

## Sade's Itinerary of Transgression

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I would like to address the nature of transgression and its logic or itinerary in Sade's work. If this task is somewhat speculative and incomplete, it perhaps mirrors the foundational incompleteness of the more than sixteen extant volumes of Sade's writings. For a more exhaustive, if not definitive, resolution of the very issue of transgression, the analysis would have to continue the debate between Derrida and Foucault over the validity of Bataille's celebrated account of transgression, which in turn draws upon the earlier work of Roger Caillois.<sup>1</sup>

The first concern, however, is to try to ascertain to what extent 'transgression' is really a concept in the strict sense. While it can assume a variety of grammatical forms (noun, transitive or intransitive verb, adjective or adverbial form), the noun derives ultimately from the Latin verb *transgredi*, which means, to step (*trans*) across (*gredi*). In its transitive verbal form, the *OED* defines 'to transgress' as follows: 'To go beyond the bounds or limits prescribed by a law, command etc'. Or, to break, violate, infringe, contravene, trespass against'. To this, it adds: 'To offend against (a person); to disobey. To go or to pass beyond (any limit or bounds)'. In its *noun* form, the citation continues: 'The action of transgressing or passing beyond the bounds of legality or right: a violation of law, duty or command; disobedience, trespass, sin'. 'The action of passing over or beyond (in the etymological sense)'. Or, 'The refusal to be limited'. More *conventionally*, perhaps, transgression is held to be synonymous with the following: trespass, violation, infraction, breach, infringement, contravention. Further, it is held to be analogous with such terms as encroachment, invasion, entrenchment, slip, lapse, offense, sin, vice, crime.

It immediately becomes evident that 'transgression' is no ordinary word. It seems to represent what Leibniz would call a *musterrolle* of characterisations or qualities: for example, a veritable roster or calendar of types and specimens. The *examples* or instances of its use-- simply as enumerated in the *OED* entry-- concern or deal with the following abstract cases: bounds, limits, prescriptions, laws, commands, conventions, duties, statutes, constitutions, doctrines, goals,

paths, boundaries, proportions, sequence or formations. The *general subject matter* to what these cases or concerns would refer, are the following-- again, from one dictionary citation: property, civil law, constitutional law, ecclesiastical or cannon law, human will, Divine will, the human subject, human conduct, geology, music and manners. This abstract and general range alone, would provide a dizzying basis for a *classification* of transgression. And add to this a discussion of precisely what *nature, conduct* or *humanity* alone might entail, and the most astute numerologist or taxonomist would quickly be left speechless. *Again*, in its most succinct *lexical* formation: to transgress is to pass beyond any limit, any boundary. And *what is* defined by a limit? a boundary? Precisely that which has discrete *form, discrete identity*.

We seem hard pressed, then, to speak about transgression in any precise sense. What, for example, would constitute a *strategy* for finding *examples* of transgression? That is, how would we *identify* transgression, or acts of transgression, in the first place? This task would surely raise the problem of the hermeneutic circle: we would have to presuppose a rather definite concept of transgression in order to discern its particular instances. Quite simply, one would have to know, one would have to presuppose, the nature of what one is looking for, prior to being able to identify something as an example of it. Alternatively, is transgression perhaps something other than a concept in the strict sense-- is it perhaps a vague notion? An idea, disposition, or state, which assumes identity only in name, only nominally? Would this nominal unity therefore be established on the basis of gathering various *features of resemblance*? Thus, the nominal unity of the term would find its *basis* in metaphorical usage, or in a certain figurative use of speech (for example, by turning to the analogy or simile). Would there be a family resemblance of features? Perhaps a general metaphorical or morphological sameness to the varied uses of what passes for transgression?

One striking feature of this term, this so-called concept of transgression, is that in each pretended case of its use, *it seems to acquire sense from the object of its operation*. Thus, I transgress something or someone. If I transgress the law, I am a law-breaker. If I transgress divine command, I am a sinner. If I transgress one's person, I am perhaps an assailant or a rapist.

Do that to another's *property* and one is a trespasser; to another's *ownership* of property, and one is thereby a thief. Those who transgress codes of social conduct are termed barbarians or churls; civil conduct, criminals. Transgress proper etiquette or manners and one is a boor. Do that to statistically conventional behaviour, and one is usually deemed insane. If transgression were to be operated upon conventional *speech*, discourse itself would become incomprehensible: it would risk grammatical unintelligibility. The transgression of conventional sexual conduct or identity constitutes deviance or perversion, as would the transgression of ethical codes constitute immorality.

Now, surely, these terms carry a *negative* import, even if, to be most generous, this might only amount to a rhetorical indictment. The question of negativity, however, arises in at least *two* senses: 1) Negativity arises in the attitude that we assume *in the face of* such transgressions as rape, insanity, theft, boorishness, etc. In this case, it is a matter of our judging certain transgressive acts negatively. Yet-- following for a moment the *nominal* sense of transgression-- would there not equally be transgressive acts we might well consider in *positive* terms, acts which we would most likely lend our approval? Perhaps there are 'good' or estimable types of transgression: indeed, to transgress the limits of the *status quo*, understood as *progress*? For example, technological, economic or political progress? Perhaps *liberation* from institutional forms of repression, such as racism, sexism, economic or political bondage? Liberation from institutions of repression-- taxes, titles, penal incarceration, the madhouse or even educational tracking, for instance. *Freedom*, in this case, would signify release *from* a variety of binds, restrictions, codes, norms, etc., that were not felt by the individual or by the society to be in his or its best interests. And transgression in this *positive attitudinal* sense thus raises the second question concerning negativity.

Secondly, each case of transgression seems, as we said, to be governed by its object. What the sense or meaning of each transgressive act is seems to come from *without*, from a *limiting* exteriority.<sup>2</sup> Here, the very operation of transgression seems to encounter, precisely, its limit. In what case, transgression-- it might be argued-- *is* its own limiting case. That is, transgression would seem to be the negativity which governs the *field* of

possible operation itself-- whether this field be ethics, morality, sexuality, religion, civil law etc.

It would appear that *this* sense-- transgression as negativity-- would probably be the principal consideration for our everyday use of the term. At least, that is what would seem to be the case. In other words, transgression seems to stand or fall on its association or identification with one or another kind of *negation*. But, and this is precisely what is at issue, is this negative or negating function simply coextensive with the *already existing field* of operation? Does the limit of the operational field dictate the range and extent of negativity, or, does negativity dictate the limit of the operational field?

If what is at stake in the notion/idea/ or concept of transgression is simply the play of negation or advantage in attempting to pursue it-- for it could be understood *merely* as rejection, denial, violation or negation-- then one would simply be immoral, irrational, unbalanced, unthinking, illogical, unhealthy, noncooperative, insincere, immodest, unconventional and illegal. Or, a sinner, deviant and coward. In such cases, negativity would be inscribed *within* its field and by its field as surely as the function of denial, invalidity and contradiction would be found only within a system of logic: as subduction and negation are within mathematics, as ellipsis and negation lie within conventional grammar. In short, transgression would operate as a system-bound rule of operation or deviation. And again, it would be the limit case of its own field.

What would the positively construed attitude have to say about the *second* kind of negation: for example, the limit case? Ideally, both the negative and the affirmative kinds of transgression *could occur within* the field of operation: progress, reform or development as affirmative modes need not *leave* the region of play or operational engagement. New *acts* might be developments or refinements of earlier types: innovative social or political developments would thereby still *remain* under the domain of societal or civil codes. In such a sphere, emotional or sexual differences, for example, might not only be tolerated, but might well be accommodated to existing structures of social and cultural organisation.

Affirmatively transgressive acts would be little different from reformist gestures in this case. The limits which define positive and negative operations would remain basically unchanged-- or, at most-- somewhat expanded according to an already inscribed pattern or code of systematic organisation. In this sense, the difference between heresy and heterodoxy might amount to little more than such reforms as those proposed by Martin Luther: for example, a protest-ant re-formation.

Following this line of thought, it might appear that transgression-- in either its negative or affirmative modes-- nonetheless remains *bound* by its limits, since the limits, which in each particular case are addressed, are themselves circumscribed by the very field which defines them. In the simplest terms, negativity is bound by the values *positive and negative*, and by the respective *region or field of application*. Thus, a positive transgression nonetheless invokes the field in which it operates. And, this is precisely *why* a rapist is a term of *moral* reprobation, or 'atheist' a term of religious reprobation, or 'schizophrenia' a term for the mentally maladjusted or dis-functional. Hard it is to escape the field of negativity, precisely because negativity-- whatever we may think of it-- is one of the structures *of* the field.

So far, then, we seem to hesitate to assign a positive conceptual value, some value or mark of content, to the seemingly *ampliative* character of transgression. Rather, we have been speaking of it as a notion, perhaps, one that had to be discerned across a variety of cases. The *word* seems to derive its sense from the object and field of the so-called 'transgressive' operation. Further, we have been discussing, without really settling, the issue as to whether 'transgression' is in fact system-dependent: for example, whether transgression is simply bound by the rules which govern a field of operation-- even if it be simply to negate or to violate these rules themselves, these taboos and prohibitions. Or, should we ask, as 'ampliative', does transgression *reinscribe* these rules of governance and limit within a wider field of play, *or*, finally, whether it suspends the rules themselves *by which* the field of play is properly identified and denominated. Which is to say, there seem to be three possible options to our understanding of transgression so far: 1) that it is system and function-bound. 2) That it is system and function-expanding, for example, that it is

'ampliative'. 3) That by its operation, system and function are themselves fundamentally altered, volatilized: disrupted and *essentially* changed.

Alternatively, and more modestly, perhaps, these three ways of viewing transgression might simply point up that we have but barely sketched out the domain of a discourse, without assigning a very precise sense to the terms of that discourse. To come to the point of decision, we would ultimately have to examine instances or cases of what *passes for* transgression. We would have to examine various discourses *about* transgression, and raise the issue as to whether or not it can be called a concept, a notion or a sense-unity *at all*, and finally, to try to point out within which context it makes sense even to talk *about* transgression either about a specific case of transgression, or about transgression in *general*. If the latter, what is the *compass*, the arena, the deployment of transgression? What does it include or exclude as its multifarious operation? Might general transgression include, within its own reservoir of possibility and operation, the formal identity of the *language* we use to denominate it? In which case, can it-- to call it 'it'-- be spoken about, written about, enunciated, recorded or even remembered? Recall our itinerary.

More commonly, perhaps, we tend to think of transgression as being *motivated*, as having some purpose *for* its initial operation-- commonly, I say, if we think of the usual, lexically defined instance of this word. 'Little Francine was *raped* by someone'-- there must be a *reason*! 'Young Herbert *outraged* the entire community by his *unspeakable* acts'-- *why* would such a nice boy do that? Motivation and purpose: these seem to characterize what passes by the name 'transgression' in almost every possible case, whether we initially view transgressive acts as negative or as positive testaments.

Perhaps the most *positive* sense of transgression could be expressed in the rather sympathetic terms of liberation or freedom. To free oneself from fetters of one kind or another, to overcome an undesirable condition, brought about by external powers, to liberate oneself from, perhaps, an unjust fate. Of course, it will be under the *rhetoric* of just such cases that we are wont to ascribe heroism, courage and tragedy to the human situation. We know that for the mythology of Hesiod and Homer,

the fates guarded the portals of eternity, weaving out their web of constraint, governance and ultimately, of subjugation-- the subjugation of humanity and even of the Gods as well. Fate or fortune-- the words are identical-- govern our affairs. One knows this familiar lament all too well. It is that in the face of which one is powerless. It is our condemnation. Nonetheless, it occasionally smiles on the hero, on the tragic hero, or, even on the person who presumes to unravel its divine fabric.

By the period of the Italian Renaissance and, following that, the European Enlightenment, however, that fabric had become somewhat threadbare. Galileo, Copernicus, Bacon, Hobbes and Machiavelli were the first to more accurately divine the pattern to this web: it was relatively consistent in warp and weave, it employed the primary colors, and it operated according to the inexorable order of mathematical exactitude. It only remained to fully assess the myriad details, the rules, the complex web of causal affinities in order to understand the very operations of fate: but by the period of the Enlightenment, fate or fortune-- what Machiavelli termed 'sweet mistress *fortuna*'-- was itself held to be coextensive with the entire natural order.

We are familiar enough with this historical period of thought to recognise it as exemplary of the modern age, having brought us the teaching of the mathematical mastery over nature. But, why, one asks, should one *master* nature? Machiavelli responds: 'Such that we may make provisions to ensure our own well-being in the face of its cruel and intemperate demands'. Descartes, likewise, responds: 'Such that I may enjoy all the sweetness and felicity this world has to offer'-- and *not*, one might add, to be crushed by it. We should remember that, for Descartes, the highest branch on the celebrated 'tree of knowledge', is morality. And what, for Descartes, is morality? He defines it, quite simply, as 'the art of living well'.

The *motivation* for mastering nature would thus appear to be transparently obvious. Its means, perhaps less so. Ultimately, it is by something entirely *unnatural*, that one conquers nature, that we can become 'the masters and possessors of nature'. This unnatural means of overcoming nature is *art*: that is to say, artifice, technique. For Descartes, this will be the *art* of reasoning well, that is, by following a non-natural method, guided by the rules of mathematics. His two earliest works

constitute this claim: the *Regulae* and the *Discourse on Method* argue that analytical geometry is fully adequate to describe and to explain the whole of physics, mechanics and dynamics-- for example, the entire natural order: fate.

Inhabiting the age of Descartes-- as we well do-- this is barely an issue for us. Quite simply, we believe it. We are the masters and possessors of nature. In somewhat more contemporary terms, it is frequently heard said that, 'we want it all and we want it now'. Even better, perhaps, 'we expect it all and we expect it now'. From the situation we occupy, then, *three teachings of Descartes* have been passed down to us, and precisely, constitute our age as our age- and we with it:

1) That we determine the ends and purposes of nature by our own *will*. That is, we become the source of value for the world-- no longer is it attributed to the dreary fates or to the God of the Levant. Our *human will* dictates the value importance of anything in the world.

2) We accept it as a fact, as a very condition for our modern existence, that our human knowledge *interprets* the world *according to* the pattern we have selected-- in our case, mathematics.

3) What follows, in consequence, is the fact that nature itself becomes something quite different for our age-- quite different from the conception of nature, prior to the Enlightenment. Nature itself, nature in itself, is no longer held to possess value, meaning or purpose-- except for, apart from, *that* value, purpose and meaning with which we humans have chosen to *invest* it. All this follows from Descartes: as the earth replaced the sun for Copernicus, so does the human replace God for our modern age.

When the Marquis de Sade writes, some 150 years later, however, he shows that the new teachings of the Renaissance and Enlightenment still remain incomplete in their extension, for they are, strictly speaking, limited to the precise domain of the natural sciences. If human will replaced the divine order, this was only effective, it seemed, on the level of scientific theory- - this, even despite the benefit of an ever-increasing number of practical inventions and applications (for example, as



catalogued in Diderot's *Encyclopedia*). What Sade saw practiced, however, was the very opposite of a newborn and unfettered human freedom. Rather, Sade shows how the ancient religious and moral teachings, together with their restrictions, their taboos and prohibitions, etc.-- Sade shows how the ancient moral teachings continued to *forbid* the effective practice, the effective reawakening of human freedom. If God was no longer in control of physics and dynamics, he seemed, nonetheless, to continue to control the minds and bodies of humanity in general. 'The light of stars takes years ...'

Sade's task, then, is to dramatically finish the work of Descartes: to complete the work of the Renaissance and Enlightenment thinkers, and to bring the doctrine of absolute mastery and freedom down from the level of theoretical physics and dynamics, to the practical level of daily life. Namely, down to the level of the *individual's* freedom: so as to permit the individual to act as she or he chooses. Thus, Sade claims to engage the doctrines of the new sciences so as to bring about their concrete *expression* on the level of ethics and morality. In short, he is concerned to understand and to explain how it is we act. At the very height of the Enlightenment, Sade draws his conclusions for the forthcoming secular age: a hundred years before Dostoyevsky and Nietzsche. Sade, like Raskolnikov, declares: 'If God is dead, then *everything* is permitted'. For the individual, or for humanity at large, for that matter, there is no rule, no law, that is absolutely justified or universally justifiable.<sup>3</sup> Nothing from without can *legitimately* restrict our freedom to act, nothing can *properly* be said to determine how or why we should act, other than our own will, our passions and inclinations. In fact, for the modern political state, freedom itself is the beginning and end of human action: life, liberty and the *pursuit* of happiness, whatever the latter might consist.

We recall that in the High Middle Ages, the *authority* for the religious and political administration of Europe, was St. Thomas Aquinas. In the *Summa Theologica* he writes:

Now it is evident that the world is ruled by divine providence, that the whole community of the universe is governed by the divine reason. Therefore, the very notion of the government of things in God, the ruler of the universe, has the nature of a law

(...) Law is a rule and the measure of acts, whereby man is induced to act or is restrained from acting: for law (*lex*) is derived from the term 'to bind' (*ligare*), because it binds one to act or not to act.<sup>4</sup>

This was a sentiment about which Sade felt quite strongly. Understandably so, since he was bound in prison for some twenty- seven years of his life. Likewise, it is understandable that he wrote in defence of personal freedom, and that he not only attacked the notion of confinement, restriction, and constraint, but that he attacked the *institution of law* itself. For every law claims submission of the individual. The human subject is precisely, thereby, that which is *subjected*.

In view of his heritage, and in consequence of his own subjection, Sade is perhaps the single most uncompromising revolutionary in the tradition of Western thought: he attacks, he lay's siege to, the Divine Law, to the Eternal Law, to the Natural Law, and to the Human Law. It is for this reason that Sade is not the paltry libertarian, who only wants to negotiate free passage in and among the necessary rules of order, convention, and social justice. Rather, he is a *libertine*: the only value consists, ultimately, in his personal exercise of freedom-- from any and all constraints, limits, bonds. Thus, his highest act is the total destruction, the total annihilation, of these constraints themselves, these laws, rules and duties that bind, that restrict and constrict his personal freedom.

Sade is no longer content to live comfortably under the dominion of order, for *order itself* constrains and dictates only *certain* possibilities of personal action. Order itself crushes-- it deforms or reforms its 'other'-- in its ceaseless demand for conformity, assimilation and submission. Sade's writings about transgression or revolution, are thus statements in the strongest sense, they are 'doctrines' *in extremis*: they demand the complete overthrow of any vestige of order. His revolt or transgression takes place, in each case, according to the particular type of restriction that is imposed on his freedom. Thus, Sade variously proposes blasphemy, immorality, crime, incest, murder, violation, lies, slander, theft, rapacity, irrationality, sodomy, hate and every other kind of violence, perversion or aberration conceivable-- each of these a specific and considered tactical operation to serve the strategic movement of the libertine's transgressive itinerary.

Now, all this is not to suggest that we cannot profit from a consideration of Sade. On the contrary, his peculiar style of excess teaches us a great deal about the tenor of modern life and thought. Like many strictly contemporary thinkers, Sade teaches the doctrine of individual freedom: and for him-- that is to say, properly speaking, for the libertine-- this means absolute freedom or liberty: absolved from all constraint. Somewhat differently, perhaps, this is the modern foundational doctrine of mastery itself: the mastery formerly possessed by *fortuna*, God or Nature. But now, with Sade, this drive to mastery assumes a most deliberate progression. One does not, for instance, start off as a master. For Sade, we can point out at least eight stages in this progression to absolute mastery, to absolute freedom, eight stages of transgression, or, eight transgressive operations-- each of which may be conceived as a particular art or teaching.

1). First, and as a preliminary step, the libertine must establish power over *himself*. Mastery begins with the art of self-mastery. The libertine must first free himself from his *own weaknesses*-- he must overcome his own weak sentiments-- sentiments which would prevent the growth and consolidation of his own power. Thus, the libertine must start off with what is closest to himself, with what is already within himself, namely, with his apparently singular emotions-- his sentimental values, or, what Sade refers to as the 'alleged instincts'. To gain self-control, self-mastery, he has rid himself of the alleged or so-called 'natural instincts', such as the instincts or sentiments of paternity, maternity, family devotion, filial love etc. What seem to be the 'instinctual emotions of natural life must first be overcome, because they would only serve to restrict the libertine's drive to mastery; they would place limits on the expression of his own passions, his real instincts, urges, wills, energies and freedom.

Not only does Sade denounce the instinct for domestic family life, but he proposes to replace family life itself with *incest*. Marriage, for the libertine, is termed the 'hymeneal bond', and it is certainly not the product of any real love or affection-- emotions or sentiments which, in any case, would serve to weaken or to deflect the libertines's own drive to mastery. Sade has one of his characters, Dolmancé, in *Philosophy in the Bedroom*, make following remark:

What is it we see? Reciprocal hatred; children who, even before reaching the age of reason, have never been able to suffer the sight of their fathers; fathers sending away their children because they could never endure their approach. Those alleged instincts are hence fictions, absurd; self-interest only invents them, usage prescribes, habit sustains, but never did Nature engrave them in our hearts. Tell me: do animals know these feelings? No, surely not; however, 'tis always them one must consult when one wishes to be acquainted with nature. O Fathers! Have no qualms regarding the so-called injustices your passions or your interest leads you to work upon these beings, for you nonexistent, to which a few drops of your sperm has given life. To them you own nothing, you are in the world not for them but for yourselves; great fools you would be to be troubled about, to be occupied with anything but yourself; for yourselves alone you ought to live. And you, dear children, you must be persuaded also that you own nothing to those individuals whose blood hatched you out of the darkness. Pity, gratitude, love-- not one of these sentiments is their due; they who have given you existence have not a single right to require them from you; they labor for themselves only, let them look after themselves.<sup>5</sup>

2). Second. By removing this kind of *restrictive* instinct and emotion, and by denouncing the *closest bonds*-- the family-- as specious, the libertine finds himself limited, checked, at another level, one that is far more *extensive* than the family unit. Thus, he must next assert his mastery over people in *general*, that is, over conventional *society* as a whole. This project demands the cultivated exercise of *cruelty* on the part of the libertine. He must guarantee the effective submission of other individuals, precisely to ensure that *they* remain weak, that they not be a threat or limit to his own mastery.

3). Third. More importantly, perhaps, one's concerns are not exclusively preoccupied with individuals. Rather, it is the province of *customs and manners*, for example, *morality*, which binds people together into a more powerful and dangerous organisation. Consequently, for the libertine, it is these *customs* which must suffer his attack. Custom or convention forms individuals into a *group* and renders them collectively dangerous to the libertine. Also, these customs themselves are

socially restrictive to the libertine. They continually impose taboos and bonds upon the individual, there prohibiting his own free action. Thus, Sade repeatedly attacks the customs and morality of a people, claiming that they are entirely arbitrary, unnatural and unfounded-- in short, they are simply relative codes-- relative, as he says, to a patch of geography, of terrain. One particularly personal, if not recurring, example he cites is to be found at the end of his 'Notes Concerning my Detention': 'So long as any French soil is left on the globe, it will forever be recognisable by the corruption practiced upon it'.<sup>6</sup>

4). Fourth. But with the violation of custom and habit, a *new basis* of social coherency and social justification is revealed, one that again severely restricts the libertine, namely, *law* itself. Thus, the libertine is compelled to attack the legitimacy of civil law by showing that it, in turn, is fully arbitrary: that civil law, just as much as manners, customs and habits varies from country to country, place to place, time to time, to me to to me.

To *counter* the restrictive effects of civil law, Sade shows that the law itself is fully unjust and unjustifiable-- that it doesn't merit compliance. In consequence, he counsels *fraud* to overcome the unjust law. The civil law, he says, supposedly exists for the weak; but the civil contract *deprives* the weak of what little they do have in the first place. Alternatively, and at the same time, it deprives the strong the right of acquiring more. As such, the law is contradictory, and benefits no one. As he would claim in *Justine*,

the truly intelligent person is he who (...) lashes out against the social contract, he violates it as much and as often as he is able, full certain that what he will gain from these ruptures will always be more important than what he will lose if he happens to be a member of the weaker class; for such he was when he respected the treaty; by breaking it he may become one of the stronger.<sup>7</sup>

5) Fifth. Society, nonetheless, claims to justify the civil order: ostensibly, it justifies the state and its laws by calling upon a transcendent foundation-- by invoking a deity, by recourse to theological argumentation, for example, by claiming divinely ordained rights and principles, divinely sanctioned human laws, by claiming equality in the face of God and by the precedent of Holy writ. Thus, *civil* law would typically justify itself by appeal to the authority of Divine Law.

The libertine, therefore, sets out to deny the existence of God: to disprove the divine, indeed, to ridicule it, to show the pain and suffering that religion in fact causes the individual to endure-- and, certainly, this is the very axis of his novel, *Justine*. To overcome or to correct the limitations imposed by religion, Sade appropriately teaches blasphemy.<sup>8</sup>

But blasphemy is not only a temporary victory, a pyrrhic victory, on the way to complete mastery and freedom, a victory gained largely by flight. Blasphemy is only tactical stage because if theology is itself but the product of a frail human psychology, if God is *only* a fiction of weak minds, then the claims of religion are easily **dispensed** with. Religion as the foundation of law, law as the foundation of society's manners and customs-- all this can be **easily** dissipated. One need not struggle against mankind's pettiest fears, because they simply reflect and reinscribe the *weakest elements* of society at large. To *seriously* wage war with religious taboos and beliefs, and to remain at this level of discourse and blasphemy, would be to *concede* the issue of mastery. It would be to depend *upon* the religious beliefs of other people-- hardly one's equals-- to depend on *their* child-like delusions for one's own attempt at victory, one's own liberation. Rather, the libertine derives pleasure and strength from his mastery over society and their silly beliefs: the libertine himself accordingly becomes solitary and uniquely sovereign-- divine.<sup>9</sup>

6). Sixth. To remove himself from all sentimental, family, social, civil and religious restrictions, Sade makes the libertine attain *equality* with nature at large. Up until now, each stage of his progress towards the attainment of mastery, his path to *absolute freedom*, had been justified by appealing to *nature*. But at this stage of his evolution, the libertine now conceives himself to be on the same level as nature itself. He willfully embraces all that exists: he pursues all things, every activity, every thing, and *not just* pleasant diversions or excesses. He welcomes pain, suffering, joy, filth, happiness, wealth, abuse, degradation, every act, every delight, every torture.<sup>10</sup>

Sade here reinterprets *nature* in a way that is somewhat different from the traditional view. For Sade, nature is precisely the sum of forces of creation and destruction. Indeed, to create, one must forcibly destroy. Thus, for Sade, there is no

*natural order* as such to be maintained, no natural *reason*, no natural *purpose*, no natural *ends*. What *is* natural, then, is quite simply, everything that could possibly be. As Bishop Butler would so succinctly express this: 'All that is, is and not another thing'. To wit, nature as *partes extra partes*, in a perpetual state of motion, of dynamic transformation. Indeed, this is *far* from the rationally ordered and purposive view of a traditionally conceived nature.

So, with the libertine, there is nothing *more* natural than the destructive violation of what was formerly *called* natural law--the God-given reason and purpose that purportedly structured the entire universe and the constitution of the human species. By *appealing* to his newly formulated natural order, Sade will have sodomy replace the sanctified form of procreation. Likewise, bisexuality and homosexuality, because they express natural urges, are *more* natural than what was formerly called sex by nature: for example, conventional sexuality-- its *practice*, and the *identity* of its *participants*. In keeping with this new found view, contraception and onanism displace mere birth--and abortion and murder serve to transgress what religion had for so long venerated as 'natural' life. In one of his characteristically exculpatory accounts, Sade would equate criminality itself with his account of nature, both of them seen as the extension of mechanics:

The primary and most beautiful of Nature's qualities is motion, which agitate her at all times, but this motion is simply a perpetual consequence of crimes; she conserves it by means of crime only; the person who most nearly resembles her, and therefore the most perfect being, necessarily will be the one whose most active agitation will become the cause of many crimes. Since it is proven that she cannot reproduce without destructions, equilibrium must be preserved; it can only be preserved by crimes; therefore, crimes serve Nature; if they serve her, if she demands them, if she desires them, can they offend her? And who *else* can be offended if she is not?<sup>11</sup>

7). Seventh. Yet, for Sade, even this seemingly total abandonment of restrictions, this complete overcoming of taboo, law, form, identity, order and natural limitation, etc., even this seems to be *inadequate* because the libertine would

unwittingly become a *slave* to *nature* itself, to nature herself. Indeed, nature permits-- it encourages, it is identical with-- every conceivable violation and excess. Thus, nature seems to exercise her *authority* even here, even in the deepest and most excessive throes of criminality. And while the natural order so conceived might hardly be thought to be at all repressive or restrictive, nonetheless, for Sade, even this is felt to be an impediment to his concept of a total freedom or sovereignty. He therefore feels compelled to overcome *nature itself*. But how can one plausibly do this? How can one overcome or transgress nature? Especially, nature as it is conceived by the likes of someone like Sade?-- for example, according to a rather casually conceived Eighteenth century mechanistic view.

Sade seems to present three ways of overcoming nature so conceived: thereby, to gain absolute freedom for the libertine:

a). The first way is by teaching, and by adopting, the cultivated practice of *apathy*. Neither a question of creation nor destruction, neither production nor depletion: rather, the libertine finally attains a state of rest and passivity-- he continually needs **whips, chains, implausible devices, greater and greater tortures and spectacles** to increase his jaded state of apathy. In short, the libertine *denies* nature any kind of recognisable or typical activity, by refusing to participate on its terms. And at this state, the initial distinction between 'real' and 'alleged' needs-- or, between natural and conventional-- becomes abandoned.

b). The second approach Sade takes in his attempt to transgress nature is to *replace* it with what could only be unnatural-- the life of the *imagination*. And, for Sade, the imagination is the highest faculty, the highest capacity of mankind. The libertine acts out of the imagination in order to impose what is thoroughly fictive, unnatural, in the place of the real and natural. Nature thus becomes *recreated* in the *image* of the debased and perverted libertine's imagination.

c). As a third strategy, Sade seeks to reverse the very conditions of man's natural existence. No longer shall health inspire happiness, but now, continual shock, disruption, and violence. If health is also equilibrium, harmony, proper proportion, reason and balance, then this shall be *overturned* and made unstable, unbalanced and degenerate by excess of everything, by-- as Bataille would have it-- *plethora*.



8). We reach the eighth stage of the Sadean itinerary. In the end, we could say that Sade's libertine achieves all he has set out to attain-- that he *overcomes all opposition* and becomes free, unfettered. But the *only* limitation he cannot overcome is death itself. He comes closest to surpassing that most human mark of finitude, however, in *Juliette*, when he says,

What I should like to find is a crime, the effects of which would be *perpetual, even when I myself do not act*, so that there would not be a single moment of my life, even when I were asleep, when I was not the cause of some chaos, a chaos of such proportions that it would provoke a general disturbance so formal than even after my death its effects would still be felt.<sup>12</sup>

Also, one can find much the same state purpose in *Justine*: for example, the well known passage where Sade compares one of his characters to

...those perverse *writers* whose corruption is so dangerous, so active, that their single aim is, by causing their appalling doctrines to be printed, to *immortalize* the sum of their crimes *after* their own lives are at an end: they themselves can do no more, but their accursed writings will instigate the commission of crimes, and they carry this sweet idea with them to their grave.<sup>13</sup>

A third instance in *Justine*, where the libertine literally experiences the delight of transport in overcoming the limitations of death, is the occasion of the game played by the infamous cad Roland, the old game of 'cut-the-cord'. In this case, the *petit mort* of *jouissance* effectively becomes an out-of- life experience:

Roland is stimulated by a few of his usual caresses; he climbs upon the stool, I put the halter round his neck; he tells me he wants me to curse him during the process. I am to reproach him with all his life's horrors, I do so; his dart soon rises to menace Heaven, he himself give me the sign to remove the stool, I obey; would you believe it Madame? Nothing more true than what Roland had conjectured: nothing but symptoms of pleasure ornament his countenance and at practically the same instance rapid

jets of semen spring nigh to the vault. When 'tis all shot out without any assistance whatsoever from me, I rush to cut him down, he falls, unconscious, but thanks to my ministrations he quickly recovers his senses.<sup>14</sup>

We recall a striking fact about the Marquis de Sade: he was imprisoned for a period of twenty-seven years. We could say that the cause for his imprisonment was simply the fact that he was certifiably, impossibly mad. These two considerations go a long way to explain why he was obsessed with the notions of constraint, restriction, limitations and his almost Satanic obsession with power. In short, it is perhaps understandable why he was so concerned with his own absolute freedom, liberty or mastery.

Psychopathology and rhetorical hyperbole aside, however-- and granted, they are difficult to minimize in Sade's case-- his itinerary of transgression nonetheless reflected one of the major themes of Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment thought: that of autonomy and self-determination. Certainly, autonomy as the transformation of the subjected individual, but also, by virtue of his participation in the French Revolution, Sade joins the modern historical movement of national self-determination, which so consciously sought to incarnate these very ideals. At once striving for a rigorous personal autonomy, yet finding himself bound by the conflicting demands of the still-emerging nation state, Sade embodied the often times painful contradictions of modernity in his own person: not the least of which was his repeated incarceration by the revolutionary regime itself, much less his fortuitous liberation from its death-sentence by the guillotine (*l'arret de mort*).<sup>15</sup>

To get a clearer perspective on this subject who is the agent of transgression, we are again drawn to the nature of the libertine as cast by Sade-- particularly in regard to the defining role played by his 'otherness', that in relation to which transgressive agency is directed. From Fichte through Kojève, it has become relatively commonplace to understand the very interiority of the modern subject through its relation to the other. Bataille, for example, develops his understanding of 'inner experience' according to what he terms the 'principle of continuity'.<sup>16</sup> Simply stated, the principle of continuity holds that we can describe what any individual is or is not, in terms of that individual's *continuity*

with other people (the intersubjective dimension), continuity with oneself (the constituted ego identity), continuity with the prevailing morality, with the prevailing thought of an age, with the environment. With those whom one trusts, with what one believes, continuity with the ensemble of civil and cultural codes, or-- in brief-- continuity with one's place in the world (the domain of general acculturation). In each case, we say that one is continuous or discontinuous with respect to *something else*-- with respect to society, time past, humankind in general, ideology, value, nature and culture.

Now, we don't usually employ the term 'continuity' when we talk like this, but we do use other words for the same kind of relation: we say, for example, that someone is 'well-adjusted', 'at ease', 'integrated', 'normal', 'conventional', that he 'gets along' and is well- or poorly- 'adapted', etc. We may also say, for example, that we 'identify' with something, that we 'associate' with others, or that we 'relate' to them in some fashion. 'Adjust', 'identify', 'integrate', 'associate', 'relate': these terms mean that we unify, that we become one, *with* our surrounding world. Such an analysis tends to make us think in terms of *others*, in terms of what is *outside* us. We are well-adjusted because we are continuous with what is not us. What is peculiar in these cases is that to account for the specificity of the subject, we seem to have totally abstracted from the very uniqueness and individuality of ourselves-- from what we are, deep down inside. Who *is* this *me* which must undergo the process of adjustment, identification, integration or association in the first place-- and continually thereafter?

Sade asks the question, and his answer *is*, nothing but *energy*: sheer, unrestrained, unlimited energy. Energy without form, without order, without reasons, excuses or justification. Now, the terms Sade uses to describe this energy are several: most importantly, they are desire, passion, shock, pleasure, pain, excitation, orgasm, flood etc. Each of these terms is unique in that *of itself* it has no limits, *no specific nature, form or identity*. When one strips everything away from oneself, all conventions, all definitions, codes and restrictions, what results? Unrestrained energy that expresses itself as action, as desire, as passion etc., and in an infinity of ways.<sup>17</sup> Thus, at the very start of *Philosophy in the Bedroom*, the positively divine libertine, Mme. de Saint-Ange (Madame Holy Angel), says:

I have discovered that when it is a question of someone like me, born for libertinage, it is useless to think of imposing *limits* or *restrains* upon oneself-- impetuous desires immediately sweep them away. In a word, my dear, I am an *amphibious* creature; I love everything, everyone, whatever it is, it amuses me. I should like to *combine every species*.<sup>18</sup>

Here, especially, we see this *drive to unite, to combine, to be continuous*. But there is a significant difference in this case. Mme. de Saint-Ange is not going to combine on the level of *them*, of the *other*, of society, morality and religion. No shopkeeper mentality there. A real Iron Lady, she-- and certainly one of the major figures in Sade's repertory of libertines.

She wants continuity, but on a quite different level-- her own level. Continuity on the level of what is her own, herself. And, her imperious continuity is centrifugal, not centripetal! What is this level of self for Sade? We have already noted it: energy-- a fully consuming passion, desire, pleasure, ecstasy. All these terms, which are themselves formless and without restriction, all these terms which point to the level of the most personal, intense, core sense of self, all these are really expressions of what we call sexuality, eroticism, life energy as primary process, as libido, as power.

What the libertine wants, then, is the free fulfillment, the unrestrained exercise of all these desires, these primary drives and pulsions. Thus, sexuality is the strongest, the most intense, most personal performance of continuity-- to be associated with, identified with, integrated with-- anything. Unity or continuity, in this case, is dictated from within, from the intensely personal drives and desires, which furrow and *invest exteriority* with delight. This comes *from within* and not, repeat, not from without. Thus, the only thing truly important to the libertine is himself, or, equally, herself-- which explains why the libertine continually exercises a sovereign and confident self-assertion, a complete and fulfilling egoism, an unremitting subjectivism which seeks no approval, requires no consent, and tolerates no resistance. All value derives from the unique and sovereign libertine: the exterior object stands as nothing. Selfish, vain and totally despotic.

At this point in our reflection, there emerges the great contradiction-- the contradiction of all contradictions-- the great wall of China: it is the contradiction between the individual and the state, the private and public, the self and other, the I and the Thou, the subject and the object. In short, it is the general contradiction between the me and the non-me-- which is to say, the you, the they, the them, the it, the system, the rules, God, the trap, jail, and the madhouse. We know what Sade wants and we know who wins, who will always win. Social continuity stands in the way of personal continuity. Social continuity requires taboos, restrictions, prohibitions, mores and laws. Society, in short, limits the individual's very life, his freedom to act out of himself. The individual's life thus becomes broken, fragmented, made *discontinuous* by the demands of social continuity. Society thereby forces the individual into isolation- - into a situation that frustrates his very attempt to be autonomous.

We have already seen how these restrictions and prohibitions assume a *systematic order* for Sade: internalized instincts led to the family; the family led to society; society led to morals and manners; morals and manners led to law; laws led to theology; theology led to reason; reason to nature. Each move in this series was a *justification* for the previous move, the previously attained stage. Thus, society ultimately justifies itself by appealing to what is 'natural'. Furthermore, we saw how Sade attacked each justification in turn, even to the point of upsetting or volatilizing the very notion of nature. Thus, he effectively eliminates the source, the cause, the origin of these-- to him-- painful taboos. He eliminates the underlying reason or justification for any taboo, any restriction or inhibition.

In short, Sade is perfectly content to get rid of anything that stands between the libertine and his own expression of natural instincts, that is, his own so-called 'inverted' or volatilized nature-- which is neither rational nor theological. Nature here becomes a reflection of the libertine's own energy, his own passions, desires and destructive cruelty. Simply by reading *Philosophy in the Bedroom*, one could easily divine what would become of *social continuity*-- much less, community-- were Sade to implement his stated project. Now, the traditional way of defining the individual according to *social continuity* would

be the following (for example, according to an ascending order of justification), and this is contrasted with Sade's position:

TRADITIONAL VIEW

- 1) individual
- 2) sentiments
- 3) family
- 4) society at large
- 5) morals (manners)
- 6) laws
- 7) theology
- 8) reason
- 9) nature

SADE'S VIEW

- 1) individual (libertine)
- 2) X (alleged)
- 3) X (fictional)
- 4) society of libertines (jokes)
- 5) laws (capricious and few, if any)
- 6) morals (manners)
- 7) X (blasphemy)
- 8) X (desire, passion)
- 9) nature (inverted, volatilized)

Nature, then, for Sade-- the base of his whole system, becomes the justification for the individual's action-- for his personal *continuity*, his unrestricted fulfillment of desire, passion etc. *Natural principles* therefore *dictate* morals and manners: on this basis his proposed revolutionary *government* would institute laws, but laws in accordance with the ways people-- that is, libertines-- would in fact behave, laws based on how libertines *do act*, not on how people in general should act. Thus, society becomes a society of libertines and the individual is free to be himself or herself. In other words, *everything drops out* except the libertine himself and an inverted nature. But, because nature is itself either *formless* or has an *infinity of forms*-- nature, thus, as unprincipled polymorphous perversity-- it too, drops out of the equation. Ultimately, nature is itself overcome by the imagination, by exhaustion, excess, apathy and art. Thence goes its own agency: likewise, passes any imposition of bind or constraint, for example, of law- - of legitimation or justification.

In the end, the libertine acts out of himself, out of his own delight in the senses: the imagination opens an ever-widening palate for his tastes, for the progressively intense exercise of his drives, eschewing the natural for the infinity of the fictive, rendering it-- in turn-- fact, deed. In one sentence of the *Philosophy in the Bedroom*, Sade effectively sums up his entire system: 'Every principle is a judgement, every judgement is the outcome of experience, and experience is only acquired by the exercise of the senses'.

What kind of *unity* or *continuity*, then, does the libertine achieve in the end? Again, the continuity of uninterrupted sexuality, of a totalizing libidinal cathexis-- once all those taboos are removed, ignored, avoided or destroyed. The libertine's art is to increase sexual appetite and desire in a vertiginous spiral, becoming intensely physical, exteriorized and universally imposed-- a kind of physical ex-pression of the formerly private drives. And-- formless, beyond all reason-- eroticism would never again be the same. This would be a divine madness, total transcendence in immanence, akin to the prophetic, blasphemous and poetic elements of the Platonic account in the *Phaedrus*, or to the Dionysian 'witches brew', as Nietzsche recounted it in *The Birth of Tragedy*. The libertine's cathected enjoyment would increase 'a thousandfold' in the 'immense melting pot' of 'transspeciating' nature, as the Comte de Bressac would proclaim. Thereby, the libertine overcomes his isolation: through desire's union. Or, through the delirium of madness or excess-- whether in intense physicality or, in continually writing himself *deeper* into his own plot of madness. And, in just such a plot, everything that stands between the libertine and nature, that is, between two notions of the inside, everything must collapse: laws, morality, sentiments, family, society, reason and religion. All these now stand as nothing to his logic of transgression. They all have *equal* value, which is to say, quite arbitrary value-- for the now 'divine Marquis'-- precisely because they have no value of *themselves* in their otherness. As the nefarious Mme. Dubois would conclude,

One must never appraise values save in terms of our own interests. The cessation of the victim's existences is as nothing as compared to the continuation of ours, not a mite does it matter to us whether any individual is alive or in the grave. (...) For there is no rational commensuration between what affects us and what affects others; the first we sense physically, the other only touches us morally, and moral feelings are made to deceive; none but physical sensations are authentic (...) thus, not only do two hundred *louis* suffice for three murders, but even thirty *centimes* would have sufficed, for those thirty *centimes* would have procured a satisfaction which, although light, must necessarily affect us to a much more lively degree than would three men murdered, who are nothing to us. (...) A little more philosophy in the world would soon restore all to order.<sup>19</sup>

## NOTES

1. The principle text in question is Bataille's *Eroticism*, English translation, M. Dalwood (London: Calder, 1962), but especially central would be his *Inner Experience*, English translation, L. A. Boldt (Albany: SUNY Press, 1988), and his *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings, 1927-1939*, English translation, A. Stoekl, C. Lovitt and D. Leslie (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985). Derrida's essay 'From a Restricted to a General Economy: a Hegelianism Without Reserve', is to be found in his *Writing and Difference*, English translation, A. Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), Chapter IX, pp. 251-257 and Foucault's text, 'A Preface to Transgression', is to be found in his *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice*, English translation, D. Bouchard, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press), Pt. I, Ch. 1, pp.29-52. The discussion would also have to include, among many of his works, the important 'Sade' essay, by Maurice Blanchot, which appears in *The Marquis de Sade: Justine, Philosophy in the Bedroom, Eugénie de Franval, and Other Writings*, English translation, R. Seaver and A. Wainhouse (New York: Grove Press, 1965), pp.37-72, as well as Pierre Klossowski's *Sade My Neighbour*, English translation, A. Lingis, (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1991), and his 'Nature as a Destructive Principle', in *The Marquis de Sade: The 120 Days of Sodom and Other Writings*, English translation, A. Wainhouse and R. Seaver (New York: Grove Press, 1966), pp.65-86.
2. Recall, that for Bataille, the experienced sense of transgression came largely from within, that is, from the intensified *desire* provoked and induced by the fearful taboo or prohibition. Nonetheless, the taboo or prohibition was itself initially imposed from without.
3. More strongly, the very terms which constitute universality itself-- totality, the transcendental, the absolute, law, reason and identity-- as an *intelligible* system or as a system of *control*, these are the terms which Sade is concerned to evade, to deconstruct, to dissimulate.
4. *Summa Theologica I*, Question 91, article 1; Question 90, article 1.



5. Sade, *Philosophy in the Bedroom*, op. cit., p. 354
6. Sade, *Justine*, op. cit., p. 154
7. Sade, *Justine*, p. 494
8. Here we see one of Sade's recurrent tactics: to contravene the universal law or premise by invoking the particular fact. The empirical alone is real. The example of blasphemy should bring to mind the occasion for Sade's initial imprisonment: the invagination of a crucifix and confessional wafers he performed upon a young provincial girl. The degree of ridicule he draws upon rule governance, however, is perhaps nowhere more evident than the comminatory set of rules devised by the 'society of the friends of crime' in the *One Hundred and Twenty Days of Sodom*, whereby human actions is 'governed' or 'legislated': merely by the number of agents (storytellers, prostitutes, villains, homosexuals, hags, children) multiplied by their collective number of members and orifices: this factor by the production and multiple exchange of their respective secretions and emissions. The society's laws are but the temporary coincidence of the libertine's caprice, as is membership itself.
9. The model of divinity operative in Sade (for example, when the narrator identifies himself with it) is also *ironic*, and largely patterned on Descartes' God of the *Meditations*--for whom the *divine truths* were dependent on the *divine will*. What results from such a position and for God, so conceived, is deftly stated by Pierre Bayle, and quoted in Leibniz, in his *Theodicy*, paragraph 180: 'The consequence of this doctrine will be, that before God resolved upon creating the world he saw *nothing better in virtue than in vice*, and that his ideas did not show him that virtue was more worthy of his love than vice. *That leaves no distinction between natural right and positive right*; there will no longer be anything unalterable or inevitable in morals. (...) (Also) it opens the door to the most exaggerated Pyrrhonism: for it leads to the assertion that this proposition, three and three make six, is only *true where and during the time when it pleases God*; that it is perhaps *false* in some parts of the universe; and that perhaps it will be so among man in the coming year'. Leibniz continues his remarks in paragraph 186: 'Through this artifice, the eternal verities, which *until the time of Descartes* had been named an object of the

divine understanding, *suddenly became an object of God's will*. Now the acts of His will are *free*, therefore God is the *free cause of the verities*. That is the outcome of the matter. (...) But if the affirmation of necessary truths were actions of the will of the most perfect mind, these actions would be *anything but free, for there is nothing to choose*. (...) (And) that was preserving only the name of freedom'. In a letter to Malebranche, June 1679, Leibniz states the reason for Descartes' ironical characterization of God: 'I am told that Descartes established so well the existence of God and the immortality of the soul, I fear that *we are deceived by such beautiful worlds*. For the God or perfect being of Descartes is not a God such as one imagines, and as one would wish, that is to say, just and wise, doing all things for the good of the creatures so far as is possible, but rather he is something approaching the God of Spinoza, that is to say, *the principle of things*, and a certain *sovereign power* called *primitive Nature*, which puts all in *action*, and does all that can be done; which has *no will nor understanding*, since according to Descartes he does not have the good for the object of his will, nor the true for the object of his understanding. For he did not wish that his God act according to some end, and it is for that reason that he excluded from philosophy the quest for final causes, under this clever pretext that we are not capable of knowing the purpose of God' (my emphases).

10. Nietzsche would later articulate this state of personal dispossession in his doctrine of the 'Dionysian' attitude in his *Birth of Tragedy*, and in his early essay, "The Dionysian Worldview". For an extended discussion of Dionysian 'dispossession', cf. D. Allison, "Nietzsche Knows No Noumenon", in *Why Nietzsche Now*, Ed. D. O'Hara (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), pp.295-310
11. *Justine*, p. 520.
12. *Juliette*, English translation, A. Wainhouse, (New York: Grove Press, 1968), p. 525.
13. *Justine*, p. 611.
14. *Ibid.*, pp.687-88.
15. On July 27th. 1794, Sade was scheduled to be executed. The Jacobin bureaucrats, however, had misplaced his prison admission papers, so he could not be located by the bailiff and be brought to the guillotine by the execution detail. Twenty-one of his fellow prisoners were not so fortunate.

16. G. Bataille, *Eroticism*, op. cit. Cf. esp. his Introduction, and Part One, 'Taboo and Transgression'.
17. This reduction of the traditionally conceived 'natural' world to the domain of the formless, a domain without order, parallels the entire Cartesian project, whereby the Aristotelian account of nature-- as informed-- is reduced to that which, of itself, has no form, and is thereby precisely 'elemental': the reduction of all things to the celebrated 'wax' example in the *Meditations*. Since wax is an 'element' and ordinarily thought of as a 'thing', it has no proper 'form' at all, save the abstract property of extension. The Cartesian project, like Sade's, is to begin from the imagination, and to impose an entirely unnatural determination upon nature: for Descartes, this 'art' is precisely mathematics, his *mathesis universalis*. For Sade, it is the reduction to the elementally formless, out of which desire will multiply its incarnations to infinity, in the ecstatic play of transgressive energy.
18. In *Justine*, op. cit., p. 187.
19. *Justine*, pp. 491, 695.

## **Reading the Lack of the Body: The Writing of the Marquis de Sade**

Kathy Acker

I am using this essay to do two things. To read a short passage from *Philosophy in the Bedroom* by the Marquis de Sade. To read one of his tales.

The more that I write my own novels, the more it seems to me that to write is to read.



# *The Divine Sade*

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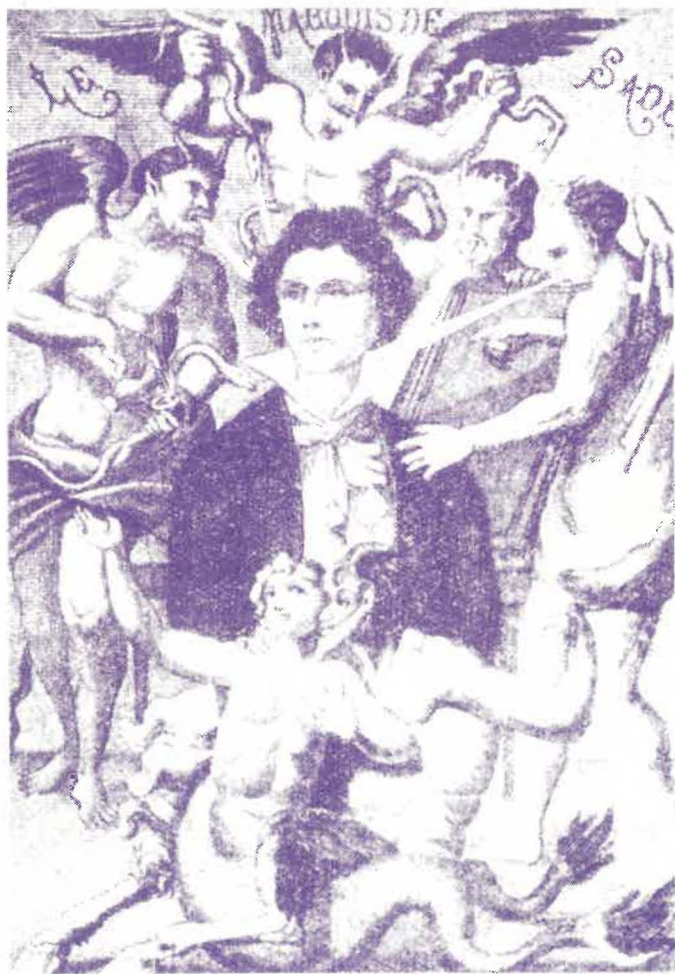
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# *The Divine Sade*



*edited by*  
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**The Divine Sade**, the first compilation of essays on the Marquis de Sade (1740-1814) published in Great Britain, is a ground breaking and innovative volume. With contributors ranging from Kathy Acker to Philippe Sollers, **The Divine Sade** presents an expansive philosophical exploration of this compelling figure. Furthermore, **The Divine Sade** examines the historical, literary, religious and theatrical framework of Sade's work, and includes translations of Annie Le Brun and Philippes Sollers' essays produced specifically for this issue.

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