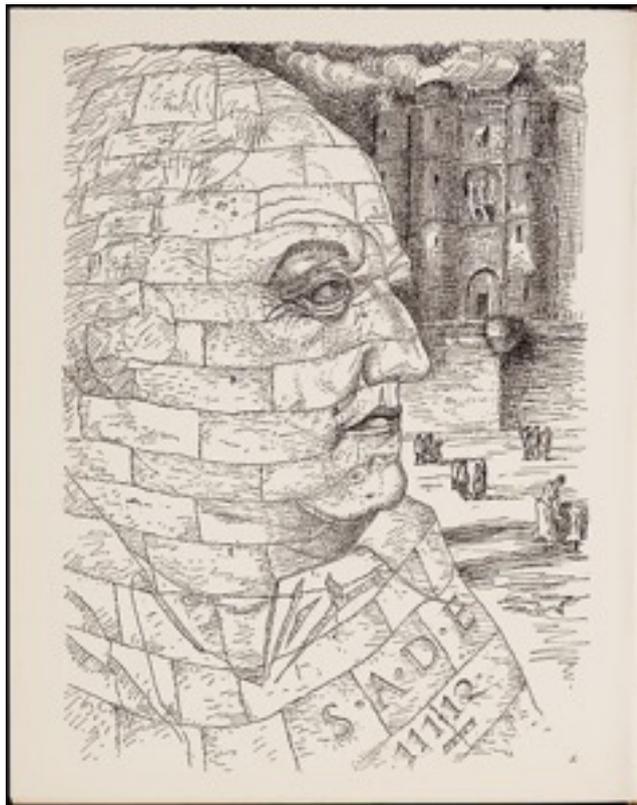


Marquis de Sade Revisited

Naturalism, Ethics and Politics

or

Reading Sade with Spinoza and Deleuze



Portrait of Sade by Man Ray (1942)

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August 2015

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Acknowledgements

An acknowledgment is a formality hence too often not sincere at all. Let me be sincere and only thank the people who really helped me writing this thesis. I thank my supervisor dr. Rick Dolphijn for the liberty to express my own thoughts and for giving me a great degree of autonomy during writing this thesis as well as in other courses. His view on the academy as well as on teaching is truly inspirational and a relief compared to the rigid rest. I thank dr. Birgit Kaiser for willing to be my second assessor. I thank my girl, Marit, for keeping me calm and providing the perfect environment. I thank all those dead, old and grey thinkers who give me inspiration every day, especially Deleuze and Spinoza who show and teach me that there is so much beauty in the world. I would like to thank Albert Heijn on the Burgermeester Reigerstraat in Utrecht for selling me the much needed coffee, cigarettes and wine. I would like to thank my uncles Maarten and Joost who respectively helped me financially and emotionally. Lastly, I thank my parents for bringing me up in a home full of books, art and music.

Abbreviations of frequently cited works

Works by Sade

| | |
|----------|---|
| Justine | <i>Justine, or Good Conduct Well Chastised</i> (1791) |
| Juliette | <i>Juliette, or Vice Amply Rewarded</i> (1797) |
| PIB | <i>Philosophy in the Bedroom</i> (1795) |
| SOD | <i>The 120 days of Sodom</i> (1785) |

Works by Deleuze (and Guattari)

| | |
|-----|--|
| ATP | <i>A Thousand Plateaus</i> (1980) |
| CC | <i>Masochism: Coldness and Cruelty</i> (1967) |
| EPS | <i>Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza</i> (1968) |
| NP | <i>Nietzsche & Philosophy</i> (1962) |
| N | <i>Negotiations 1972 -1990</i> (1990) |
| SPP | <i>Spinoza: Practical Philosophy</i> (1970) |
| WIP | <i>What is Philosophy?</i> (1991) |

N.B. The in-text citation of these works will be the title of the work followed by page number ,e.g., *SPP*, 27). Other works that I use will follow the author/page number logic (i.e. Barthes, 71), unless otherwise indicated.

N.B.B. If I cite from Spinoza's *Ethics* I follow the commonly used annotation system which works as follows: *Ethics* chapter two, proposition 21, Scholium, will be E2P21, Schol.

My ideal, when I write about an author, would be to write nothing that could cause him sadness, or if he is dead, that might make him weep in his grave. [...] Give back to an author a little of the joy, the energy, the live and love and politics that he knew how to give and invent.

Gilles Deleuze, *Dialogues*

I address myself only to people capable of hearing me out, and they will read me without any danger.

Marquis de Sade, *Philosophy in the Bedroom*

Not many words will be required now to show that Nature has no end set before it, and that all final causes are nothing but human fictions.

Spinoza, *Ethics*

There where eternities in which it did not exist.

Nietzsche, *On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense*

Introduction

What does it mean to think? To really come up with new ideas? To connect things, to bring about new things? Who am I to think about the nature of thinking? I can only say what happens from my own viewpoint, from what I feel or what the senses give to me empirically. My thought or thinking-process is never comprehensive; never a whole, always fragmented. There are rather loose ideas, often highly associative and disconnected. They, those ideas, emerge within the deep space of the brain; in a millisecond there is a feeling of absolute clarity and lucidity caused by synaptic fissures that arrive and go like lightening over a dark plain on which unformed elements dwell. It is by this light that one can oversee these elements, only for a very short time, these abstract bodies that were always already there waiting to become something. “There is no heaven for concepts” (WIP, 5), Deleuze and Guattari rightfully state, “they must be invented, fabricated, or rather created and would be nothing without their creator’s signature” (ibid.) I have to forge these elements, connect and augment them with each other and give them a reason to start walking down a certain path. There is no Platonic world of ideas.

What does it mean to engage (just engage), that is, what does it mean to start a relation with a writer, a transhistorical relation? They speak to you and they don’t ever hear your answers, they never reply to the forged abstractions that walk down from the dark plain. One can only guess. Of course there are charming solutions: “let us declare him or her dead” and the linguistic box of pandora was opened. But there is a real world, right? My brain is real, my thoughts are real, matter is real. I am willing to destroy my linguistic capacity only to experience the world like the animal experiences the world, or for that

matter, a flying stone experiences the world. Because that would be a real account of the world: to be matter and to be within matter, to “live in the world like water in water” (Bataille, 19), we will see Sade had a similar desire to *be* matter.

Writing is utterly insufficient in describing, representing the world or to express thought. If we could only for one moment open our brains and let thought speak for itself, without representation, only traveling particles that show us something like a radical ontology. But we are stuck with the predicament of consciousness, but then, what are we without consciousness? Is it possible to break through letters, words and sentences and to reunite oneself with the universe? A stranger asks: “Who are your ancestors, what is your filiation?” and one replies “the sun and the stars.” We are all interstellar creatures.

What does it mean to create an academic piece? “I expect to find X in Y through methodology Z” is the often heard recipe. When did the Trojan horse of the Royal or State science enter the humanities, or was it always already possessed by the State? Why did we let the State incorporate us, why are we being devoured? Writing brings one to unexpected places, it is therefore impossible to really *know* what is coming to you. It is a rhizome which slowly but steadily spreads out on my screen.

Sometimes, in the desert of rigidity, one hears voices from afar. And if one is patient and quiet these voices become clearer, louder, they become intelligible. They gradually swell like a Wagnerian overture, and on a certain point they overrule, exceed, *shout out* the wild, nonetheless dull, chatter of the establishment of the doxa. Those are the desert voices from the margin that come to reclaim. Reclaim the position they *should* have occupied, but they are condemned to that profound nomadism. Sade is one of those voices.

And one might ask: “what do you do”? Answering this question is impossible, because I am not a literary scholar (literary studies is often applied philosophy), nor a philosopher (the philosopher does not like the literary scholar because of the prostitution of his trade), neither a philologist (analyzing literature is to destroy emotion) or writer (it is impos-

sible to compose art after years of destroying it by the means analysis, critique or deconstruction). The only answer could be: “I am a theoretician, I *know* theory”, and the conversation is over.

What does it mean to engage with an immense and heterogeneous oeuvre such as that of the Marquis de Sade (hereafter Sade)? Sade could probably never imagine that his work would be of huge importance in twentieth century (mainly French) philosophy. What is more, he never wanted such attention or appraisal, for he writes in his last will: “The ditch once covered over, above it acorns shall be strewn, in order that the spot becomes green again, and the copse grown back thick over it, the traces of my grave may disappear from the face of the earth as I trust the memory of me shall fade out of the minds of all men [...]” (Sade, 157). But this is, as often the case by Sade, an ambiguous statement. It is not so much a wish (or will) to not be remembered for his crimes or alleged appalling literature, but the very last argumentation or proposition of a materialist philosophy. Sade stays loyal to a transformative Nature until his very death. But, as many brilliant wo(men), Sade went down history rather miserably. For the greater audience Sade has become a vague echo or indicator of a dark mixture of pornography and violence. An anonymous name they associate with cheap mass-culture porn or bleak and empty novels like *Fifty Shades of Grey* (Sade would laugh at the mildness of this work). When did Sade become Sadism? It was the German/Austrian psychiatrist Richard von Kraft-Ebbing who coined the terms Sadism and Masochism first¹². What is more, he was the first who connected the two alleged pathologies, he writes: “The perfect counterpart of masochism is sadism. [...] The parallelism is perfect. All acts and situations used by the sadist in the active role, be-

¹ Though Sadism was already a widely used term in ‘underground’ scenes before Kraft-Ebbing, he was the first to ‘formalize’ the term. In his magnum opus *Psychopathia Sexualis* (1886).

² The pathological, sexological, psychological, psychoanalytical and psychiatric dimension of Sade is obviously a main theme. I, nevertheless will mainly focus on Sad’s (nature) philosophy, and only occasionally refer to sadism as pathology or its alleged connection with masochism.

come the object of the desire of the masochist in the passive role” (Kraft-Ebbing, 213). The interconnectedness of these pathologies is sustained and continued by Freud and if one consults the DSM V, nothing has changed in the past 130 years.

But Kraft-Ebbing was merely a cataloguer who collected pathologies (and case-studies), no, it is Sade who is the creator, the real psychiatrist, the clinician who invented every possible perversity humankind could possibly commit. He dared to enter the dark parts of the brain we only quickly oversee in sinister dreams or grim deliriums (and does the sweating, the rapid eye movement, the pain one feels, the voices one hears not indicate that the dream is real?).

If one decides to write about Sade, one decides at the same time to write about twentieth century French philosophy, or more broad, French cultural theory/criticism. Every thinker of good reputation wrote, as if indebted, extensively on the work of Sade. To name a few: Maurice Blanchot, Roland Barthes, Simone de Beauvoir, Pierre Klossowski, George Bataille, Jacques Lacan and, last but not least, Gilles Deleuze. Though they often refer to and praise each other, one clearly describes the specific ‘idiosyncrasies’ of their respective philosophical projects. In this way their studies are not only Sade-studies but, at the same time, also introductions to their own thought.

One may wonder what to do with such a saturated topic. What can one possibly add to the immense corpus of Sade-studies that would be new? And who am I to start dialogues with giants, let alone challenge them? Because I *have* something to add, but it is not via critique or polemics. I agree with Karen Barad when she says that “[c]ritique is all too often [...] a destructive practice meant to dismiss, to turn aside, to put someone or something down [...]. [T]his is a practice of negativity that I think is about subtraction, distancing and othering [...].” (Barad qtd. in Dolphijn & van der Tuin, 49). Rather I will, and this is above all important, read Sade *affirmatively*. What does Sade want to tell us? What does his libertines teach us? But it also a matter of ‘accidents’ and unintentionally: what do we

find in Sade that he himself did not foresee? In other words: to which concept brings Sade's oeuvre birth? Deleuze already wrote in the second cinema book (*The Movement Image*) that "[a] theory about cinema is not about cinema, but about the concepts that cinema gives rise to and which are themselves related to other concepts corresponding to other practices" (280). We are not criticizing, analyzing or theorizing Sade, we look at concepts that emerge when we engage with his books.

It might be clear that I am aiming for both a reevaluation (rehabilitation) and emancipation of Sade's thought. My project intends to value Sade in his nakedness, detached from the plethora of ideas (sometimes even clichés) that surround him. Not that I imply that preceding Sade-studies did not value Sade, but they nonetheless too often regress in formulating dualisms and furthermore too eagerly, too soon, too hastily discard Sade as philosopher. Consequently, an emancipation implies that we will, as said above, affirm Sade and undertake the effort to *seriously* consider him as someone, whether it be philosopher, theoretician, novelist (pornographer) clinician (pornologist) or thinker, who formulate convincing and valid ideas/concepts that we still could use today (as I will show in the last chapter).

How do we proceed? My principal guides and mentors in interpreting Sade are Spinoza and Deleuze. The former because there are in Sade Spinozian traces everywhere. But using Spinoza is double. Sade could not only be considered Spinozist (chapter one), we also use a Spinozian instrumentarium in order to pry open the ethical dimension of Sade which is, until today, still dominated by the transcendental binary of Good and Evil. We will use Deleuze not only because of his excellent reading of Sade (one of the few affirmative readings of Sade) in the monograph about Leopold von Sacher-Masoch *Coldness and Cruelty: Masochism*, but also because of the two brilliant books on Spinoza which are respectively *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza* and *Spinoza: Practical Phi-*

losophy. I will furthermore use several Deleuzian (and Guattarian) concepts in order provide a framework in which we can interpret Sade. It goes without saying that I also draw on the rich tradition of Sade-reception. Especially the readings of Blanchot, Barthes and Bataille have show themselves to be very useful in the present context, that is, that they read Sade affirmatively, be it in different ways. Blanchot elaborates on (among other things) Sade as philosopher, Barthes gives a brilliant reading of, which he calls, a Sadean ethnology, and Bataille formulates the interesting idea (though not without any problem) that Sadists or libertines are apathetic (this is especially interesting if we take the Spinozian passions in to account in chapter two). I furthermore rely on the excellent, comprehensive Sade-study of Lode Lauwaert³ (KU Leven) which offers an overview of the French Sade-reception. Lauwaert treats, respectively, the interpretations of Klossowski, Blanchot, Bataille, Lacan, Barthes and Deleuze. He furthermore offers useful historical and biographical facts about Sade's life. And in addition to this I also, qua general historical 'data', rely on Donald Thomas' biography⁴ of Sade.

This thesis consists of four chapters which can be read independently as separate essays rather than a comprehensive whole or study. Though there is a red line (we end chronologically: "Sade and Us") the several paragraphs should be regarded as little explorations or studies that nonetheless are being classified under several philosophical 'themes'. The chapters respectively treat the topics naturalism, politics and ethics. The fourth and last chapter, "Sade and Us", will be at the same time an conclusion and an exploration of how Sade's thought could be of use to us today. Chapter one (*Naturalism*), will treat Sade's philosophy and consist of three parts: first we will focus on Sade's, which I would like to call, *guerilla-philosophy*, that is, his manner of philosophizing. Secondly we will focus

³ Lauwaert, Lode. *Markies de Sade. Essays over ethiek en kliniek, literatuur and natuur*. Kalmthout: Pelckmans, 2014.

⁴ Thomas, Donald. *Markies de Sade. De definitieve biografie*. Amsterdam: Bert Bakker, 1995.

on Sade's actual (materialistic) philosophy, its sources and especially its affinity with Spinoza. Lastly, we will focus in this chapter on the concept of vitalism in Sade's materialism. Chapter two will deal with Sade's ethics. We will respectively focus on the (theological) categories of Good and Evil and Spinoza's alternative to this (Christian) Morality which I will call 'an earthly ethics of affectivity'. If we affirm Spinoza's ethics and read Sade through Spinoza we discover a whole new world and, consequently, shed new light on the relation between bodies in Sade's literature that always already form assemblages with non-human elements. In chapter three we will focus on Sade's politics. This chapter consists of three parts which respectively treat Sade's critique on tyranny (with the help of Spinoza's conception of tyranny), Sade and the (Kantian) LAW and Sade's emancipatory dimension regarding woman and homosexuality.

Regarding the primary texts I rely on the excellent translations of Austryn Wainhouse⁵. This not only because of the translations, but also because they contain accurate chronologies, bibliographies, as well as several useful essays written by, for instance, de Beauvoir, Blanchot and Klossosowski.

I made a selection of the works that, in my opinion, bring forward Sade's philosophical project best. They are the four most renowned works which are: *Juliette*, *Justine*, or *Good Conduct Well Chastised*, *Philosophy in the Bedroom* and *The 120 Days of Sodom*⁶. I will nevertheless incidentally refer to other works if they support certain assumptions or ideas. It is difficult, if not impossible, to read everything of Sade and consequently make a convincing selection. This has two reasons. On one hand Sade's work is immense: it consists altogether of nine (often multi-volumed) novels (some of which consists of nearly

⁵ Wainhouse is one of the few (maybe the only) translator who translated and compiled academic reliable editions of Sade's oeuvre.

⁶ Originally in French published as respectively: *Juliette, ou les Prospérités du vice* (1797), *La Nouvelle Justine, ou les Malheurs de la vertu* (1791), *Philosophy dans le boudoir, ou les Lustiteurs immoraux* (1792) and *Les 120 journées de Sodom, ou l'École du libertinage* (1785).

thousand pages), nine political pamphlets, twelve posthumously published works (novels, plays, letters) and many more unpublished or destroyed works⁷. It is thereby a difficult task to read Sade: the endless repetitions of cruelties, and the ample and detailed descriptions of these cruelties go on for pages on end, causing the reader a sense of boredom. Or as Blanchot remarks: “it is almost impossible to read it: every possible measure has been taken [...] to make certain this book remains a secret, a wholly unreadable work, as much for its length, the way it was written, and its endless repetitions, as for the force of its descriptions and its ferocious indecency” (Blanchot qtd. in Wainhouse, 38). But one hardens oneself, or becomes numbed during the reading process, and the crimes become bleaker until they are almost normal (maybe this could be the only danger in Sade). On the other hand: Sade’s philosophical ideas are scattered throughout his work (I will argue in chapter one that Sade performs a *guerrilla-philosophy*) and it is therefore quite a task to ‘distillate’ useful ideas out of the dense and the hotchpotched narratives. Lastly I would like to emphasize that this thesis is a continuous negotiation between history, biography, text and concepts. I will not follow one specific current, but instead look how these four ‘elements’ interact with each other.

Deleuze once wrote about what it is like to write about philosophy or a particular philosopher: “I saw myself as taking an author from behind and giving him a child that would be his own offspring, yet monstrous” (N, 6). Well (if we affirm the idea of Sade as philosopher), let us take Sade from behind, he would not mind at all, and see what monstrous offspring we can produce.

⁷ Wainhouse offers a comprehensive bibliography of Sade’s works. See: Wainhouse (1987), p. 702-707.

Chapter one: Naturalism

Guerrilla-philosophy/materialism/vitalism

Guerrilla Philosophy

What do we mean if we coin the terms naturalism or nature philosophy? It is certainly not a philosophy about the 'living' or natural world, that is, a thought about animals, humans, plant, rocks, etc. (maybe only in the second instance). We firstly must understand this naturalism in the context of the great 'divide' in continental philosophy⁸: on the hand we have the line of Kant – Husserl – Levinas/Derrida, and on the other hand there is the genealogy of Spinoza – Nietzsche – Deleuze⁹, indeed the line of transcendental and existential phenomenology and the monistic line of immanence. We will follow the second line of thought in which, eventually, naturalism equals a philosophy of the earth, whether in Spinoza, Nietzsche, or Deleuze (and associated thinkers). Is there a place for Sade in this genealogy (or was he always already part of it)? At the outset we could in any case make this preliminary comparison: like the above mentioned thinkers Sade envisions an immanent world and every transcendental claim (and sometimes even metaphysical claims) or movement, that is, an movement from men to God (heaven, afterlife, morality), or, more general, from

⁸ There are multiple naturalisms. Not only in the continental but also in the Anglo-Saxon, analytical, tradition. Within our particular scope we have not the space to treat these other 'paradigms'.

⁹ Giorgio Agamben formulates these genealogies (See: Agamben, Giorgio. *Potentialities: Collected Essays in Philosophy*. Trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999. p. 239). I think, however, that Agamben 'missed' one name, and that is Descartes. In this context I would like to suggest that Descartes is in fact Kant's philosophical predecessor or even father, and I agree with Bertrand Russell if he writes that "In Kant the subjectivist tendency that begins with Descartes was carried to new extremes" and consequently, "[in Kant] there is an emphasis upon mind as opposed to matter, which leads in the end to the assertion that only mind exists." (See: Russell, Bertrand. *History of Western Philosophy*. London/New York: Routledge, 2004. p. 752.) Needless to say we disagree with that boring nag from Königsberg.

matter to mind, are rejected and fiercely contested. This radical immanent world consists of matter (as single substance) which ‘behaves’ according to a self-organizing and self-generating principle. Whether the Spinozian affect, the Nietzschean force, or the Deleuzian assemblage, it is a matter of the interconnectedness of matter (in all its different guises): the organic and non-organic, artifice and nature, matter and mind. We furthermore have to make the remark that the undercurrent of our genealogy is the critique on the Cartesian mind/body dualism and that it follows Spinoza’s famous proposition that “the idea of the body and body, that is, the mind and the body, are one and the same individual, which is conceived now under attribute of thought, now under attribute of extension” (E2P21, Schol.). Our genealogy is also a geology, that is, quite literally, a genealogy of the earth. Deleuze and Guattari write that “thinking takes place in the relationship of territory and earth” and “that the earth constantly carries out a movement of deterritorialization on the spot, by which it goes beyond any territory: it is deterritorializing and deterritorialized” (*WIP*, 86). I would like to make the point that Sade proceeds according to this principle, as we will see later on. In our genealogy thought is always situated, it takes place, and an idea (composed out of chaos, whether in philosophy art or science) continuously deterritorializes and is consequently being reterritorialized in order to land again¹⁰.

Before we proceed with Sade’s philosophy of Nature I first would like to focus on Sade’s way of philosophizing or the construction of his thought.

I would like to argue that many Sade-commentators try to conceive of Sade’s work as a whole, which is to say, as a closed philosophical framework, but soon one discovers its many inconsistencies and contradictions. George Bataille, for instance, says: “Let this be clear: nothing would be more fruitless than to take Sade literally, seriously. Of various philosophies he attributes to his characters we cannot retain a single one” (Bataille, 110).

¹⁰ See: Dolphijn, p. 2.

Bataille seems to say that there must be a continuity, a begin and end, an teleology in Sade's work in order to label him as philosopher. And in addition to this Bataille adheres to a philosophical ideal. He writes: "Sade started with an examination of violent 'releases' in practice which he wanted to make intelligible, while philosophy starts from a calm consciousness - from distinct intelligibility - in order to bring it to a point of fusion" (Bataille, 115). Blanchot asks himself: "what is the gist of Sade's thought? What in fact *did* [Blanchot's emphasis] he say? What is the scheme, the order of the system? Where does it begin and where does it end?" (39). And Klossowski seems to point to Sade's incapability when he writes that "[a] deep need for justification leads Sade to seek arguments for his defense in the philosophy of La Mettrie or d'Holbach, or even better, Spinoza" (70) and in addition to this Klossowski makes the remark that Sade's has merely "philosophical preoccupations". Maybe Sade is not a philosopher within the rigid boundaries of the logocentric doxa or within realm of the ones who seek meaning in transcendentalisms that in many cases are nothing more than replacements of God (i.e. the mind, spirit or Geist as God). On the contrary I would like to argue that Sade performs a contra-philosophy, a guerrilla-philosophy, or even better, *guerilla-theory* that stays on and within the earth, and which is non-teleological. Blanchot makes a interesting remark in this context:

[Sade's] theories and ideas are constantly generating and unleashing irrational forces to which they are bound. These forces simultaneously animate and thwart the theories, in such a way that the theories resist at first but then eventually yield; they seek to dominate the insurgent force, finally do, but only after they have unleashed other obscure forces, which bear the theories further along, deflect them from their course and distort them. (39)

And this is *exactly* the gist of Sade's thought: it is a continuous process of deterritorialization and reterritorialization of idea and theories, in short, thought. Sade refuses to settle down, refuses to be permanently territorialized on a paradigm or current, he refuses to be part of the doxa; his philosophical project(s) consists of continuous reevaluations, revisions, counter-arguments and reconsiderations. Guerrilla has two connotations: one is polemological¹¹ and the other is situational, both apply to Sade. It is polemological in the strictest sense, that is, Sade is a polemic, his rhetoric is often violent and aggressive and only deployed to annihilate fixed, ingrained and rooted ideas (in any case transcendentalisms). The second connotative, the situational, refers to "Designating activities conducted in an irregular, unorthodox, and spontaneous way, without regard to established conventions, rules, and formalities"¹². And this we also have to take literally in a Sadean context. It is surely unorthodox (marginal) but at the same time orthodox (rigid composition), spontaneous (irrational) and rational (enlightenment thinker), conventional but utterly unconventional (radicalism), and above all, the transgression of all rules and laws.

Sade's guerilla-philosophy, that is, his way of theorizing, can be elucidated with a comparison to music. The one who is familiar with the work of the French baroque composer Jean-Philippe Rameau knows that his music is a strange mixture of rationality and the most unexpected dissonant and irrational outbursts. *La Folie*¹³, for instance, sings the most impossible, long, fluctuating pitch ladders. On one moment with a brute, ominous glottal sound, the other moment high in the air, wavering, floating and escaping. Rameau's music refuses to settle down, to go back in the harmony: it always escapes at the moment one

¹¹ Guerilla is Spanish for 'little war'.

¹² In: *The Oxford English Dictionary* consulted via the Utrecht University's library website.

¹³ One of the main character of the opera *Platée* (1745). I specifically refer to the aria in act II, scene 5 which is called: "Formons les plus brilliants concerts" ("Let us make the most brilliant music"). I highly recommend the reader to listen to this wonderful opera and daring piece of music, especially when conducted by Teodor Currentzis.

expects it to land. And speaking of baroque music, one might know that the harpsichord (Sade played this beautiful instrument well¹⁴), contrary to the piano forte, directly ‘loses’ its sound, that is, the sound or tone directly disappears, until the next key is being pressed. And this is Sade: a harpsichord piece, continuously evaporating and returning, with that characteristic prominent tone. Sade is a fugue.

Materialism

Sade’s philosophy is ultimately a philosophy of the earth, or to use present day vocabulary, a geo-philosophy: “man owes his existence to [...] Nature’s schemes [...]. He is but as a oak, as grain, as the minerals to be found in the earth’s entrails, who are bound only to reproduce, reproduction being necessitated by the globe’s existence [...]” (Sade [1795] 1990, 209). In Sade everything springs from the earth and returns to the earth. It is a philosophy of particles, composition, decomposition and transformation. It is a radical materialist ontology that fiercely rejects any transcendental inventions and that, above all, lets Nature speak for itself. Instead of imposing a theory on Sade from the outside (like many did before) we start from within and from the middle. What does Sade, or more specifically Sade’s characters, teach us? In *Justine* the following is said:

[A]ll men, all animals, all plants growing, feeding, destroying and reproducing themselves by the same means, never undergoing a real death, but a simple variation in what modifies them; all, I say, appearing today in one form and several years or hours later in another, all may, [...] change a thousand thousand times in a single day [...]. (519)

¹⁴ Lauwaert, p. 24

Sade clearly alludes to a *natura naturans*: a self-generating nature or self-causing activity of nature¹⁵ in which there are no fixed ontological entities but instead a dynamic ontology of becoming. And, indeed, if we follow Sade, we are interstellar. Billion years from now our particles will be part of magnificent assemblages in space, forming the most terrific planets and solar systems. It is only the predicament of having consciousness that is the grit in the works. Throughout his oeuvre Sade does not spare effort to overemphasize the transmutative and affective quality of matter. In *Philosophy in the Bedroom* for instance the libertine Dolmancé elaborates on the act of murder: “murder is no destruction; he who commits it does but alter forms, he gives back to Nature the elements of whereof the hand of the skilled artisan instantly re-creates other beings [...]” (238). Or, again, in *Justine Coeur-de-fer*¹⁶ explains: “upon our death, that is to say, upon the conjointure of the elements whereof we are composed with the elements composing the universal mass, annihilated forever, regardless of what our behavior has been, we will pass for an instant into Nature’s crucible thence to spring up again under other shapes [...]” (497). And in the more sober and milder *Dialogue Between a Priest and a Dying Man* the latter says: “Before my eyes I have not the example of Nature’s perpetual generations and regenerations? Nothing perishes in the world, my friend, nothing is lost; man today, worm tomorrow, the day after tomorrow a fly [...]” (173). And there are many more similar ideas that can be found. It may sound odd, but there is a certain comfort and beatitude in Sade’s theory of transformation or trans-

¹⁵ Sade was a great reader, and he was certainly familiar with Spinoza’s work (In *Juliette* he explicitly refers to Spinoza). When Spinoza coins the phrase “Natura Naturans he means that “we must understand what is in itself and is conceived through itself, or such attributes of substances as express an eternal and infinite essence [...]” The idea of “Natura naturans” is ‘opposed to’ “Natura naturata”: “I understand whatever follows from the necessity of God’s nature, or from any of God’s attributes, that is, all the modes of God’s attributes insofar as they are considered as things which are in God, and can neither be nor be conceived without God. See: E1P29, Schol..

¹⁶ Coeur-de-fer, Iron heart, a utterly appropriate name for a libertine. But as we will see later on the sadist’s heart is everything but made of iron.

mutation. In drawing the ultimate conclusion of formulating and inherently materialistic universe (i.e. no God or Morality) Sade offers at the same time a form of terminal care. Is it not Cicero who learned us that philosophizing is learning to die? The primary consequence of the Sade's universe is a radical decentralization of humankind. In Sade we find anti-anthropocentric elements everywhere. And this is logical: a radical rejection of transcendentalisms and affirmation of a radical ontology or materialism inaugurates a horizontal plane on which *everything* and *everybody* moves instead of a vertical system in which man and God are the measure of all things¹⁷. Sade's anti-anthropocentric stance find its source not only in a fierce atheism (on which we return in a moment) but also in a certain biological essentialism, for he writes:

What is man? and what difference is there between him and other plants, between him and all the other animals of the world? None, obviously. Fortuitously placed, like them, upon this globe, he is born like them, he reproduces, rises and falls; like them he arrives at old age and sinks like them into nothingness at the close of the life span Nature assigns to each species of animal, in accordance with its organic constitution.
(*PIB*, 330)

Sade clearly envisions man among species rather than above species: anthropos rather than human. And this biological reductionism (and I use this term not negatively it rather designates an consequence of radical materialism) can be found everywhere. For instance Sade writes: "The man I describe is in tune with Nature. He is a savage beast. Why, is not the tiger or the leopard, of whom this man is, if you wish, a replica, like man created by Na-

¹⁷ This is the famous (or infamous) phrase coined by the pre-Socratic philosopher Protagoras. It refers to the idea that "humanity cannot know the world except by means of human aptitudes and abilities." (In: Tyler, Tom. *Ciferae: A Bestiary in Five Fingers*. Minneapolis/London: University of Minnesota Press, 2012. p. 2). I would like to add: Protagoras as proto-Kantian or *ur*-correlationalist.

ture and created to prosecute Nature's inclinations? (*Justine*, 608). Or: "Let us consult Nature [...] and may the laws that govern animals, in much stricter conformance with Nature, provide us for a moment with examples" (*PIB*, 218), and, "I do understand that any such things could belong to this animal we call man? Who feeds, drinks and reproduce like beasts [...]" (*Juliette*, 386-387). It is hence not only an anti-anthropocentrism but foremost an anti-humanism, that is to say, not only an critique on humanities hegemony, but also a critique on the human as such, the human being a weak, afraid and hypocritical creature which denies Nature and seeks refuge in transcendental chimeras. But it is also a question of arrogance or hubris: [e]steeming ourselves the foremost of the universe's creatures, we have stupidity imagined that every hurt this sublime creature endures must perforce be an enormity; we have believed Nature would perish should our marvelous species chance to be blotted out of existence [...]" (*PIB*, 238). One should here think about the gnat; Sade as predecessor of Nietzsche¹⁸. In line with humankind's decentralization lies Sade's boundless atheism. And maybe we can even state that Sade's philosophy is one purely directed against God, is invented to fight religion and that transformative and affective quality of matter and, consequently, anti-humanism, anti-anthropocentrism only occur in the second instance or are a result of the rejection of God. If Spinoza's 'motto' is *Deus Sive Natura*¹⁹, the idea that God or Nature is the cause of everything, of the single, self organizing substance, Sade's motto could be *Natura Sine Deo*²⁰. In Sade only Nature is the cause of the

¹⁸ Nietzsche's critique on anthropocentrism is beautifully and poetically described in the begin of the posthumously published *On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense*. He writes: "Once upon a time, in a some out of the way corner of the universe [...] there was star upon which a clever beast invented knowing. That was the most arrogant and mendacious minute of "world history" [...]. There were eternities during which it not exist [and] if we could communicate with the gnat, we would learn that he likewise flies through the air with the same solemnity, that he feels the flying center of the universe". In: Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Philosophy and Truth. Selections from Nietzsche's Notebooks of the early 1870's*. Trans. Daniel Breazeale. New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1993. p. 76.

¹⁹ God or Nature.

²⁰ Nature without God, own translation.

workings of the substance. We will focus in more detail on the relation between Sade and Spinoza later on in this chapter (and extensively in chapter two). Sade deploys his atheism in many different ways. It is not only the foundation of his philosophical framework but he also uses the means of language to utter his aggressive stance against religion. This blasphemy is not only a reinforcement of the bigger philosophical project, but obviously also a means to shock and provoke the reader and the State (and for Sade this was not without harsh consequences²¹). His work is punctuated with, sometimes hilarious (in their naivety), blasphemous passages, and Sade would not be Sade if these passages were not sexually or pornographically charged. In *PIB*, for instance, Madame de Saint-Agne reaches her climax and exclaims: Good God, I'm dying. Dolmancé, how I love to handle your prick while I discharge [...] Oh, *heavenly fuck* [my emphasis]" (208). And during oral sex Dolmancé cries out: "voluptuous, accomplished woman, never deny your lovers this pleasure: 'twill bind them to you forever ... Ah! by God! ah, by God's own fuck!" (241). And there are many more situation in which Sade directs his anger for God through pornography. But this process is somewhat double; it is a means to provoke on one hand, but on the other hand it is remarkable that Sade's characters invoke God when they reach their climax, their *petit mort*.²² Sade often refers to God as a chimera (his work is punctuated with this word), as an human concoction and regarding Sade's rather aggressive or activist stance towards religion we might even call him a anti-theist rather than a atheist, Sade's atheism is namely inherently polemological and has the sole purpose to destroy religion. By coining the predicate 'anti-theist' I mean Sade as dualist: God versus Nature, instead of the more neutral term 'atheism'. One could write multiple dissertations about Sade's anti-

²¹ Sade was prosecuted for his personal or individual atheism and for his atheistic (anti-theistic) tone of his philosophy and literature. We come back on Sade as victim in more detail in chapter three.

²² When the libertines almost reach their climax or crisis they often refer to it as an 'near-death experience'. In *PIB* for instance we find phrases like: "I cannot bear it anymore! oh, I'm dying!" (p. 206).

theistic rhetorics and this is not an exaggeration. On nearly every page of the works we treat we find anti-theistic statements, (extensive) elaborations and scoldings as well as carefully constructed counter-arguments. Where does this hyperbolized exaggerations derive from? Sade seems intelligent and well-read enough not to regress in these often childish and pathetic passages. Do we have to understand the anti-theism in the context of his irrationality? Is it part of his guerrilla philosophy? Or, and for me this is the most plausible case, does Sade uses hyperboles to reinforce and stress the more theoretical and abstract notion of anti-theism (a trope he also uses in other contexts, see following chapters)? And in addition to this (and this runs throughout Sade's work): the line between Sade and his characters (author/personage) are often thin and blurred. This is, in any case, a problem when studying Sade (and authors in general). It is therefore, not only, a difficult undertaking to distillate a 'meaning' or system out of his work in general, we also have to be careful in formulating generalities, that is, look for patterns or laws, especially when one focus on one particular work (like many Sade-commentators, and myself, do). It is tempting to find something in novel X and take this as an representation of the whole. But on the other hand, this is the only thing we can do, especially if take Sade's contradictory and elusive guerilla-philosophy into account.

We have seen that Sade considers matter as transformative, affective and non-teleological, but Sade does not only invent this framework to emphasize an immanent materialism; he foremost uses it to justify destruction, crimes and in particular murder. The creative counterpart of nature is destruction and an initial characterization could be: no creation without destruction. Destruction gives back to Nature the materials to create new entities as it where: "destruction hence, like creation, is one of natures mandates" (*PIB*, 275). We are directly faced with an contradiction: does destruction even exists consider the fact that Sade adheres to the idea of transmutation? If everything never "undergoes a real death,

but a simple variation in what modifies them [...]” (*Justine*, 519) destruction becomes untenable. Sade nonetheless regards destruction not only as one of Nature’s fundamental qualities but foremost the very mechanism on which Nature thrives; without destruction we rob Nature from its ‘right’ to exist: “Since it is proven that she [Nature] cannot reproduce without destructions” (*Justine*, 520). From Nature’s immanent destruction Sade takes an interesting, though rash, mental jump: nature destructs, hence murder is legitimate, and not merely legitimate: the act of murder renders a service to Nature. And this is the point where one stumbles, this is the point where the Sade-commentator gets confused and grasps for a breath. This is the point where one falls back onto Morality. But we have to affirm this idea: destruction and murder are the ultimate consequences of the rejection of a transcendental Morality or ethics. Bataille rightfully remarks that Sade regards Nature as an ateleological and impersonal force which is indifferent to humanities’ plans and ambitions and to life and death²³. Sade nevertheless continuously anthropomorphizes Nature and ascribes a dark vitalism to it; a counter-vitalism which is not directed to life but to death. Hence, Nature, in Sade’s vision, is not that neutral or impersonal it might look like at first glance. We will turn to the topic of vitalism at the end of this chapter.

Of all interpreters of Sade’s philosophy of Nature, Deleuze stands out. He distinguishes in Sade (partly drawing on Klossowks) a primary and secondary nature. The latter is

bound by its own rules and its own laws; it is pervaded by the negative, but not everything is in negation. Destruction is merely the reverse of creation and change, disorder is another form of order, and the decomposition of death is equally the composition of

²³ In: Lauwaert, Lode. “Batailles lezing van Sade. Genot en literatuur als expressies van Kracht.” *Tijdschrift voor Filosofie* 73 (2011): 231-260.

life. The negative is all-pervasive but the process of death and destruction that it represents is only partial. (CC, 27)

The primary nature solves the contradiction we have sketched above; destruction is another form of creation. Sade's primary nature could be understood as the cycle of life in which destruction is necessary in creative productivity. Primary nature, according to Deleuze is "[a] pure negation that override all beings and all laws, free even from the necessity to create, preserve or individuate. Pure negation needs no foundation and is beyond all foundation, a primal delirium, an original timeless chaos solely composed of wild and lacerating molecules" (CC, 27). Primary nature is the negation and annihilation of all life, the perfect crime or transgression that is nothing but an unreachable fantasy. Many libertines in Sade's story fantasize of such a crime, there is however one passage that illustrates primary nature best., Clairwil, a libertine in *Juliette*, says: "

I would like [...] to find a crime which [...] would go on having perpetual effect, in such a way that so long as I lived, at every hour of the day and as I lay sleeping at night, I would be constantly the cause of a particular disorder, and that this disorder might broaden to the point where it brought about a corruption so universal or a disturbance so formal that even after my life was over I would survive in the everlasting continuation of my wickedness. (Juliette, 525),

This might be pure negation, and I largely agree with Deleuze on this specific topic, but we could understand this fantasy also in a different way. In my opinion Clairwil *wants or wishes to be Nature*. He wants to take upon the role of a destructive substance, an evil Nature, if you wish, or he wants to be matter: "I would be constantly the cause", the cause of a

non-teleological chaotic Nature. But Sade is here, at the same time, self-contradictory. The notion of disturbance is peculiar, especially if one thinks about the impersonal and ongoing force of nature which is destructive and creative at the same time. A disturbance implies a rupture or discontinuity in this very Nature. However, a suspension or interruption of the single substance is impossible.

The fantasy is never fulfilled, the libertines try hard though to reach it but is eventually a s a carrot-stick situation.

Sade does not stand alone. He find his sources in many different thinkers and philosophies. In *Juliette* one of characters raves about philosophy:

Refer yourself again and again to the great theses of Spinoza, of Vanini, of the author of *Le Système de la Nature*. We will study them, we will analyze them together, I promised you authoritative dissertations upon this subject and I am going to keep my word: both of us shall feast heartily upon these writers and shall fill ourselves with the spirit of their sage opinions. (31)

A short remark. This celebration of philosophy or thought is typical for Sade. He is literally a thinker of the enlightenment or, to be more specific, of the light. Sade's work is punctuated with phrases like "let us deign for a moment to illumine our spirit by philosophy's sacred flame" (*PIB*, 332), "[t]hat is what we are going to analyze with the aid of philosophy's torch [...]" (*Ibid*, 311), and about Christians he writes "the dogma they count upon most heavily [...] vanishes [...] at the mere approach of philosophy's rational light" (*Julliette*, 372). We will return to Sade as rationalist or (counter) enlightenment thinker in the following chapters. Let us for now concentrate on Sade's sources.

Simone de Beauvoir makes in her essay “Must We Burn Sade” the rather reactive remark that “all one hears [in Sade] is the droning drivel of Holbach and La Mettrie” (Beauvoir qtd. in Wainhouse, 47). Why Beauvoir makes this point is guesswork, but let us assume that it is the clash between matter and mind. It is indeed Holbach and Mettrie who are of paramount importance in understanding Sade, thinkers who are both strongly associated with French mechanistic and deterministic materialism of the eighteenth century. We do not, however, have the space to give an extensive overview of this movement which had a tremendous amount of followers and strong ties with the *Encyclopedists*²⁴. I would like to follow no one other than Karl Marx on this topic, he wrote about the movement: “French Materialism was [...] an open struggle against metaphysics of the seventeenth century, and against all metaphysics, in particular that of Descartes, Malebranche Spinoza and Leibniz” (Marx, 163)²⁵. If we look at the work of Paul-Henri Thiry, Baron d’Holbach (hereafter Holbach), a *Encyclopedist*, founder of his own *salon* (*Le coterie d’Holbach*²⁶) and the author of *The System of Nature* (*Système de La Nature* (1770)) we find this struggle. In this work (which is quite a tour de force²⁷) he directly makes this point clear. In chapter one he writes:

²⁴ Among the so called *Encyclopédistes*, the composers of the famous *Encyclopédie, ou dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers* (*Encyclopaedia, or a Systematic Dictionary of the Sciences, Arts, and Crafts*) (composed between 1751 and 1772) where famous names like d’Alembert, Diderot, Rousseau, Voltaire and Montesquieu.

²⁵ See: Marx, Karl. “French Materialism and the Origin of Socialism.” *Karl Marx: selected writing*. Ed. David McLellan. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000. 163-170.

²⁶ Holbach’s salon was frequently visited by (among others) Hume, Diderot and Helvétius.

²⁷ Holbach does not leave one stone unturned in his magnum opus. He literally treats every thinkable subject. Nature, philosophy, mythology, theology, education, morality, law, physics, chemistry, etc. are all being passed in review.

Man is work of Nature; he exist in Nature: he is submitted to her laws: he cannot deliver himself from them; nor can he step beyond them even in thought. [...] For a being formed by Nature and circumscribed by her laws, there exist nothing beyond the great whole of which he forms a part, of which he experiences the influence. [...] There is not, there can be nothing out of that Nature which includes all beings. (14)

And he writes specifically about metaphysic: “philosophy [is] no longer any thing more than imaginary science: it quit[s] the real world to plunge into the ideal world of metaphysics; it neglect[s] Nature to occupy itself with Gods, with spirits, and with invisible powers” (284). In Holbach’s eyes ‘real’ philosophy is about *pure* materiality, and to stick with his polemical rhetoric, he regards metaphysics and theology, not only as similar disciplines, but foremost as some sort of intellectual ‘hobby’, or as Marx writes: “Philosophy was opposed to metaphysics as Feuberbach [...] opposed sober philosophy to drunken speculation” (164). In French materialism there was a general conception that real philosophy had to be almost a physics; it is hence not only a critique on metaphysics but a movement towards a pure physicalism. The French materialists also radically break with the Cartesian mind/body dualism, but sustain Cartesian materialism as well as the idea of animal-machine²⁸ which was further developed by Julien Offray de La Mettrie²⁹ (hereafter Mettrie) with the idea of “L’homme machine” (man a machine). This model does not only contains the idea that man is a machine qua organism, that is, organs that function like a machine, it also emphasizes that emotions, thoughts, mental illnesses (in short: the mind) are caused by complex mechanical processes.

²⁸ Descartes anthropocentrism lies not only in the splitting of body and mind but also in his idea on the animal. He regards animals as mere machines that work or function according to mechanical principles, and, as opposed to humans, lacked a soul, consciousness or mind.

²⁹ “[Mettrie] [...] transposed the Cartesian structure of animals to the human soul and affirmed that the soul is a modus of the body and ideas are mechanical motions.” See: Marx, p. 164.

We have to understand Sade's position within the above described 'paradigm'. At first sight Sade seems to be dualistic philosopher of Nature, that is, he departs from the physical and rejects the metaphysical; he overemphasizes this rejection again and again. But if we perform a close-reading we discover that Sade is actually a metaphysician *pur sang*. This accounts for the emphasis on self-generating matter, the idea of *natura naturans* and nature as a non-teleological and dynamic whole. Whether he likes it or not, Sade is a monist and adheres to the single substance. Sade learns us many lessons and the most important one is that we, in any case, must not trust him. He continuously misleads us, this ambiguity (physicalist or monist) is a guerrilla-tactic. If Sade adheres to a monism, does this mean that he is a Spinozist?

Sade's stance towards Spinoza is double. At one moment he celebrates his thought (see above) and the other moment he seriously criticizes him. Sade makes one particular interesting remark in this context. In *Juliette* we read:

The universe is an assemblage of unlike entities which *act* and *react* [my emphasis] mutually and successively with and against each other; I discern no start, no finish, no fixed boundaries, this universe I see only as an incessant passing from one state into another, and within it only particular beings which forever change shape and form, but I acknowledge no universal cause behind and distinct from the universe and which gives it existence and which procures the modifications in the particular beings composing this. (43)

And Sade emphasis again: "This God men have dreamt up is, in their presentation of him, what? an assemblage of all beings, all properties, all powers; the immanent and non-dis-

tinct cause of all natural effects. [...] But their God is actually only Nature, and Nature does not discriminate, neither does she deign to judge [...]” (*Juliette*, 541). Or in *PIB*: “Am I to hear in reply, that God and Nature are one? ’Tis an absurdity. The thing created cannot be the creative being’s equal. Might the pocket watch be the watchmaker?” (210). In the passages from *Juliette* Sade reveals himself as a pure Spinozist, and to put it boldly: the first passage is Spinoza in a nutshell. Sade speaks of action and reaction (composition and decomposition), there is a refutation of a teleology or final cause, and he speaks of an continuous affectivity. The only thing Sade does not quit to criticize is the inclusion of God in Spinoza’s framework. I think, however, Sade struggled with one of the key ideas of Spinoza, namely, the famous phrase “Deus Sive Natura”³⁰. It is in many ways a problematic term. Normally it is translated as God or Nature, but if we look further in *Ethics* Spinoza writes: “the power by which singular things [...] preserve their being [conatus] is the power itself of God or Nature [...]” (E4P4, Dem.). Hence, God and Nature are not the same, but the *power* they express is the same, this is totally different than a the interchangeability of God or Nature. It is the *power* the substance expresses and whether this is God or Nature, is in my opinion, of secondary importance, or as Deleuze writes:

the question of Spinoza’s atheism is singularly laking in interest insofar as it depends on arbitrary definitions of theism and atheism. The question can only be posed [...] from a religious viewpoint: a God that is to say, inseparable from *ratio boni* proceeding by the moral law, acting as judge. Spinoza is clearly an atheist in this sense: the moral pseudo-law is simply the measure of our misunderstanding of natural laws. (EPS, 253).

³⁰And in addition to this phrase Spinoza makes similar other distinctions: “God, or a substance consisting of infinite attributes” (E1P11), and, “God is eternal or all God’s attributes are eternal” (E1P19).

We must not forget that Spinoza himself, despite the emphasis on God, was firmly grounded in mechanical materialism. Russell for example (who shows great admiration for Spinoza³¹) writes that: “[Spinoza] accepted from Descartes and his contemporaries a materialistic and deterministic physics, and sought, within this framework, to find room for reverence and a life devoted to Good” (611). And Deleuze adds to this:

A long theological tradition had asserted the identity of power and act, not only in God, but in Nature. [...] a long tradition of materialism in physical theory asserted the actual character of all power in created things themselves. [...] The two currents meet in Spinoza, one relating to the essence of substance, the other to the essence of modes. (EPS, 93).

I think Sade largely oversaw or ignored the atheistic dimension of Spinoza . He, as it happens, often shows himself as deeply atheistic. It is in the extensive appendices and scholia's that we discover the true or genuine Spinoza. These delightful passages are highly emotive, personal, (sometimes) polemical and 'undermine' the very geometric composition of the ethics³². In these parts we find Spinoza's atheism, he writes for example: “the will of God, that is, the sanctuary of ignorance (E1, App.), and consequently “when they see the structure of the human body, they are struck by a foolish wonder, and because they do not know the cause of so great an art, they infer that it is constructed, not by mechanical, but by divine, or supernatural art [...]” (Ibid.). But as Deleuze rightfully remarks (see above), we can only speak of atheism from religious viewpoint, and both Sade and Spinoza are alrea-

³¹ “Spinoza is the noblest and most lovable of the great philosophers. Intellectually some have surpassed him, but ethically he is supreme.” See: Russell, p. 610

³² If one intends to read *Ethics*, I recommend to start with the scholia and appendices.

dy beyond religion, beyond Good and Evil. Sade is a Spinozist but under another maxim: *Natura sine Deo*.

But there is also a structural (qua structure) or formal similarity between Sade and Spinoza. Deleuze writes that “Sade is spinozistic” (CC, 22) and that “[i]n Sade we discover a surprising – a naturalistic and mechanistic approach imbued with the mathematical spirit. This accounts for the endless repetitions, the reiterated quantitative process of multiplying illustrations and adding victim upon victim, again and again retracing the thousand circles of an irreducibly argument” (CC, 20). We find this affinity also on a discursive level. Akin to Spinoza, Sade composes his literature in a geometrical way. The libertine meticulously formulates theoretical propositions and definitions, physical demonstrations, axioms, scholia and appendices. And, like, Spinoza, it is in the scholia and appendices that the libertine show irrational and emotive forces. And this is exactly the process of (re)detritorialization or guerrilla-philosophy on which we elaborated above on.

Vitalism

Sade’s philosophy of nature, as we have seen above, manifest itself in many guises. But I would like to add one more idea. A theme that continuously returns (after all extensive elaborations and side-roads) in Sade’s thought is not destruction, hedonism, Sadism, biological essentialism or even atheism, no, the undercurrent of Sade’s theories is the idea that matter is alive (understood partly in a materialistic/deterministic or monistic/Spinozist framework). Sade regards human life (or more generally speaking, *organic* life) in my opinion, only as a secondary phenomenon which *derives* out of matter: matter as some sort of Prometheus who models humankind out of clay. It is therefore a vibrant philosophy of an impersonal or non-human life. And this lively matter has a urge to continue to flow and

build, it is *conative*³³ matter always ‘seeking’ ways to persevere. But one does not easily separate the non-human and human domains: Spinoza shows after all (as we will see in the second chapter) that *every* body is always already an affective body. However, what I try to emphasize here is that Sade could be read in a whole other way if we take into account and *affirm* this conception about matter. Throughout his work Sade alludes to the self-organizational quality of Nature (as we have seen above), it is therefore tempting to interpret Sade’s philosophy not only as a materialism but also as a vitalism. Not a vitalism as in “life”, but a vitalism of matter. But does the very concept of vitalism not contradict the idea that matter must “speak for itself”, that is, is the addition of a vitalism not a transcendental procedure? French materialists like Holbach and Mettrie would surely reject such a intervention, and it is assumable that Sade, being (partly) grounded in this materialism, would also be somewhat suspicious about it. I nevertheless (whether he likes it or not) make a argument for this *conative* matter.

In *Vibrant Matter*³⁴ Jane Bennett formulates the concept of so called “vital materiality” (Bennett, vii) which could be useful to us in the present context. Drawing on (among others) Spinoza, Deleuze, Bergson, Driesch and Nietzsche she advocates for the idea that matter has actually a life. She writes: “[...] I mean the the capacity of things [...] not only to impede or block and designs of humans but also to act as quasi agents or forces with trajectories, propensities, or tendencies on their own” (Bennett, viii). Using the Spinozian affect and conatus the Deleuzian assemblage as well as Latour’s actor-network theory and Bergson’s and Driesch’s vitalism she ‘shows’ that matter, whether it be a power-grid, metal

³³ We will treat the concept of *conatus* in chapter two.

³⁴ A wonderful book that advocates for acknowledgement of non-human and non-organic life. Bennett, Jane. *Vibrant Matter. A Political Ecology of Things*. Durham/London: Duke University Press, 2010.

or food “dissipate the onto-theological binaries³⁵ [...] to induce in human bodies a aesthetic-affective openness to material vitality” (x). She coins the term “thing-power” in order to designate that “things” (thus not only animals and humans) or matter in general are conative bodies (she uses Spinoza’s example of the falling stone) and form complex assemblages together with humans, they function as actants. It would go to far to say that Sade, like Bennett, advocates for a “thing-power” let alone for a “a life of metal”. He nonetheless accredits to matter an idiosyncrasy not that different from Bennet or Barad, who argues that “[m]atter feels, converses, suffers, yearns and remembers” (Barad qtd. in Dolphijn & van der Tuin). Such anthropomorphisms are common in Sade. Nature wills, has a gender (always a she), it judges, demands and thinks:

[B]y what right do the theologians deny their God the power to give this matter the faculty of thought? Were we suppose a matter that could think we could at least gain a few insights into the subject of thought or what does the thinking in us; whereas so long as we attribute thought to an immaterial being it is impossible for us even to begin to understand it. (*Juliette*, 46).

Is there more, that is to say, is there more than only Sade’s *conative* matter? I think we have to turn the vitalist ‘tradition’ in order to answer that question. At the outset we can say that vitalists like Bergson and Driesch, seek another ‘reason’ for life outside the mechanistic or deterministic paradigms of biology or physics, whether it be Bergson’s “élan vitale” or Driesch’s “entelechy”. Bennett writes that: [w]hereas the vitalist lifted instances of “life” outside the reach of [the] mechanical world, the materialist insisted that every entity or force, however complex, “organic”, or subtle, was ultimately or on principle explicable in me-

³⁵By onto-theological binaries Bennett means: “life/matter, human/animal, will/determination, and organic/inorganic”. Bennett, p. x.

chanical or [...] “physico-chemical” terms” (64). Morphogenesis or autopoietic organization is driven by a invisible (metaphysical) life force or “the idea that life [is] irreducible to a mechanical or deterministic matter. There must be exist a life principle that [...] animate[s], which [is] itself material even though it takes on existence only when in relation to matter” (Bennett, 63-64). Within the vitalist ‘movement’ Henri Bergson is maybe the most important name. In *Creative Evolution* he writes that

[t]he profound cause is the impulse which thrust life into the world, which made it divide into vegetables and animals, which shunted the animal on to suppleness of form, and which, [...] in the animal kingdom threatened with torpor, secured that [...] it rouse itself up and move forward. (132)

In Bergson we find a dualism: matter and life. These two instances “are strivings that exist only in conjunction and competition with each other” (Bennett, 76). Matter fulfills a passive function and bears a *gravitas*, “matter must be understood as leaning forward to passivity, a tendency in favor of stable formations” and life “names a certain propensity for [...] activeness [...] in favor for mobile and morphing states” (Ibid.) Similar to Bergson’s *élan vitale* is the concept of “entelechy” coined by Hans Driesch. In many aspects Driesch and Bergson envisioned a similar vitalism, that is, both thinkers reject mechanistic and deterministic materialism and affirm a invisible force. But Driesch approaches matters in a different and more ‘scientific’ way. Driesch (an embryologist) seeks his ‘proof’ for entelechy via a negative way, that is, to put it simple, the element which is absent in a particular morphogenesis; the forming life is not explainable by (organic) matter formation alone, there is an invisible force “[that] decides which of the many formative possibilities inside the emergent organism become actual” (Bennett, 72). Driesch, however, makes a distinction between the or-

ganic and non-organic, that is, “[he] affirms a qualitative difference between entelechy-infused life and inorganic matter: entelechy (as a *self-directing* activeness) is what distinguishes a crystal from a embryo, a parking lot from a lawn, me from my corpse” (73). One could formulate one important critique on the concept of vitalism: why do we need this additive if we take into account that matter, on a atomic or even subatomic level ‘behaves’ intelligent. Are ontogenesis, morphogenesis and allopoiesis not, if we follow a reductionist path (since when is this a dirty word?) not eventually caused by particles? May be we could even speak of ‘idiosyncratic’ matter. But let us not walk down the slippery path of quantum physics. It suffices to say that Sade show affinity with the vitalist, that is to say, organic life is being fueled by an invisible force, but not only life, also matter, the self-generating substance on which we elaborated on above, does have a strong connotation with these two vitalism. We however, have to make the remark that in Sade it is about a *negative* vitalism, that is, life driven towards destruction.

Chapter two

An ethics of the earth/ bodies/ Sadean assemblages

An ethics of the earth

The plethora of Sade studies condense in one single point: the problem of Evil³⁶. I do not refer to the question coined by theology why God (or another deity) allows evil in the universe, rather I mean the way in which Sade-commentators try to grasp the meaning and function of the cruelties he describes. It seems to me that one takes refuge in the *a priori* transcendental categories of Good and Evil (indeed with capital letters) in order to understand Sade's ethics (through Kant's universal ethics³⁷). But Sade is already beyond Good and Evil³⁸. One uses the remains of Christian morality, the morality Sade detested, in order to impose it onto his work. And this is utterly paradoxical; one uses the tools Sade's philosophy tries to destroy. Can we find another way in which we can investigate Sade's ethics? Can we bypass the moral binary (if Sade is Evil what on earth Good?)? Is it not the brilliant lens grinder from the Dutch town of Rijnsburg (who, just like Sade, was hunted, prosecuted and mocked by the State³⁹) who offers us the proper tools? The concept of Evil

³⁶ Though this is exaggeration, I am nonetheless serious. Except for Deleuze (and to some extent Bataille, Barthes and Blanchot), Sade-interpreters do not quit the idea of Good and Evil.

³⁷ We will treat Kant's universal ethics (and Lacan's interpretation of these ethics in a sadean context) in chapter three.

³⁸ I obviously borrowed this phrase from Nietzsche and I in a Sadean context it designates to large extend the same idea, namely, that Sade does not know Good and Evil because he rejects these categories, what's more, they do not even exist in a Sadean universe.

³⁹ Spinoza was not only excommunicated by the Jewish community in Amsterdam because of his convictions, he was also fiercely prosecuted by the State (and its Calvinist fundaments).

is persistent. But how can a transcendentalism, or chimera as Sade calls it, be persistent? We have to return to earth, to Sade's beloved "solitude of the earth entrails", to the "mystery of subterranean and reclusive existence" (Blanchot, 38). Spinoza shows us that the earth only makes a distinction between good and bad (indeed with lower case letters). In one of his two brilliant Spinoza studies Deleuze writes: [e]vil can only be spoken of from the particular viewpoint of an existing mode: there is no Good and Evil in Nature in general, *but there is goodness and badness* [Deleuze's emphasis], useful and harmful, for each existing mode" (EPS, 274). The categories of Good and Evil are the irksome reminders of the fall of men, the fall of Adam and Eve. Spinoza points out that morality is a transcendental judgement imposed upon mankind by God and this morality is idle chattering, as Deleuze calls it, replacing real philosophy:

When Spinoza says that we do not know even what a body can do, this is practically a war cry. He adds that we speak of consciousness mind, soul, of the power of the soul over the body; we chatter away about these things, but do not even know what bodies can do. Moral chattering replaces true philosophy. (EPS, 255)

As soon as Adam ate from the forbidden fruit he received the Evil/Good binary from God, but Spinoza understand this *physically*: "Therefore the command given to Adam consisted solely in this, that God revealed to Adam that eating go that tree brought about death, in the same way that he also reveals to us through our natural understanding that poison is deadly" (Spinoza [1665] 2002, 810). The total rejection of transcendentalisms inaugurates

a typology of immanent modes of existence, replaces Morality, which always refers existence to transcendent values. Morality is the judgement of God, the *system of*

Judgement. But Ethics overthrows the system of judgement. The opposition of values (Good-Evil) is supplanted by the qualitative difference of modes of existence (good-bad). (SPP, 23)

We are hence faced with an immanent earthly ethics instead of a transcendental (heavenly or divine) morality. If we want to understand goodness and badness of an affective ethics we first have to turn to the Spinozian body.

Spinoza's universe consists of various bodies (whether human, animal or thing) that are in a continuous relationally; bodies enter into relationships and establish a mutual constitution. In the first instance we have to understand this as a pure physical process: "a body is composed of a infinite number of particles; it is the relations of motion and rest, of speeds and slownesses between particles that define a body [...]. [A] body affects other bodies, or is affected by other bodies: it is this capacity for affecting and being affected that also defines a body in its individuality" (SPP, 123). But it is, according to Deleuze, not purely a physical matter. It is rather a ontology of becoming of *modes of existence* instead of a pure *existential ontology*. Hence the question is not what a body *is*, but what a body can *do*.⁴⁰ These modes of existence have to be primarily understood as expressive and of being capable to affect and being affected. The good and bad within the process of affectivity occur when a body is either being composed or decomposed, the former being an affectivity in which the body becomes a stronger whole, the latter when "a body threaten[s] my coherence" (SPP, 19). Composition and decomposition are the counter-ethics of Good and Evil. Hence we can only say when something is good or bad for a body, and this we

⁴⁰ Deleuze and Guattari elegantly summarize Spinoza's philosophy of the body when they write: "We know nothing about a body until we know what it can do, in other words, what its affects are, how they can or cannot enter into composition with other affects, with the affects of another body, either to destroy that body or to be destroyed by it, either to exchange actions and passions with it or to join with it in composing more powerful body." See: *ATP*, 257.

can understand quite literally. Spinoza himself refers in this context often to the process of poisoning.⁴¹ Composition, on the contrary, causes a body to become stronger, think in this context, for instance, about food. But Spinoza's ethics is yet more complex, for affectivity is twofold: there are actions and passions; the former being an affect that "spring from the individual's essence" (SPP, 27), the latter being an affect that "originate outside the individual" (Ibid.). In other words: it is the activity of my body, that is, my body is capable of producing affects (the power to act) and my body 'receives' affects from the outside. And, depending on the 'nature' of these affects (whether they engage in a relation of composition or decomposition), they cause either sadness or joy, hence, there is passive joy or passive sadness. We must however keep in mind that "[a]ll passions cuts us off from our power of action; as long as our capacity to be affected is exercised by passions, we are cut off from that of which we are capable" (EPS, 240). Joyful passions or external affections, however, "compounds with our [bodies], [...] its power is added to ours; the passions that affect us are those of *joy* [Deleuze's emphasis], and our power of acting is increased or enhanced" (SPP, 28), or, "[w]hen the feeling affecting us itself agrees with our nature, our power of action is then necessarily increased or aided" (EPS, 240). At the other side of the spectrum or oscillation we find passions that cause sadness. These passions *completely* block our ability to act and, consequently, causing our bodies to decompose or the mind feeling sad. It is however a case of ambiguity or relationally, when passion 'destroy' one body the other body in a particular affective relationally: "everything in such an encounter seems to depend on the respective essences or powers of the bodies that meet one another. If my body has essentially a greater degree of power, it will destroy the other, decompose its relation" (EPS, 242). This notion of power is of paramount importance if we include Sadean bodies in this framework.

⁴¹ Deleuze writes: "The evil suffered by man is always, according to Spinoza, *of the same kind as indigestion, intoxication or poisoning.*" See: *EPS*, 247.

Spinoza's ethics of affective bodies alters the way in which we usually understand Sade. What happens if we look at the victim/libertine relation through a Spinozian lens? How could an ethics of the earth liberate Sade?

The processes of composition and decomposition are not of a dualistic simplicity (or/or) but much more ambiguous (and/and). We could very easily come up with situations in which decomposition and composition (sadness and joy) go together. The cigarette that I smoke while writing this thesis causes me to relax, but at the same time it has the potential to cause horrible diseases. A glass of wine offers inspiration, relaxation and general social coherence, but at the same time it affects the liver, the blood vessels and the brain. Psycho-active drugs, like lithium 'cures' (manic)depression, but at has at the same time the potentiality to seriously damage the kidneys, and so on. I use these examples because they include thought and mind. This is to illustrate that affectivity and the consequent (de)compositions not only work on a bodily level but also on the level of the brain (feeling sad), Deleuze write: "a mode is a complex relation between of speed and slowness, in the body but *also* [my emphasis] thought" (SPP, 124). The ambiguity or oscillation of (de)compositions, actions and passions, joy and sadness can be illustrated by an intriguing part of *Ethics*. In this rather obscure passage of *Ethics* Spinoza elaborates on the act of beating, he writes: "The act of beating, insofar as it is considered physically, and insofar as we attend only to the fact that the man raises his arm, closes his fist, and moves his whole arm forcefully up and down, is a *virtue* [my emphasis], which is conceived from the structure of the human body" (E4P59, Schol.). Beating, hence, is an *expression* of the human body and the very act increases the *conatus* and makes the body a stronger whole. The concept of the conatus deserve further explanation. The conatus contains the idea that "each thing, as far as it can by its own power strives to preserve in its being" (E3P6). Even a falling

stone, according to Spinoza, strives to keep falling⁴². Hence, it is not only a universe of affective bodies but also, and that is equally important, conative bodies. The ‘strength’ or intensity of the conatus is directly dependent on the degree of activity, what is more, “[c]onatus [...] always involves some degree of our power of action, with which indeed it may be identified: this power is thus increased when our conatus is determined by an affection that is good or useful to us” (EPS, 240). In the context of a beating, thus, the conatus of the one who beats is increased: Deleuze writes that “ what is good is that [...] it expresses what my body can do in a certain relation” (SPP, 35). Beating is in this context an *action* that establishes a *passion* (sadness) in the body that is being beaten.

I would like therefore to make the argument that we can consider Spinoza’s beating similar to Sade’s flagellation or other violent acts in which one body is being decomposed and another is becoming stronger or extend its power of action. This, of course, means that our ‘classical’ or ingrained ideas about the sadistic act (or violent acts in general) in Sade’s literature become untenable. To regard the Sadist as an active and *conative* body that seeks to enhance his very existence is in conflict with the commonsensical idea of the Sadist as ultimate villain, tyrant, and, indeed, as the pinnacle of Evil. And, this is the other way around, to regard the victim of the Sadist as a body which is only being decomposed, *a sad body*, does bear a degree of ‘neutrality’ which goes against the feelings we usually project onto the victim, that is, feelings of disgust, pity or anger. But, and this is the beauty of Spinoza, these feelings, in turn, are sad passions as well: “Spinoza traces [...] the dreadful concatenation of sad passions; first, sadness itself, then hatred, aversion, mockery, fear, despair, *morus conscientiae*, pity, indignation, envy, humility, repentance, self-abase-

⁴² In a letter to G.H. Schuller (1674) Spinoza writes: “while continuing in motion the stone thinks, and knows that it is endeavoring, as far as it lies, to continue in motion. Now this stone, since it is conscious only of its endeavor and is not all indifferent, will surely think it is completely free, and that it continues in motion for no other reason than that it so wishes.” See: Spinoza. “Letter 58. To the most learned and wise G.H Schuller from B.d.S.” *Spinoza: Complete Works*. Trans. Samuel Shirley. Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett, 2002. p. 909.

ment, shame, regret, anger, vengeance, cruelty” (SPP, 26). The libertine is an *active* and *conative* body that avoids sad passions by always being the more powerful element in an affective relationship. This does not mean that sad passions are absent, on the contrary, they are everywhere, but only in the body and mind of the weaker party (victim). I furthermore would like to argue that, in line with the sadist’s active quality, that the sadist is emotional man or woman. And that these emotions are in any case joyful passions. I would therefore object that libertines in Sade apathetic (as some argue⁴³) but that they are *active* and *conative* (wo)men who avoid sad passions and seek the joyful ones. They do not know envy or hate, nor pity or fear (they do know solidarity⁴⁴). Apathy implies a state of catatonia. Bataille argues that one of the key characterizations of the Sadean world is the absence of a relation with the Other⁴⁵ and Bataille makes even the bolder statement, which is more important in our context, that the Sadist is not concerned with his own actions nor what is beneficial to his self-interest⁴⁶. The first argument of Bataille, the absence of a relation with the Other (e.g. victim) becomes untenable if we take into account the notion of affectivity; in the Sadist universe (and in every other event when two or multiple bodies meet) bodies are each others condition. It is hence a apathy of the mind, Bataille envisions but, as we have seen, the Sadist are emotional creatures. Bataille argues for a double apathy, I would like to make the point that it is a single apathy. The sadist indeed does not care for the well-being of his victim, but (through activity) is very committed to his own well-being. He or she enjoys, giggles, feels, enjoys eating and drinking, a quick glance on, for instance, *PIB* shows this. The libertine or Sadist is a creature of joy. In *PIB* there

⁴³ Lacan, Deleuze and Bataille argue that the Sadists is apathetic (as we will see later on).

⁴⁴ “I’ll perhaps have you do much that is evil, but never will I do any to you.” *PIB*, p. 244

⁴⁵ Lauwaert, 111.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.* 113.

are countless examples of Sadists that find joy in orgasms, torture or reasoning (“Look madame, do you see it? Do you see this libertine discharge *mentally* [Sade’s emphasis]” (288). And I want to go even a step further; the libertine is a *emotional* (wo)man. Naturally the Sadist establishes a tremendous amount of Sad passions, but from his or her viewpoint it is pure conative activity, aimed to self-perseverance and pleasure.

To conclude this paragraph I would like to say that it is through the earthly ethics we must understand Sade’s literature. I cannot emphasize enough that it is in this context all about the earth and the bodies on that earth which engage in affective relationships. If affectivity radically breaks with transcendental values, this means, at the same time, that the Sadean act(s) have to be considered in a totally new way: there are no more Evil acts or deeds, only temporal, immanent and affective movements.

Bodies

Deleuze offers us an intriguing starting point from which we can begin to formulate a milieu in which Sadean bodies move. He writes: [w]hat is involved is no longer the affirmation of a single substance, but rather the laying out of a *common plane of immanence* [Deleuze’s emphasis] on which all bodies, all minds, and all individuals are situated” (SPP, 122). In other words: could we envision a Sadean ethology? Before we turn to an ethology it may be useful to focus on Spinoza’s critical stance towards humanity (anthropocentrism). It is clear by now that Spinoza envisions a radical immanent world of affectivity in which the nature/culture divide is being deconstructed: affectivity is after all not limited to nature alone (i.e. natural bodies). Deleuze rightfully states that:

the plane of immanence, the plane of nature that distributes affects, does not make any distinction between things that might be called natural and things that might be called artificial. Artifice is fully a part of Nature, since each thing, on the immanent plane of Nature, is defined by the arrangements of motions and affects into which it enters, whether these arrangements are artificial or natural. (SPP, 124).

Spinoza's 'naturecultures' destabilize the unique position of humankind in the universe as well as its transcendental constructions like Morality and God. Spinoza shows, within a horizontal composition, an immoral⁴⁷ ethics of the earth which radically breaks with human exceptionalism. One is always already caught in a immense process of affectivity and "it is by speed and slowness that one slips in among things, that one connects with something else. One never commences; one never has a *tabula rasa* [Deleuze's emphasis]; one slips in, enters in the middle; one takes up or lays down rhythms" (SPP, 123).

How, then, does a Sadean plane look like? What happens in Sadean ethology?

In *Sade, Fourier and Loyola* Roland Barthes gives a semiological reading of Sade. Although Barthes is at odds with the paradigm we follow, he gives nonetheless an excellent reading of Sade which is highly useful to us. He gives an analysis of a Sadean ethnography or society. Firstly Barthes gives an analysis of *spatiality* in Sade's world. The key characteristic of this spatial dimension is that it is primarily a matter of enclosure. The spaces in which libertines meet libertines, libertines meet victims, and victims meet victims are always closed. Their bodies meet in far away castles, dungeons, vaults, basements and dense forests. Furthermore, as Barthes argues, "there always exist, in Sadian space, a "solitary" where the libertine takes some of his victims, far away of from all [...] eyes, where he is irrevocably alone with his object" (Barthes, 16). A good illustration of this sort of

⁴⁷ This does not imply the negativity which is normally associated with the term(s) "immoral" or "immorality", but, quite literally, not following, discarding or not knowing the Good/Evil binary.

spaces is the abbey in *Justine* (in which the heroine is brutally abused): “six thick enclosures rise to baffle all attempts to see this building from the outside. ... and the compounded enclosures, some stone walls, other living palisades formed by trees growing in strait proximity to each other ...” (*Justine*, 578). The interior of this abbey is a confined space as well, full of obscure corridors, claustrophobic subdivided chambers and cells: “the basement form a large hall in the middle, around it are distributed eight smaller rooms of which two serve as dungeons [...] and the other six are reserved for provisions. [...] And two cabinets the monks enter when they wish to isolate their pleasures. [...]” (*Justine*, 579). Spaces in Sade are (to use Deleuzo-Guattarian vocabulary) striated spaces. And this striated space the libertine functions as the State and “the State [striates] the space over which it reigns, or to utilize smooth spaces as a means of communication in the service of striated space. It is a vital concern of every state to [...] control [...] and to establish a zone of rights over an entire exterior, over all the flows traversing the ecumenon” (ATP 474).

These spaces, according to Barthes, are double: the physical space bears a meaning. In Sade’s case this means that the confined quality of Sade’s ‘architecture’ gives birth to an “autarchy” [in which] the libertines their assistants, and their subjects form a total society, endowed with an economy, a morality, a language, and a time articulated into schedules, labors, and celebrations” (Barthes, 17). Sade’s autarchy is characterized by a strong hierarchy in which there is a rigid divisions between roles and social positions. In the Sadean society, as Barthes writes, “classes are set, one cannot emigrate from one another; no social promotion. This urge for hierarchization has obviously a strong connotation with the society Sade lived in (or at least until the revolution), the vertical organized society of the ancien regime (e.g. King, clergy, nobility, etc). This is scheme is represented in most of Sade’s literature and can be, according to Barthes, summarized as following:

(1) the great libertines [kings, cardinals, noblemen, wealthy commoners]. (2) the major assistants, who form the bureaucracy of libertinage [...]. (3) next the aides; sort of housekeepers or duennas, half domestics half subjects [...], or menservants, torturers or pimps; (4) the subjects [victims] *per se* are either occasional (families, young children fallen into the hands of the libertines) or regular, brought together in harems [...] (5) the last class, or pariah class, is made up of wives. (Barthes, 25)

Although one must be careful in formulating generalities, that is, imposing a general rule upon a heterogeneous body of work like Sade's, Barthes nevertheless show not only Sade's affinity with organization in general (something we also see in his manner of reasoning, the organization of bodies or the discursive or textual composition of his writing), but foremost Sade's 'social consciousness'. And in addition to this, and this is a very *practical* element; the libertine has to be *necessarily* rich in order to sustain and continue a libertine life or as Barthes writes "[money] allows for the purchase of and upkeep of the harems: pure means, it is then neither prized or disprized; one only hopes it will not form an obstacle to libertinage" (Barthes, 23). But richness or wealth is also one of the mechanism that establishes the *inequality* or *hierarchy* which is the key condition that makes the sadist or sadean relation even possible: "Sadian society is not cynical but cruel; it does not say: there must be poor in order that there be rich; it says the opposite: there must be rich in order that there be poor; wealth is necessary because it contrast with misfortune" (Barthes 23, 24). Richness or wealth does not only have a monetary dimension, in Sade, as we have seen in Barthes' overview and classifications of roles, there are not only poor or misfortunate victims; Sade also seems to have a penchant for victims coming from higher social classes: "subjects are given a kind of primacy of rank, it is because "bon ton" is a pri-

me operator of vice, owing to the increased victim's increased humiliation [...]" (Barthes, 23).

We have seen that, if we read Sade through Spinoza, only affectivity between bodies (and the mutual constitution of these bodies through affections) remains. But how can we translate this to a practical or concrete situation? What does actually happens in an affective Sadean relation between bodies? In order to answer these questions we have to pose another: what is Sade's idea of the body? It is tempting (if we follow deterministic and mechanistic French materialism) to dig out Offray's concept of 'l'homme machine' (Man a machine) or Vaucanson's digesting ducks. But there are not only 'metafied'⁴⁸ machines in Sade, there all sort of kinds machines whether to achieve pleasure, pain or both. In *Juliette* for example "[a] woman lowered herself over, and engulfed, unavoidably and, as it where, involuntary, a soft and flexible dildo which, through a system of springs and clockwork, filed away automatically and without cease, every fifteen minutes squirting a given measure of warm and fluid into her vagina [...]" (973)⁴⁹, or the cannibal Minski who's

rapings where facilitated by an ingenious contraption; it was kind of high stool, splay-legged and of iron, upon the victim lay either belly up or belly down, depending upon which orifice she was called upon to present; to the stool's four legs the victim's four limbs where made fast, who from the position thus assumed offered the sacrificer either a wide-open cunt, if she was lying belly up, or a wide-open ass, if she was lying down. (*Juliette*, 586)

And there are machines of pure torture (without sexual acts):

⁴⁸ A term I thankfully borrow from Angela Carter. See: Carter, p. 140

⁴⁹ I can assure the reader, that when one enters the dark regions of the internet, a similar 'modern' machine is easy to find.

[O]ne saw a unusual wheel. It revolved inside a drum, the inner surface of which was studded with steel spikes; the victim bent in an arc upon the circumference of the wheel, would, as it turned, be rent everywhere by fixed spikes; by means of a spring device the drum could be tightened, so that, as the spikes grated flesh away, they could be brought closer and contact with the diminished mass maintained. (*Juliette*, 334)

Machinery or *tèchne* is omnipresent in Sade. Whether the complex machines as described above, or simpler ‘tools’ like (wooden) Dildo’s, rods and whips. What is more, the Sadist cannot function without machinery; in nearly every act an intervention of artifice enhances and helps the libertines in their endeavors and increases the pleasure. There are the machines described above, but there are also knives, sewing kits, needles, candles, sticks, nails, coffins, ad infinitum. But this is not fetishism, no, it is practical and instrumental. They are not instruments of the fetish (“this is not a phantasy but a program” (*ATP*, 151), but of experimentation. We will further elaborate on the relation between bodies and artifice or nature and culture in a moment, but let us first return to the human body in Sade. Roland Barthes writes that “the Sadian machine does not stop at the automaton [...]; the whole group of the living is conceived and constructed like a machine [in which] all the bodies sites are occupied by different partners [...]” (156) and “ everyone [i.e. participants in an orgy] creates and immense and subtle mechanism, a meticulous clockwork, whose function is to connect the sexual discharges, to produce the continuous tempo, to bring pleasure to the subject of the conveyor belt [...]” (125). But there is always a foreman who oversees the machines, who maintain them, who gives them input. The libertines allocate the bodies they use (or the machinic parts, whether single (one man machine) or plural (machine for-

med by bodies)), in meticulously orchestrated orgies the libertine set out the procedure, explains the scheme: “ I am going to insert my prick in her ass ... you will frig her, do your utmost [...] After a few runs into this child’s ass, we will vary the picture [...] you will avail me of your ass [...] you will discharge [...] “ (*PIB*, 240), the anal machine. Or the flagellation machine: “my opinion would be for us all to flagellate one another: Madame de Saint-Ange will trash Lapierre, so as to insure Madame de Mistival’s obtaining a good encounter; I’ll flay Madame de Saint-Ange, Augustin will whip me, Eugénie will have at Augustin an herself will be very vigorously beaten by the chevalier” (*PIB*, 363). And here explicitly the foreman’s indisputable authority: “ [W]hile I arrange this bout in a sufficiently lustful manner. (*As Dolmancé gives his orders, each person executes them, taking his post.*) [Sade’s emphasis]” (*PIB*, 289). But the human or metafictional machines, as soon as the goal has been reached (whether it be production or climax), quit to function, Sade often uses phrases like “the circle breaks” (*PIB*, 290) or “the attitudes are dissolved” (*PIB*, 294). In Sade there seems to be an molar organization at work, that is, Sade departs from a organization that is always triple; the organization *within* (inner human constitution (organs)) or *of* the body, the organization between two bodies and the organization of multiple bodies. But the organization has to be destroyed: “Yes, Yes, she must be split like a melon, halved, God and God again, yes, it’s got to enter” (*PIB*, 292), and, “cut [her] in eighty thousand pieces” (*PIB*, 362). And the hundreds propositions at the end of the *120 Days of Sodom* are noting more than horrible and cruel manuals to destroy the machines. It is not a matter of surface, that is, only wounds or wounding, but the effort to fully destroy the *organism*. This could be easily understood as mere murder, but in Sade’s case it is primarily the machine that is being disposed of. But the urge to destroy does not only occur by the active party, it is also often the wish of the passive counterpart. The young Eugénie, for instance, cries out to the libertine Le Chevalier: “Go on tiger ... tear me to ribbons if you wish ... I

don't care a damn! ... Kiss me butcher, I adore you! ... [...] Thrust! Thrust! Thrust! Chevalier, I am coming! ... spray your fuck over *the wounds and lacerations* [my emphasis] ... drive it to the bottom of my womb [...]” (*PIB*, 293). And during a threesome: “Discharge, Dolmancé, ... discharge, my love ... this fat peasant inundates me: he shoots to the depths of my entrails ... Oh, my good fuckers, what is this? Two at a time? Good Christ! [...] I am annihilated ... [...]. Am I enough a whore know? ... [...] what an agitation!” (*PIB*, 294). Or: “Thrust, thrust, my good fellow... tear me, if so it must be ... Dost see my ass? Is it not ready? [...] Well drive... ah, by Christ! what a bludgeon! never have I received one of such amplitude ... Eugénie, how many inches remain outside?” (*PIB*, 217). Out of these destructive orgies the “Body without Organs” (hereafter BwO) emerges. Deleuze and Guattari write about the masochist body:

it is poorly understood in terms of pain; it is fundamentally a question of the BwO. It has its sadist or whore sew it up; the eyes, anus urethra, breasts, and nose are sewn shut. It has itself strung up to stop the organs from working; flayed, as if the organs clung to the skin; sodomized, smothered, to make sure everything is sealed tight. (*ATP*, 150).

The BwO⁵⁰ is the answer to and critique on the organism of the body (or organization of other molar ‘machines’). The concept firstly emerged in Deleuze’s intriguing *Logic of Sense* and was further developed in *Anti-Oedipus* and *A Thousand Plateaus*. The BwO is a

⁵⁰ The Body without Organs is a term Deleuze and Guattari borrow from Antonin Artaud who fabulously stated that: “Man is sick because he is badly constructed. We must make up our minds to strip him bare in order to scrape off that animalcule that itches him mortally, god and with god his organs. [...]When you will have made him a body without organs, then you will have delivered him from all his automatic reactions and restored him to his true freedom. See: Artaud, 570

body⁵¹ but without organizational principle and is foremost an alternative to the body understood by psychoanalysis (e.g. Lacan and Freud), Deleuze and Guattari write:

where psychoanalysis says, “Stop, find yourself again,” we should say instead, “Let’s go further still, we haven’t found sufficiently dismantled our self. Substitute forgetting for anamnesis, experimentation for interpretation. Find your body without organs. Find out how to make it. It’s a question of life and death, youth and old age, sadness and joy. It is everything is played out. (*ATP*, 151)

The BwO is hence not only a matter of joy or liberation; it is also a matter of sadness (sad passions) (“Why such a dreary parade of sucked-dry, catatonicized, vitrified, sewn-up bodies, when the BoW is also full of gaiety, ecstasy and dance?” (*ATP*, 140)), as in the case of the sadist or masochist act: the libertine and his victim both destroy the organization of bodies and make it into a *sad* BwO, and this goes back to the concept of affectivity (whether decomposition or composition, sadness or joy, active or passive). But let us assume in any case, that the body of the victim, in Sade, is on one hand a organism (which is used as a (fucking) machine) and on the other hand that this body becomes a BwO (in a negative way). In this way the victim’s BwO escapes the State system and a transformation from molar (bodies) to the molecular takes place (though this transformation is a negative *decomposition* caused by affective bodies).

⁵¹ “[T]he BwO is not at all opposite to the organs. The organs are not its enemies. The enemy is the organism. The BwO is opposed not to the organs but to that organization of the organs called the organism”. See: *ATP*, 158.

Assemblage

A Sadean affectivity is never dual, that is, not only a situation between two bodies, but instead always multiple. It is not alone the multiplicity of affects or bodies, but foremost the multiplicity of *heterogenous* elements that constitute a Sadean act. And here we touch upon the concept of the assemblage, admittedly a poor translation of the actual concept Deleuze and Guattari use, *agencement*. Of the word “assemblage” The *Oxford English Dictionary* gives the following definitions: “the joining or union of two things; conjunctions [...]” or “the joining, putting together of parts” and “A number of things gathered together; a collection, group, cluster”. But an *agencement* designates something different: it is not so much an organization of things “but the *process* [my emphasis] of arranging, organizing, fitting together” (Stivale, 91). The concept of the assemblage is complex and takes many forms throughout *A Thousand Plateaus* (and elsewhere). But an initial ‘definition’ is given by Deleuze and Guattari when they write: “We will call an assemblage every constellation of singularities and traits deducted from the flow – selected, organized, stratified – in such a way as to converge (consistency) artificially and naturally; an assemblage, in this sense, is a veritable invention” (*ATP*, 406). One has to understand the assemblage not only physically or as a gathering of corporealities, or even as material: heterogenous elements engage in relationships (and these elements are not ontological fixed, but are modes of existence that are themselves speeds and slownesses, in short, they are affective becomings) whether it be utterances, signs, events, physical objects, etc. Deleuze and Guattari give a elucidative example of an assemblage:

Little Hans’s horse is not representative but affective. It is not a member of a species but an element or individual in a mechanic assemblage: draft-horse-omnibus-street.

It is defined by a list of active and passive affects in the context of the individuated assemblage it is part of: having eyes blocked by blinders, having a bit and a bridle, being proud, having a big peepee-maker, pulling heavy loads being whipped, falling making a din with its legs, biting etc. These affects circulate and are transformed within the assemblage; what a horse “can do”. (*ATP*, 257)

With the concept of the assemblage we return to the begin of this chapter: what can a body do? What happens on the plane of consistency? What is an Sadean ethology, that is, a more ‘theoretical’ ethology than we have described above with the help of Barthes (which was an ethnology-ethology)? We have so much elements, events and utterances: bodies, machines/techné, minds, castles, dungeons, swearing, moaning, screaming, wine, blood, food, God, earth, chimera’s, raping, fucking, asses, pricks, cunts, philosophy, etc. All these elements are gathered for, a only a very short time, in a single context. But we have to keep in mind that Deleuze and Guattari distinguish a “ double articulation” of the assemblage: the ‘machinic assemblage’ and the ‘collective assemblage of enunciation’: “On the one hand it is a machinic assemblage of bodies, of actions and passions, an intermingling of bodies of bodies reacting to one another; on the other hand is a collective assemblage of enunciation, of acts and statements, of incorporeal transformation attributed to bodies” (*ATP*, 88). And in addition to this Deleuze and Guattari emphasize “that the assemblage is not confined to the strata is that expression in it becomes a *semiotic system*, a regime of signs, and content becomes a *pragmatic system*, actions and passion” (*ATP*, 504). But there is yet another division. An assemblage “has both territorial sides, or reterritorialized sides, which stabilize it, and cutting edges of deterritorialization, which carry it away” (*ATP*, 88). Back to Sade. How could we concretize a Sadean assem-

blage? In *Justine* the heroine is kidnapped by the morbid obese⁵² Count Gernande. When imprisoned in his castle she discovers that the count uses the countess as human tapping-machine, the count, namely, has a blood-fetish. Several times a week the countess is forced to undergo rather harsh phlebotomies (which are being accompanied with sexual activities in which Justine is forced to partake). The procedure: “arms suspended by two straps”, “he feels the veins, and lances them, on each arm”, “Bloods leaps far”, “he has a clear view of these two fountains”, “I [Justine] suck him”, and “I pump the last drop from him” (*Justine*, 643). And consequently: “Gernande remained delirious for ten minutes flailing his arms, staggering reeling like one falling in a fit of epilepsy, and uttering screams which must have been audible for a league around; his oaths were excessive; lashing out at everyone at hand, his strugglings were dreadful” (Ibid.). On the machinic part (horizontal axis) we find the straps, the lancet, veins, fountains of blood, the count, countess, and Justine and the actions and passions between these ‘actants (pragmatic system)’. On the other side (enunciation) we find the mental transgressive state of the count, his screaming and swearing, the phenomenology of seeing the two fountains of blood and Justine’s inner dialogue (semiotic system). And the assemblage is directly being deterritorialized into another assemblage.

The emphasis on bodies as well as assemblages in Sade work are logical results of the affective ethics. I intend to show how the ‘abstract’ concept of affectivity can be concretized in an actual Sadean situation. It not only elucidates the concept of affectivity but it also shows that it is never an linear or dualistic occasion, that is, body X act upon body Y, with Z as result. A particular Sadean situation is always already a matter of a multiplicity of

⁵² An example of Sade’s impossibilities (see chapter three). In a single meal the count devours the following: “two soups [...] roast beef, eight hors d’oeuvres, five substantial entrées, five others only apparently lighter, a boar’s head [...]. Then sixteen plates of fruit [...]” And with these dishes the count drank: “[a] round dozen of bottles of wine, four of [...] burgundy, four of champagne with the roast; Tokay, Mulseau Hermitage and Madeira where downed with the fruit. Two bottles of West Indies Rum and ten [!] cups of coffee.” In: *Justine*, p. 639-640.

Nature and artifice, of machines and bodies, the organic and non-organic. In this way Sade undermines the nature/culture binary. Furthermore, and this is maybe more important, Sade replaces fantasy or theatre (with which the Sadistic act is often associated) with programs, procedures and operations.

Chapter three: Politics

Against tyranny/the LAW/spaces of emancipation

Against Tyranny

An often 'neglected' guise of Sade are his remarkable politics. I do not necessarily refer (only in the second instance) to a possible politics that his literature brings implicitly forth, but to Sade's actual political ideas which he exposes throughout his work and find their crystallization in the pamphlet we talked about in chapter one: "Yet Another Effort, Frenchmen, I You Become Republicans". If we have to formulate an initial characterization of Sade's politics we could say that it is primarily an activism against the State. Some biographical and historical facts are needed to support this assumption. Sade was throughout his life (or at least since his thirties) victim of the State. He was not only prosecuted because of his sexuality⁵³, but foremost because of his writings. Whether it was the ancien régime, the Reign of Terror or the Napoleonic era, all these forms of government regarded Sade as subversive and dangerous. Admittedly, Sade was prosecuted for two crimes he

⁵³ Throughout Sade's work the act of sodomy plays an important role. In his actual life Sade takes an ambiguous role regarding sexuality. There is one record that states he had sex with his male servant Latour (it is without any doubt that Sade fostered sexual relationships with men throughout his life). They were both sentenced to death in absentia (they escaped prison). See: Lauwaert, p. 2 and Thomas, p. 121-125. I would like to say: Sade as victim of homophobia.

committed that where fairly serious⁵⁴, but in general the reasons to hunt him down where political motivated. It was either his ‘dangerous’ writing or his sexual preferences that altogether caused him to spend over 40 years of his life in several prisons and eventually the infamous asylum of Chareton. At the end of his life Sade had become a fat and bold man (beautifully represented by a portrait Man Ray, see title page) tormented by physical ailments⁵⁵. But it is in this time Sade began to write frenetically, his most renowned novels where written while in captivity. It is not strange to consider Sade as a Nietzschean free spirit: being tormented he was in search to unshackle the chains of bad health and imprisonment through the act of writing and thinking. In his own particular way Sade was in search of *his* great health⁵⁶. It is no wonder that Sade at a certain point began to detest the State or authority in general. I would like to make here the point (not without problems) that Sade is in fact, in many ways, the Deleuzo-Guattarian nomad that escapes the control of the State, and we all know that the State does not like nomads. Sade’s nomadism is double; it is physical nomadism and a nomadism of the mind or thought. Deleuze and Guattari point out that the nomadism is a way of life that takes place outside the (striated) organization of the State. And I think we have to understand this quite broad; nomadism or noma-

⁵⁴ According to prosecutors and the victims themselves Sade poisoned in 1772 three prostitutes with candies that contained the alleged aphrodisiac Spanish fly. On an other occasion, a few years earlier (1768), Sade picked up a prostitute named Rose Keller. Under false pretenses Sade lured here to his castle and beat her severely. Afterwards he poured hot candle wax in her wounds. See: Lauwaert, p. 25-28.

⁵⁵ When Sade was young he was considered extremely handsome: blue eyes, slightly build, elegantly dressed, intelligent, and witty. See: Lauwaert, p.29 and Thomas, p. 58. But Sade was also an excellent but rather ‘wild’ and reckless army captain. One of superiors makes the remark that Sade, during battle, is “totally insane but very brave”. See: Thomas, p. 58.

⁵⁶ See: Dolphijn, p. 5-6.

dology is a resistance to all forms of (striated) sedentary structures. Sade was either on run or incarcerated: physical or thought. Deleuze writes in “Nomadic thought”⁵⁷:

the nomad is not necessarily one who moves; some voyages take place *in situ* [Deleuze’s emphasis], are trips in intensity. Even historically, nomads are not necessarily those who move about like migrants. On the contrary, they do not move; nomads, they nevertheless stay in the same place and continually evade the codes of the settled people. (149)

Sade is a ‘physical’ nomad: always on the run escaping State control and censorship, and a nomad of thought: evading codes with his philosophy and literature. By undermining the State in all his guises (royal philosophy, literature, politics, religion) Sade functions here as a war-machine or “creative line of flight” (ATP, 233). Sade seems to find himself in a permanent state of indeterminacy or intermediacy. In a letter (1791) to his childhood friend that later became his lawyer Gaspard-François-Xavier Gaufridy⁵⁸, Sade writes about the social status quo during the first years after 1789:

I am anti-Jacobin, I hate them heartily, I adore the king but abhor the old abuses; I love a mass of articles in the constitution, but others repel me. I want their lusture to be returned to the nobility because I can see no point taking it away. I do not want a national assembly but two chambers [...]. That is what I think. What am I? An aristo-

⁵⁷ A relatively unknown but brilliant essay by Deleuze about Nietzsche. In: Allison, David. B, ed. *The New Nietzsche: Contemporary Styles of Interpretation*. New York: Delta, 1977.

⁵⁸ See: Thomas, p. 50.

crat or a democrat? You tell me, if you please for I am unable to judge. (Sade qtd. in Bataille 112-113)

A cynic would make the remark that Sade is an opportunist. And we indeed have to admit that he often butters both sides of his bread. Whether during the ancien régime or the Reign of Terror, Sade always got away. At one moment as a decadent and rich Marquis, the other moment as citizen Sade stirring up the crowd. But cynics often do not think beyond their reactivity. There is something more profound about Sade's politics, he does something more than only trade positions. Sade's intermediacy or in-between position is self imposed, fueled by a deep aversion towards State tyranny of any kind whatsoever. Sade refuses to land, to be permanently territorialized, he simply cannot confirm to the State. And this refusal is twofold: it is, as we have seen, a resistance against the State on one hand and on the other hand the State could very well prohibit and obstruct the actions and thereby the essence of the libertine. To begin with the tyrannic aspect I would like to turn once more to Spinoza. Throughout *Ethics* tyranny plays a crucial role and a preliminary characterization of this tyranny is "that all that is sad is bad and enslaves us; all that involves sadness *expresses* [my emphasis] tyranny" (EPS, 270). How does sadness cause tyranny? Spinoza distinguishes the slave, the tyrant and the priest and these three conceptual personae refer to "the man with sad passions [slave]; the man who exploits these sad passions, who needs them in order to establish his power [tyrant]; and the man who is saddened by the human condition and by human passion in general [priest]" (SPP, 25). It is a trinity that self-perpetuates through " [a] hatred of life, [a] resentment against life" (SPP, 25). The tyrant – slave (or master – slave) relation is characterized by mutual dependency: "[t]he tyrant needs sad spirits in order to succeed, just as sad spirits need a tyrant in order to be content and multiply" (SPP, 25). It is this framework with which Sade

shows affinity. Sade aligns tyranny and religion for he writes in the above mentioned pamphlet⁵⁹:

Frenchmen [...] [k]now well that you cannot possibly liberate her from royal tyranny without at the same time breaking for her the fetters of religious superstition: the shackles of the one are too intimately linked to those of the other; let one of the two survive, and you cannot avoid falling subject to the other you have left intact. (298)

Hence, religion and tyranny are inherently interconnected and mutually depended. Sade gives countless historical examples in which the State and religion are a ‘toxic’ duo subjecting, as Sade calls it, “slaves” who nonetheless maintain the status quo: “how many feeble and pusillanimous creatures will not speedily become the thralls of this cunning shavepate?” (*PIB*, 297). Within his critique on tyranny Sade elaborates extensively on the death penalty, and this is to some extent hard to reconcile with the crimes of the libertines. But those are individual murders that have nothing to do with the State; they take place in the enclosed and isolated Sadean society (which nonetheless functions as the State, see chapter two). Sade writes that one should “get rid forever of the atrocity capital punishment, because law which attempts a man’s life is impracticable, unjust, inadmissible” (*PIB*, 310), but Sade directly adds that “an infinite number of cases, where, without offense of Nature, men have freely taken one another’s lives, simply exercising a prerogative received from their common mother” (*Ibid.*). We already elaborated on this more ‘individualistic’ killing in the previous chapters, let us concentrate solely on State initiated violence which find its cumulation in capital punishment. Sade gives two specific reasons why he is against capital punishment. He firstly regards the law as “cold and impersonal a total

⁵⁹ “Yet Another Effort, Frenchmen, I You Become Republicans”

stranger to the passions which are able to justify in man the cruel act of murder” (*PIB*, 310). Secondly, Sade argues (like many present-day opponents of the death penalty) that capital punishment “never repressed crime” and consequently he gives the rather odd argument that “it would be difficult to conceive of a poorer calculation than this, by which a man is put to death for having killed another: under present arrangement the obvious result is not one man less but, of a sudden, two; such arithmetic is in use only amongst headsman and fools” (*Ibid.*). What to do with these rather peculiar arguments? The first reason seems to allude to the rejection to any State involvement whatsoever, that is, the State cannot and must not control and consequently punish human passion. The second reason, I would like to suggest, we have to interpret, not only as the idea that capital punishment does not repress crime, but as a contradiction: to kill someone if that someone is a killer himself. It is most interesting to have a look at Sade’s first argument, Sade, namely, addresses an very important mechanism: the State who interferes in human passions. Admittedly, Sade directly associate this with murder and the freedom of men to commit murder, but it is again State (or religious) tyranny that never may intervene in personal life, in human passions.

But there is a darker dimension of Sade’s politics. It is his deep contempt for the masses that gives his activism a reactive and bitter taste, however, at the same time this could also be regarded as proto-Nietzschean thought, Sade’s aversion to the masses or even better, the herd, is namely always fueled by his atheism. The Dutch (existentialist) writer W.F. Hermans rightfully states: “Sade as atheistic moralist. Sade as Nietzsche’s precursor. Sade’s philosophy is at the same time more cruel, inhumane than Nietzsche’s and also more magnanimous” (Hermans, 24)⁶⁰. Sade pushes Nietzsche to the limit as it where,

⁶⁰ My own translation of the original Dutch text: “Sade als atheïstisch moralist. Sade als voorloper van Nietzsche. Sade’s filosofie is tegelijk wreder, onmenselijker dan die van Nietzsche en toch ook grootmoediger.” In: Hermans, W.F. *Het Sadistische Universum*. Amsterdam: Bezige Bij, 1967.

but stays nonetheless Nietzschean, an 'accelerated' Nietzschean. Let us first concentrate on some concrete examples in Sade's literature which could bring us closer to Nietzsche. Sade points towards the sedative function of religion, i.e., that it protects one from fear:

Ignorance and fear [...] those are the twin bases of every religion. Man's uncertainty with the respect to his god is, precisely, the cause for his attachment to his religion. Man's fear in dark places is as much physical as moral; fear becomes habitual in him, and is changed into need: he would believe he were lacking something even were to have he to have nothing more to hope for or dread. (PIB, 305)

Religion or God in this context is thus both the cause of fear and solution to fear; a self fulfilling prophecy. Sade shows here the reactive force of religion, and we all know it is in Nietzsche all about forces. Life, world or universe is ultimately a matter of the 'interplay' of forces, which can be discerned as follows: "Active force, power of acting or commanding; [...] reactive force, power of obeying or of being acted; [...] developed reactive force, power of splitting up, dividing and separating; [...] active force become reactive, power of being separated, of turning against itself" (NP, 63). It is exactly this forces Sade already envisioned 100 years before Nietzsche. I Sade it is all about the active and reactive, I even dare to argue that the libertine is the Nietzschean Overman. Not the Overman raped by the Nazi's and mass-culture, but rather the overman who overcomes reactivity and humanity, or, "Man is essentially reactive, and human history is the universal becoming-reactive of force. The only way for man to attain true affirmation is to overcome himself, to become something other than human – to become the Overman" (Bogue, 27). And this is exactly what the libertine does, be it through *the negative*, or through the negative to the active. Sade's literature and philosophy, hence, tell not only a story about affectivity, but also

about the active and the reactive. The active libertine who overcomes himself again and again, and the reactive victim (in case of a bodily situation) or the reactive and fearful slave who seeks comfort in God and religion.

The LAW

Deleuze rightfully remarks that “Sade’s hatred of tyranny, his demonstration that the law enables the tyrant to exist, form the essence of his thinking. The tyrant speaks the language of the law, and acknowledges no other, for he “lives in the shadow of the laws.” The heroes of Sade are inspired with an extraordinary passion against tyranny” (CC, 87). Deleuze refers here to the LAW (indeed with capitals) as formulated by Kant. According to Kant the law does not derives Good, but the Good itself is the condition of the law, or as Deleuze writes: “Whereas the classical conception only dealt with *the laws* [Deleuze’s emphasis] according to the various spheres of the Good or the various circumstances attending the best, Kant can speak of the moral law, and of its application to what otherwise remains totally undetermined [...] the moral law is the LAW” (CC, 82-83). Kant’s moral LAW is an anthropology; an anthropocentric universal. The law is a unconditional categorical imperative, from which the good derives⁶¹, and, “He [Kant] wants [...] ‘a completely isolated metaphysics of morals, which is not mixed with any theology or physics or hyperphysics’. All moral concepts [...] have their seat and origin wholly *a priori* in the reason” (Russell, 759), hence, the birth of a universal ethics which is add odds in every

⁶¹ Lauwaert, 142.

aspect with Sade's affectivity (which we formulated above). Deleuze, however, argues that the libertines intend to transcend the Kantian LAW "no longer in the direction of the Good as superior principle and ground of law, but in the direction of the opposite, the idea of Evil, the supreme principle of wickedness, which subverts the law and turns Platonism up-side down" (CC, 87). I, nevertheless, would like to argue libertines do not know Kant or the transcendental, there is nothing to rise above nor to descent to. The libertines do know matter, or the substance of which they are part of.

Lacan undertakes the very bold endeavor to align Sade and Kant (In "Kant Avec Sade"). This is not without any problems, Sade and Kant are opposites. Kant, after all, gives us an anthropology; the anthropocentric universal law dictated via the categorial imperative, while Sade, as we have seen above, rejects this LAW as well as anthropocentrism (as logical consequence of radical materialism and/or ontology). And (as we have seen in chapter 2) Sade's ethics is about affects, about empiricism, that is, what a body *does*, while Kant adheres to transcendental absolutism and universals (including a universal ethics). And in addition to this Kant, as we have seen in the previous chapter, puts the mind matter binary to the limit until there is only the mind (Geist) left. Summarized; Sade is immanent, inhabiting the earth entrails and Kant is always already 'something out there', Sade is immoral (affectivity), Kant is moral (universal ethics). Lacan, however, argues that Sade continues Kant's ethics (be it in a extreme way). According to the psychoanalyst, the Sadean universe answers to two conditions dictated by Kantian ethics. These conditions are: 1) a radical rejection of the pathological, that is, human conduct, in Sade, is not driven empirically, and 2) Sade, like Kant, adheres to a universality, and in Sade this means that Nature or substance becomes a function as an universal 'law'. And, like Bataille and Deleuze, Lacan also defends the thesis of the sadist as apathetic, that is, the libertine obeys apa-

thetically to Nature that has become a categorial imperative.⁶² In summary: both Sade and Kant reject the senses, the empirical, and, consequently both obey or adhere to a universal LAW: Kant morally and Sade via the LAW of the single substance or Nature⁶³.

In our context we can nothing do but disagree with Lacan. The affective ethics, as well as the libertine as active and emotional creature undermines both apathy and the universal. I would further more like to emphasize that Lacan does exactly the opposite of what Sade intends, that is to say (and I briefly mentioned this earlier) Lacan tries, in my opinion rather forcefully, to descry a transcendental dimension in Sade, but this is exactly what Sade rejects. We have to affirm Sade, and in doing this, we discover the earth.

Spaces of emancipation

It sounds almost absurd if one would argue that Sade is feminist or an advocate for gay rights. But Sade's has yet some new tricks up his sleeve. How does an Sadean feminism looks like? Let us begin with something that is not directly associated with feminism: the practice of anal sex. In Sade anal sex (I refuse to use the term sodomy⁶⁴) plays a crucial role. It is not

simply anal eroticism, a natural and animal pleasure [only in the second instance]; it is an anal eroticism [...] interpreted as an act that functions neither for reproduction of the species nor for the species bonding, as an act done to gore the partner and re-

⁶² See: Lauwaert, 145. He gives an excellent reading of the relation between Kant and Sade Lacan forges.

⁶³ Lauwaert, 147

⁶⁴ I find it a highly offense term since it implies an punishment for being homosexual (see the biblical story of Sodom and Gomorra) I therefore use the much more neutral 'anal sex'.

lease the germ of the species in his excrement. Thus sodomy [...] is an assault on the human species as such [...] and an act directed against God, the ultimate formula for all forms. (Klossowski, xiii).

In this way the act of anal sex ‘fits’ perfectly in his anti-anthropocentric as well as his anti-theistic projects. But the act of anal sex is not only philosophical motivated: for the libertine the very act of anal sex is the pinnacle of pleasure (whether in a man-man or man-woman situation). In *PIB* Madame de Saint-Ange explains:

This scepter of venus⁶⁵ [...] [a]lways obedient to the passions of the person who wields it, sometimes it nest there (*She touches Eugénie’s cunt*), this is the ordinary route, the one in widest use, but not the most agreeable; in pursuit of a more mysterious sanctuary, it is often here (*She spreads wide Eugénie’s buttocks and indicates the anus.*) that the libertine seeks enjoyment. (200)

And in addition to this: “It has pleased Nature so to make us that we attain happiness only by the way of pain. But once vanquished and had this way, nothing can equal the joy one tastes upon the entrance into our ass; it is a pleasure incontestably superior to any sensation procured by this same introduction in front” (*PIB*, 202). In a critical context anal sex is an act, as said before, directed against procreation, and, consequently, against humanity as such. In the critique of procreation lies a key aspect of Sade’s politics which offers a surprising affinity with the emancipation of woman. Or as the American feminist Camille Paglia argues: “with [...] Sade we [women] have the right to thwart nature’s procreative

⁶⁵ Penis

compulsions, through sodomy and abortion” (Paglia, 14). An amusing though exalted passage from *PIB* elucidates Sade’s idea on the matter very well:

Oh, charming sex, you will be free: as do men, you will enjoy all the pleasures of which Nature makes a duty, from not one will you be withheld. Must the diviner half of humankind be laden with irons by the other? Ah, break those irons; Nature wills it. For bridle have nothing but your inclinations, for laws only your desires, for morality Nature’s alone; languish no longer under brutal prejudices which wither your charms and hold captive the divine impulses of your heart. (323)

It is clear that it is not only specifically procreation which is Sade’s target. It is marriage, monogamy, the hierarchy between man and woman, in short: woman's social position which prohibits her to live according her genuine desires, pleasures and will. Sade creates actual spaces for women to release their sexuality from the confined, oppressing and misogynist milieus of 18th century France. This sexual liberation (as far as I know Sade it the only author of his time who formulated such liberation) is put to the extreme in the novel *Juliette* (the counter-narrative of *Justine*)⁶⁶. In this work the homonymous heroine totally surrenders to the most extreme sexual and violent practices, she becomes the prototypical libertine that murder, rapes, get raped and tortures. We could, however, object here, that Sade turns Juliette into a man or, at least, projects a masculinity onto her, we will turn to this matter in a moment.

However, one could easily object that, first of all, Sade is a misogynist *par excellence*. A quick glance at his work soon reveals the countless horrible predicaments many of

⁶⁶ Justine and Juliette are sisters; the former is a narrative about the violation of virtue, the latter the celebration of vice.

the female character undergo, but also Sade's aggressive rhetorics show a deep contempt for women. Secondly, and that is may be more important, Sade seems to ascribe an (alleged) male sense of sexuality to women, that is, he projects his own unbridled sexual energy on the female characters in his literature: he expects women to display a similar sexual behavior like men. And in addition to this and to support this Sade often falls back on Nature, and I do not refer to his philosophical Naturalism, but rather to the living world of animals. If Sade writes that "[i]t is certain, in a state of Nature, that women are born vulguiva-guous⁶⁷, that is to say, are born enjoying the advantages of other female animals and belonging, like them and without exception, to all males" (*PIB*, 318). In this biological context the idea of an emancipation becomes deterministic, that is, Nature does it, and man (part of Nature) necessarily has to behave according to this Nature. But, whatever Sade's motives are, there is nonetheless a strong emancipatory, emotive tendency which has as its object (among others) the sexual liberation of women

Simone de Beauvoir, and I would like to follow her on this specific topic, attacks the idea of Sade as misogynist. In her famous essay *Must we Burn Sade* she makes an interesting mental leap. She argues that Sade finds in women "his double rather than his complement [...] because they were closer to him [...]. Sade felt himself to be feminine, and he resented the fact that women where not the males he really desired" (Beauvoir qtd. in Wainhouse, 34). Beauvoir uses the example of the female libertine Durand in *Juliette* who has " [a] clitoris as long as a finger" (*Juliette*, 1032) that "enables her to behave sexually like a man" (Beauvoir, 35). Beauvoir obviously alludes to the idea of Sade as homosexual, seeking in woman a way to experience the feelings of the passive, female, victims: "by being sodomized, beaten and befouled, Sade also gained insight into himself as passive flesh" (Beauvoir, 37). Sade ultimate wish is Juliette as man.

⁶⁷ And word derived from the Latin 'vulgivagus' meaning: wandering or restless. In: *Latijn/Nederlands Woordenboek*. Red. prof. dr. Harm Pinkster. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1998.

Sade himself is very clear about homosexuality. Besides the celebration of anal sex on which we have elaborated above, Sade is continuously in search of justifications for sexual activities between men, and often he find this arguments in ancient Greek and Roman history and mythology. In *PIB* there are countless references to ancient philosophy and myths in which the eroticism between two men is being celebrated, whether it be Plutarchus, Caesar or Jerome de Peripatetic, and interesting in this context is that Sade links homosexuality with polemology, he writes: “Plutarch speaks with enthusiasm of the battalion of lovers: for many a year they alone defended Greece’s freedom” (327), and he quotes Jerome de Peripatetic: ““The love of youths” says he, “spread throughout all of Greece, for it instilled in us strength and courage””(Ibid.). And: “Pederasty has always been the vice of warrior races. From Caesar we learn that the Gauls were to an extraordinary degree given to it” (328). But it is not only the penchant for Greek an Roman antiquity, Sade also gives all sorts of ethnographical examples of homosexuality, pederasty, and pedophilia from all over the world: he refers to the Indians in Illinois and Lousiana, men form Benguela⁶⁸, sex between young boys and men in Algiers, Mohammed and his preference for young boys and the Persians⁶⁹. There is however, another interesting element which we could add to Sade’s historical justifications. We already elaborated on Sade as teacher or the educational nature of his prose, and it might be useful to link this up with the Plato’s idea of the *erastes* and *eromenos*. In the *The Symposium*⁷⁰ one of the participants of the drinking party, Pausanias, gives a extensive exposé about the nature of (Platonic) love and eroticism. He argues that real love is the intellectual and erotic reciprocity between the *erastes*, the

⁶⁸ A city in today’s Angola.

⁶⁹ See: *PIB*, p. 327-329

⁷⁰ Plato. *The Symposium*. Eds/Trans. M.C Howatson and Frisbee C.C. Sheffield. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008.

senior partner, and the *eromenos*, the younger partner: the erastes teaches the eromenos philosophy and passes on his wisdom, in exchange for physical eroticism. Plato writes:

[W]hen a lover [erastes] and his beloved [eromenos] come together, each will have its own principle. [...] The beloved will believe that by helping in any way the one who is making him wise and good he too will be justified in so helping him. Thus the lover will be able to contribute to his beloved's understanding and excellence in general, and the beloved will seek to acquire these qualities for his education and wisdom in general. (16)

The relation between the lover and beloved, however, is not horizontal but hierarchal: the erastes is the authority to which the eromenos has to obey and, above all, the eromenos is obliged to do sexual favors in exchange for a education. In Sade we find a similar principle. In *PIB* the libertines do not only teach Eugénie sexology or pornography (what can several parts of the body do) but they also educate her (and each other) in philosophy. I would like to argue that the sexual acts in *PIB* are not only the physical demonstrations of philosophical proposition, but that Eugénie functions as the beloved and the libertine as the lover, be it in much more grim milieu. Dolmancé and Madame de Saint-Ange teach, Eugénie offers her body.

Sade offers more than only simplistic historical arguments. In defending homosexuality he takes, again, refuge in mechanistic/deterministic biology. He writes:

the penchant for sodomy is the result of physical formation, to which we contribute nothing and which we cannot alter. At the most tender age, some children reveal that penchant, and it is never corrected in them. [...] Regardless of how it is viewed, it is

her [Nature's] work, and, in every instance, what she inspires must be respected [...].
(*PIB*, 326).

Whether Sade means if we have to respect homosexuality or Nature remains unclear. Sade elsewhere, however, emphasizes: "when the study of anatomy reaches perfection they will without any trouble be able to demonstrate the relationship of the human constitution to the tastes which it affects (*Justine*, 603). Whether Sade seeks his arguments in history (culture) or biology (nature) is, in my opinion, of secondary importance. And if he actually advocates for a gender/queer activism stays unclear and questionable (especially if we take the role of Nature into account). But what we do can say, is that Sade's literature 'accidentally' fulfills an emancipatory function: anal sex as political resistance, either for the sake of women or homosexuals.

Conclusion: Sade and Us

Without self-pity or revel I would like to say that I have undertaken the difficult task to show another dimension of Sade. I have tried to unstick him from commonsense, prejudices, clichés, in short, the doxa. A new Sade has been constructed, a 21st century Sade. A Sade who envisions a life of matter, a Sade as emancipator, a Sade of the affective earth and a Sade of the in-between. What do I mean when I write “Sade and Us”? There are two sides: practical and theoretical. Theoretical: with which epistemological, ethical or ontological present-day themes does Sade’s thought links up, practical: what does Sade teach us. Let us first focus on the theoretical aspect.

An analogous transhistorical comparison is easy to make and not without problems. Can we just say thought X is similar to thought Y? I will nonetheless argue that Sade is in many ways a precursor of several currents of thought. Especially Sade’s critique on anthropocentrism, his preference of matter over mind as well as the critique on the nature/culture binary find their echo in many fields: the several post- and anti-humanisms, speculative realism or object oriented ontology (OOO) and consequently several new- or neo materialist project(s).

Whoever states that Sade’s philosophy is a philosophy of death or destruction does not take in account that he envisions another life that is commonly understood. Sade is all about life, but not a human centered life. Rather it is about an impersonal or inhuman life: a life of matter (as we have seen in chapter 1). Sade’s death and destruction is only pointed towards humankind (and other organic life) and in doing so, I would like to suggest,

Sade takes upon the role of a post-humanist *avant la lettre*. Sade does not only advocates a radical decentralization of humankind, but he also shows us an environmentalism, that is, a world of affectivity in which man is part of nature and not outside of it. I would like to return to Sade's beautiful idea that we "never [undergo] a real death, but a simple variation in what modifies [us] [...]" (*Justine*, 519). Is this not an affirmation of life and a total rejection of death? Who says Sade is about death? Yes, his characters are about death, his libertines can only exist through the means of murder. But does anyone ever noticed that Sade is playing games, that he is a ironic or humorous man? Does it occur to anyone that he uses hyperboles only to reinforce his philosophical project? Many of Sade's descriptions are highly unrealistic; cocks with a length over 60 centimeter, over a hundred ejaculations a day, and, consequently huge amounts of sperm, the most impossible (or very uncomfortable) sexual positions, horrific tortures victims undergo again and again without dying, and so on (see the copious meal of count the Gernande in chapter two). Not that fiction has to be true or necessarily has to represent real possibilities (after all it is fiction), Sade nonetheless deploys rhetorical devices in order to accentuate the underlying, more abstract, philosophy: they are literary demonstrations elucidating philosophical propositions.

What is Sade? Definitely a post-humanist, or rather, an anti-humanist, he offers a critique on correlationalism long before Quentin Meillassoux and friends. Meillassoux who so elegantly deconstructs Kant. In *After Finitude* Quentin Meillassoux gives an excellent critique on Kantian and post-Kantian correlationalism, the idea that "it is [im]possible to consider the realms of subjectivity and objectivity independently of one another" (13), or in other words: "By 'correlation' we mean the idea according to which we only ever have access to the correlation between thinking and being, and never to either term considered apart from the other" (Ibid). Correlationalism is an anthropocentrism, that is, the world can-

not exist without human subjectivity and vice versa. Correlationism, according to Meillassoux, is either weak or strong. The latter being an absolute rejection of “the in-itself” and refers to the idea that “we are radically confined in our own thought, without knowing the in-itself, not even its taking place and logicity” (Meillassoux qtd. in Dolphijn & van der Tuin, 72), while former “grants too much to the speculative of thought. [...] Kant claims that we know something exists in itself, and that it is thinkable” (Ibid.) Either way, whether strong or weak correlationalism, the mind is always been regarded as the mediator between the subject and world, or as the instance that splits subject and world. With the concepts of the “arche-fossil” and “ancestrality” Meillassoux offers us both a radical and charming alternative to correlationalism. The former is the *physical* or *material* ‘proof’ of a world outside the subject: “I will call ‘arche-fossil’ or ‘fossil-matter’ not just materials indicating he traces of past life [...], but materials indicating existence of an ancestral reality or event; one that is anterior to terrestrial life” (22), while the latter designates the more broad idea of “any reality anterior to the emergence of the human species- or even anterior to every recognized form of life on earth” (21).

Posthumanism can mean many things. First of all I would like to propose an initial division (admittedly a rigid division, nonetheless, for now, a workable division) between the posthuman, post-humanity, and post-humanism. These three ‘predicates’ have multiple dimensions: respectively a temporal, qualitative and epistemological. Simply formulated we can ask ourselves, for instance, these three question: what comes after the human, how do climatological, financial crises as well as (bio)technological inventions and developments affect humankind’s idiosyncrasy, as well as alter its position? What does it mean to think a post humanism, that is, an ‘new’ epistemology that succeeds ‘classical’ humanism that finds its origin in enlightenment thought? These question (and certainly many more) emerges at the outset when one coins a post-human(ism)(ity). But these are all

questions asked from a human perspective, from an “epistemological anthropocentrism” which is “characterized by a temporal preoccupation whereby the human being arrives or appears before all else” (Tyler, 21). We have to bypass or go beyond the human, whether by the means of anti-humanism or post-humanism. We have seen that how Sade goes beyond the human, but does he really offer solutions? Does he give us at the beginning of the thread with which we can think further? Yes and no (never or/and but always and, and, and, ad infinitum). His solutions are both charming and naive. It is obvious we cannot go back to a natural state, his biological determinism is simply untenable. Nor we can uphold ideas like the destructive nature and or the legitimacy of murder. But we have seen that Sade is a Spinozist, that he has an affinity with Nietzsche as well as several useful, activist, political ideas. And there lies the power of Sade. Maybe he is simply too elusive to take him seriously, but we could at least read him alongside many different thinkers. We furthermore have to admit that Sade did not have the methodologies or knowledge we have today. It is therefore difficult to align him with present-day thinkers, but, as we have seen above, he shows in any case a deep interconnectedness.

What else can we learn, other than philosophy or theory, from Sade? Is there a practical dimension in Sade (other than sexual practices)? I think Sade actually teaches us how to live. We should not only simply fulfill our physical or sexual desires, Sade shows again and again the pitfalls of religion; he shows us, to use the words of the late Christopher Hitchens, that “religion poisons everything” (Hitchens, 13). God deprives us of our critical capacities, he makes us not only dependent of tyranny (“how many feeble and pusillanimous creatures will not speedily become the thralls of this cunning shavepate?” (*PIB*, 297)), but he also makes us reactive and he thwarts every genuine *active* endeavor.

Sade show us, furthermore, alternatives to established conceptions, ideas, opinions and prejudices, but Sade dwells in the margin (in his life and after his death) and (despite the academic attention) seems to be of no use except his pornographic legacy. But maybe it is in the field of pornography or sexuality in general that Sade is valuable. By becoming part of general (canonical) cultural history he may very well have contributed to our 'sexual consciousness' (we have seen Sade as liberator/emancipator of sexuality in chapter three). But there is more. When did Kant took a flight? And why is our genealogy (see chapter one) marginal (not qualitative but literally 'in the margin')? I always liked the idea of Sade as a 'counter-enlightenment thinker'. We have seen where enlightenment thought (and its anthropocentric project) has led to, Adorno and Horkheimer show it to us. Sade offers us alternatives. It is Sade, the flamboyant, irrational, nomadic, guerilla-philosopher, not Kant, the rigid, boring, strolling virgin (the only similarity is, despite Lacan's efforts, that they both wore whigs) who comes up with workable theses that are so much needed in our radically changing world.

According to me there is one lesson Sade teaches us: distrust authority, reject religion and tyranny, be active and avoid reaction. Though Sade gained much attention in the twentieth century, his influence nowadays is fading. Scholars seem to have lost interest in his work, at universities Sade's work is scarcely taught, and we cannot find his novels on the obligatory reading lists in high schools or universities⁷¹. This is in my opinion a pity: Sade has so much to offer. Though he is too elusive to consider him as 'comprehensive' thinker, we could very well read him *alongside* others, that is, as supporting thinker. He shows his relevance in literary studies (the composition of his novels as well as the content

⁷¹ A quick glance on the internet soon reveal Sade's marginal position in present day academia.

is unique in literary history), philosophy for the multiple reasons we elaborated on above, Gender- and queer studies/theory (either as paragon of misogyny or emancipator) or in history/political sciences (as we have seen in chapter three).

Sade deserves a place among the giants, but he loves the earth too much. And maybe we have to let him be, to let him dwell in the earth entrails. The ones who really want to understand him have to descent, if they dare (no one likes leaving mount Olympus), and then, if patient and willing enough, they discover Sade's brilliance and beauty.

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