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9 THE PROSTITUTE AS NEO-MANAGER: SADE'S *JULIETTE* AND THE NEW SPIRIT OF CAPITALISM

Olivier Delers

The heroine of *Histoire de Juliette* (1797) is Sade's fantasized version of a violent, cruel and perverted female libertine. Drawn from a young age to sexual experimentation, Juliette routinely participates in rapes and murders and becomes an advocate for the necessity of evil in the world. But there is another version of the character, which appears briefly in two earlier texts dedicated to her innocent and virtuous sister Justine: *Les Infortunes de la vertu* (1787) and *Justine, ou les Malheurs de la vertu* (1791). Both texts stage the life of Juliette, the orphaned daughter of a bankrupt *financier* who decides to make a career selling herself to rich Parisian aristocrats.¹ These two texts portray her rapid ascent through the social strata of Ancien Régime France, from a young girl in a convent to a common prostitute, and eventually to a respected – if still promiscuous – noblewoman. What is particularly striking about this early Juliette is her concern for economic calculation: she is first concerned with survival and carefully accumulates cash, property and titles in an attempt to gain ever greater economic power and social prestige. If each venal transaction brings new acts of *libertinage*, it also reaffirms Juliette's keen understanding of what drives the production, multiplication and preservation of wealth. In fact, Juliette's actions reveal a fundamental truth about the underlying social and economic structures of Sade's universe: the existence of two different groups, one composed of exploiters who are mobile, adaptable and connected, and the other formed by the exploited, who are condemned to a life of suffering and vagabondage. This division is also characteristic of what theorists have called 'modern network economies' and my analysis will explore the continuities between prostitution in Sade's fictional society and the nature of the post-industrial world as described by the French sociologists Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello in a recent study, *The New Spirit of Capitalism*. I will draw on their description of 'neo-managers' and 'connectionist spaces' as two crucial components of modern capitalism to show how Juliette's identity as a venal body is a function of the social connections that she chooses to pursue.²

Sade's heroine, in her successive attempts to attract new potential clients and to extract everything she can from them, is depicted as a deft manager of her body and of her relations with other economic actors. Not only does she seem to possess an instinctive knowledge of what drives success in Sade's social world, she also has an uncanny ability to avoid being punished for her crimes. This essay suggests that Juliette's successful negotiation of her adventures shares characteristics with Boltanski and Chiapello's account of those who succeed in advanced capitalist societies, and that libertine modes of behaviour prefigure a number of features of what they designate as network societies.

Boltanski and Chiapello's *New Spirit of Capitalism* is first and foremost a sociological project whose aim is to make sense of the various motivations of social actors for believing and participating in the capitalist system at different periods in history. In their analysis, the third spirit of capitalism, the age of 'neo-managers' and network economies, succeeds the first spirit of capitalism centered around the figure of the bourgeois entrepreneur in the nineteenth century, and the second spirit of capitalism articulated around large industrial firms run by expert managers in the twentieth century.³ But it is also an epistemological project: by looking at the different strategies used by social actors to justify their engagement in capitalism, Boltanski and Chiapello interrogate the ways in which sociology, as a discipline, has traditionally codified the position of individuals in relation to social structures. The theoretical implications of their analyses are not only valid in the context of post-industrial societies but also apply to earlier stages of capitalism and pre-capitalist societies. By juxtaposing Sade's early works of fiction and *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, I will suggest ways that these texts depict individuals who affirm a certain independence of action even when their bodies are entrapped in systems of industrial production.

Even though the intensity of her sexual appetite is kept in check by her desire for social elevation in *Les Infortunes de la vertu* and *Justine, ou les malheurs de la vertu*, Juliette is still a paradigmatic example of what Kathryn Norberg has called 'the libertine whore'. As a type in early-modern pornographic fiction, she conforms to a series of characteristics that highlight both her specific skills and multiple identities:

the 'libertine whore' ... is independent, sensual, sensible and skilled. She is healthy and possessed of a very healthy – that is, normal – sexual appetite. She is a businesswoman and an artist who provides 'varied' sex for men who can afford it. She is a courtesan who lives in luxury and abides by 'philosophy', usually materialist philosophy. Intelligent, independent, proud and reasonable, she is *not* diseased or monstrous; she is not humiliated or victimized either by life or her clients. She may have come from working-class roots, but she overcomes them through her education and intelligence. An *arriviste*, she can scoff at social distinctions and hoodwink the rich and powerful.⁴

Juliette's journey, as we will see, is not unlike that of the generic libertine whose sketched out by Norberg. She stands out as a subversive female character who challenges the traditional gender stereotypes of eighteenth-century literature and who, in doing so, 'reveals a great deal about attitudes towards women, female sexuality and women's social role'.⁵ Or, to put it differently, Juliette's transgressions and her performance as a prostitute 'offer alternative narratives of female sexuality and experience'.⁶ Sade, the 'terrorist pornographer', as Angela Carter calls him, who 'restitute[s] sexuality as a primary mode of being' creates a space for female sexual agency by depicting a successful prostitute at the end of the eighteenth century.⁷ He also creates a space where identities are not predetermined and essentialized, but rather fluid and relational. If the representation of this kind of venal body necessarily brings up gender issues, it also offers new possibilities to think of Sade's philosophy of action as a 'radical empiricism', to use Boltanski and Chiapello's terms, in which relational ontologies underpin a series of loosely connected networks.⁸

Juliette as 'Neo-Manager'

Before our heroine Juliette can escape the fate of the submissive and silenced prostitute and become a case study for new social practices, she must learn her trade and experience the inner workings of the prostitution industry. Sade's description of Juliette's journey is as intense as it is condensed: only four pages are devoted to her in *Les Infortunes de la vertu* and five pages in *Justine, ou les Malheurs de la vertu*. Juliette's story begins in the safety of the domestic sphere, where young girls are supposed to be protected from the economic transactions of the outside world. The sudden bankruptcy and subsequent death of their parents force Juliette and Justine, her sister, to find means of supporting themselves. Juliette, already drawn to vice and physical pleasures, leaves her fate in the hands of La Duvergier, a brothel owner who promises her that with hard work and dedication, she will be able to retire after a few years as a financially independent woman.⁹ But prostitution, for La Duvergier, follows the logic of industrial production: Juliette's body is temporarily turned into a commodity available for purchase on the sex market:

dès le lendemain, ses prémices furent en vente; en quatre mois de temps, la même marchandise fut successivement vendue à quatre-vingt personnes qui toutes la payèrent comme neuve.¹⁰

(the very next day her virginity was up for sale. Within a space of four months, the same merchandise was sold in turn to eighty persons, who each paid as though for unused goods)¹¹

In *Justine, ou les malheurs de la vertu*, Juliette becomes even more productive and the narrator is more specific about what gives the commodity/body its intrinsic value:

En quatre mois, la marchandise est successivement vendue à près de cent personnes ... Chaque fois, la Duvergier rétrécit, rajuste, et pendant quatre mois ce sont toujours des prémices que la friponne offre au public.

(In four months, the same merchandise is sold in turn to about a hundred persons ... Each time, La Duvergier takes in and reshapes, and for four months, it is the same unspoiled goods that the rascal offers the public.)¹²

Beyond the high number of clients, *La Duvergier* focuses here on the efficiency and mechanization of production, as the procurer repeatedly alters Juliette's body to increase her profits by selling her as a virgin over and over again. Still, her industrial scheme is based on a sham, on reselling the same good – Juliette's virginity – for what it is not. Sade also suggests that Juliette's activities are not limited to consuming and exploiting the body: her 'prémices' are not marketed to individual buyers but to the 'public' at large, as if 'la friponne', as Sade calls her, were engaged in a four-month long performance that was in itself remarkable. In other words, prostitution is not simply an illicit and mechanized transaction taking place in the relative anonymity of the brothel, but the sale of an unique product, advertised as such and paradoxically available to all.

But what is of particular interest is what comes after the heroine's brothel experience. After moving from traditional family relationships that protect women from the forces of the open sexual market to a form of industrial prostitution that subjects the prostitute's body to its sustained rhythm and yield requirements, Juliette finally gains her independence, 'working' as a courtesan whose sexual skills coupled with a talent for cunning and anticipation make her highly successful in expanding her personal wealth and her circle of influence:

elle devint en quinze ans femme titrée, possédant plus de trente mille livres de rente, de très beaux bijoux, deux ou trois maisons tant à la campagne qu'à Paris, et pour l'instant, le cœur, la richesse et la confiance de M. de Corville, conseiller d'état, homme dans le plus grand crédit et à la veille d'entrer dans le ministère ...¹³

(she became within the space of fifteen years a lady possessing a title, an income of 30,000 livres, gorgeous jewels, two or three houses in Paris, and in the country, plus, for the time being, the heart, purse, and confidence of Monsieur de Corville, a Councillor of State, a man enjoying the highest credit and poised to become a Minister of the Crown ...)¹⁴

Fifteen years after starting her career as a prostitute, Juliette possesses economic, social and cultural capital: not only has she secured the long-term financial stability of the *rentière*, she has also adapted to the lifestyle of the nobility, and she

has managed to develop important connections with the inner circle of political power. The narrator explains that she has done so through a series of 'conquêtes':

Jusqu'à vingt-six ans elle fit encore de brillantes conquêtes, ruina trois ambassadeurs, quatre fermiers généraux, deux évêques et trois chevaliers des ordres du roi ...¹⁵

(Until she was 26, she continued to make brilliant conquests, ruined three ambassadors, four tax-farmers, two bishops, and three Knights of Royal Orders ...) ¹⁶

The number of ruined clients is impressive, but prostitution, in this case, differs from sex being sold as a commodity and from the logic of industrial production. The verb 'ruiner' implies a process, as if each lover were considered a separate project requiring a combination of her skills of seduction and of her ability to drain those men of their possessions. Interestingly, the categories of men mentioned here cover the spectrum of the rich and powerful in Ancien Régime France: foreign dignitaries, tax collectors, clergymen and nobles of high rank. They also attest to Juliette's capacity to adapt and to her knowledge and understanding of how to be successful in a specific social context. In fact, the narrator describes her as a 'créature adroite et ambitieuse de trouver journellement de nouvelles dupes et de grossir à tout moment sa fortune tout en accumulant ses crimes'¹⁷ ('a scheming and ambitious woman who could find new dupes daily and swell her fortune at every turn as her crimes accumulated')¹⁸ mixing the language of gain ('ambitieux', 'grossir', 'accumulant') with the language of skills ('adroite') and deception ('dupes'). The courtesan-prostitute develops her prowess as a con artist with the necessary skills and knowledge to come out on top of the projects (or 'conquêtes') in which she is engaged.

The character of Juliette, in the way that she navigates Sade's social world, resembles the figure of the neo-manager, a term coined by Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello to describe the type of economic actors who understand the nature and the rules of success in post-industrial network societies. Just like our courtesan, who spends more than fifteen years recruiting rich prospects from various backgrounds, neo-managers 'are at ease in *fluid* situations', and 'prefer the exploration of new networks to the stability of established relations'. Like Juliette, they possess a form of knowledge and skills that are 'highly specialized, creative, and personalized'.¹⁹ What differentiates Sade's heroine from the common prostitute is her ability to design new forms of *libertinage* for each of her new lovers, but also to imagine ways of getting rid of them without endangering her social rise. Prostitution, for Juliette, is not serial but adaptive. In short, Sade's heroine is what Boltanski and Chiapello would call 'un créatif' ('a creative figure'), 'a person of intuition, invention, contacts and chance encounters'.²⁰ She combines her artistic abilities with a keen understanding of the social world and of the dominant network, which is what allows her to be at the right place at the right time making the right connections.

So like other 'libertine whores', Juliette is more than a body meant to be consumed by male clients. 'She has her art and her equipment', as Kathryn Norberg puts it, and she knows when and how to use them.²¹ Sade uses the word 'art' repeatedly to characterize his heroine but always qualifies any claims to aesthetic perfection by reminding the reader that Juliette's 'talents' have a practical purpose. In both novels, art is linked to 'finesse'²² and denotes a means to an end: 'l'art de s'en faire entretenir.'²³ Furetière himself, in his *Dictionnaire universel*, gives a rather polysemous definition of the word 'art': it means, among other definitions, 'les manières et inventions dont on se sert pour déguiser les choses' ('the ways and inventions one uses to conceal things'), but also 'pour embellir' ('to embellish') and finally 'réussir dans les desseins' ('to succeed in one's schemes').²⁴ Deceit, beauty, and successful scheming: Juliette's peculiar form of artistry makes it difficult to limit the prostitute-turned-courtesan to neatly defined categories. Juliette can be seen as a performance artist: she thinks of her actions as a specific creative moment that will be publicized as such and identified with her. Like the neo-manager, her goal is to 'create a *happening* and to *put [her] name* to it.'²⁵ The performance becomes part of her body of work only to the extent that it helps her build her reputation and thus to move on to new projects. In other words, it is an expression of the character's selfishness. Feminist critics have noted the discursive slip between the body of the whore and the body of the actress and Sade's Juliette certainly illustrates this phenomenon.²⁶ The more Juliette takes on the role of performer and escapes the mechanical rhythm of industrial production, the more she is endowed with a creative potential and insider knowledge. Yet, at the same time, her artistic abilities only seem to make her a more efficient sexual worker: the more she performs and imposes her 'signature' on her style of *libertinage*, the more astute she becomes at using her body in expert ways to extract advantages out of prostituting herself. What matters to her are the new connections that she is able to establish, and not so much the substance of these connections. Even when she has secured an enviable social and financial position, she continues to make herself available for venal performances: 'c'était une riche veuve qui donnait de jolis soupers, chez laquelle la ville et la cour étaient trop heureuses d'être admises, et qui néanmoins couchait pour deux cent louis et se donnait pour cinq cent par mois'²⁷ ('She was a rich widow who gave gay supper-parties to which the ornaments of town and court were only too happy to be admitted – yet she could be bedded for 200 louis and bought for 500 a month').²⁸ The randomness and anonymity of the relationships in which she engages complement the selfish individualism of the character and underline a desire to form bonds outside of the rules of traditional economic or interpersonal relationships.

The narrator pinpoints the moment when the young prostitute makes her first connection and begins her social ascent:

Elle plut à un vieux seigneur fort débauché qui d'abord ne l'avait fait venir que pour l'aventure d'un quart d'heure, elle eut l'art de s'en faire magnifiquement entretenir et parut enfin aux spectacles, aux promenades aux côtés des cordons bleus de l'ordre de Cythère ...²⁹

(She took the fancy of an old, thoroughly depraved nobleman who at first had singled her out for a mere quarter of an hour's amusement. She managed to beguile him into keeping her in the most opulent manner and at last began to be seen in theatres and in the fashionable walks on an equal footing with the luminaries of the Order of Cythera ...)³⁰

Juliette turns a fifteen-minute trick into a valuable relationship which brings her both a steady income ('entretenir') and a chance to make contact with Parisian aristocratic circles. But Juliette, like the neo-manager, is 'always on the move, passing from one project to the next, from one world to the other'.³¹ Both are 'faiseurs de réseaux' (networkers) who 'connect, profit and disconnect in order to find a more lucrative project', without paying too much attention to relations of friendship or to loyalty.³² Even marriage, with its suggestion of a return to the safety of the domestic sphere, is just another node along the network for the heroine. The conte de Lorsange, whom she marries,

lui reconnut douze mille livres de rente, lui assura le reste de sa fortune qui allait à huit, s'il venait à mourir avant elle, lui donna une maison, des gens, une livrée, et une sorte de considération dans le monde qui parvint en deux ou trois ans à faire oublier ses débuts.³³

(made over an income of 12,000 livres to her, and arranged that the remainder of his fortune, a further 8,000, would be hers should he die before she did; he gave her a house, servants, and a retinue and conferred on her a degree of respectability in society which ensured that within two or three years her beginnings were forgotten.)³⁴

But Juliette prefers to continue her successful career as a courtesan, even if she has to kill her husband: 'pressée de jouir seule, d'avoir un nom, et point de chaînes, [elle] osa se livrer à la coupable pensée d'abrèger les jours de son mari'³⁵ ('impatient to enjoy her advantages alone, to have a name and to get rid of all chains, she dared yield to the culpable notion of abridging her husband's life').³⁶ The goal of this particular project is clear: 'avoir un nom', that is gaining a new, more respectable outside identity. But the narrator also insists on two important features of Juliette's character: freedom of movement ('point de chaînes') and selfish individualism. In fact, the expression 'jouir seule' seems to indicate a refusal to acknowledge the bonds created by interpersonal relationships (whether it is of love, friendship, or more venal relationships). It is about a form of success – and by semantic extension, a form of sexual pleasure – that can never be bilateral, that simply cannot be shared.

As a character who constantly searches for new connections but who defends a unilateral conception of relationships, Juliette embodies one of the central

contradictions of the neo-manager. On the one hand, Sade's description of her journey clearly underlines her 'desire to *connect* with others, to *make contact*, to make *connections*, so as not to remain *isolated*' and her ability of '*adjusting* to other people and situations, depending on what the latter demands of them, without being held back by timidity, rigidity or mistrust'.³⁷ On the other hand, the heroine needs to be '*adaptable*, physically and intellectually *mobile*' because 'the ability to disengage from a project in order to be *available* for new connections counts as much as the capacity for engagement'.³⁸ Connection and mobility are both critical to Juliette, yet they do not preclude egotistic self-interest. In fact, Juliette's venal relations in *Les Infortunes de la vertu* and *Les Malheurs de la vertu* paint the picture of a social world dominated by connections and dominant networks where selfish behavior is not discouraged and where the moral and political structures that could guard against such behavior are non-existent. Sade's version of prostitution becomes a case study for a dystopic network society ruled by anomie, where, as Boltanski and Chiapello predict, 'opportunistic behavior, even if it were adopted only by a few people to start off with, would tend to spread rapidly'.³⁹

The disappearance of traditional forms of policing and the development of opportunistic behavior point to another central characteristic of the network economy in which neo-managers strive: the apparent immunity of those who commit crimes. Sade makes it clear that Juliette is particularly talented at hiding her evil deeds and that she feels free to commit crimes in order to carry her projects through. She murders her husband 'avec assez de secret ... pour se mettre à l'abri des poursuites, et pour ensevelir avec cet époux qui la gênait toutes les traces de son abominable forfait'⁴⁰ ('with such stealth ... that she was able both to elude the arm of the law and to bury all traces of her abominable crime along with her hindrance of a husband').⁴¹ Later on,

Juliette se noircit de deux nouveaux crimes semblables au premier; l'un pour voler un de ses amants qui lui avait confié une somme considérable que toute la famille de cet homme ignorait et que Mme de Lorsange [Juliette] put mettre à l'abri par ce crime odieux; l'autre pour avoir plut tôt un legs de cent mille francs qu'un de ses adorateurs lui faisait sur son testament en sa faveur au nom d'un tiers qui devait rendre la somme au moyen d'une légère rétribution.⁴²

(Juliette sank even deeper into the mire with two more crimes of the same kind as the first; one, that she might rob one of her lovers of a sum of money put into her keeping by him without his family's knowing which she sequestered to her own profit by means of her odious crime, the other, that she might the sooner receive a bequest of 100,000 livres which one of her admirers had written into his will in the name of a third party who was appointed to hand the money over to her against a small consideration.)⁴³

In either case, Juliette is not punished for her criminal actions, and her ability to go on killing unsuspected is even more pronounced in *Histoire de Juliette*. This kind of immunity, for Boltanski and Chiapello, is the direct consequence of the increased mobility of powerful economic actors. It shows the growing irrelevance of the domestic world in relation to the connectionist world of network societies:

In a domestic world, honoring debts that have been contracted is based upon the coexistence of the same persons in the same space, and the reciprocal control they exercise over one another. Now, in a connectionist world, mobility, which constitutes a fundamental requirement, makes it largely possible to elude the collective reprisals entailed in the former domestic world by defaulting and displaying ingratitude towards those whose support one enjoyed.⁴⁴

In both novels, *Les Infortunes de la vertu* and *Justine, ou les Malheurs de la vertu*, the domestic world no longer affords the protection it traditionally provided, and Justine's attempts to seek the protection of trusted friends and figures of moral authority after her parents' death prove useless.⁴⁵ On the contrary, Juliette's first instinct – choosing prostitution as a career – puts her on the right track to reclaim a privileged position in society. Her natural understanding of space allows her to remain relevant on the network and to keep doing what she does best: connecting, exploiting, destroying, and eventually disconnecting – destruction and murder being perhaps the feature that distinguishes Sade's character most from Boltanski and Chiapello's neo-manager.

Sade, Venality and the Network Society

My reading of Juliette indicates that some elements that dominate later phases of capitalism can already be prefigured at the end of the eighteenth century, at a time when French society is still governed by the pre-capitalist political and economic structures of the Ancien Régime. Sade, in his master-narrative that opposes vice and virtue, paints a social environment that is already ripe for dominant networks and neo-managers. Juliette's journey as a prostitute and courtesan provides a privileged vantage point to observe these phenomena because she lays bare the exchanges that occur between economic actors, but also because she manages her body in a way that combines the logic of business transactions with a certain aesthetic idealism. This is a trait that she shares with other Sadean 'neo-managers' like M. de Bressac, La Dubois or the monks of Saint-Marie des Bois – to name only a few other characters who appear in *Les Infortunes de la vertu* and *Justine, ou les malheurs de la vertu*. I now want to explore the usefulness of the concepts I have been using – the connectionist world of network societies in which neo-managers thrive – to think about both the nature of Sade's fictionalized social world and prostitution in eighteenth-century France.

Needless to say, networks do not suddenly become relevant in the second half of the twentieth century when they provide the operative metaphor for what Boltanski and Chiapello call the 'third spirit of capitalism'.⁴⁶ If networks act as an interpretive framework to analyse how the capitalist system has transformed itself and has supported its ideology in comparison with earlier stages of capitalist development, they can also offer ways of thinking about the internal rules, patterns of exchange and modes of recruitment of pre-capitalist economic systems. Juliette's particular way of approaching venality, for instance, is closely related to managing her body in efficient ways, continually forming new ties and preserving her mobility. Of course, Juliette's story is highly idiosyncratic and Sade constantly pushes his lead character to the limits of verisimilitude. But that feature of the two early Justine novels actually allows Sade to sketch out a unique set of social structures and to tackle broad sociological questions that also underlie the analysis of network economies that Boltanski and Chiapello engage in: to what extent do systemic impositions cripple any claims to free action? Is success generally reserved to those who have internalized the rules of the system, or is there room for outsiders to subvert established hierarchies? What happens to a society when social identity ceases to be linked to birth or occupation and becomes dependent on the relations that individuals are able to build and maintain? Juliette's trajectory as a prostitute and a courtesan who is endowed with creative agency provides unexpected answers to these questions by presenting identity as being primarily relational rather than essential, and by questioning the power of fate to constrain personal ambitions.

Sade begins the two novels with an ironic attack against 'la Providence': the ultimate achievement of philosophy, he tells us, would be to decipher 'les caprices bizarres de cette fatalité à laquelle on donne vingt noms différents' ('the bizarre caprices of the Fate to which a score of different names are given') and thus to help man understand 'la manière dont il faut qu'il marche dans la carrière épineuse de la vie'⁴⁷ ('the ways in which he is supposed to tread in the thorny career of life').⁴⁸ Justine's story as a whole reads as an ironic parable against the discourse of fate, which tends to reduce complex social phenomena and individual volition to suspiciously simplistic answers. If it is Justine's destiny to be systematically abused and victimized, then it might be mere chance that gives Juliette wealth and titles. The forms of exploitation created in societies where networks operate are often naturalized as being produced by fate, as being the logical consequence of a person's innate nature. Boltanski and Chiapello notice a tendency to de-emphasize structural inequalities in network economies and to resort to the language of destiny to explain the inability of some to form connections: 'Exclusion is thus presented as someone's misfortune [*destin*] (to be struggled against), not as the result of a social asymmetry from which some people profit to the detriment of others.'⁴⁹ Justine, while at times wondering why

an innocent and honest young woman like herself would be subjected to a long streak of misfortunes, never seeks to identify specific causes and instead keeps 'struggling' to find safety and employment. Likewise, Juliette just goes on accumulating lovers and wealth without a moment of introspection to question the source of her success. Sade plays with these two characters who seem hard-wired for a certain kind of life and who, often in preposterous ways, seem to have no say in the decisions that affect them directly.

Of course, the two sisters Justine and Juliette should theoretically share the same type of social and cultural capital and respond in similar ways to the constraints imposed by the society in which they live.⁵⁰ Instead, we are confronted by a paradoxical situation: one sister is subjected to entrenched hierarchies and privileges while the other has seemingly internalized the social rules that allow her to succeed in different social positions, as a prostitute, a courtesan or a noblewoman. As Sade stages characters in a space where making new connections is essential, he also delineates a theory of action that distances itself from – and in fact clearly mocks – predetermined outcomes and that credits social actors with agency, creativity and originality.⁵¹ In doing so, Sade again prefigures a similar process that accompanies the deployment of network economies in post-industrial societies:

In a network world, where the more unpredictable and remote connections are, the more likely they are to prove profitable, the class *habitus*, on which the spontaneous convergence of taste relies in predominantly domestic social orders, is no longer a sufficient support for intuition or flair. On the contrary, the great man is he who establishes links between beings who are not only removed from one another, located in different universes, but also distant from his social background and the circle of his immediate relations.⁵²

Juliette and Justine correspond perfectly to the dichotomy between the strong and the weak in a connectionist world. One sets out to explore a new world and subsequently moves unencumbered from one social group to another, while the other relies on domestic allies who reject her. The original opposition between vice and virtue unfolds into an opposition between prostitution and sexual restraint, between the world of global exchanges and movement and the local world of stagnation.

As we have seen, what separates one life from the other is Juliette's affinity for a new economy of venality, one that supersedes the traditional economy of prostitution in which the bodies of women of lower birth are consumed by well-off men. This new economy requires full engagement – body and soul – from its participants, but in return the sexual marketplace is no longer kept separate from other sites of social exchange. There is now a natural continuity between the world of prostitution and the world of the noble elite: in fact, venality seems

to characterize a whole set of relationships and connections that are more open and fluid. The economy of venality, as it is portrayed by Juliette, subverts and redefines gender and social expectations: the rich and powerful are willing to sell themselves as a way to preserve their mobility; women take advantage of men – to gain wealth and prestige – at least as much as men take advantage of them sexually; and finally, status is no longer solely dependent on birth or wealth. For characters like Juliette, venality offers the possibility to take on new identities when needed, depending on the connections that seem most profitable.

The story of Juliette's transformation into a shrewd manager of her body and of her interests in *Les Infortunes de la vertu* and *Justine, ou les Malheurs de la vertu* provides an alternative narrative of feminine success and liberation, a narrative that will be revised, refined and complicated in *Histoire de Juliette*. Sade's new economy of venality retools the traditional sexual contracts of patriarchy into new forms of exploitation in which gender roles are interchangeable and in which women are not systematically subjected to the position of the exploited.⁵³ In reimagining venal relations through the character of Juliette, Sade also makes an interesting hypothesis about the nature of social identity in the late eighteenth century, one that Boltanski and Chiapello's analysis of the new spirit of capitalism helps us uncover. Throughout her social rise, Juliette takes on several identities, but she remains a character with little substance: the few narratorial comments explaining how the heroine chooses perversion and vice over virtue hardly conceal the fact that she is almost entirely defined by what she does and who she associates with. Boltanski and Chiapello suggests that in a connectionist world, existence itself is a relational attribute: 'every entity, and human persons by the same token as the rest, exists to a greater or lesser extent depending upon the number and value of the connections that pass via it', or, to put it differently, 'they are themselves only because they are the links that constitute them'.⁵⁴ Juliette's journey points to ontological possibilities that go beyond a critique of patriarchal contracts and traditional forms of prostitution. And even if, in the end, this form of liberation from systemic constraints is not limited to female characters in *Les infortunes de la vertu* or *Justine, ou les malheurs de la vertu*, it is first introduced through a new economy of venality in which identities cannot be essentialized according to birth, levels of wealth, occupation or gender expectations. In short, the 'libertine whore' is not alienated from her body and reduced to the substantial identity of the common prostitute with the social and moral stigmas attached to it.

Relational ontologies are a central characteristic of Sade's fictional depiction of prostitution in the last years of the Ancien Régime. If they help us rethink the nature of prostitution in relation to old hierarchies and new networks, they also provide new ways of sketching a Sadean theory of action that anticipates

not only the social structures of network economies but also a new sociological paradigm which would

replac[e] essentialist ontologies with open spaces, without borders, centres or fixed points, where entities are constituted by the relations they enter into and alter in line with the flows, transfers, exchanges, permutations, and displacements that are the relevant events in this space.⁵⁵

Sade's political economy in the shorter and earlier novels that I have focused on in this article is that of a radical empiricist who conceives of action and identities not as absolutes but as flows. As I have suggested elsewhere, longer novels like *La Nouvelle Justine* or *Histoire de Juliette* have a very different narrative structure and simply alternate between long philosophical tirades on the necessity of evil in the world and pornographic tableaux.⁵⁶ We often forget, however, that before becoming a structuralist with a repetitive view of how economic structures limit individual possibilities, Sade outlines an original and daring vision of the social world, a 'new spirit of capitalism' of sorts that can be brought to light through the insights of the sociology of post-industrial network societies.