

Le monde est l'ensemble des symptômes dont la maladie se confond avec l'homme.
Gilles Deleuze, *Critique et Clinique*¹

In contrast with psychoanalytic interpretations of literary works, which tend to see writers as patients, Deleuze's critical-clinical 'project' proposes a relation between the critical and the clinical, whereby writers, like clinicians, can themselves be seen as symptomatologists. The fundamental point of contention is that interpretations of the literary work focusing on personal and family related causes or presuppositions overshadow the discernment of the fundamental productive nature of literary creation. Moreover, the 'sense' of the symptom should be sought out from among the forces producing it rather than from its form against such preconditions. As Zourabichvili explains: "if, using the terms of Nietzsche, Deleuze can say that the real critique is a symptomatology (or clinical), it is because he is no longer satisfied with the form of the phenomenon, but wants to know just what 'will' is invested in the phenomenon"².

Hence, from the point of view of Deleuze's 'critique et clinique' project, the fundamental question that should be asked to literature is: 'what is it for?'. Such is the opening interrogation of Deleuze's book on Sacher-Masoch. The idea behind the critical-clinical 'project' involves going beyond the application of pre-existing clinical concepts to literary production, to trying to extract clinical manifestations and concepts existing beyond these from the worlds created within literature's other. Such conception also indicates a slowing of the plane of the subject and of the personal, as well as a distancing of what may be considered the interpretation of the work based on the biographical projection of the author. Following from here, the exercise of literature can be thought of as something that necessarily 'transcends what is' through an operation that involves the suspension or 'defacement' of the biographical-personal dimension by virtue of a 'becoming-world' of the biographical.

Within this frame, this essay aims to address what is arguably the most crucial in Deleuze's conception of literary creation, that is, the possibility of reconfiguration of the biographical experience beyond the

1. Gilles Deleuze, *Critique et Clinique*, 1993, p.14. Last book edited by Deleuze comprising essays published between 1963 and 1989 and revised at the time of publication alongside many other original essays on literature.

2. François Zourabichvili, 2006, "Kant avec Masoch", *Multitudes* 2006/2 25; Gilles Deleuze, 1962, *Nietzsche et la Philosophie*. "Si, parlant d'abord dans les mots de Nietzsche, Deleuze peut dire que la vraie critique est symptomatologie (ou clinique), c'est parce qu'elle ne se contente plus de la forme du phénomène, mais demande quelle « volonté » s'investit dans le phénomène".

phenomenological through an ethical-political crossing of literature and life alongside the renewal of the idea and practice of the 'biographical' within a collective, world-historical sense.

This is where Masoch comes in.

Présentation de Sacher-Masoch

The book *Présentation de Sacher-Masoch* was the first in which Deleuze formulated the clinical-critical question under the guise of a symptomatology resembling Nietzsche³. In this same sense, the appropriation of Masoch's and Sade's names by clinical semiology in Krafft-Ebing's *Psychopathia sexualis* (1886), to designate and classify new clinical entities, respectively, 'masochism' and 'sadism', is understood by Deleuze as a sign of the prodigious literary effectiveness of their works. Precisely because it reveals the capacity of Masoch's and Sade's works to extract new configurations within the limits of the invisible, making visible and possible new dimensions of sexuality that assert themselves as genuine ways of life: 'sadist' and 'masochist'.

However, the very literary singularity of Leopold von Sacher-Masoch and Marquis de Sade was precisely subject to challenge when Freud failed to discern literary production properly in the terms of a symptomatology of the world. Though in the eyes of Deleuze, Freud did attain the merit of introducing fiction into medical diagnosis, taking the first steps toward the subordination of aetiology to symptomatology, and thus properly discerning the constellation of forces reuniting around a symptom to the detriment of casual reasoning. Yet according to Deleuze, in one particular case Freud had simply superimposed a familiar-personal grid onto the symptom, reducing it to the realm of the intimate and the personal. I am referring here to Freud having explained "sexual perversion" based on castration phantasies and internal aggressiveness and with an infantile and family related genesis, thus, emphasising a personal and pulsional economy, and, in his conception, having reduced masochism to the rule of sadism (or the desexualized return of sadism to its own object) (Freud, 1915, 1919) unifying both identities into one; 'sado-masochism'⁴. In so doing, Deleuze considers there is a failure to discern masochism and sadism as complete, non-transformative entities in their own rights. Above all, as manifestations of the world, they are lost by referring the whole to the interiority of the writer or to a psychobiography of the work:

"Sadism and masochism are confused when treated as abstract entities each in isolation from its own specific universe. Once they have been cut off from their Umwelt and stripped of their flesh and blood, it seems

3. *Présentation de Sacher-Masoch: Le froid et le cruel*, 1967, Minuit, Paris. The other two essays devoted to Masoch are "De Sacher-Masoch au Masochisme", *Arguments*, n.21, 1961, and in 1989, "Re-présentation de Masoch", *Libération*, May.

4. It is in the essays "*The Drives (Instincts) and their Vicissitudes*" (1915) and 'A child is being beaten - a contribution to the study of the origin of sexual perversions' (1919) that Freud presents perversion as originating in childhood, and a fantasy subject to transformation by repression or by sublimation. Particularly, in the 1915 text, sadism and masochism are addressed as two movements of one same drive.

natural that they should fit in with each other"⁵.

Hence, according to Deleuze, the designation of 'sado-masochism' stands as a *semiological monster* in that it obscures the constellations of forces and the specific and diverse movements that embody the signs. In other words, the problem arises when, separating the writer from his world, sight is lost of the particular manifestations that the literary production forced itself to 'extract from the invisible by making visible'. In this case, by reducing the literary exercise to the form of the writer's personal experience, there is a loss of the relationship with the world to which the symptom belongs, as well as the positivity of literary production, which is demonstrated by the actual fact that the names of Sade and Masoch come to designate actual clinical manifestations.

Sadism and Masochism

In Freud, the subjugation of masochism by sadism occurs when the two entities are absorbed into one, that is, into the 'sadism-masochism' unit. What is then designated as the 'sadism-masochism' perversion becomes a partial drive, a state of oscillation between a sadistic pole and a masochistic pole, explained by an overlap of the death drive (drive of destruction and domination) to the pulse of life that is redirected to the other (sadism), and to the self (masochism). The goal of the drive – violence – is retained, only the object changes (the other or the self). In this sense, masochism and sadism form part of the same oscillatory and partial drive: on the one hand the libido diverts the death drive towards objects in the external world, from which sadism results - maintaining it - on the other hand, in the organism through a co-libidinal excitation that represents the place of the original and erogenous masochism⁶. While sadism and masochism might seem complementary, in the sense in which the first finds pleasure in giving pain to the other, and the second experiences pleasure in the pain inflicted by the other, Deleuze argues that the mechanisms by which they operate are productively distinct. Crucially, the masochist, or 'victim' in Sade's novels does not match the 'masochist' in Masoch's novels. Nor, conversely, does Vanda, the 'cold and indifferent woman', the 'cruel woman' of Masoch's literary world, correspond to the sadist male of Sade's novels: "a genuine sadist could never tolerate a masochistic victim (...) Neither would the masochist tolerate a truly sadistic torturer."⁷

Deleuze attempts to show that behind Masoch's woman-executioner lies an idea of pedagogy: the masochist's cruel woman must be created and taught, their relationship contractualised, "the masochist contract implies not only the necessity of the victim's consent, but his ability to persuade, and his

5. *Présentation de Sacher-Masoch: Le froid et le cruel*, Paris, Minuit, 1967. *Masochism: Coldness and Cruelty*, trans. Jean McNeil (Zone Books, NY, 1971), p.42.

6. Freud, *The Economic Problem of Masochism*, 1924.

7. *Masochism: Coldness and Cruelty*, p.40.

pedagogical and juridical efforts to train his torturer"⁸. However, the masochist's woman also renounces pleasure, suspends satisfaction and feels no pleasure in the victim's pain, at the same time as the sadist's victim also feels no pleasure in the pain inflicted. Here, Deleuze finds a singular logic of desire – which contradicts the notion of desire modelled from absence and according to a transcendent ideal – proceeding by the suspension, the postponement of pleasure, which is to say, prolonging desire as a process, independent of a final object that grants satisfaction. In this way, according to Deleuze, the suspension of desire and the denial of the real predominate in Masoch's literary world; while for Sade pleasure and the projection of the ideal over the real prevails. Nevertheless, beyond that, such phantasm also serves different functions in both Sade and Masoch. While in Sade, fiction should be destroyed at the expense of that which is lived, in Masoch, the phantasm is precisely the place of the masochist's investment (the fetish object) in which the real and the ideal intertwine. Therefore, one ought to understand the Deleuzian insistence on making the clinical disjunction or decomposition of sadism with masochism in light of an objective to discern distinct literary projects, varied worlds and movements of forces, and different processes of actualization beyond the appearance of complementarity. As I will show here Deleuze finds opposed notions of desire and of pleasure, as well as different capitalizations of the fictional with political meanings and inferences.

The becoming-world of masochism, the phantasm and the collective

In *A childhood memory and reflections on the novel* (1888), Masoch describes some of the events associated with the discovery and construction of his 'masochism'. An early fascination with the sacrificial economy of the church, with its figures of martyrs and saints, a childhood feeling of growing pleasure upon punishment; along with an inclination for the study of the history of matriarchal and patriarchal societies. It is worth noting that Masoch structures his work around a series, under the name of 'Legacy of Cain', and of which the book *Venus in Furs* (1869) forms a part of Love, its first volume. In this context, the following consideration of Deleuze proves extremely crucial: "What is the meaning of the term 'Legacy of Cain'? It is intended first to express the burden of crime and suffering inherited by humanity"⁹. If we accept such facets of Masoch's work as inseparable from that which is clinically called masochism, then the question we arrive at is the following: for what reason would a 'masochist' want "to account for the inheritance of crimes and sufferings that weigh upon humanity?" The work of Masoch certainly reflects the cultural and political movements of his time and culture, latent in the types of characters portrayed, from Slavic folklore and the

8. Ibid., p. 75.

9. *Masochism: Coldness and Cruelty*, p.12.

multiple revolutions against the Habsburg Empire during 1848, just as much as the work of Sade is inseparable from the French Revolution. However Deleuze's response points towards yet another dimension of the socio-political valence of Masoch's work, sought beyond the identification of some of its historical and social features.

It seems that what is at stake here is not just a political-cultural investment in the work, but in a work that in itself perverts the world, through a crossroads of the personal with the collective, or of a *becoming-world of the biographical*¹⁰. Such would also be the mark of the writing of the writer in contrast to that of the 'neurotic'. The novel of the 'neurotic' in which the world is a projection of a second order, the fruit of an indirect relation mediated by the phantasm (the world as the projection of my phantasms, or the origin of my phantasms, thus both cause and product) and of the writer who, while trying to directly relate to it, turns out as much a 'patient as a doctor of civilization'. Therefore, the excessive projection of man over the world would be repaired on that other plane that is literature, or the *literary plane*, through a specific practice of experience and an openness to the de-subjectified forces of the Outside. Hence, to say that experience is elevated to the literary equates with the conception of a process of personal trans-biographization that would refer experience to the world and to a collective. In this sense, it seems that it matters less to think of the literary operation as the negation of the biographical, but rather as a particular process of *agencement* with an out-of-self, a collective and impersonal (though singular) outside, in which literature finds its highest justification. As Éric Alliez explains, from the moment in which the personal and the collective coalesce – as happens with Masoch – the phantasm becomes part of an existential and political program¹¹. From that point onwards, masochism is not only Leopold von Sacher Masoch's masochism, but something that inscribes and re-enacts the liberation movement of the world within a program of masochism: the writer diagnoses the world and evaluates the chances for a new health, or for a new man¹².

Also at stake is the breaking of the merely fanciful statute of fiction, taking part in it and connecting it to the social and the political so as to extract its greatest potential, which is the potential of the false (that is not constituted by opposing the true, nor as its negation), and that opens up as political possibility of creation. It is in this sense that Deleuze affirms that true writers are those who make of the phantasm not the origin but the work itself:

10. 'The artist is not only the patient and doctor of civilization, but also its pervert'. *Logique du sens* Paris: Minuit, 1969. *The Logic of Sense*, trans. Mark Lester with Charles Stivale. NY: Columbia University Press, 1990, p. 238.

11. cf.: Éric Alliez, "Deleuze avec Masoch", *Multitudes*, 2006/2, 25, p. 53-68.

12. In "Re-présentation de Masoch", 1989 (reprinted in *Critical and Clinical*, pp. 53 -xx): "More a physician than a patient, the writer makes a diagnosis, but what he diagnoses is the world; he follows the illness step by step, but it is the generic illness of man: 'the legacy of Cain', 'the Sign of Cain' as the total work (p.53).

"What properly belongs to Sade, Masoch and a few others (for example, Robbe-Grillet or Klossowski) is making the phantasm itself the object of their work, whereas usually it is only the origin of the work. What literary creation and the constitution of symptoms have in common is the phantasm. Masoch calls it 'the figure' and in fact says 'one must go beyond the living figure to the

problem'. If the phantasm for most writers is the source of the work, for those writers who interests me it is precisely the phantasm that is at stake in the work and has the last word, as if the whole work reflected its origin"¹³.

The literary (or the phantasm elevated to the literary) therefore represents a means through which one goes from 'the figure to the problem'. In *The Logic of Sense* this idea of movement from the figure to the problem is taken up in terms of an extraction of the non-actualizable of the pure event and of going from the causes of the symptoms to the quasi-causes of the work, in opposition to that which takes place in the familiar novel of the 'neurotic'¹⁴. Thus the production of a symptomatology involves this movement of the 'figure' – in the sense of the personal, of the familiar, of the neurotic – to the problem or structure in which the problem is placed. That is to say, this involves a movement from the personal to the collective.

The power of fiction and perversion as program

We find in Masoch a pedagogical relationship with the ideal woman who corresponds to the phantasm, however, within other terms, we might also state that the masochist manipulates the real directly, for creates his own through a pedagogy of the phantasm. Thus, the distinction between the lived real and the phantasm does not take place in Masoch as, on this level, the object *par excellence* of the masochist is the fetish object, which in itself is a phantasmatic construction (the phantasm suspends the ideal in his interiority and makes itself permeated by the real). We should then note that, while remaining true that the masochist prefers phantasm to the real this is because law prohibits a relationship with the real (in Freud, the prohibition of incest, where the Law is no longer the law of father and mother, but becomes the moral law). The masochist operation simultaneously also allows the thought that the terms are not of an escape from the real to the imaginary, but of the movement of the phantasmic as a creation of new conditions of existence beyond transcendental Law (of the possible)¹⁵. Additionally in this case, this is the brutal power of fiction that begins being delineated in Masoch. The phantasmic, or the movement of the figure to the problem, represents the maximal figure of the fictional, not because the phantasm is an escape from the real, but because the phantasmic movement carried out in masochism creates its own conditions of possibility. The ideal, now phantasmal, ceases to be transcendent and fiction starts creating its own conditions of realization.

Let us see how through the contract, the masochist makes use of the law by which the real is manipulated to the point of matching and being permeated by the phantasm. The despotic woman of the masochist rules over him and

13. Interview by Madeleine Chapsal, "Mystique et Masochisme" in *La Quinzaine littéraire* 25 (April 1-15, 1967): 12-14 reprinted in *Desert Islands and Other Texts 1953-1974*, trans. Michael Taormina. Cambridge: Semiotext(e), 2004, p. 132.

14. "The neurotic can only actualize the terms and the story of his novel: the symptoms are this actualization, and the novel has no other meaning. On the contrary, to extract the non-actualizable part of the pure event from symptoms (or, as Blanchot says, to raise the visible to the invisible), to raise everyday actions and passions (like eating, shitting, loving, speaking, or dying) to their noematic attribute and their corresponding pure Event, to go from the physical surface on which symptoms are played out and actualizations decided to the metaphysical surface on which the pure event stands and is played out, to go from the cause of the symptoms to the quasi-cause of the oeuvre - this is the object of the novel as a work of art, and what distinguishes it from the familial novel (*Logic of Sense*, p. 237).

15. See François Zourabichvili's "Kant avec Masoch", *Multitudes*, 2006/2 no 25, p. 87-100, which develops the idea that Deleuze finds in the work of Masoch as the means for a total reconfiguration of the question of the critique, since it is in Masoch that the meeting of Art and Law occurs on which the critical and clinical depends and the fetish as condition for freeing the imagination of the Kantian conditions of possibility.

has rights over his life, from the way he acts and speaks to the choice of his name. We correspondingly then perceive the relevance of Deleuze's criticism of the inscription of the negative upon desire and the transcendent ideal of the phantasm. While psychoanalysis understands that the masochist, like everyone else, seeks pleasure but is not able to achieve this except through pain and phantasmatic humiliations whose function is to appease deep anguish, Deleuze shows that what is important to note is how the suffering of the masochist is the cost he has to bear, not to access pleasure, but to dismantle the pseudo-connection of desire with pleasure, which throws back into obscurity an entire existential and political program of the masochistic fiction, of the creation of the woman-executioner, and of suspension as practice¹⁶. Therefore, the assumption that literature should reflect not only the phantasm (as an origin of the work), but also the real problem, implies, from the part of Deleuze, providing literature with a unconditional relationship with the real, established through, among other means, a relationship of pedagogy and the disconnection of the negative from desire.

According to Freud, the masochistic drive realises itself when a third party emerges in the process, a third indeterminate object that occupies the place of the first subject, who moves to the place of the object and is mistreated. In the place of the first, another is placed, the idealized woman of the masochist, for example, that occupies the place of ruling subject. In keeping with Freud's conception, the masochist, a dominated and mistreated object, determines the conditions of his own domination as it is he himself who creates his dominating subject, the 'cold and cruel woman'. However the subject occupying the place of the first subject (absent in order to be violated as an object) is the sadist, or the reverse of the masochist drive. Thus, in Freud's understanding, masochism is de-sexualized sadism directed against the self. Furthermore, the empty place occupied by an undetermined third subject, born in the process of masochist movement of the death drive directed against itself, is an event of depersonalization necessary for accomplishing the masochistic drive. As the subject-object relationship becomes damaged, jeopardizing the Other as a structure, it happens that perversion produces depersonalization, creating "a world without the Other", to making recourse to the words of Deleuze. As Freud explains in *The Drives (Instincts) and their Vicissitudes* (1915), the subject moves and this aspect distinguishes, for instance, masochism from self-punishment in obsessive-compulsive neurosis.

Now, while Freud is able to conceive of this idea of Other, this third indeterminate, he is unable to see these same mechanisms operating in sadism and masochism as entities in their own right, creating their own interior element of difference, an Other of masochism and an Other of sadism, whether real, whether imaginary, and corresponding to the idealized woman-executioner.

16. In *Re-présentation de Masoch*, Deleuze clearly equates suspension to juridical formalism in Kafka "a justice that is not confused in any way with Law p.77) Cf. also the dissent among the conceptions of desire and pleasure in Deleuze and Foucault in terms of an opposition between desire and pleasure, suspension and satisfaction, that correspond to different political strategies of resistance.

We would state that it is precisely in this capacity for creating that Other, in the literary worlds of Sade and Masoch, that the literary operation resides. In other words, masochism's Other or sadism's Other correspond to an idea of sadism existing in Masoch and an idea of masochism existing in Sade and not necessarily complementary. Thus, from the point of view of an analysis of the biographical dimension in relation to Masoch's construction of the plane of the literary, the clinical disjunction of the entities sadism-masochism opens up a space to grasp an Other that finds its origins in the interiority of the work and concerns the construction of literary experience on a phantasmatic plane as the suspension of subject-object relations, determinants of a certain structure of the experience.

In this sense, one should think the model of masochist perversion in relation to the reconfiguration of the relations of enunciation and their relation with the real to understand the influence of masochism – as a literary machine – in the thought of a *minor practice* of literature, in which speech is on the side of the victim, that is to say, in which the subject that subjects himself originates a new speech.

Conclusion

The understanding of literature as symptomatology involves operating two inflections of thought around what literature is and does, and how the personal-biographical element is operated: literature is a way of opening to the world, for it is more on the side of the 'world' - the writer as the 'clinician of civilization' – and of the collective than of the personal, with a primarily political sense that Deleuze later develops ('the formation of a people to come' particularly in *Kafka* with Félix Guattari) and the assertion of literary production to the extent of a speculative extraction of the event that launches and renews the conditions of the experiment beyond the possible.

In short, we may say there are six key factors resulting from analysis of the formulation of the critical-clinical question in the work of Deleuze's Sacher-Masoch that are crucial to the exploration of how personal biographical elements are treated in literature: 1) the formulation of an idea of the 'other' that is interior, resulting in a process of depersonalization in Masoch, denoting the power of the fictional as the opening up of a space of difference, or a figure of an Other that is not formed by subjugation, but in which the very act of its creation implies a de-subjection via the creation of the other. In this continuity it should be noted that this mental 'other', that is created, is not projected on the real, but is – 'the masochist's ideal woman executioner' – formed by a relationship of pedagogy in which the real can be said to be manipulated, contradicting the very idea of either transcendental Law or of the father; 2) the development of an idea of literature inseparable from a

practice and a politics of life through a thinking of the contract in opposition to the institution, and of desire as the suspension of pleasure; 3) the renewal of the subject-object relationships in the literary plane and, specifically, the dissolution of the Other as structure. This essentially allows us to conceive of a process of constituting experience that does not in its genesis impose a domain of the subject on the object, or at least the possibility of a concomitant relationship with the object¹⁷; 4) the re-singularization of the biographical and personal experience of the author when thinking about the connection between the writer and the world, the one that becomes with the world, the one who is delirious while perverting the world and making the world delirious – 'from the figure to the problem'; 5) speculative fiction and perversion as a literary model in which the phantasm, the fictional, is thought of with a productive and constitutive valence; 6) finally, masochist perversion as a minor practice in which speech is on the side of the victim.

17. In *Logic of Sense*: "In other words, the positive, highly affirmative character of desexualization consists in the replacement of psychic regression by speculative investment. This does not prevent the speculative investment from bearing upon the sexual object - since the investment disengages the event from it and poses the object as concomitant of the corresponding event" (p.238).