which these two terms come together is not to be derived from a difference in origin," for example, some external metaphysical mystical one, as he tries to indicate with the coiling-twisting *single* band of "a topological model, the Möbius strip" (p. 727). For it is, rather, something internal, inside, something *inner*: and it is thus that I turn now to Bataille's 1943 *Inner Experience* text, where the reference to nonknowledge is first put to print. The aim will be to show that not only does a careful reading of Bataille free him of any false charge of "mysticism" or wayward ignorance, but also provides a *technique* for managing madness that can support that of psychoanalysis—where, of course, vice versa, what Lacan (2011/2017) calls the "psychoanalyst's knowledge" (p. 73, p. 107), or the "unknown knowledge" of "the unconscious" (p. 17), can also throw a clarifying light on what Bataille here has done.

As Kendall (2014) introduces a recent translation, "*Inner-Experience* was the first full-length book to carry the name of the forty-four-year-old Georges Bataille on its cover" (pp. vii)—even though he was already known for his work with the Collège de Sociologie and Acéphale, the journals *Documents* and *La Critique Sociale*, and the "pseudonymously published" erotica *Story of the Eye* (1928/2001c) and *Madame Edwarda* (1941/2003). And while Lacan (2011/2017) is right to note that the notion of nonknowledge is not all throughout Bataille's writings, who indeed never did "have a field day with it" (p. 9), it can still be of value to examine what Bataille actually did say on nonknowledge—in addition to the public silence—so as to extract its *inner*-experience...

Bataille (1954/2014) in fact writes of first reaching the "extremity of knowledge" by wanting to "mimic absolute knowledge," or via any method supposing an "infinite effort of the mind wanting knowledge" (p. 58)—that is, not necessarily Hegel's (p. 110)—whereupon the mind reaches its limits on the periphery and finds where it will "know nothing" (p. 58). It is the *anguish* that thereby emerges from not knowing anymore that Bataille (1954/2014) calls "nonknowledge," but he is also quick to clarify that "here nonknowledge does not do away with particular knowledge," but only "its meaning, lifts all meaning from it" (p. 58). This is a key qualification as it contravenes the notion that all logical empirically verifiable knowledge is suddenly abolished simply by reaching its present limits, cutting against any inflated sceptical ignorance, but also against any mystical theological fantasies that one may imagine or recycle from history to clog up all the gaps, and even encroach beyond them.

In other words, the earth is still not flat, it still goes around the sun and not vice versa, and "we did indeed go from geo- to heliocentrism," as Lacan (2011/2017) puts it, with the real revolution or *blow* struck to "cosmological narcissism" (p. 15) being for Lacan (1975/1999) when Kepler found "it turns in an ellipse" and not a perfect circle around a "centre" as if replicating the imagined perfection of a God, Good, or afterlife in heaven (pp. 42–3).^[4] Hence, Bataille (1954/2014) depicts this relation to the limits of knowledge, that neither does away with real knowledge nor adds fake knowledge in the form of false beliefs, with the capitalised statement "NONKNOWLEDGE LAYS BARE," but also so that one can "*see* what knowledge was hiding up to there" (p. 57).

This is because what we *do* know can indeed hide what we do not at times, even simply as a consequence of where or not we choose to focus. But the critical thing here in Bataille (1954/2014) is not to fend off the anguish of not-knowing by hastily forging sense or meaning to the *nonknowledge*—which the latter can, in any case, through epistemic honesty, immediately dissolve back into a "nonsense without remedy" (p. 58)—but rather to embrace how "in anguish appears nudity, which leads to ecstasy" (p. 57).

Such an erotic ecstasy is telling psychoanalytically, as it is only relative to its following of a nudity marred with anguish—and *barred* by a pre-existing knowledge *clad* with imaginised meaning—that Bataille (1954/2014) wants to return "with a new knowledge," where existence "recovers a meaning" that refers *only* to this ecstatic "rapture" (p. 58). And the "movement starts again from here," where, Bataille notes, one can "develop the new knowledge" in writings such as this: "I have just done so," he writes, *resurfacing* via "communication" as loss of self ceases "with a new knowledge" (p. 58). But without the ecstasy linked to embracing a nudity reached through anguish, one risks remaining in an asceticism that does not touch

nonknowledge at all.

Bataille's Anti-Ascetics

Bataille's (1954/2014) critique of the ascetic ideal, for its mystical pantomime of nonknowledge, is imperative here, depicted as a "bloodless, non-laughing particle of life, grumbling in front of excess joy, lacking freedom" and, in short, a "deception" (p. 28). This is such for Bataille that with regards to knowledge, "the extremity is accessible through excess not through lack," with the latter merely amounting to "an impotent poverty" (p. 28). Bataille explains that the only thing that thus requires "renunciation" is the ascetic ideal itself, as it actually masks a vain "pretension to become everything, by possession of God, etc"—such as with "St. John of the Cross himself," Bataille reports, who wrote "*to arrive at being all*" (p. 28).

This is where the ascetic denies erotically sensual objects, "to kill the desire that links one to the object," but only now to make "deliverance, salvation, the possession of the most desirable object" (Bataille, 1954/2014, p. 28)—in a procedure which epistemically and optimistically assumes too much by way of afterlives, immortal souls, and God-Father confessors gate-keeping a heaven beyond the stars. For Bataille (1954/2014), moreover, this is only how one self-mutilates through a "sacrifice of a part of oneself" as of to "save another part" (p. 29). But if one wants to recover this lost part and *experience* it, "to lose oneself entirely" within it, Bataille will stress that it is possible only with a "bacchanal movement, not calm in any way," with appeals to an "excess of forces, to movements of drunkenness, of desire" (p. 29).

Bataille (1954/2014) thus concludes that the asceticism that "knows nothing of eroticism is no less foreign to the end of the possible" than it is "without inner-experience," where one must rather choose the "arduous, stormy path" of a being "whole" only in the sense of being "non mutilated" (p. 30). This more erotic wholism is also the basis of his critique of Hegel's "'system'" where "poetry, laughter, ecstasy are nothing," which "Hegel hastily rids himself of" to pursue "knowledge" with an "immense fatigue" linked for Bataille to "the horror of a blind spot" (p. 113). Thus, when it comes to those haunted by the idea of "no sexual excess" or "absolute chastity," Bataille affirms that he will "dare to dismiss these pretensions," so as to suggest instead a Dionysian "wildness" that "returns the old maid—and whoever resembles her—back to their domestic poverty" (p. 30).

Regarding Hegel, Bataille (1954/2014) later clarifies that "poetry, laughter, ecstasy" are systemically elided by him because they do not lead to an alleged "completed man" linked by "knowledge" to "distinct consciousness, activity, work" or the "absence of death" but are, rather, "short of dying of them," what one leaves "like a thief" as one "leaves a woman after making love" (p. 113). In a separate 1953 article published on "Nonknowledge," moreover, Bataille (1953/2001b) explains this by suggesting that "entering into nonknowledge" is really an "enjoyment [*jouissance*] of the night" and only a "slow death"—that is, one that is thus "possible to enjoy" (p. 204).

Bataille's Nietzsche

It is Bataille's (1954/2014) Nietzsche influence that comes to the fore here, with this scornful dismissal of asceticism along the *inner* path of nonknowledge, writing that "the night of nonknowledge," linked to rising above the need to "be everything" in the mystical sense—or to "turn away from the self" in the ascetic sense—"neither adds nor takes away anything from Nietzsche's teaching" (p. 32). As examples of this, Bataille (1954/2014) will stress precisely its promotion of "laughter," "risk," the "exaltation of virtues" and "forces" (p. 32). This speaks to the critique of the oppositional "reduction" or "negation of nature" Bataille (1954/2014, pp. 81–2) wages in the section of *Inner Experience* titled "Blue of Noon," after the at the time unpublished novel completed in 1935 but not published until 1957 (1957/1988), which contained a part of

the same text.^[5] Bataille (1954/2014), moreover, is here not just juxtaposing one arbitrary ethical choice to another but pointing to something much more fundamental, in decrying the “servitude” of the ascetic’s “laughable renunciation” that means the “earth is at its feet like scraps,” even though “above, the sky is empty” (p. 82). But Bataille (1954/2014) will also concede that he has “tended more than Nietzsche toward the night of nonknowledge,” and “insisted on the sense” of this being the “death of God”—noting by comparison that Nietzsche “does not linger” as much here in such “swamps where, as if bogged down,” Bataille “spends time” (p. 33n227).

Nevertheless, Bataille (1954/2014) will discern that “Nietzsche himself would be misunderstood if one did not go to this depth,” of a kind of *erotic atheology*—as indeed he has been, Bataille laments, having “had, till now, superficial consequences, as imposing as they may be” (p. 33). And while we might think here of the Nazi appropriations of Bataille’s time of writing, we could also of the many attempts since to misappropriate Nietzsche’s work to the various competing idealisms and prevailing world views (*Weltanschauung*), along with Bataille’s own work itself, which motivated Lacan’s initial intervention on *nonknowledge*.^[6] Thus, in order to avoid such superficial consequences ourselves, imposing or otherwise, I turn back to what Lacan (2011/2017) “initially called *The Psychoanalyst’s Knowledge*” in his dialogue with *Brick Walls* (p. 73), to see what might be further extracted for a technique for managing madness such as these “... or Worse” (p. 34).

Perverse Analyst-Knowledge

Lacan’s (2011/2018) “... or worse” appellation became the title of the resumption of his long running Seminar which his lectures to *Brick Walls* at Sainte-Anne coincided with. But it was also here at Sainte-Anne’s where Lacan (2011/2017) explains what this means by saying: “at the place of these three dots you can put whatever you like,” and then admit that things might actually be “worse” (p. 34). Lacan (2011/2017) had just finished his account of the failure, for instance, of the Enlightenment goal to “set out a knowledge that would not pay homage to any power,” insofar as the ensuing “French revolution” only yielded the valets of “the establishment of a race of masters who were more ferocious than any who had previously been seen at work” (pp. 33–4)—namely, the “bourgeois” (pp. 21–2)—with just a “little twist” required to turn the master’s discourse “into the discourse of the capitalist” (p. 60). By comparison, moreover, the psychoanalyst for Lacan (2011/2017, p. 34) can only convey a knowledge that “can’t do anything about it,” a “knowledge of powerlessness”—but as Miller (2011/2017) so aptly puts it in the blurb of *Talking to Brick Walls*, “this, at least, respects the real.”

With *respect* to this real—the sovereignty of which Bataille would also note is beyond any pre-conceived moral goal or utilitarian purpose^[7]—Miller (2011/2017) explains that what analysis supposes apropos of it is a knowledge “of the unconscious,” which one arrives at along the “path of truth” by free-associating what comes to mind, “frankly and with no frills,” where *jouissance* is met in “terms of libido.” This is precisely the polymorphous *perverse* truth of the drives, available to *knowledge* through psychoanalytic interpretation of the memorialised and thus signifierised erotic residues of their psycho-sexual development. But what Miller (2011/2017) notes blocks this path is not only the “passion for might” and “power” which obliterates any experience involving *not* so much efficient but “*para-praxes*”—where as put back in Lacan’s (1975/1991) first Seminar, “truth emerges from the mistake” (p. 265)^[8]—but also the passionate ignorance which seizes on “established knowledge” (Miller, 2011/2017) at the expense of what Lacan (2011/2017) is calling “psychoanalyst’s knowledge” (p. 107): For “if the unconscious is something surprising,” Lacan affirms, “it’s because this kind of knowledge is something else” (p. 16).

Lacan (2011/2017) here is reminding us that this paradoxically “unknown knowledge”, a “knowledge that is unknown to itself,” is not at all reducible to how instinctually “an animal knows, by and large, what it needs” (pp. 16–17). Because for us, being the *speaking* animal we are, it is what occurs after we distance ourselves *symbolically* from our now latent animality via taboos and prohibitions, meaning at issue in psychoanalysis

for Lacan (2011/2017) is “a knowledge that is well and truly articulated” or “structured like a language” (p. 17). Later Lacan (2011/2017) illustrates this with the rhetorical question of how or “in the name of what would there be perversion in animal species?” in the name of “what jouissance, perverse or otherwise?” even when they “couple!”—adding that one would “really have to belong to humankind to believe that copulating gives rise to jouissance” (p. 68). This evokes Lacan’s (1986/1997b) *Ethics Seminar* claim in 1960 that “without a transgression there is no access to jouissance” (p. 177)—along with Bataille’s (1973/2001d) earlier insight in his 1948 *Theory of Religion*, published posthumously in 1973, that “animality is immediacy or immanence,” that there is nothing of taboo to transgress for them because they are already there *in the real*—that “every animal is *in the world like water in water*” (p. 17, p. 19).

Not so for the *human* animal we are anymore, after we evolve to the symbolic articulation of taboos on immediate impulses of sex and death, both prehistorically as a species and through socialisation as children. This is why Lacan (2011/2017) suggests “the dimension by which the speaking being is distinct from animals” is now in the “wide-open gap” where we “lost” our “way”—*potentially gone mad*—but able thus also “to treat the body” *erotically* by periodically transgressing our taboos with “what is called, strictly speaking, jouissance” (p. 23).^[9] It is this *jouissance* that implies the perverse analyst-knowledge, lost to the unconscious—to *the night of nonknowledge*—for if it becomes overly barred, this where a potential madness exacerbates, begins to hold sway.

Technique for Madness

Freud (1905/2001a) succinctly captures the connection between the three general forms of madness the barring of this (non)knowledge can bring in an original footnote to the “Neurosis and Perversion” subsection of his 1905 *Three Essays on Sexuality*. Here is where he writes that: “the contents of the clearly conscious fantasies of perverts,” which in “favourable circumstances” can be transformed into behaviour; of the “delusional fears of paranoiacs,” which are “projected in a hostile sense on to other people”; and of “the unconscious fantasies of hysterics” or neurotics in general, which “psychoanalysis reveals behind their symptoms”—all *coincide* with each other, “even down to their details” (p. 165n2).

This clearly puts the pervert *closer* to the side of truth, where Freud (1905/2001a) notes that “symptoms are formed in part at the cost of abnormal sexuality,” as well as the “so-called *normal*,” in giving “expression (by conversion) to instincts which would be described as *perverse*” if allowed to be “expressed directly”—meaning that the “*neuroses are, so to say, the negative of perversions*” (p. 165). But this is not to say that perversions are completely without defensive structure, as Lacan’s (1994/2020) *Seminar IV on The Object Relation* is ever keen to point out—where the fetishes involved can even suggest a “*Verleugnung* [...] disavowing” of the maternal lack of phallus yet also involve later Oedipal material back-mixed in with the ensuing castration complex, together with the even earlier *pre-genital* oral-anal, scopic-invocatory, sado-masochistic fixations and subject-object “alternation of identifications” (p. 148, p. 152). Such is what, for example, may result in a “defence against homosexuality” in the case of a boy, where Lacan (1994/2020) joins Freud and Gillespie in noting “*how narrow may be the margin between fetishism and homosexuality*” (p. 152), as the boy endows the girl with a phallus to desire her and avoid castration phobia (Gillespie, 1940, p. 414). But it is also what can involve a defence against heterosexuality in the case of a girl, such as with Freud’s (1920/2001c) *Homosexual Woman* case (pp. 145–72) discussed repeatedly by Lacan (1994/2020), where metaphorically taking her father’s “penis” to romance a lady with is a defensive metonymy against her initially “frustrated” wish to *bear* her father’s child (p. 122, p. 139).

Nevertheless, in terms of proximity there is often still more *directly* erotic truth to the manifestations of perversion, given the perverse traits of the drives in general, which are evinced even beneath Schreber’s hyper-distorted psychotic projections. This is where Lacan (1981/1997a) notes the “double reversal” in Freud’s formulae of: “*I do not love him, I hate him*,” but only because “*He hates me*” (p. 42, p. 90)—or as Freud (1911/2001b) explains, “because he persecutes me,” where the persecutor is “someone who was once

loved” (p. 63). Such a someone for Schreber eventually becomes the God who wants to *change him into a woman to impregnate* and thus *persecute* him according to a delusional metaphor which signals for Lacan (1981/1997a) foreclosure, “*Verwerfung*” (p. 12, p. 149), of the many perverse truths of desire and *real* relation to sexual difference, including “primitive bisexuality” (p. 85) and the concomitant thought of “castration” (p. 12, p. 89).^[10] For here is where, Freud (1911/2001b) observes, “internal perceptions” or “feelings” are rejected, projected, “replaced by external ones” (p. 63), where it seems what was once unsymbolised and “abolished internally returns from without” (p. 71)—or as Lacan (1981/1997a) puts it “re-emerges in the real” (p. 13), *hallucinated* as if it were real, “that is, accompanied by a sense of reality” (p. 14).

This brings us finally to the enigmatic connection Lacan (1981/1997a) draws between Schreber’s invective, that “God is a whore” (p. 100), and Bataille’s “inner-experience,” the “odd extremity” of which is crystallised for Lacan (1958/2006a) in the novel “*Madame Edwarda*” (p. 485, p. 488n36). This is the novel written contemporaneously by Bataille (1941/2003) with *Inner Experience*, where God is now literally a whore, or vice-versa, in the form of the eponymous prostitute Bataille calls: “GOD figured as a public whore and gone crazy” (p. 150, p. 152, p. 155). I suggest what Bataille wants to do here is return the *hyper*-denaturalised, desexualised and ascetic God-Father figure of Judeo/Christian-Platonism to its original *erotic* cycle with the non-known perverse ground it initially tried to hide or escape from: But without, like the psychotic Schreber, having to reabsorb it into what Freud (1911/2001b) records as a kind of born-again virgin-Mary “fantasy” or “redeemer delusion” (p. 18, pp. 20–1)—which is where, Lacan (1997a) notes, the “fantasy of pregnancy and procreation” in “his delusion ends up, that a new humanity, Schreberian in spirit, has to be re-engendered by him” (p. 168).

Lacan (1997a), moreover, marks that throughout Schreber’s delusion, from the “imminent rape” and “threat to his virility” at the start, to the “effusion of voluptuousness” at the end, there is nevertheless the feeling of “*being forsaken*” (pp. 126–7). Thus, Lacan (1997a) also warns against reducing Schreber’s psychosis to his delusion at the “imaginary” level (p. 106), as some kind of spiritual essence coming out—invoking rather Wolf Man’s severed finger hallucination to underscore how this delusion is a symptom of an initial foreclosure against a “threat of castration,” as if a homoerotic impulse *literally* meant being female and lost penis: hence the frightened foreclosure of sexed difference that now “refuses access” to the “symbolic world” of what one has “nevertheless experienced” but “wants to know nothing about” (pp. 12–13).

It is, then, only as a consequence of this *refusal* that Freud (1911/2001b) can quote Schreber later saying what occurred in his body was “similar to the conception of Jesus Christ in an immaculate virgin,” in “a woman who had never had intercourse with a man”—where “nerves of God corresponding to male semen” were somehow “projected” into his body and “impregnation had taken place” (p. 32n). For such was only the “secondary” (Freud, 1911/2001b, p. 18) attempt at cure, stabilisation, “recovery,” “reconstruction” (p. 71), after, as Lacan (1958/2006a) provocatively states it, Schreber tells “the Name-of-the-Father to go fuck itself, with the Name of God right behind it” (p. 485)—as if to *excrete* on the “whole world” (Freud, 1911/2001b, p. 26)—whereupon the signifier was “unleashed in the real” as the critical function of the “Name-of-the-Father began to collapse” (Lacan, 1958/2006a, p. 485).^[11]

Conclusion

Without this paternal function to help him properly affirm, distantiate, or differentiate the maternal body and adequately symbolise its perceived “lack,” “castration”—*and the polymorphous-perverse knowledge and desire this erotically entails*—poor Schreber has little agency in the cascading series of catastrophes that soon unfold in him.^[12] Bataille, however, with the technique of drawing perversion out from nonknowledge I have here discussed to disclose the non-known truth of unconscious desire, requires no such thing in any ascetic redeemer ideal—as neither should we who are fortunate to not be psychotic seek to build another church or theology around Schreber’s final puritan solution, to reinforce the *un*-learned ignorance of the

neuroses. But nor should we merely attempt to psychiatrically drug this attempted *return* of the unconscious into some kind of capitalist submission! For Bataille's will is to recover for knowledge the original *sexual-animal* sense of the *erotic* sacred that existed before the Christian-Platonic dualism of spirit as Good and matter as evil became the hegemonic ideology—in what Nietzsche records as the slide of the late Roman era into the Dark Ages that ensued as the logical consequence of such a mass-institutionalised madness.

I conclude, thus, that Lacan's (1958/2006a, p. 485) observation that Schreber's inner-experience is "ahead of its time," apropos of temporarily calling God a *whore* in rebelling against his plight, also reveals Schreber left sorely stranded *far behind*—from paradoxically not being able to go back properly far enough! For *whore* is something still wholly derisory for him to be hastily eschewed pursuant to the Judeo/Christian-Platonic traditions: where our animal aspects, in the ways of Aphrodite, were shoved too far into nonknowledge on the sexual plane, expunged from the sacred and denigrated moralistically as "perverse." But with perversion and nonknowledge as a technique of inner-experience, here, aided with Bataille and Lacan—wherein the implacable perversity of unconscious desire can be better accessed, affirmed, symbolised and *known* again, brought to light—I suggest that we ourselves can continue to correct this slide into a darkness that lasts *for ages ... or worse!* ... with an improved technique for managing madness.

Why? Because where perverse sexual desires are no longer necessitated to be located *out* in some externally marginalised or demonised object, there too is a subject able to enjoy and affirm them as nestled deep within their own unconscious nonknowledge with their origins intact, without going mad. It means the neurotic subject can *know again* of the repressed perversion beneath their symptom, the perverted subject can *know again* what was disavowed vis-à-vis the expected maternal phallus, and the psychotic subject can also, to an extent, *know again* that foreclosed in their paranoia is their own polymorphous perversity, which is affirmable both as bearer and object of the phallus. Nonknowledge here becomes learned once more: whereas to merely consign our perversion to it beckons madness galore!—namely, that of trying to systematically deprive the Other of the very *jouissance*-knowledge we remain ignorant of properly *experiencing within*. . .

Humanity achieves its inner experience at the instant when bursting out of the chrysalis it feels that it is tearing itself, not tearing something outside that resists it. Bataille, *Eroticism* (1957/2001a, p. 39)

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Notes:

[1] This research was initially presented at the Lacan Circle of Australia International Conference, “We’re All Mad Here,” November 25, 2022.

[2] For the final four Sainte-Anne talks see Lacan’s (2011/2018) *Seminar XIX* (pp. 51–64, pp. 78–94, pp. 128–45, pp. 169–86).

[3] In *Seminar XVII* Lacan (1991/2007) tracks this *rejection* back further to the Hebraic roots of Christianity: in Yahweh’s “ferocious ignorance,” about “religious practices” blending “supernatural agencies in with nature itself,” and founded on “a certain type of knowledge—sexual knowledge” (p. 136).

[4] For analysis of Lacan’s general under-emphasis of the empirical aspect of science (the senses, observation and experiment), see in particular chapter 6 section 6.2 of (Themi, 2014, pp. 117–27).

[5] The novel is set during the Spanish Civil War. For discussion of its depiction of how the *ascetic* negation of nature affects a “superficial socialism,” see chapter 6 of Themi (2021, pp. 149–72). For analysis of Nietzsche’s genealogical critique of “*anti-nature*” denaturalising morality, see in particular chapters 4–6 of Themi (2014, pp. 65–127).

[6] Freud (1933/2001e) notes that *if* psychoanalysis accepts a world-view it is “the scientific one,” which is only one by *de facto* since it accepts the “limitation to what is at the moment knowable” as *not* derived mystically from “revelation, intuition or divination,” but from “intellectual working-over of carefully scrutinised observations” and “research” (pp. 158–59).

[7] For analysis of Bataille's (1976/1999) sovereignty in *Accursed Share*, see chapter 3 section 3.3 of Themí (2021, pp. 88–92).

[8] Lacan (1975/1991) adds, “truth grabs error by the scruff of the neck in the mistake” (p. 265). This is not to suggest the superstition that every mistake is automatically laden with hidden truth or meaning other than the general one that humans are fallible.

[9] Eroticism here can be defined as re-accessing libido that has been previously prohibited, which requires transgressing said prohibition or taboo, deviating from it, which is hence “perverse” with respect to it. Further genealogical discussion of the erotic taboo-transgression co-relation can be found in Themí (2015, pp. 312–35). This is an earlier article version of chapter 1, “Bataille, Nietzsche, Lacan, and the *Real* of Erotics,” in Themí (2021, pp. 15–46).

[10] See also Lacan's (1981/1997a) *Seminar III* (p. 30, p. 86, p. 89, p. 321).

[11] In an *Écrits* note Lacan (2006a) also criticises reducing Schreber here to having “regressed to the anal phase” as if he were a common neurotic simply repressing it, stressing how subsequent to *foreclosure* for the psychotic it really is like the cosmos is infinitely dispersed with their anal elements (p. 488n35). In *Seminar III* Lacan (1981/1997a) likens the neurosis-psychosis distinction to one where people imagine “that however much of a barrier there is, it's like putting up a partition in a grain store” where “the rats get through in the end,” “perforating the partition wall” (p. 166).

[12] For more on the question of *symbolisation* and *castration*, see respective Index entries in Lacan's (1981/1997a) *Seminar III* (p. 46, pp. 81–3, p. 86, pp. 176–77, and pp. 12–13, p. 30, p. 89, pp. 105–6, p. 176, pp. 307–8, p. 312, p. 315).

Bio:

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