

**AN ENLIGHTENMENT PARADOX/ PARADIGM INCARNATED:  
BIOPOLITICAL SADISM AND THE LIBERTINE/ NON-LIBERTINE  
DIFFERENCE IN THE WRITINGS OF DONATIEN ALPHONSE  
FRANÇOIS, MARQUIS DE SADE**

By  
Alexandra Claudia Manta

Submitted to  
Central European University  
Department of Gender Studies

*In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts*

Supervised by Assistant Professor Anna Loutfi  
In Coordination with Professor Allaine Cerwonka

Budapest, Hungary  
2010

## ABSTRACT

The present thesis looks at the main writings of Donatien Alphonse François, Marquis de Sade (*Dialogue between a Priest and a Dying Man* 1782, *The 120 Days of Sodom* 1785, *Justine, or Good Conduct Well-Chastised* 1791, and *Philosophy in the Boudoir* 1795) from a biopolitical perspective, constituted around the ways in which power grapples with bodies through a sovereign act of deciding on their “making,” “unmaking,” and “re-making” via their continuously assigned possibilities for life/ death. Reading Marquis de Sade through the framework offered by Michel Foucault and Giorgio Agamben entails producing a 'Sadean' politics of life/ death as opposed to Sadean eroto/ pornography.

Here, I (re)define 'sadism' as intrinsic to an operation of sovereign power that decides on the life or death of bodies. In Sade's novels, 'sadism' is a normal operator of exceptional violence that, in a power relation, systematically and randomly disarticulates a “form-of-life” that is politically meaningful and therefore livable, from a biological state of “mere existence” that is politically irrelevant and therefore killable (Agamben 1998). It affects the (human) bodies at stake to the extent that in it, life and death are distributed among bodies in function of a “libertine/ non-libertine difference” that exemplifies an anthropological, biological, and political differentiation continuously taking place as the effect of a constant decision made upon individual/ collective bodies. The “libertine/ non-libertine difference” figures as a biopolitical split superseding other types of differences (of gender, of sexual orientation, of class, of age, of political belonging) by inhabiting these in turn or by gliding over them. Through this system of differentiation, power re-configures its modalities of force, its technologies of domination, its discourses and institutionalized relations so as to always be able to reach every body, and some bodies while not others, in ways not immediately evident.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To my brainiac supervisor Anna Loutfi, I wish to address the following: “The sleep of monsters produces reason(s).” “It is not my mode of thought that has caused my misfortunes, but the mode of thought of others” (M. de Sade). “A single event can awaken within us a stranger totally unknown to us. To live is to be slowly born.” “You become responsible forever for what you have tamed” (Antoine de Saint- Exupéry). “What could I say to you that would be of value, except that perhaps you seek too much, that as a result of your seeking you cannot find” (Herman Hesse). “Some people never go crazy. What truly horrible lives they must have” (Charles Bukowski). I thank her for being who she is and then changing her mind, for accepting to engage with my project, and for giving me courage when I felt most distressed.

I wish to thank Allaine Cerwonka for returning to CEU just in time to stir my project with her wonderful classes, and with the rich dialogue they have ensued. I want to thank her for providing me with innovative questions, and also for her understanding in those times when I most needed it. Thank you for your untiring support.

I wish to thank Marquis de Sade for haunting me in ways both pleasurable and painful. I thank my mother, for her immense love and care. I thank Sasha, for being my best and worst friend all this time, for haunting me, like Sade, both pleurably and painfully, and for saving my ass by submitting the thesis on time to the department (I hope). I thank my good friends, Elena Popa and Jess Shahan, for desperately trying to make me go out, drink, and become a pool champion. I thank those which aren't forgotten, in alphabetical order: Velid Borjen, Edward Cuneo, Petra Bakos Jarrett, Anna Mol, Andrzej Oleszak, and Alecs Ianko, even less forgotten, despite the distance.

I wish to thank Coca Cola, South Park, Spiderman shots, Nurofen forte, the color black and metal music for existing. I wish to thank the world for not ending on May 21<sup>st</sup>, before I get my MA degree. Last, but not least, there's one person I won't thank, my president.

## Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION .....	1
CHAPTER 1 Paradigm in Chains, Paradox in Furs: Purifying De Sade in the Guts of the French Enlightenment?.....	4
1.1. Introduction .....	4
1.2. Sade: An Enlightened Delight, or Enlightenment's Intoxication?.....	8
1.3. Sade Biopoliticus: The Paradigmatism of Paradox. Enlightened? Modern? None, Both .....	17
CHAPTER 2 Methodological Pleasures: Sade, between Foucault and Agamben....	21
2.1. Introduction .....	21
2.2. Foucault: Old Sovereignities, New Racisms .....	24
2.3. Agamben: New Sovereignty, Old Distinctions.....	28
2.4. Sadism and Libertinage: The Boudoir's Sovereign Decisions & Deadly Differences.....	31
CHAPTER 3 Sadean Times, Revolutions in "Nature": Religious, Philosophical, Political, Sexual Routes to Libertinage .....	36
3.1. Introduction .....	36
3.2. Religious Libertinage: Where is God? Who is God? Erection Reigns Supreme .....	37
3.3. Philosophical Libertinage: Thoughts on Matter, Sensation, and Life.....	44
3.4. Libertine (Medicinal) Politics: French Republican Sexuality .....	51
CHAPTER 4 The Question of Expérience, and Its Libertine Answer: The (In)Sensitive Politics of Experiencing/ Experimenting on The Living, with Sovereign Effects.....	55
4.1. Introduction .....	55
4.2. Experience, Experiment: Tales of Indistinction .....	59
4.3. Haller's Irritability/ Sensibility Problem.....	62
4.4. Sadean Cruelty: Sadism as Political Decision upon Experience/ Experiment	70

CHAPTER 5 “ <i>Libertinizing</i> ” the Sadean Body: Deus et (Fucking) Machina, Biopolitical Sadism, and the Desire for (anthropo-political) Difference .....	75
5.1. Introduction .....	75
5.2. Deus et (Fucking) Machina: 'You Suffer, Therefore I Am' .....	79
5.3. Biopolitical Sadism: On Women, Reproduction, and the Poor .....	86
CONCLUSION.....	101
Bibliography.....	103
A. Primary Sources .....	103
B. Secondary Sources .....	103

# INTRODUCTION

What would it mean to inscribe a French Enlightenment figure as obscure(d) and unlawful as Donatien Alphonse François, Marquis de Sade (Phillips 2005), as exemplary for the ways in which power has become interested in living bodies, in their incessant twisting and twitching around, in their reproduction, in their differentiation and specification, in their death and in their prolonged dying, with a view to perpetuating itself as the fact of acting upon the 'unknowing' of if, where, and how life/ death happen, and happen differently, in and across bodies. It is such unknowing which brings about the necessity of knowing life and death as both facts of the organic, and facts of the political. What would it mean to bring to a genealogy of biopolitical writings, predominantly coagulating around the works of Michel Foucault and Giorgio Agamben, a discourse traditionally classified as libertine/ erotic/ pornographic (Ferguson 1991; Goulemot 1998)? What would it mean to stare at the 'Enlightenment' through its 'solar anus' (Bataille 2004 [1985])? What does it mean to say that there is something about the narratives of this pseudo-philosopher, banished *libertine* writer, resuscitated Republican citizen, sporadically madman and sporadically pervert (Phillips 2005) which speaks to us, to the ways in which we presently think about power, and about living flesh, and about their reconfigurable inter-penetration in the act of government?

The thesis constitutes a critical engagement with some of the most important of Sade's novels: *Dialogue between a Priest and a Dying Man* (1782), *The 120 Days of Sodom* (1785), *Justine, or Good Conduct Well-Chastised* (1791), *Philosophy in the Bedroom* (1795), and *The History of Juliette* (1797). The first chapter starts with an interrogation of the extreme shifts Sade has suffered within the historiographies of 'Enlightenment thought,' and of 'modernity,' at the hand of 20<sup>th</sup> century (literary) criticism. It also sets up the stage for justifying the use of the 'biopolitical' framework in reading Marquis de Sade's texts, by means of the argument that it

is the inseparability of Sade's liminality from his standing in for (exacerbated) normalcy within such intellectual histories that has the potential to convert Sade in a tactics for reading 'Enlightenment' more generally.

The second chapter explores in detail the theories of Michel Foucault and Giorgio Agamben on 'sovereignty' and 'biopolitics,' so as to provide a theoretical grounding for the highlighting within the present analysis of specific Sadean concepts such as 'despotism'/'sovereignty,' 'cruelty,' 'libertine/ non-libertine,' 'pain/ pleasure.'

The third chapter embeds these concepts within a range of historical, socio-political, and scientific-philosophical conversations taking place at the time within French society, or Europe more broadly: the re-configuration of atheism in relation to the 1789/91 overthrow of the monarchy as an attempt at abolishing sovereignty-preserving theologico-political apparatuses (Delon 1987; William 2007; Swann 2007; Guicciardi 2007); pre-/post-Revolutionary citizen politics suffused with racist regenerative population policies (Quinlan 2006a & 2006b; Van de Walle & Muhsam 1995) in a context of class struggle; the convergence of physiological and theological theories on physical/ moral regeneration; materialist philosophies, scientific developments in physiology, experimental anatomical practices, and emerging imaginaries of the 'living' body (Koumba 2009; Kozul 2009; Barroux 2009; Kehres 1997).

The fourth chapter, starting from a problematization of 18<sup>th</sup> century Hallerian physiological theory of 'sensation,' discusses the ways in which the 'living' (historically associated to 'sensuous experience' or 'embodied sensation') cannot exist outside of a field of power within which a decision effects what it is and what it is not, what is or what merely resembles 'living,' which type of living gets acknowledged and which does not. The focus lies primarily with the role of pain in Sadean vital politics, as that which 'invisibly' inscribes a body in power as starting point for the body's instrumentalization through its own being as/within difference-making.

The fifth chapter redefines the concepts of 'sadism' and 'libertinage' in relation to the sovereign logic of power's operations of differentiation and life/ death decision-making with respect to bodies. Can Sadean 'sadism' be re-interpreted as a function 'proper' to the relation of power that differentiates between (non)libertines for life/death management purposes, and how are individual bodies/ species bodies redefined, managed and empowered/destroyed in relation to gender, class, age, reproductive sexuality in this context? How is the 'libertine/ non-libertine difference' produced as a difference in life/ death, and through what power technologies is it sustained or interrupted? My assumption is that Sade opens up a space for revisiting the kind of difference-work that is at stake within power mechanisms, technologies, and discourses in two points: 'sadism' in relation to 'sovereignty', and 'non/libertinage' in relation to 'un/livingness.'



# CHAPTER 1 Paradigm in Chains, Paradox in Furs: Purifying De

## Sade in the Guts of the French Enlightenment?

the earth, by turning, makes animals and men have coitus, and (because the result is as much the cause as that which provokes it) that animals and men make the earth turn by having coitus. It is the mechanical combination or transformation of these movements that the alchemists sought as the philosopher's stone. It is through the use of this magically valued combination that one can determine the present position of men in the midst of the elements.

Bataille. "The Solar Anus." 2004 [1927], 6

It is the radical impossibility of representing Sade's work that unsettles our fin-de-siècle, and the certainty that this impossibility controls the economy of all representations.

Philippe Sollers, in Frappier-Mazur 1998, 206

### 1.1. Introduction

Ever since the 1783 edition of the *Berlinische Monatsschrift* journal, where Johann Zöllner deplored the insufficient epistemic grounding of socio-political and educational, nationally implemented 'enlightening' projects<sup>1</sup> sweeping across 18<sup>th</sup> century Europe – issue later addressed in Kant's *Was Ist Aufklärung?* - the problematic of the Enlightenment has increasingly assumed historical, philosophical and political dimensions. Disseminated across specific national contexts, where concepts of 'public good' and 'public act(ion)' were being reconfigured and redeployed, questions regarding the meanings of such projects, of their aims and immediate effects, eventually constituted themselves into what Gadamer called “a task [...] never entirely finished” (in Schmidt

---

1 Hence, Johann Friedrich Zöllner was among the first intellectuals to publicly launch the 'enlightenment question': “What is enlightenment? This question, which is almost as important as what is truth, should indeed be answered before one begins enlightening! And still I have never found it answered!” (in Schmidt 1996, 2).

1996, 19). In a sense, as Michel Foucault insightfully recognized in his 1984 essay “What is Enlightenment?,” to take the task of Enlightenment seriously entails considering the historical reiteration of this interrogation, as well as self-interrogation as “historicophilosophical” practice more generally, an answer in itself (1996, 392-396). Thus, Enlightenment's imprint and legacy *is*<sup>2</sup> never-ending curiosity about Enlightenment, and it historiographically produces a *critical difference* in the period's self-positioning with respect to its own past and future, evincing the *recognizably modern* preoccupation with the continuity/ difference tension, both diachronically and synchronically (Foucault 1984, 6-9)<sup>3</sup>.

In this context, the *oeuvre* of Marquis de Sade, as much 20<sup>th</sup> century Sadean criticism has shown, is another window unto, and another means of rehearsing, the question on the nature and significance of Enlightenment (Allison, Roberts and Weiss 2006 [1995]). The ways in which Sade has been brought in relation to the concepts of 'Enlightenment' and 'modernity' suggest Sadean writing is rather the pretext and occasion for a pronouncement on their definitions and inter-traffic. Sade's instrumentalization is both made explicit, and ultimately exhausted in Jean-Pierre Dubost's argument that Sade as such “does not exist” (1998, 52). I therefore do not wish to ask “What is Sadean Enlightenment?,” but to tackle the ways in which Sade is not merely a specific configuration of statements in a domain of knowledge loosely called 'Enlightenment thought,' for it is instead a *modality of the Enlightenment* – a way of simultaneously asking the question and (re)producing the answer insofar as question and answer are inseparable in the Enlightenment game. Rethinking Sade as a *method* for Enlightenment will be further developed in the second chapter of the thesis.

<sup>2</sup> All emphasis (Italicization) in the body of the thesis, unless related to work titles, is mine. All emphasis in quoted excerpts, unless otherwise stated, is mine.

<sup>3</sup> Foucault posits the Enlightenment as a modality of modernity (whether 'modern' or 'counter-modern'), by virtue of the period's continuous interest in differently articulating its own difference with respect to other periods (ex. Renaissance vs. Enlightenment), or to itself (ex. mainstream Enlightenment vs. Radical Enlightenment) – again, 'Enlightenment' is rendered accessible as an intelligible, delimited, definable entity only through the repeated re-articulation of its specific difference through a *critical* question about its own existence. See Foucault's “What is Enlightenment?” in Paul Rabinow's 1984 *The Foucault Reader*, and “What is Critique?” in James Schmidt's 1996 *What is Enlightenment? Eighteenth-Century Answers and Twentieth-Century Questions*.

The present chapter will, on the one hand, review some of the most recent or most prominent of Sadean scholarship, from the perspective of an historico- epistemological exercise which either renders Sade the *paragon* of Enlightenment thought – the central example, representative to an exceptional degree –, or its *parergon* – the liminal exception, giving Enlightenment thought substance, coherence, and a certain conceptual currency precisely by determining what it *is not*, and what it *cannot be*. In *The Truth in Painting*, Jacques Derrida defines the *parergon*, drawing on Kant's *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*, as that which “inscribes something which comes as an extra, *exterior*<sup>4</sup> to the proper field [...] but whose transcendent exteriority comes to play, abut onto, brush against, rub, press against the limit and intervene in the inside only to the extent that the inside is lacking” (1987, 56). In a sense, Sade alternatively comes to occupy the awkward positions of either 'paradigm' (Foucault, *Of Language and Literature*, 1964), or 'paradox' – as that exception to 'the Enlightenment' that is constitutive of 'Enlightenment' precisely by *not being it*, by pointing towards and drawing the boundaries of the phenomena, events, materialities engulfed within it (Brix 2007, Hénaff 1999 [1978], Meeker 2006).

In relation to 'modernity,' Sade is again positioned accordingly, as either modernity's obscure forerunner – which his adoption by the French Surrealists in the 1920s and 1930s seems to imply (Allison et. al. 2006 [1995], 1-3) – or as modernity's 'other' (Cusset 1998; Nagy 1975; Foucault 1975-76; Foucault 1972). Within 20<sup>th</sup> century Sadean criticism, Sade – the name standing in for a complex, heterogeneous and often self-contradictory body of writing, at extremes taken to be the sign of philosophic palimpsest *par excellence* (Brix 2007) – is being purified from its potential to complicate the definitions and histories of (French) Enlightenment already in place. Sadean writing, alternatively placed inside/ outside of both 'Enlightenment' and 'modernity,' fully represents only its own “radical impossibility of [being] represent[ed],” as

---

<sup>4</sup> Emphasis in the original text.

Philippe Sollers postulates in *Sade dans le temps* [*Sade in time*] (in Frappier-Mazur 1998, 206).

On the other hand, the chapter introduces my own position on the process of 'putting [Sade]-into-history<sup>5</sup>', and of using Sadean texts as loci for investing with power, for reinterpreting, re-arranging, hierarchizing, and politically maneuvering concepts of 'Enlightenment' and 'modernity.' Given that I approach the writings of Marquis de Sade with a distinct framework in mind, informed by the theories of late Foucault and Giorgio Agamben, and concerned with the total implication of the biological life of bodies in the political operations of power mechanisms<sup>6</sup>, I argue, at a rather general level, that Sadean texts can be considered *paradigmatic* precisely because *paradoxical*. As either the logical product of (an equally logical development in) a set of factors pertaining to Enlightenment's 'specific difference<sup>7</sup>,' or the coexistent negation of Enlightenment thought, Sade entertains an equally *exceptional relation* to 'Enlightenment' – between being 'too much' its representative, and not being its representative 'at all,' a relationality<sup>8</sup> is always in place at the meeting point where representativeness turns into non-representation and vice-versa, triggering a necessary decision on Sade's place within the history(ies) of Enlightenment. I owe to Agamben's notion of the relationality of the non-relational (being excluded from, and non-related to, a form of power as a modality of being included in, and therefore in relation to, that form of

- 
- 5 For M. Foucault's *discursivization of sex*, enabled by the technologies of confession employed within Christian pastoral power mechanisms, in order to produce, via institutionalized pathways, *sex as the truth of the self*, and consequently the self as intelligible and administrable, see *History of Sexuality Vol. 1: The Will to Knowledge* (1990 [1978], 18-24). For a thorough analysis of the convergence between libertine literature and Catholic confession guidelines, briefly highlighted by Foucault, see Jean-Pierre Dubost. 1998. "From the "Will to Knowledge" to Libertine Textuality."
- 6 Among the works informing this definition, I count: Foucault. M. 1990 [1978]. *The History of Sexuality Vol.1: An Introduction*. New York: Pantheon Books; Foucault. M. 2003[1997]. *Society Must Be Defended: Lectures at College de France 1975-1976*. New York: Picador; Gordon, C. 1991. "Governmental rationality: an introduction." *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality*, ed. Burchell, et al. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press. 1-51; Agamben, G. 1998[1995]. *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*. California: Stanford University Press; Agamben, G. 2000[1996]. *Means without End. Notes on Politics*. Minneapolis & London: Minnesota Press; Agamben, G. 2005 [2003]. *State of Exception*. London: Chicago Press.
- 7 Take for instance the (potential for) 'unreason' in Enlightenment's discourse on rationality. Horkheimer & Adorno's 1944 *Dialectic of Enlightenment* succumbs to such a view: "Enlightenment has always aimed at *liberating men* from fear and establishing *their sovereignty*. Yet the fully enlightened earth radiates disaster triumphant. [It] already contains the *seed of the regression* apparent everywhere today." (in Schmidt 1996, 21) Emphasis mine.
- 8 Drawing on Victor Goldschmidt's 1947 *La Paradigme dans la dialectique platonicienne* [The Paradigm in Platonic dialectics], Agamben defines the "paradigmatic element" as a **relation** between the element's **singular** existence as element within a field, and the element's instantiation through itself of a **rule of intelligibility** for that field (2009, 23). In *The Signature of All Things. On Method*, the paradigm is defined as the "singular case that is isolated from its context only insofar as, by exhibiting its own singularity, it makes intelligible a new ensemble" (2009, 18).

power<sup>9</sup>) the *exceptionality* of the constant relationality that Sade establishes with the 'Enlightenment,' and through which Sade is constantly (re)positioned. Moreover, Agamben's concept of 'paradigm,' as that which is *exceptional* by virtue of its *non-exceptional* relation to a set of elements (1998 [1995], 19-20), helps re-envision Sade's exceptionality as 'specific' to Enlightenment by means of its exhibiting certain unsolved tensions that keep on reproducing in the very act of their (attempted) resolution.

At a different level of the argumentation, the Sadean corpus might be seen to perform more emphatically a gesture that points to a shifting in the meaning of politics - gesture previously located by Foucault in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century: the birth of a biopolitical relation, of a biopolitical sovereign power and a biopolitical subject. Although it is only in the following chapter that I expand on the possibilities afforded by the 'biopolitical framework,' while also laying down the principles that underlie my 'bio-perspective' on Marquis de Sade, it is important at this point to approach the historiographical question of continuity/ difference in more detail.

## ***1.2. Sade: An Enlightened Delight, or Enlightenment's Intoxication?***

Engaging with either the philosophical bent, or the literariness of Marquis de Sade's work is not a late 20<sup>th</sup> century whimsicality, but a practice with a history going back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century: historians such as Michelet, or writers such as Stendhal, Baudelaire, Flaubert, Huysmans and Swinburne have approached Sade either hermeneutically or aesthetically, struggling to produce a place for Sadean texts in the cultural and intellectual narrative of the time. In the 1920s, the French Surrealists, notably Apollinaire and Breton, have resorted to Sade's obscenities, aggression, and stylistic excess for their own (methodological) purposes of employing shock(ing) experimental techniques to disrupt the experience of tradition, and to allow for the rescuing of experience *from* tradition (Allison et. al. 2006 [1995], 1-3).

---

9 See Agamben. 1998 [1995]. *Homo Sacer*, on the relation of exception as “the extreme form of relation by which something is included solely through its exclusion” (18).

Now, the division between the 'philosophicalness' and the lyricism of Sadean writing, further enhanced by the growing intellectual breach between formal and content-critics, should not be considered innocent. In both cases, the critical engagement with Sade's work is justified by means of an internal split through which Sade is being (partially) eliminated from himself: in Georges Bataille's words, Sade comes to function as its own "foreign body" even as it is passing into the literary canon of the 1960s – "an object of transports of exaltation to the extent that these transports facilitate his excretion" (2004 [1930], 92). Perhaps with the exception of Bataille and Klossowski, who emphasize the power element in Sade precisely at the moment of conflation between "destructive" philosophical system and tortured linguistic expression – the political in Sade emerging at the moment when the text 'performs' on the reader, through its materiality, what the text 'narrates'<sup>10</sup> – the two domains remain disarticulated from each other, and said to work only in spite of, and not through, one another. The political element, at the interstice between a corpus of knowledge and a doing of power (in/ through language), is therefore subtly erased.

A similar argument is formulated by Natania Meeker in *Voluptuous Philosophy: Literary Materialism in the French Enlightenment*. Meeker's project consists in the (re-) construction of a genealogy of philosophical materialism, starting from the Roman poet- philosopher Lucretius, author of *De Rerum Natura* – in which an atomistic-materialist concept of the universe is introduced – and ending with the cluster of 18<sup>th</sup> century French materialisms, as they differently relate to the Lucretian legacy<sup>11</sup>. Exponent of Epicureanism, whereby human life is sensuously

---

10 This is why Klossowski asks in "Sade, or the Philosopher-Villain" (2006 [1995]): "What does thinking and writing – as opposed to feeling and acting – mean for Sade?" (33). Moreover, Klossowski determines that Sadean sadism, as the "performance of a single gesture" (42) in and through language, constitutes Sade's "destructive" philosophy insofar as it succeeds in perpetrating itself in the act of self-description/ demonstration at the level of language. This is why Bataille also adopts a 'Sadean' expression in articulating his philosophy: "I imagine myself covered with blood, broken but transfigured and in agreement with the world, both as prey and as a jaw of time, which ceaselessly kills and is ceaselessly killed" (2004 [1985], 239).

11 The so-called Lucretian materialist doctrine postulates the existence of a self-contained, autonomous universe, constituted from an infinitely pliable substance called "matter," in its turn divisible into interactive small, indivisible particles called "atoms," continuously moving in a haphazard manner through empty space (vacuum). The Lucretian view of the universe, inspired by Greek atomism, is entirely atheistic, explaining all natural

defined in terms of a purposeful pursuit of pleasure and avoidance of pain, Lucretius is set up by Meeker as a philosopher not merely advancing a theory of 'matter' as empirical entity, *rationaly* graspable and *experimentally* verifiable beyond the philosophical discourse itself, but as a philosopher that sensuously demonstrates his philosophical ideas in the act of exposing them, through the 'mater-iality' of the text, through the ways in which readers pleasurably/ painfully experience the text. The 'facticity' of Lucretian 'matter' cannot be disengaged from its 'metaphoricity,' from its textual representations that not merely describe what matter is, but prove that there is matter-in-action through the material effects unleashed in the act of reading (Meeker 2006, 1-5). In this context, Sade, as well as La Mettrie, are 18<sup>th</sup> century French materialists “hedonistic[ally] [re]turning” to Antiquity (2006, 18). A Lucretius redivivus, Sade demonstrates somatically, through experienced pain/ pleasure, the facts of philosophy. As such, he is positioned as subversive to a specific 'canon' of 18<sup>th</sup> century French materialisms that have rhetorically constituted themselves as 'properly' scientific by “de-materializing” the experience of the text, by separating within the concept of 'matter' the representational of the text from the somatic outside the text (2006, 20).

Although I find Meeker's argument compelling, I cannot help but question the divisions she so neatly draws, and for which no explanation is advanced (why Sade and La Mettrie, and no other 18<sup>th</sup> century French materialists). To what extent is pleasure removed from the realm of 18<sup>th</sup> century 'proper' scientific materialism, and if not, to what extent are the pleasures of textuality distinguishable from the pleasures of the procedures, design, and effectiveness of the 'scientific method'? If the shift is between two modalities of representation, out of which one modality claims while the other rejects, textual *mediation*, on what account does Meeker indulge in the Lucretian- La Mettrian- Sadean model? Is Lucretius set up as an *authentic origin* of sensuous materialism, and if so, what does it mean for Sade to 'return' to Lucretius? I would argue that

---

phenomena in terms of atoms' activity in space. This activity of the “first-bodies” is responsible for generating sensation, especially pleasure: “The *clinamen* of the elementary principle – notably, the atom, the law of the atom – would be the pleasure principle.” (Derrida, in 2006, 31) See Meeker 2006, 18-36.

Sade does not return, to the extent that Sadean writing *mixes* both modalities of representing – exposing precisely the pleasures of the subtle experience/ experiment of sublimating pleasure, of the 'scientificization' of a discourse that does not recognize itself as discourse, but as science. This aspect will be further elaborated in chapter 4.

Marcel Hénaff, in *Sade: The Invention of the Libertine Body*, addresses Sadean writing more straightforwardly, as the logical excessive product of Enlightenment thought<sup>12</sup>. On the other hand, Michel Brix concludes in “Sade est-il un philosophe des Lumières?” [Is Sade a Philosopher of the Enlightenment?], that Marquis de Sade is Enlightenment's absolute *critical* voice. Sade would be the satirist-philosopher bold enough to push 17<sup>th</sup> -18<sup>th</sup> centuries philosophies to their very limit, so as to demonstrate that it takes only a twist of the phrase or the dropping of a word for Montesquieu, Voltaire, La Mettrie, d'Holbach, Buffon, Rousseau or Hobbes to have advanced systems of thought capable of justifying everything one wishes justifiable (2007, 14).

Alberto Leon, in the 2004 article “Foucault contra Sade o Foucault con Sade? Del sadismo al sadomasoquismo” [Foucault against Sade or Foucault with Sade? From sadism to sadomasochism] documents the history of the tensioned relationship Foucault establishes with Sadean writings, from his 1961 *History of Madness in the Classical Age*, up to the 1975-76 interview “Sade, Sergent du sexe” [Sade, sergeant of sex]. Initially, Foucault discusses phenomena associated to 17<sup>th</sup> - 18<sup>th</sup> centuries *libertinage*<sup>13</sup> in relation to time-specific power technologies, such

---

12 “It may be that Sade [...] brought an end to classical thought in a more unexpected sense, in that the horror deployed by his texts, far from overstepping the bounds of reason and overrunning its margins, is actually reason's unavowable extension, it's scandalous continuation” (Hénaff 1999 [1978], 285)

“This sleek, unfeeling [libertine] body looms as the emblem of the most dreadfully abstract process, the one signaling that the era of the Earth and of gods, of works and of days, the open-ended time of space and of the gaze, of rhythm and of breath, has come to an end or been brought to one” (Hénaff 1999 [1978], 288-289)

“Sade is, in a way, the symptom par excellence of his century, but also his diagnosis. In Sade, the 18<sup>th</sup> century hears its own voice” (Hénaff 1999 [1978], 289)

13 Although a broader discussion of *libertinage* is integral to the third chapter of the present thesis, as part of the social, intellectual and political context in relation to which Marquis de Sade's works must be read, and although the Sadean texts end up modifying the initial historical complex concept of *libertinage*, at this point a minimal definition will be useful. On a first level, *libertinage* refers to a constellation of philosophical elements, epistemological enterprises, anti-religious attitudes and movements, specific ways of social living tied to the private/ public spatial distinction, sexual and erotic styles of addressing the body, political problems to be managed and solved. In the literature, an ambiguous line separates 17<sup>th</sup> century *libertinage érudit*, more emphatic in its intellectual, anti-theological and political manifestations, and 18<sup>th</sup> century *libertinage*, more overtly sensual and



as the institutionalization of *internment*, which effect the internalization of 'unreason' as an identifiable, locatable, specifiable, individualized aspect of the self with a view to rendering the 'self' cognizable to power, and consequently sensible to its operations. The paradox of *libertinage* consists, in this framework, in being a dialect of 'unreason' that, instrumentalizing a rationalizing discourse predominantly ascribable to Enlightenment, attempts to inscribe itself as rational. As such, both *libertinage* and Enlightenment act as distinct, but not unrelated, fields of power, within which a discourse constructing 'reason' as the only acceptable 'method' for truth is assumed by different power mechanisms, toward the legitimization of the administration of knowledges, of the ways in which these knowledges are produced, and of these knowledges' effects in relation to human bodies and human practices (Leon 2004, 4). Marc André Brenier, in *Libertinage et figures du savoir* [Libertinage and figures of knowledge], posits as one of the central tasks of Enlightenment thought the questioning of the relation between subject and object within the context of knowledge-production, as well as of the relation between knowledge and sense experience (in Meeker 2006, 12). *Libertinage* pretends to eliminate these short-circuiting relations by including Enlightenment's stumbling-block (sensation, feeling) as valid pathway to knowledge. Consequently, libertinage might be thought of as one 'attitude'<sup>14</sup> of Enlightenment insofar as it is an Enlightenment breaking from its own limits, and opening up to what it claimed *not to be* – a logical continuation/ shift within a field where reason and unreason become less distinguishable.

Only in the 1964 manuscript of the conference *De Langue et Littérature* does Foucault articulate a clearer vision of Sadean *libertinage* as distinct from both the Classical *episteme* of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and 'modernity':

---

sexually performed. See Sophie Houdard. 2001. "Vie de scandale et écriture de l'obscène: hypothèses sur le libertinage de moeurs au XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle" [Life of scandal and obscene writing: hypotheses on the licentiousness of manners in the 17<sup>th</sup> century]. *Tangence* 66: 48-66; Turner, J. 1987. "The Properties of Libertinism." *'Tis Nature's Fault: Unauthorized Sexuality during the Enlightenment*, ed. R. P. MacCubbin. Cambridge & New York: Cambridge University Press, 75-87. *Libertinage* also has a literary dimension, at the intersection of philosophical works, political pamphlets, and pornography. For debates on the specifics of "libertine novel," see Jean-Marie Goulemot. 1998. "Toward a Definition of Libertine Fiction & Pornographic Novels." *Yale French Studies*. 94: Libertinage and Modernity. 133-145.

14 For the concept of 'attitude,' see Foucault's 1984 "What is Enlightenment"?

Sade's work, beyond doubt, is the historical threshold of literature. In a sense, you know that Sade's work is a gigantic pastiche. There is no phrase in Sade which is not completely turned towards something already said, by 18<sup>th</sup> century philosophers, by Rousseau, there is not a single episode, not a single scene, intolerable, narrated by Sade, which is not actually the derisory, absolutely defiling pastiche of some scene from some novel of the 18<sup>th</sup> century [...] meaning that Sade's work pretends, pretended to be the erasure of all preceding philosophy, literature, language, and the erasure of all this literature in the violation of a speech which would desecrate the page thus turned blank... [...] a work which, in a sense, eradicates all written word, and with this gesture opens an empty space, where all modern literature will take place; I believe Sade is the very **paradigm** of literature. (Foucault 1963, in Herman & Hallyn 1999, x)

In a sense, Foucault's positioning of Marquis de Sade as a counter-Enlightenment voice that reverses in mocking tone, and turns in upon themselves all 18<sup>th</sup> century philosophies, might well take Sade outside charted Enlightenment territory – a gesture perhaps not without influence on someone like Michel Brix. And yet, even if there might be a way of reading Sade as just the *paradoxical* product of an Enlightenment socio-historical, political and cultural context, disjunctive in substance and form from its intellectual milieu, one would still have to complicate this reading by asking what is Sade's work *doing*, and how does this *doing* precisely relate or separate Sade from Enlightenment thought? As Foucault argues, Sade is an erasure of past narratives (more or less scientific, more or less imaginary, more or less historical) in a manner similar to Enlightenment's positioning *vis-à-vis* medieval and Renaissance cosmogonies, epistemologies, and histories of thought. Sade's work comes to signify a gesture of power insofar as it posits itself as its own source of legitimacy and possibility of functioning (Sade is nothing but the emptying of the field of knowledge potentially containing Sade so as Sade singularly becomes the field of knowledge); a gesture of powerlessness too, insofar as Sade points to its own limitedness *within* the field of knowledge that it eventually overcomes – a gesture that Sade erases as well precisely in powerfully erasing anything else on way to achieving its specific singularity. Sade repeats an Enlightenment strategy of power, and a discursive gesture as well, through which the Enlightenment becomes itself in the field of knowledge, becomes a field of knowledge, and a modality of knowledge more generally: a questioning and a cutting, questioning as cutting, as much in relation to other historico- epistemological domains, as to itself.

Foucault also points to Sadean texts as the site where *modernity* will happen, as to the *not-yet* of modernity, and eventually as that which modernity has to *overcome* in order to happen: both in the 1972 interview “Les problèmes de la culture. Un débat Foucault-Preti”, and in the 1975-76 “Sade, sergent du sexe,” Sade figures as among the last remnants of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, whose *disciplinary* eroticism needs “getting out of.” “Too bad for Sade,” the argument goes, who is impotent in front of the *modern* body, the body-to-come, the body Foucault desired and prophesied, “volatile and diffuse [...] with random encounters and pleasures without calculations” (in Leon 2004, 8). In this vision, Sade *is* and *is not*, of the Enlightenment, *is* and *is not*, of modernity. Much like *libertinage* in Peter Nagy's *Libertinage et Révolution*, Sade is a transition, a passage, an in-betweenness, a standstill moment between both:

The appearance, the very existence of libertine literature is the unquestionable premonitory sign of an imminent change of era. One cannot ever emphasize enough that libertinage, as a social attitude or as a literary course, is only a sign, and often an *ambiguous* one... Even if libertinage was often and for many a required *stage* for breaking away from the bindings of religions and superstitions of a sexual or any other nature... it had to be *overcome* in order to get at an unreserved acceptance of the Revolution. (in Dubost 1998, 55)

In a less historicized, but more philosophico-anthropological vein, Georges Bataille and Pierre Klossowski have put Sade on the agenda of modernity in the 1930s, theorizing a series of concepts deployed in Sade's work as transcending their particular textual instantiations, and structuring the *modern* frame of mind, *modern* ways of living as involved with power operations, and the concrete relations carrying them out: sovereignty, eroticism, waste, consumption, economy, utility, life, death/ annihilation, race, perversion, Good/ Evil (Bataille 2004 [1930]; Bataille 1991; Klossowski 1965; Klossowski 2006 [1995]). Moreover, Klossowski goes as far as to identify, in “Sade, or the Philosopher-Villain,” the nature of the Sadean libertine with a deadly gesture, “count[ing] for the totality of [his] existence,” which “consecrates the death of the species in him as an individual” (2006 [1995], 42-43). By attempting to *naturalize* libertine nature – following a line of argument traceable to Sade – Klossowski re-inscribes the “counter-generality” of “insubordinate life-functions” (Klossowski's terminology for the perversion of sexual

functions in human living beings) within the reproductive “normative generality of the human race” (sexuality) thus describing death and non-reproduction as a variety of the living, sustaining it insofar as its aim is to enable its own reiteration upon a living material, “aspir[ing] after nothing save to renew itself” (*idem*, 34-40). Death, in this framework, is nothing but a reshuffling of the living in such a way that annihilation will take place and the living will be preserved with a view to the potential repetition of the killing. Infinite death is infinite life and vice-versa, to the extent that they are not both *qualities* of the same substance, but that the principles which produce the *qualitative difference* in substance are the same. Sade thus writes:

The principle of life in all beings is no other then the death principle; we receive them both and nourish them both at the same time. At that moment we call death, everything appears to dissolve; we believe this because of the *excessive difference* which is then visible in this portion of matter which no longer seems alive [...] There is, in the end, *no difference* between the first life we receive and this second life we call death... (in Klossowski 1965, 72-73)

Klossowski's analysis of Marquis de Sade's work through the lens which makes life and death coincide can be read as the preamble to the Foucauldian analysis of Sade in *History of Sexuality*. It can also point to a different way of posing the question of continuity with/ break from 'Enlightenment'/ 'modernity' in relation to the political meaning of the life/death coincidence. Georges Bataille, in “The Practice of Joy before Death,” written in the 1930s, glorifies a visceral vision in which life and death are conditions for individuating, and of the individuated, organic material, which function precisely because premised on each other:

Everything that exists destroying itself, consuming itself and dying, each instant producing itself only in the annihilation of the preceding one, and itself existing only as mortally wounded. (2004 [1985], 238)

I can only perceive a succession of *cruel splendors* whose very movement requires that I die: this death is only the exploding consumption of all that was, the joy of existence of all that comes into the world; even *my own life* demands that everything that exists, everywhere, *ceaselessly give itself* and *be annihilated*. (2004 [1985], 239)

Klossowski and Bataille have invented a vocabulary; have named a process, an event, a congruence, a rationality according to which a relationship constantly unfurls. Sadean texts constitute the theater of the proceedings, of the operations, of the subtle tracings of these

operations in the flesh and blood of representation. But if the difference splitting fictional from nonfictional, immaterial from material bodies is one of politics of representation, as Natania Meeker argues, one of (non-) representability of mediation, as Bruno Latour has it in *We Have Never Been Modern* (1993 [1991], 13-48), why should this theoretical cluster not be opening up the possibility of a politics of life/ death within and across bodies that have the potential for this kind of change? Additionally, Charles Wolfe's 2010 article "Why was there no controversy over Life in the Scientific Revolution?" argues, contra Michel Foucault (*The Order of Things* 1973), that 'life,' as the site of metaphysical anxiety and scientific experimentation, is not the product of the 19<sup>th</sup> century rise of biology, but of diverse 18<sup>th</sup> century polemics tapping into philosophies and anthropologies of the 17<sup>th</sup> -18<sup>th</sup> centuries. Can we not consider Sade's involvement with a problematics of 'life,' as evinced by 20<sup>th</sup> century criticism, a symptom of the ways in which both materialism and biology are distinct ways of representing and discussing a similar element, a similar relation, a similar transformation, though differently shaped within these discursive fields?

Even if both Bataille and Klossowski only timidly approach the question of 'living' within the universe of Sadean materialism in relation to a type of power, to a modality of functioning of power which is named sovereign, the ways in which this function can be appropriated within a state economy of power, the ways in which this function can apply to individual/ collective bodies, the ways in which this function is not merely a modality of circumscribing and handling bodies but also of producing them, are still left unproblematicized. Equally unquestioned aspects – but which will be part of the biopolitical framework – revolve around the kind of bodily differences that determine, or are determined by, the life/ death distinction as it operates within/ across bodies, and the ways in which these differences work towards the upholding, or undermining, of a model of human embodiment upon which they are premised.

### **1.3. Sade Biopoliticus: The Paradigmatism of Paradox. Enlightened? Modern? None, Both**

When the name of Sade enters Michel Foucault's 1978 *History of Sexuality Vol.1*, in the last chapter "Right of Death and Power over Life," a novel relationship is at stake – perhaps not entirely disconnected from previous French explorations in the domain of Sadean life/ death principles. Yet the relation temporalizes and historicizes Sade by placing his work on the threshold between two different modalities of power in their specific treatment of bodies: the 'sovereign' regime of *blood*, and the 'biopolitical' regime of *sex*. And if Foucault wishes to account for the manner in which, on the "threshold of modernity" (1990 [1978], 143), *sovereignty* - the rationality of power which disregards the 'life' of bodies in all aspects but its *lawful taking* -, *disciplinarity* - the body-driven, individualizing technological assemblage occupied with the efficiency of control and resource-extraction -, and *biopolitics* - the logics of power investing in the total life of the population -, collapse into each other, in what way if not through the Sadean looking glass (1990 [1978], 135-139)? Yet, Foucault refuses Sade the *biopolitical*:

Sade carried the exhaustive analysis of sex over into the mechanisms of the *old power of sovereignty* and endowed it with the *ancient* but fully maintained prestige of blood [...] In Sade, sex is without any norm or intrinsic rule that might be formulated from its own nature; but it is subject to the unrestricted law of a power which itself knows no other law but its own; [...] it is no longer anything but a *unique and naked sovereignty*: an unlimited right of all-powerful monstrosity. (1990 [1978], 148-149)

What Foucault seems to be arguing is that Sade cannot, on the one hand, be made to count, or accountable, for *modern* biopolitical forms of government<sup>15</sup> - in the way the eugenicists can and must (*idem*, 148) – because Sadean sexuality fails to formulate itself into a conditional, rule-abiding domain for power to penetrate in relation to a programmed management of bodies

---

<sup>15</sup> Foucault might also be providing a potential counter-argument to analyses deriving from, and supplementing, Adorno and Horkheimer's *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*, which would render disparate figures such as Marquis de Sade and Nietzsche, *emblematic* for a specific extreme of rationality, originating in the 'Enlightenment,' and moving with self-destructive force, into modern genocidal totalitarianisms.

to the achievement of improvement/ degeneration, health/ disease, life/ death etc. In this context, sexuality does not point toward the means and modalities power must negotiate in producing its variable effects, but toward the act of power in itself and limited to itself – of a power already constituted and re-affirming itself in every mortal act of sex, for it is in the act of *taking* that sovereign power is rendered powerful. It seems that for Foucault, biopower belongs to the 'modern' framework insofar as it instantiates itself in relation to its effects, which it tries to predict, control, overturn: a power that is powerful in its preoccupation with its own effects; whereas 'pre-modern' sovereignty is imagined as that modality of power in which what counts, as its sole effect, is power itself, its permanence, its continuation<sup>16</sup>. Giorgio Agamben's employment of Sade will change the terms of the debate once more.

In *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, Agamben inscribes Sade in “his incomparable presentation of the absolutely political (that is, “biopolitical”) meaning of sexuality and physiological life itself” (1998 [1995], 79). The ruse in Agamben's concept of biopolitics, and which allows for the incorporation of Sadean philosophy, is the absorption of sovereignty as a logic within the workings of a biopolitical mechanism: the power which disseminates life/ death into a vital field, pretending to organize, rationalize, distribute, calculate, predict or at least try to predict, and face its own effects, is precisely the power underneath whose rationality is the empty force of the moment when it decides on its action in a manner rather independent from these effects – for the effects remain ultimately nondeductible from the decision prompting them. As Nancy Miller has argued in “Libertinage and Feminism,” libertine writing has a predilection for the *moment* (which becomes, in the Agamben's framework, another name for the *decisive event*), evincing the “will to capture [it], to seize it, to locate it, to master it” (1998, 19). Thus, Sade comes to figure the irrationality of power's rationality, the movement through which exposure to

---

16 In the 4<sup>th</sup> lecture (1 February 1978) from *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France 1977-1978*, Michel Foucault distinguishes between 'sovereignty' and 'government' as modalities of political practice insofar as sovereignty is both its own end, and the means towards it, whereas government's end resides in the things and relations directed: their optimization, efficiency, usefulness (2007, 134-138).

death, to blood, to sex renders any body the paradigmatic subject of power, unpredictably vulnerable to protection because constantly threatened (the more constant, unavoidable, and arbitrary the threat, the greater political investment in the subject's living). Predictably, Sade as the literary 'camp' of Enlightenment, is recast as another paradigm of modernity, precisely because paroxysmally paradoxical.

I would like to refrain from having to pronounce myself on the relation between Sade and Enlightenment, or Sade and modernity, beyond claiming that such relationships do exist, but that all attempts at specifying them are necessarily charged with a politics of the present and a hope for the future. Is Sade Enlightenment's unclassifiable accident? Then why is modernity constantly turning back to his work, glimpsing beyond its shoulder almost to make sure that *Sade was then*, and cannot repeat? Is Sade the logical product of Enlightenment knowledge/ power articulations? Then why is he being exceptionalized, past and present? Perhaps keeping such questions alive constitutes a dead end, and perhaps answering them tells more of one's politics than of Sade's.

My project is limited to the production of a specific *politics of sadism*, and of the *libertine/ non-libertine difference* that would account for the ways in which the life/ death of bodies is materially mediated into the power relations represented in Sade's work. Might the *libertine* assume functions and operations of power that belong to a sovereign decision, understood as systematical and random disarticulator of a "form-of-life" that is politically meaningful and therefore livable, from a 'mere existence' that is politically irrelevant, and as such killable (Agamben 1998 [1995], 9-14)? Might *sadism* be re-conceptualized as intrinsic to the sovereign decision on the life/ death of bodies, in the form of the arbitrary violence which is the decision itself, and which renders death and life, human and non-human, sovereignty and bestiality, annihilation and survival, potentially indistinguishable? What might be the role of the libertine/ non-libertine difference in relation to life/ death, and how is this difference produced and



instrumentalized?

Finally, Marquis de Sade's texts belong to a period of time (1782-1812) which is, within historical chronologies, traditionally marked under the name of 'Enlightenment,' or the 'long 18<sup>th</sup>-century.' The position his *oeuvre* occupies within the histories of 'Enlightenment' and 'modern' epistemologies, however, can be considered rather as the unstable effect of flexible definitions of both 'Enlightenment' and 'modernity.' My choice of theoretical framework does not, therefore, rest with biopolitics' potential for solving the problem. Rather, what biopolitics affords is both the opening up of a novel problematic complex (the question of the 'organic life' of the body and its strategic re/definitions within power relations; the question of 'death' not as the element external to power which must be negotiated, but as the very guts of power which can be politically bridled), and loose enough reading techniques allowing for its re-formulation within a specific historical, social, and political context. The following chapter deals more closely with the cluster of concepts, theories, and theoretical possibilities that inform my reading and that can be said to pertain to a nascent biopolitical domain.

## CHAPTER 2 Methodological Pleasures: Sade, between Foucault and Agamben

Man has not been able to describe himself as a configuration in the episteme without thought at the same time discovering, both in itself and outside itself, at its borders yet also in its very warp and woof, an element of darkness, an apparently inert density in which it is embedded, an unthought which it contains entirely, yet in which it is also caught.

Foucault. *The Order of Things* 1973, 326

### 2.1. Introduction

To select one particular method as interpretative grid for the Sadean corpus ultimately entails selecting one 'Sade' among its many potentialities. 'Sade' functions as a multifarious sign under whose shadow, in time, number of conceptual elements and relationalities have gathered: 'Enlightenment' (Foucault 1964; Kavanagh 1998; Hénaff 1999 [1978]), 'counter-Enlightenment' (Hénaff 1999 [1978]; Meeker 2006; Brix 2007), 'modernity' (Bataille 1991; Bataille 2004 [1985]; Klossowski 1965; Klossowski 2006 [1995]), 'counter-modernity' (Cusset 1998; Ferguson 1991), even Cartesianism (Russo 1997), counter-utopianism (Martin 1998), and paradoxical political creeds like “impolitics” (Roger 2006 [1995]) or aristocratic democracy (Hayes 1989). As discussed in chapter 1, the coincidence between the functions of (i) case study, and (ii) rule of intelligibility for, Enlightenment as a particular historico- philosophical problematization, renders the work of Sade *paradigmatic*, irrespective of its representativeness/ non-representativeness (in terms of content, or of the relation to other elements within 'Enlightenment' as discursive field). 'Sade,' similarly to 'Enlightenment,' is constituted in the fight for (re)formulating its self-questioning<sup>17</sup>,

---

17 In the manner: “Who/ what is Sade?”

and as such, 'Sade' might be re-conceptualized as a tension within a field of knowledge ('Enlightenment') exposing that same field as tension in itself. This is what I call taking 'Sade' as a *method* for approaching 'Enlightenment.' Yet Sade has been constantly assigned a radicalness whose relationship to a specified norm of thought and representability could be teleologically inscribed within either the norm's normal development, or abnormal deviations<sup>18</sup>. My interest in reading the material through the 'biopolitical' lens does, as we have seen, neither solve, nor avoid the problem, and it cannot be advanced as self-evident.

First, the fact that both Michel Foucault, and Giorgio Agamben, have made Sade into the example of, and counted him amongst the evidence for, their theorizing is relevant, although not sufficient. In *The Order of Things: An Archeology of the Human Sciences*, while pursuing the analysis of modalities and functions of representation, as they shift in the passage from the Renaissance to Classical and modern *epistemes*, Foucault discusses Sade in terms of what I call a *vital difference* – consisting precisely in the emergence of a relation of *indistinction* between *signs* and their opposing *signs* within a discourse attempting to name 'life,' and to locate it beyond discourse. It is this *critical indifference* of *signs* for/ in front of 'life' that prompts a separation of the existence of 'life' from its modalities of discursivization, from its becoming-intelligible via discourse, to which it is no longer reducible:

That life *can be no longer separated from* murder, nature from evil, or desires from anti-nature, Sade proclaimed to the eighteenth century [...] Perhaps for the first time in Western culture, life is escaping from the general laws of being as it is posited and analyzed in representation. [...] life becomes a fundamental force, and one that is opposed to being [...] life is the root of all existence, and the non-living, nature in its inert form, is merely spent life; *mere being is the non-being of life*. For life – and this is why it has a radical value in nineteenth-century thought- *is at the same time the nucleus of being and of non-being*. (1994 [1960], 273)

---

18 Sadean writing can indeed be said to embody the “para”- element, defined by J. Hillis Miller, in Bloom, de Man, Derrida & Miller (1979). *Deconstruction and Criticism*, as the “something simultaneously this side of a boundary line, threshold, or margin, and also beyond it, equivalent in status and also secondary or subsidiary, submissive, as of guest to host, slave to master. A thing in ‘para,’ moreover, is not only simultaneously on both sides of the boundary line between inside and out. It is also the boundary itself, the screen which is a permeable membrane connecting inside and outside. It confuses them with one another, allowing the outside in, making the inside out, dividing them and joining them.” Footnoted in Gérard Genette's *Paratexts: Threshold of Interpretation* 1997 [1987], p.1.

I argue that this splitting of the *representable* 'being' of the body from the beyond-representation 'living' of the organism might constitute the initial step in, on the one hand, the (re)-consideration of the stakes of politics in relation not to representation, but to human living material, and on the other hand, in the interrogation of Sade's relevance for a politics of the living. As we have previously seen, Sade is indeed taken up again in *History of Sexuality Vol.1*, yet not as the representative of a (bio)*politics for* life – envisioning the control, sustenance, improvement, and care of, and calculated intervention within, the population body – but of a 'sovereign' politics *on* life – preoccupied with its own reproduction through the constant potency of deciding on, and enacting, the termination of life (1990 [1978], 135 -159).

Giorgio Agamben, however, re-positions Sade with respect to Foucauldian life-politics, which does no longer merely 'coexist' with sovereign power modalities of affecting/ effecting bodies, but which integrates as its functional element the *sovereign* logic of deciding upon differences between bodies, upon their significance, their hierarchies, their differential correlations with the life/ death domain, and upon the politics of these correlations (1998 [1995]). It is this total permeation between sovereignty and biopolitics that enables Agamben to advance Sade as the leading figure underwriting the “biopolitical manifesto of modernity” (*idem*, 78), and to connect – too hastily I would claim – Sadean sadism to contemporary sadomasochistic practices as “technique[s] of sexuality by which the bare life of a sexual partner is brought to light” (*idem*, 79). Foucault's merit, in this sense, rests perhaps with his careful historical nesting of theoretical claims: after all, his concepts of 'sovereignty' and 'biopolitics' were both devised and advanced in relation to specific socio-political and historical frames (prominently the 17<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries France). Agamben, as a political philosopher, less so, to the extent that he models number of this concepts (*bare life*, *homo sacer*, *nomos*, *potestas*, *auctoritas*, *bios*, *ζοή*) in response to Ancient Roman and Greek sources, while operationalizing them in the context of 20<sup>th</sup> - 21<sup>st</sup> centuries totalitarianisms and democracies (1998 [1995]; 2005).

The present chapter has a twofold purpose: on the one hand, it introduces the ways in

which both Michel Foucault, and Giorgio Agamben, theorize 'sovereignty' and 'biopolitics,' in their respective conceptual networks, while on the other hand, it seeks to illuminate how the Sadean concepts of 'sadism,' 'libertine, and 'pain/ pleasure' might over-signify types of relations, procedures, events, conditions relatable to the biopolitical framework and, specifically, to the 'question' of sovereignty.

Moreover, the present thesis can serve as a platform for questioning the potential and the limits, of the *biopoliticization* of Marquis de Sade within the literature, by asking whether two distinct statements, or conceptual objects, within the relational discursive fields within which they emerge, as well as with the materialities entering their production, can despite distinct historical situatedness evince a recognizable pattern, logic or rationality underlying both<sup>19</sup>. In what ways can Sade be thought to open up a space for thinking and politicizing the *difference* within and between human bodies, as related, within and through power mechanisms, to the problematics of life/ death? In what ways are Sadean vocabularies, modalities of representing ways of living/ dying, as well as human relations, potentially informing the biopolitical writings of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries?

## **2.2. Foucault: Old Sovereignties, New Racisms**

Although the question of 'sovereignty' is detectable in most of Foucauldian writings, it is strongly addressed in *History of Sexuality Vol.1: The Will to Knowledge* (1990 [1978]), *Society Must Be Defended: Lectures at Collège de France 1975-1976* (2003 [1997]), and in *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at Collège de France 1977-1978* (2007). Sovereignty is conceptualized in terms of a political

---

19 In *Edward Said & Jacques Derrida: Reconstellating Humanism and the Global Hybrid*, Karavanta and Morgan, in a footnote, define this method as *reconstellation*, namely “the act that does not simply recognize the imperative need for a double engagement with the history of meaning inherent in the concept but wrenches both concept and object from their contexts to temporarily and persistently disrupt those relations of attachment and affiliation that have regulated their respective meanings and functions. This temporary inoperativeness of both object and concept calls for a new act of interpretation and repetition conditioned by the field that the object and concept now temporarily share” (2008, 18-19). Reconstellation is a method of analysis and (re)framing conceived by Karavanta & Morgan in relation to Theodor Adorno’s “constellation,” as introduced in Walter Benjamin’s *The Origin of German Tragedy*.

arrangement which facilitates a specific relation of *domination* implicating a localized territory, to which a multitude of *subjects* are thus tied, and a unified source of power. Consequently, sovereignty is characterized by what Foucault terms the “subject-to-subject” cycle, the simultaneous production, by and through the established *political relation*, of a political entity, both *subjected* to the power relationship with the sovereign, and *sovereignly* invested with attributes, potentialities, and forces in virtue of which the *subject* is individually accessed by power, as the possessor of individual qualities and relations on which the sovereign can intervene (2003 [1997], 43-44). Moreover, sovereignty is characterized by the absolute identity between its signifier and instrument, the monarch, and its field of operativity and support, the territorial state. Finally, the fundamental problem of sovereignty is, precisely, its foundation: in what consists its “basic legitimacy,” that which both constitutes it, and enables it to function as source and guarantor of the law (*idem*, 44). The discourse of *right*, argues Foucault, was instrumental in solving both the problem of the legitimacy, and that of the limits, of sovereign power: it “dissolve[d] the element of domination in power and [...] replace[d] [it] with [...] the legitimate rights of the sovereign [...] and the legal obligation to obey on the other” (2003 [1997], 26-27). The self-referentiality of sovereign power is underscored in Foucault's analysis of the anti- Machiavellian literature of the 16<sup>th</sup> -19<sup>th</sup> centuries, whereby the sovereign relates strictly to the territory and subjects acquired by conquest or inheritance, with the sole purpose of preserving this relation (2007, 126-135). Once grounded in divine investiture, and modeled after the theological relation between God and human beings, the sovereign relation opens unto new modalities of thinking about, and practicing, the political relationship. When what Gerhard Oestreich termed the “detheologization” of politics (Gordon 1991, 13) takes place – namely, when sovereign authority can no longer be legitimized with reference to divine authority - 'governmentality' gradually emerges, and power produces its own justification and permanence in relation to a discourse on 'life.'

Sovereign power, Foucault argues, does not vanish from the field of politics, but persists

as distinct, while juxtaposed to, and even superimposed unto, *raison d'état*, that “scandalous and all-powerful reality, whose nature escapes the intelligence and constitutes a mystery,” as Etienne Thuau, 17<sup>th</sup>-century political thinker, author of *Raison d'État et Pensée Politique à L'époque de Richelieu*, has it (in Gordon 1991, 9). The state, “born of the calculation and ruse of men, a knowing machine, a work of reason” (*idem*), adopts a novel form of political address towards the subjected body: *biopower*. If sovereign power was centered in the body of the sovereign, divinely authorized as representative of God’s will upon Earth, and mainly made manifest in the mandate “let live or make die,” modern state government takes as its object

men in their relations, their links, their imbrication with those other things which are wealth, resources, means of subsistence, the territory with its specific qualities [...]; men in their relation to that other kind of things, customs, habits, ways of acting and thinking etc.; lastly, men in their relation to that other kind of things, accidents and misfortunes such as famine, epidemics, death (Foucault 1991, 93).

The *governmentalization* of power<sup>20</sup> translates into the coupling of body-individualizing disciplinary mechanisms with biopolitical technologies and political economies for handling population bodies *en masse* as the *vital resource* of state power (Foucault 1978, 135-145). Thus, the ethos of care and induced maximal efficiency in the population acts as power's legitimizing technique. Within the emergent biopolitical landscape, human life constitutes both power's problem, and its (re)solution (2003 [1997], 245). Sex is recast as human life's sensitive spot, where power can most effectively exercise its touch upon bodies, both individual and collective, at the level of specimen and species alike (1990 [1978], 145-146). Reproduction can no longer be thought of as one potential model of biological behavior, selectable as much as any other within the field of human sexuality— it becomes both the technology, and space, of political intervention

---

20 Colin Gordon, in “Governmental Rationality: An Introduction,” cites Michel Foucault’s lectures on the re-definition, intrinsic to the making of ‘the’ modern “art of government,” of the role of the police among State apparatuses, a re-definition that implies the specific targeting of “individual lives” for the “foster[ing of] the strength of the state” (1991, 10). “*Life* is the object of police: the indispensable, the useful, and the superfluous. That people survive, live and even do better than just that, is what the police has to ensure”; “The police’s true object is man” (Foucault, in Gordon 1991, 10). The police, as a complex material reality pertaining to the state knowledge/ power *assemblage*, constitutes one means through which the workings of *biopolitics* are accomplished: no longer intervening sporadically in the life of *unlawful* subjects, the police becomes a regulating device through which the norm constitutive of the social body is imposed. Thus, the police observes, accounts for, amasses detailed knowledge of, and is concerned with scrutinizing and normalizing individual members as bodies-to-be-governed (*idem*, 10).

by means of its progressive *normativization*, and normalization. De-centered within legal theory and policing practices, reproduction becomes the background for *ab-norm-ality* (1990 [1978], 37-39). Its naturalization within the field of human sexuality both erases and reproduces the politics of this process.

Yet *how does one die* within a politics invested in the living, in its prolongation, preservation, betterment, and perfectibility? Within the old regime of sovereignty, death was allocated to the domain of the sovereign through/ as the “deductive,” *negative*, decision of “let[ting] live and mak[ing] die” (1990 [1978], 135-138). Racism, postulates Foucault, is a modality of inoculating death into the biological material integrated within the mechanisms of biopower – of fracturing the living, of turning the living against the living, making the living the threat and potential death of the living, and thus justifying the intervention of power's deadly forces, within this difference-making process, and into its effects (2003 [1997], 254 -258). “Biologico-social racism” constitutes the manner in which biopower forces the *internalization* of death potentialities within the living body of the species, thus legitimizing its efforts at continuously *purifying* the biology of the social from its self-annihilating tendencies:

the other race is basically not the race that came from elsewhere or that was, for a time, triumphant and dominant, but that it is a race that is *permanently, ceaselessly infiltrating* the social body [...] which is, rather, constantly *re-created* in and by the social fabric. (Foucault 2003 [1997], 61)

Constantly kept alive through its repeated eradications, race justifies both the death operations within (state) biopower, and ultimately, the state itself:

Whereas the discourse of races, of the struggle between races, was a weapon to be used against the historico-political discourse of Roman sovereignty, *the discourse of race* was a way of turning that weapon against those who had forged it, of using it to *preserve* the sovereignty of the State, a sovereignty whose luster and vigor were no longer guaranteed by magico-juridical rituals, but by *medico-normalizing techniques*. (Foucault 2003 [1997], 81)

By contrast, Agamben's sovereignty refers not to a *modality of government*, but to a *logic of action* infiltrating the modality of government, limitedly modeled after Foucauldian *state racism*, and essential to the workings of the biopolitical *state apparatus*.



### 2.3. Agamben: New Sovereignty, Old Distinctions

In “What is a Camp?,” Agamben explicitly re-defines the object of sovereign power as enabling the operativeness of the law: the sovereign creates the very possibility of politics as that which occupies itself with distinguishing *political* from *nonpolitical* with respect to the ‘merely’ living (2000, 37-48). In *Means without End*, the political is defined as “life that can never be separated from its form[s] [of living]” (2000, 4). More specifically, sovereign power continually instantiates the dissociation between *zōē* as “simple fact of living” indiscriminately shared by all living creatures – *denominator* of the biological life of the organism - and *bios*, as “form or manner of living peculiar to a single individual or group” - *difference function* in function of which the *zōē/ bios* disarticulation is effected (2000, 3-5). Sovereignty might thus be thought of in terms of that which performs the disentanglement of humanness from political status, of 'naked' life from legal subjectivity.

Although *zōē* might evoke a *purely* organic mode of life, both separable from and preceding the subject’s political identity as decided upon within the field of state power, Agamben’s theory of sovereignty posits this potential (sporadically actualized) distinction (between *zōē/ bios*) as both constitutive of sovereignty (precisely by virtue of its sporadic actuality), and as produced by, instead of calling for, sovereign intervention. The moment in which *zōē* and *bios* are differentiated is a moment of power, a moment of *exceptionality* in which *life in itself* is uncovered as fully imbricated in the *political*. There seems to be no outside of politics: that which is *excluded* from the political is *politically captured* in an *exclusive inclusion*, a “relation that binds and, at the same time, abandons the living being to law” (2005 [2003], 1).

In *Homo Sacer*, Agamben explains the moment of the *exception* as that which creates an *exceptional order*, or “zone of indistinction” - a form of relationality between *zōē* and *bios*, politically valuable and non-valuable existence, allowing sovereign power to exist and to concretely manifest itself in setting them apart, or in working on their indifference. Sovereignty therefore is realized

not because *zōē* and *bios* are immediately and necessarily distinguishable – in need of that distinction to be made -, but precisely for not being so:

[the sovereign] does not limit itself to distinguishing what is inside from what is outside but instead traces a threshold (the state of exception) between the two, on the basis of which outside and inside, the normal situation and chaos, enter into those complex topological relations that make the validity of the juridical order possible. (Agamben 1998, 19)

What Agamben advances under the term ‘sovereign power’ is the interplay between mechanisms of violence and mechanisms of protection, a complex machine which needs to constantly arrange bodies in function of their *political propriety*, and separate those which ‘must live,’ from ‘enemy bodies’ which ‘must die.’ In *Homo Sacer*, modern state power self-legitimation occurs via the *corpus*, the material body, the handling of the living breathing bleeding flesh of the human being who already vanishes into the body of the ‘sovereign subject,’ of the human subsumed in the *form-of-life* set up by the state (1998, 126-135). In order for state control and biopolitical intervention at the level of the population not only to be justifiable, but to exist as such, some bodies need to be ‘made sacred,’ made vulnerable, exposed as a threat *internal* to the biology of the social body, and consequently exterminated. Thus, “life exposed to death” is at the root of politics insofar as “it can even be said that the production of a biopolitical body is the original activity of sovereign power” (1998 [1995], 11; 53). Politics, in Agamben's view, is always *thanatopolitics* to the extent that, following the Hobbesian line of thought, it is the capacity to kill and be killed that founds the political community: the vulnerability of *homo sacer* in relation to sovereign power is “the originary figure of life taken into the sovereign ban and preserv[ing] the memory of the *originary exclusion*<sup>21</sup> through which the political dimension was first constituted” (1998 [1995], 53).

Ultimately, there are two essential points which set Agamben at a distance from the work of Foucault. First, for Agamben, sovereignty – though still death-ridden, is not necessarily an

---

<sup>21</sup> Emphasis in the original.

institution (a form of organizing around subjected life via technologies of government) nor a discourse of right (via laws, rituals, spectacles, public killings, war). It is instead a *logics of action*, whereby an *original indistinction* within a given domain of power justifies a *differentiating decision*. Agamben's approach inserts Foucauldian sovereignty into Foucauldian biopolitics, whereby power not only constitutes itself as power through, within and across living beings, but the life/death difference is related to livingness as to the most *general(izable)* quality of the field in which it emerges. The political difference is a difference in life and death.

Secondly, Agamben stresses the arbitrariness of the ways in which this difference is produced through a *pure decision* (1998 [1995], 17). In “From Sovereign Ban to Banning Sovereignty,” William Rasch defines sovereignty as the logical operation through which a form of power institutes itself in the act of difference-making, both within and away from, itself:

the sovereign is simply the name given to a logical effect. Rather than prior or opposed to the law, the sovereign is law's shadow, its included and excluded double.

[...] for law to be absolute, it must be limited, it must be immanent to the set in which it rules and stand in no hierarchical relation to the outside. [...] The law does not derive its power from an external source, but rather achieves its power by *distinguishing itself from itself* – an act of logical nuclear fission. (2007, 94)

The logic of sovereignty is thus circular. That is why, in spite of Andrew Benjamin's critique of Agamben's “zone of irreducible indistinction” (2008, 77)<sup>22</sup>, indeterminacy can, and has to, function as the springboard for determinacy, not because it is the *a priori* 'outside-of-power' which precedes power's differentiating decisions, but because it is the effect of power's implication in its own self-institutive tactics for making decision both possible, and necessary. As

---

<sup>22</sup> In “Particularity and Exceptions: On Jews and Animals,” Benjamin questions the relationship between the “absolutely indeterminant” zone where *zōē/ bios* indistinctly pass into each other, prompting the *decision* upon their separation, and the determinacy of the “bare life” thus produced. Agamben is seen to posit what Benjamin calls “particularity without identity,” namely “the possibility of an *exceptional* state of pre-[...] differentiation, or the actualized potentiality of a state of indifference at the interior” (2008, 80). Benjamin wishes to argue that “the excluded [bare life] bear the mark not just of exclusion – which could be no mark at all – but also the link between their particularity and exclusion” (2008, 83) – exclusion which functions via discrimination between identities, or determinants. “This determination means that sovereignty necessitates the capacity to discriminate. Discrimination occurs within a complex field of identities, which are attributed and constructed, on the one hand, and, on the other, may be regional and linked versions of autonomy and affirmation.” In this sense, “bareness” is never completely bare.” (2008, 82) It is always traceable back to its *bios*.

Jean-Luc Nancy argues:

“sovereignty [...] has to be identical with itself in both its institution and performance. It owes nothing external [...] The sovereign does not find sovereignty as something given: he has to constitute sovereignty and therefore to constitute himself as the sovereign” [...] *sovereignty realizes itself precisely there where it consumes its subjects*. (in Ahrens 2005, 305-306)

In the process of this consumption, power sovereignly produces bare life as that which “dwells [indistinguishably] in the biological body of every living being” (1998 [1995], 81), and which needs a sovereign infinitely reiterative *pure* decision to point it out, and take it up.

## **2.4. Sadism and Libertinage: The Boudoir's Sovereign Decisions & Deadly Differences**

Although I cannot provide a full account of the ways in which Sade's work may be read using what I call a 'bio-perspective'<sup>23</sup>, here I point to directions of inquiry regarding two Sadean concepts: (i) “sadism,” and (ii) the “libertine/ non-libertine difference.”

In *Philosophy in the Boudoir* (1795), Dolmancé, the libertine-philosopher mentor of the young Eugénie, explains the sovereign power – sexual pleasure – others' pain economy:

What is it one desires when taking one's pleasure? That everything around us be occupied with nothing but ourselves, think of naught but of us, care for us only. If the objects we employ know pleasure too, you can be very sure they are less concerned for us than they are for themselves, and lo! Our own pleasure consequently disturbed. *There is not a living man who does not wish to play the despot when he is stiff*: it seems to him his joy is less when others appear to have as much as he; by an impulse of pride, very natural at this juncture, he would like to be the only one in the world capable of experiencing what he feels: the idea of seeing another enjoy as he enjoys reduces him to a kind of *equality* with that other, which impairs the unspeakable *charm despotism* causes him to feel. (2002 [1795], 344-345)

“Sadism” in this context signifies more than the fact of taking one's pleasure in the other's pain: being intrinsic to sovereign power's self-instantiation through pleasure, it (re)produces sovereignty, “the unspeakable charm of despotism,” in sovereignty's *painful* distinction between

---

<sup>23</sup> By “bio-perspective” I mean an analytical lens constructed around biopolitical theories pertaining to Michel Foucault and Giorgio Agamben, as previously discussed, which centers upon the political dimension of biological life, as captured within modalities of being, modalities of acting or being acted upon, of relating or of becoming resulting from, and continuously redefining, embodiment.

despotic subject and suffering object. Sadism functions as the denominator of the violence of this decisive disjuncture, of the decision (to what extent arbitrary remains to be seen) between one body and another in relation to the distribution of pain/ pleasure, and life/ death, within sexual engagement. “Sadism” should not be limited to a medico-scientific descriptive concept attempting to fully capture and define a cluster of practices, psychological traits, sexual behaviors, popular/ medical discourses linking pain to sexual enjoyment<sup>24</sup>. “Sadism” translates the manner in which any relation of power is lived in/ through the body and the manner in which it is the prolongation of the moment of indistinction between life/ death that is at stake in power's sovereign treatment of bodies. The problem of power consists in deciding and re-deciding if/ when a body ceases to be alive, and if/ when a body ceases to be a body:

His first passion was to sever a finger; his second to pluck up some flesh with a pair of red-hot tongs, to cut off the flesh with a pair of scissors, then to burn the wound. He is quite apt to spend as long as four or five days whittling away a girl's body piecemeal, and she ordinarily dies while the cruel operation is still advancing. (Sade *The 120 Days of Sodom* 2002, 366- 367)

He tears off the youth's testicles [...] then, in place of the stolen treasure, substitutes spheres of quicksilver and fills his voided scrotum with sulphur aplenty, which cause such violent suffering [...] During his agony, the libertine [...] increases the boy's trouble by burning him here, there, and everywhere with sulphur- impregnated silvers, and by scratching, picking, and further burning these wounds.

[...] whilst sodomizing, opens the cranium, removes the brain, and fills the cavity with molten lead. (Sade *The 120 Days of Sodom* 2002, 372)

Although it is tempting to trace a libertine/ pleasure/ life – victim/ pain/ death dialectic, the writings evince a complexity which renders such categorization uneasy, and even problematic. Do libertines not suffer? Philippe Sollers argues to the contrary in his interview with Catherine Cusset “What is Libertinage?” (1998). For instance, Count of Gernande in *Justine, or Good Conduct Well-Chastised*, although Rabelaisian in all other matters, a “species of monster whose aspect alone [is] enough to strike terror,” is “barely a man, [endowed with] the most meager, the most minuscule

---

<sup>24</sup> See Ivan Crozier. 2004. “Philosophy in the English Boudoir: Havelock Ellis, *Love and Pain*, and Sexological Discourses on Algophilia” for a discussion of the 19<sup>th</sup> -20<sup>th</sup> century medicalization of *sadism* through the work of European sexologists like Krafft-Ebing, Albert Moll, and Havelock Ellis.

excrescence of flesh” (Sade, 112), thus explaining his sexualization of blood-letting as practice meant to substitute the dominance factor in the sexual encounter physically denied to him.

To mix pleasure with pain, life forces with death potentialities, to their ultimate indistinction only to posit a necessary sovereign decision on specific bodies, functioning in tandem with other specifying elements (such as class, gender, age, race, non/ reproduction, political views) is indeed to make of sadism something more. Are libertines safe in their cruel living? Not always, or at least not absolutely. Is libertinage a position readily identifiable? There is actually a degree of *libertinage* passing from victim to 'sensible' libertine (The Chevalier in *Philosophy in the Boudoir*), to ferocious and beastly 'true' libertine (Dolmancé). Are victims always already dead? Not absolutely, depending on whose victim they are, and the purposes of their victimization<sup>25</sup>. Additionally, victim and libertine are positions often occupied by the same body (even simultaneously) as differently caught within power relations concretized in sexual encounters. In the present thesis, I will attempt to link “sadism” to the biopolitical sovereign decision, as a potential (cruel) moment when a body is constituted in relation to the pleasure/ pain, and life/ death distribution within a biological field, in function of a “libertine/ non-libertine difference” exemplifying the biological and political differentiation constantly taking place as the effect of a field (sex orgy) of pain/ pleasure, life/ death indistinction.

In *The 120 Days of Sodom* (1785), Sade explains the supreme relevance of difference within libertinage:

[...] study closely that passion which to your first consideration seems perfectly to resemble each other, and you will see that a *difference* does exist and that, however slight it may be, it possesses precisely that refinement, that *touch* which *distinguishes* and characterizes the kind of libertinage wherewith we are here involved. (2002 [1785], 50)

Difference is the enabler, the mediator, and the effect, of sovereign power; it is *sadistically* traced between confusedly and variably 'libertine' and 'non-libertine' bodies with a 'racism' oblivious to

---

<sup>25</sup> See the different types of victimizations of Eugénie and of her mother, in *Philosophy in the Boudoir*.

any other types of differences. The libertine/ non-libertine difference might be read as the excesses of difference – the fact that *some* difference can always be made, over and against all others, so as a relocation of life/ death can take place.

Such are the lines along which I will attempt my argument. In Marcel Hénaff's words, the body is that “mass of flesh, network of nerves, expanse of skin from which torture, for the sake of the libertine's sexual pleasure, extracts the last vital elements” (1999 [1978], 80). I argue that the body is sovereignty's possibility of self-display, and of power, as the medium in which difference must be constantly made, unmade, and remade once more in relation to the living.

The following chapter will introduce some of the most pertinent historical, political, theological, scientific, philosophical, and legal conversations of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, taking place within France or elsewhere, which might serve to contextualize Sadean writings, and to substantiate my reading. The chapter partially responds to calls for socio-political, de-estheticizing revisions of Marquis de Sade's texts. For instance, Jean Deprun argues that Sade, “philosopher when denouncing the powers of the State, aristocrat when stigmatizing the limitations of his privileged liberties, [...] both embodied and exacerbated in his work the ruptures of an epoch<sup>26</sup>,” or Holland who demands in turn that *sadistic libertinage* be theorized as “fundamentally [embedded in] historical and cultural phenomena, before being treated as psychological” (in Evans and Griffiths 2008, 14). The focus will be on providing a historicized picture of the relevant fields of thought and practice, within which/ in relation to which the meanings of “libertinage,” “sovereignty,” and “sadism” have emerged.

As has been argued so far, in Marquis de Sade's work, “sovereignty” signifies, following Agamben, a particular modality of power as it decides on a domain of human life (one or multiple bodies) towards the definition of the form of that domain, in terms of a distinction between the living/ non-living, the pleased/ the suffering. “Sovereignty” addresses bodies in a relation of

---

26 In original: “Philosophe pour dénoncer les pouvoirs de l'État, aristocrate pour stigmatiser les limitations de ses libertés de privilégié, Sade a vécu dans son corps et magnifié dans son oeuvre les déchirements de l'Époque’.

power by putting them in a state where they need the continuous re-definition of their life-status through a decision:

Oh, there are plenty of people, [...] who never misbehave save when passion spurs them to ill; later, the fire gone out of them, their now calm spirit peacefully returns to the path of virtue and, thus passing their life going from strife to error and from error to remorse, they end their days in such a way *there is no telling just what roles they have enacted on earth. Such persons [...] must surely be miserable: forever drifting, continually undecided, their entire life is spent [...]* However, [...] *I do my choosing without hesitation, [...] as I am always sure to find pleasure in the choice I make* (Sade *The 120 Days of Sodom* 2002, 8)

“Sadism” centers this operation on the functioning of power towards a specific production of livable/ killable lives – it relates to the 'how' of the sovereign decision through which bare life is specified. The “libertine/ non-libertine difference” is merely one modality of distributing life/ death across human bodies, and it is the more effective as it stands as always reconfigurable across all other differences not merely resulting from a pure decision of power, but also disguising their production by grounding themselves in some element 'beyond' power: physiology, psychology, social status, political stand. The “libertine/ non-libertine difference” does not disguise its production – it is the immediate effect of the sovereign relation of power, and it signifies power's infinite pliability and playfulness in the production of bare life.

The following chapter is dedicated to contextualizing the concepts of “sovereignty,” “sadism” (cruelty), and “libertine/ non-libertine difference.” It identifies *libertinage* as a platform for historical, philosophical and scientific, social, and political debates in Europe, from the Renaissance to the 18<sup>th</sup> century, which both enables a mapping of these concepts in complex ways, and affords a more meaningful analysis of their different problematization within the research. My selection of debates, events, and discourses will inevitably be limited.



## CHAPTER 3 Sadean Times, Revolutions in “Nature”: Religious, Philosophical, Political, Sexual Routes to Libertinage

everything libertinage suggests is also a natural inspiration; the most extraordinary, the most bizarre acts, those which most arrantly seem to conflict with every law, every human institution [...] there is not one amongst them all that cannot be demonstrated within the boundaries of Nature (Sade *Philosophy*, 273-274)

### 3.1. Introduction

In *A Very Brief Introduction to Marquis de Sade*, John Phillips differentiates between three conceptual designations of the French word *libertin*: at the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, it seemingly applies to “free thinkers” on matters of religious doctrine; at the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, it subtly alludes to the excessive sexuality and moral dissolution characteristic of specific intellectual and social classes; and, at the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, it already refers to an established literary genre that gradually acquires a political agenda: the satirizing of ecclesiastical, aristocratic and royal corruption and degeneracy (Phillips 2005, 22). Similarly, James Turner stratifies the concept in religious, philosophical, and sexual dimensions (1987, 78). Recently, Robert Gillan, in “Cet esprit le plus libre qui ait encore existé [This so far most free spirit to have existed]: Sade and the Spiritual Libertines,” has contributed to an understanding of *libertinage* as a style of thematizing specific historical problematizations, potentially reoccurring and always signifying different sets of political, social, and intellectual concerns, as shaped by their respective historical contexts (2008).

In order to interrogate the specifics of Sadean *libertinage*, as the discursive field where various kinds of languages, practices, relations, and institutions enter, and articulate onto each other to better ground the concepts of 'libertine,' 'sovereignty,' 'pain/ pleasure,' and 'cruelty,' a

genealogy of *libertinage* needs be advanced. The present chapter focuses on the religious, philosophical, political and scientific conversations that, although separately introduced for methodological purposes, conjointly constitute the background against which Sadean *libertinage* can be conjured up. I will selectively use Sade's novels to emphasize the connections between these diverse debates, and the Sadean variant of *libertinage*, keeping in mind that, in the words of D'Alembert, I will forcefully “cast new light on some matters and new shadows on others” (in Cassirer 2009 [1951], 4).

### **3.2. Religious Libertinage: Where is God? Who is God? Erection Reigns Supreme**

Traditionally, the 'origin' of *libertinage* as a concept delimiting the unorthodox, anti-dogmatic cluster of (anti)religious beliefs, or of philosophical-scientific ideas with theological impact, is traced back to the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Edward Muir, for instance, in *The Culture Wars in Late Renaissance: Skeptics, Libertines, and Opera*, posits Italian anti-religious feelings and theistic skepticism, nurtured by French philosophies<sup>27</sup>, as gradually building up into what previous French and Italian scholars termed *irreligiousness* when speaking of the *dernier libertins* [last libertines] of the 1<sup>st</sup> half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century (Turner 1987, 75).

Muir begins the history of European *libertinage* with the Italian religious dissenter Ferrante Pallavicino, writer of the influential 1642 satire *Il Divortio Celeste* (The Celestial Divorce), where Christ is presented as attempting to obtain God's permission to divorce the Roman Catholic Church (Muir 2007, 62-63). Affiliated to the *Accademia degli Incogniti* (1630-1660), a cosmopolitan

---

27 In a 1947 article, “Libertinage et 'Spinozisme': La Théorie de l'Âme Ignée” [Libertinage and 'Spinozism': The Theory of the Inflamed Soul], J.S. Spink argues that so-called Spinozist materialism, according to which men, animals and plants share a material *intelligent* soul, different from the corporeal in the degree of refinement of matter, in turn constituted from moving particles of fiery nature originary from the Sun, is actually a 'false-Spinozism' (1947, 219-220). This misappropriation of Spinoza was produced by diverse early 18<sup>th</sup> century French treatises on the “material soul” such as the anonymous 1700 *L'Esprit de Spinoza* [The Soul in Spinoza], or the 1722 *Sentiments des philosophes sur la nature de l'âme* [How Philosophers Feel about the Nature of the Soul], having actually more to do with the 16<sup>th</sup> century Italian philosophies of Télésio and Tomaso Campanella on the “elementary fire” of the soul (1947, 228-229). The “materialist pan-psychism” of the Italian philosophers, as Spink calls it (1947, 228), is subtly inoculated into Spinozist thought, and then, through Spinoza, comes to occupy an important place within 'libertine' doctrines.

Venetian academy, Pallavicino, highly influenced by French *philosophes*, reworks the concept of *libertine*, borrowed from the French Jesuit Father Garasse's *The Curious Doctrine of the Free Spirits* (1623). The Italian 17<sup>th</sup> century *libertine* is not only “someone who identifie[s] God with nature, who denie[s] transcendence, the reality of miracles, the immortality of the soul, and the otherwordly destiny of mankind” (Muir 2007, 80), but also a critical intellectual voice involved in pamphlet/ satire/ *novella*-writing. Here, the *libertine* author piles up contemporary scientific discourses, questions about the possibility of a human innate “instinctual ethic,” and cultural and political obsessions with sexuality, probably exacerbated by ruptures in the Venetian aristocratic family life (*idem*, 80-107), as just as many proofs against both religious and political authority.

On the contrary, Robert Gillan's intervention successfully demonstrates that the search for historical 'origins' is ultimately unproductive, to the extent that, within a field of knowledge, such 'origins' can be exposed as arbitrary references for initiating the (re-) arrangement of knowledge according to ever-changing parameters of accuracy, validity, and rationality. That is why Gillan proposes a dovetailing genealogy of 18<sup>th</sup> century French *libertinage*, which he exemplifies with direct reference to Marquis de Sade.

The proposed genealogy documents divergent 18<sup>th</sup> century developments and legacies of 13<sup>th</sup> -16<sup>th</sup> centuries heretical movements, pertaining to what Father Garasse in 1623 had identified as the 'doctrine of the Free Spirit,' and which Jean Calvin had already preached against in the 1545 treatise *Contre la secte phantastique et furieuse des Libertines qui se nomment Spirituels* [Against the fantastic and furious sect of the Libertines which call themselves Spiritual]. Central are the figures of two 13<sup>th</sup> century French theologians, David de Dinant (d. 1215) and Amaury de Bène, susceptible of the kind of pantheistic materialism later to be blamed on Campanella, whereby God is identified with the spirit (movement) of matter, being universally shared by the ensouled living. Accordingly, soul and flesh are tightly imbricated to the point of existing only in relation to each other; sin is an anthropic vector, geographically, historically, culturally variable, through which a rule is given to individuals in relation to the 'social' containing them; and religion is the

instrument of political government whereby people are maintained in obedience and darkness (Gillan 2008, 515)<sup>28</sup>.

On the one hand, these early heresies tend, in Gillan's account, to develop symbiotic relationships with, while remaining ambiguously distinguishable from, 17<sup>th</sup> century *libertinage érudit* (2008, 522) – whose representatives Théophile de Viau, Cyrano de Bergerac, Gassendi, François de la Mothe Vayer, belong to specific social, economical and intellectual groups breeding and fostering skepticism, atheism, and freedom from religious authority. These more or less admixed '*libertinages*' will gradually fold into the 18<sup>th</sup> century *libertinage de mœurs*, or licentiousness of manners (Houdard 2001). On the other hand, the doctrine associated with the *Libertins Spirituels* might have survived and entered the 18<sup>th</sup> century 'on its own,' under the guise of *enthusiasm* (Gillan 2008, 523) – whose critique by the 'canon' of Enlightenment thought has been pursued over the 17<sup>th</sup> - 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, with both theological and medical arguments, as Michael Heyd shows in his 1995 *“Be Sober and Reasonable”: The Critique of Enthusiasm in the Seventeenth and Early Eighteenth Centuries*.

Jean Meslier, obscure French rural priest and philosopher of the 18<sup>th</sup> century<sup>29</sup>, whose sole book, *Mémoires des pensées et sentiments de Jean Meslier* [Mémor of the thoughts and sentiments of Jean Meslier] is only posthumously, though still clandestinely, circulated, can be thought to embody the kind of *libertine* atheism later to be associated with Sade. Olivier Mayer argues, in “Jean Meslier: curé, athée, et enragé!” [Jean Meslier: priest, atheist, and enraged!], that Meslierian

---

28 In the *Dictionnaire de Trévoux*, Boucher d'Argis, author of the article on “Libertins,” writes: “Fanatiques qui s'élevèrent en Hollande vers l'an 1528, dont la croyance est qu'il n'y a qu'un seul esprit de Dieu répandu par-tout, qui est et qui vit dans toutes les créatures; que notre âme n'est autre chose que cet esprit de Dieu; qu'elle meurt avec le corps; que le péché n'est rien, et qu'il ne consiste que dans l'opinion, puisque c'est Dieu qui fait tout le bien et tout le mal: que le paradis est une illusion, et l'enfer un phantome inventé par les Théologiens. Ils disent, enfin, que les politiques ont inventé la religion pour contenir les peuples dans l'obéissance de leurs lois; que la régénération spirituelle ne consistait qu'à étouffer les remords de la conscience” (in Gillan 2008, 515). [Fanatics who rose in Holland, in 1528, and whose belief is that there is only one spirit of God spread everywhere, which is and lives in all creatures; that our soul is nothing else but this soul of God; that it dies with the body; that sin is nothing, and that it resides only in opinion, for God is the author of all good and all evil: that the Paradise is an illusion, and Hell a phantasm invented by the Theologians. They say, finally, that politicians have invented religion in order to keep people in obedience of their laws; that spiritual regeneration consists in nothing but strangling remorse in one's conscience]

29 See Jonathan Israel's “Men, Animals, Plants, and Fossils: French Hylozoic *Matérialisme* before Diderot,” for Meslier's connection to the eclectic *clandestine* corpus of Enlightenment philosophy.

atheism is rather an *a-theology* (2009, 115), to the extent that it is politically instrumentalized in the fight against despotism, against “tous ces monstres de tyrans à testes couronnées, et tous les autres monstres, ministres d'erreurs, et d'iniquités, qui font gémir si pitoiablement tous les peuples de la terre” [all these monstrous tyrants with crowned heads, and all the other monsters, ministers of error and iniquity, who make all the peoples of the earth groan so pitiably] (Meslier, in Mayer 2009, 118). Atheism, in this context, becomes a modality, and a means, for questioning the sovereign relationship of force linking the institution of the monarchy to the subjects of power.

Daniel Arasse has already documented the centrality of the king's body as model in the establishment, preservation, and legitimization of the social structure - Clergy, Nobility, Third Estate - and of state power hierarchies - legislative, executive and judicial (in Guyon 2008, 101). The royal body, divinely tinged with the *right* to power, is put into question precisely when God ceases to be the sovereign principle holding all things in their 'proper' relations and balance, guaranteeing the 'true nature' of things as evinced in 'natural' hierarchies and relations of correspondence, affinity, or influence (Boulad-Ayoub & Torero-Ibad 2009, 9-10). Consequently, sovereignty and the sovereign relationship of force outside the political institution must confront the question of their existence, and of their *right* to exist, not in connection to a theory of the transcendence of power, but to power's material and immediate effects.

Sadean libertinage is similarly colored by 'atheism,' with one difference only: it is not interested in undoing the sovereign relationship underpinning both spiritual subjection to God, and earthly subjection to the monarch, but in the ways in which power works through the relation of dominance, towards its more effective instrumentalization within different types of relations, institutions, and practices. Thus, in the political pamphlet *Yet Another Effort, Frenchmen, If You Would Become Republicans*, Sade does endorse atheism as a political weapon, and as a therapeutics for the subjected body of the people, whose intellectual and organic resources have been consumed:

If, to his misfortune, the Frenchman were to entomb himself in the grave of Christianity, then on one side the priests' pride, their tyranny, their despotism,

vices forever cropping up in that impure horde, on the other side, the baseness, the narrowness, the platitudes of dogma and mystery of this infamous and fabulous religion, would, by blunting the fine edge of republican spirit, rapidly put about the Frenchman's neck the yoke which his vitality but yesterday shattered. (1795, 296)

Here, Sade superimposes religious sovereignty unto political sovereignty, rendering them almost identical in the type of relation they foster with respect to the body: a mechanics of extraction and use, with a distinctly pathological overtone to it. The language of atheism is always already embedded in the problematization of monarchy:

[Christian religion] shall restore the monarchy, because the power of kings has always reinforced that of the church; and your republican edifice, its foundations eaten away, shall collapse. (1795, 297)

atheism is the one doctrine of all those prone to reason. As we gradually proceed to our enlightenment, we came more and more to feel that, motion being inherent in matter, the prime mover existed only as an illusion [...] we sensed that this chimerical divinity, prudently invented by the earliest legislators, was, in their hands, simply one more means to enthrall us, and that, reserving unto themselves the right to make the phantom speak, they knew very well how to get him to say nothing but what would shore up the preposterous laws whereby they declared they served us. Lycurgus, Numa, Moses, Jesus Christ, Mohammed, all these great rogues, all these great thought-tyrants, knew how to associate the divinities they fabricated with their own boundless ambition (1795, 300)

Even if Sade's polemic is imbued with philosophical or subtle medico-scientific references resonating with specific historical debates taking place at the time, it is at the intersection of theology with politics that Sade touches upon a particular *cruelty* of (sovereign) power in its dealings with its objects. Cruelty is evinced in both the religious and legal practices of the time. On the one hand, it is Baron d'Holbach - according to Michel Brix, constituting one fundamental source of anthropological evidence for some of Sade's political arguments (2007, 12) – who wrote in 1769 *De la cruauté religieuse* [On Religious Cruelty] and *L'enfer détruit ou examen raisonné du dogme de l'éternité des peines* [Hell abolished, or rational examination of the dogma of eternal suffering]. Here, contemporary religious prescriptions for the punishment of heretics are minutely described:

We shall indeed throw into the fire of hell all those who fail to recognize the signs of our faith, says this so-called celestial book. As they will be properly scorched, we shall give them new skins again, so that they may endure more acute tortures, because God is mighty and wise. [...] All those who do not have faith will be wrapped in clothes of fire. Boiling water will fall over their head,

their flesh and their skin will be lacerated and they will be continually beaten with iron maces. (in Dubost 1998, 76)

On the other hand, as Lisa Silverman evinced in her 2001 book *Tortured Subjects: Pain, Truth, and the Body in Early Modern France*, torture was current legal practice until its complete abolishment in 1788, mainly in the form of the *question préalable*, as a means of producing evidence within ecclesiastical courts/ quasi-judicial tribunals. Silverman addressed the practice within the criminal justice systems of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, in relation to its epistemological value as instrument for extracting the 'truth' out of the interrogated body (2001, 62-63). However, the potential generalizability of torture (whose actualization remains yet limited, and unclear), whereby “all persons can be sentenced to the *question*, men and women, boys and girls, old and young, nobles and commoners, priests, clerics, monks, nuns etc.” (2001, 42) is of more relevance. The re-organization of torture within the framework of legal punishment is effected by Cesare Beccaria's 1764 book *Dei Delitti e Delle Pene* [Of Crimes and Punishments], translated in French in 1765. The book is thought to have influenced certain European 'enlightened' despots such as Gustavus III of Sweden, Catherine II of Russia, and Empress Maria Theresa of Austria, and to have been familiar to a number of French *philosophes*, among whom d' Alembert, Diderot, Helvetius, Buffon, and Voltaire. I suggest it is highly possible that Marquis de Sade was not unfamiliar with the humanist project of reforming juridical practices within European courts of justice. Limiting cruelty was one object of the reform, premised upon the utilitarian calculation of degrees of pleasure/pain to be induced through the multiplication, flexibilization, and 'specialization' of punishments (Beirne 1993, 13-15).

Thus, Sade does not ultimately argue against religious and monarchical discourses and technologies of sovereign power in order to end, postpone, or transform cruelty – for cruelty is ultimately the *paradigmatic* modality through which power addresses the body – but in order to expropriate the language of torture from institutions, and privatize it at the level of the individual. Appropriating Helvétius' explication in *De L'Esprit* [On the Soul] of despotism in terms of

personal pleasure<sup>30</sup>, Sade replaces God and monarch with *libertine* individual egoistic desire: the *libertine* “wish[es] to be roused, stirred [...] 'tis the aim of every man who pursues pleasure, and [he] would be moved by the most active means” for “there is not a living man who does not wish to play the despot when he is stiff” (*Philosophy in the Boudoir* 1795, 252; 344).

Finally, the triangle dominative pleasure – dominance – pain underlies both Sadean and religious writing. Consider early 18<sup>th</sup> century Catholic discourses and ascetic practices involving whipping. Whipping/ flagellation is a technology limitedly used within Christian self-disciplining rituals as a virtue-inflicting device, meant to heighten the 'moral' qualities of the individual, by rendering him/her master of his/her own 'animal' corporality and promoting a kind of transcending supra-individual self-sovereignty: “Everyone is the absolute master, the entire proprietor of his body” (Volney in Quinlan 2006a, 240). Religion rendered possible an ideal of moral regeneration that was to be adopted and transformed by the reformist politics of physical/ moral regeneration directed at the French *citoyen*. However, ecclesiastics were similarly aware, via contemporary physiological discourses, of the contrary effects the flagellation of the 'lower' body could induce: both religious intelligentsia and Sade shared an understanding of flogging as a potentially pleasurable, orgasm-inducing, desire-awakening practice of violent domination.

Around 1700, Jacques Boileau writes in the treatise *Histoire des flagellants* [History of Flagellants]:

It necessarily happens that, when the lumbar muscles are hit with a horse-whip or flogged, the animal spirits are violently pushed towards the pubic bone and they produce impudent movements due to proximity to the genitals: these impressions first travel to the brain, and they paint there images of forbidden pleasures, that fascinate the spirit through their tricky charms, and they reduce chastity to its last animal cries. (in Kozul 2009, 20)

Thus, theological and erotic bodily imaginaries alike were deeply steeped in the philosophico-medical language of iatrophysics - the Cartesian physiology describing bodily functioning in terms of the mechanical circulation of a 'life-fluid', composed of 'animal spirits,' through the

---

30 “Chacun veut être le plus heureux qu'il est possible; chacun veut être revêtu d'une puissance qui force les hommes à contribuer de tout leur pouvoir à son bonheur; c'est pour cet effet qu'on veut leur commander” [Each wants to be the happiest possible; each wants to be vested with a power forcing men to contribute toward his happiness with all their forces; it is to this effect that one wants to command] (in Brix 2007, 16).



labyrinthine pathways of tubular, pipe-like nerves, veins, arteries: a hydraulics of life (Kozul 2009, 21). I will touch in more detail on these developments in chapter 4, where I interrogate the politics of knowledge dynamics within physiology/-ies of sensation, in relation to scientific attempts at defining 'life.'

### **3.3. Philosophical Libertinage: Thoughts on Matter, Sensation, and Life**

*Libertinage* emerges as a form of radicalness of thought not only in relation to the atheistic theological/ political stance, but also to novel philosophies that, in the words of 17<sup>th</sup> century German scholar Veit Ludwig von Seckendorff, make “life in this world” the essence of politics (in Israel 2001, 5). The constitution of 'matter' as philosophical-scientific object central to the project of defining the 'life'/ 'animateness' of beings, the rise of empiricism and of the 'scientific method' grounded in this rigorous and rule-governed analysis of 'facts' produced through observation and experimentation, and the tensions and interplays between the mechanistic/ vitalist<sup>31</sup> principles of organization and functioning of 'matter' – all enter the philosophical configuration of French *libertinage* between 17<sup>th</sup> - 18<sup>th</sup> centuries (Cassirer 2009 [1951]; Israel 2001; Israel 2008).

Materialism was anything but a unitary philosophical project. Both Boulad-Ayoub and Torero-Ibad, in the introduction to *Matérialismes des Modernes*, and Jonathan Israel in “Men, Animals, Plants, and Fossils: French Hylozoic *Matérialisme* before Diderot,” document 16<sup>th</sup> - 17<sup>th</sup> centuries variants of materialism against the background of ancient (Aristotelian), medieval and Renaissance concepts of 'matter.' 'Matter' had been defined, in these contexts, as either the general principle of being, accountable for motion and change in substances, or the general physical material of worldly and heavenly bodies, suffused with divine, supernatural or occult

---

31 George Rousseau, in “Nerves, Spirits, and Fibers: Towards Defining the Origins of Sensibility,” claims that 'mechanism,' 'vitalism' and 'animism' can be thought of as philosophical-scientific imaginaries responding to contemporary preoccupations with the 'life' of the body, and with the ways in which a body can be said to 'live.' “Mechanism, animism, vitalism were responses to previous radical ideas and not radical new ideas in themselves. All three depend for their life-blood on the institutionalization of *physiology* as a serious endeavor in itself” (2004, 170). Emphasis mine.

forces, and prearranged by God in 'natural' hierarchies and relations. 'Modern' materialism emerges with the purgation of the supernatural from the natural, with the explication of matter through itself, as opposed to through its spiritual dimension (2009, 9), and with the flattening of hierarchies (Israel 2008, 734-735). Additionally, Lynn Thorndike, in *History of Magic and Experimental Science* (1929) makes a pertinent argument about the 'scientificization,' in a modern sense, of the empirical method in relation to experience, due to the desacralization of the universe (from the description and cataloging of commonplaces or non-manipulated matters-of-facts, to the prescription of rules for producing the facticity of experience). The varieties of 18<sup>th</sup> century materialism, with their socio-political "catechism" (Diderot, D'Holbach, in Ayoub & Torero-Ibad 2009, 9) of atheism and grounding in direct experience, can be at least partially traced to these earlier transformations.

There seem to be two onto-epistemic 'models' of the universe, besides their philosophical misconstructions or misappropriations, whose complex and ambivalent articulation in Sade's work is mainly left undiagnosed in the literature: the paradigms of Newtonianism and Leibnizianism (Toma 1982). The ambiguously distinguishable, co-existent paradigms might be thought to figure the ways in which it is precisely the mechanization of 'matter' that, by failing as system of scientific explanation, opens the possibility of matter's vitalization (Hanns Reill 2005). The paradigms prefigure the ways in which the 'moderate' Enlightenment mainstream<sup>32</sup> is not as separated as we might think from its radical 'other,' in spite of Israel's polarizing categorizations in *Enlightenment Contested: Philosophy, Modernity and the Emancipation of Man* (2008, 3-15).

On the one hand, the 'Newtonian paradigm' is mainly grounded in Isaac Newton's application of mechanical philosophy to physics and mathematics, and in his development of the

---

32 Even if Margaret Jacob argues, in line with Israel, that "the great mechanical philosophers of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, from Descartes through Newton and Leibniz... labored to use these new explanations of the natural order to emphasize the dependence of the created world on the will and power of the Creator [...] lent[ing] their support to the established Christian churches of their various societies, and often to the maintenance of established monarchical authority" (in Hanns Reill 2005, 37), it is precisely theories such as Newton's gravity force or Leibniz's monadology that initiate the problematics of life's intrinsic self-reproducing and self-sustaining, unpredictable force/ energy.

analytical method as a new rationality principle in the production of scientific accounts from 'natural' facts (Cassirer 2009 [1951]). In 1687, Newton published *Philosophiae Naturalis Principia Mathematica* [Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy], postulating the following fundamental hypotheses about the organization and functioning of the universe: (1) that it is a heterogeneous mass of heterogeneous bodies situated in space and time; (2) that these bodies are analyzable *in essentia* (in essence) and *in apparentia* (phenomenally); (3) that the objects' phenomena depend upon the observer and that, in the end, different perceptions of the same objects constitute the observer gnoseologically, rather than the objects observed; (4) that the mind can discover patterns within these phenomena, that, treated mathematically, can lead to the discovery of the general Laws of Nature (Toma 1982, 179-183). As a side effect of Newton's theorems, the world of *essence* (with its Platonic and Christian correspondences) is either fictionalized as a phantasm of the human mind, or, if still held as real, is shun as ultimately unknowable (*idem*, 180).

In this setting, the 'Newtonian' man is one element among others, within a uniform and predictable mechanism of nature, functioning according to laws capable of explicating the transformative effects these generate within it – a “machine within a machine,” as La Mettrie has it<sup>33</sup>. However, the Newtonian theory of gravitational force<sup>34</sup>, as the general principle of interaction of material objects in physical space external to objects themselves, opens up the road to the internalization of the *movement* of matter as matter's essential quality, and, in distinct materialistic contexts, as matter's principle of life.

Often described as machines for pleasure (Carrouages 1976; Salcedo 2004), Sadean

---

33 Even La Mettrie's “machine” is already *more-than-machine* to the extent that “it is so complicated that it is impossible at first to form a clear idea of it, and, consequently, to describe it” (1994 [1748], 30).

34 “'Tis inconceivable that inanimate brute matter should [...] operate upon & affect other matter without mutual contact... That Gravity should be innate, inherent, and essential to Matter, so that one Body may act upon another at a Distance thro' a Vacuum, without the Mediation of anything else [...] is to me so great an Absurdity, that I believe no man who has in philosophical Matters a competent Faculty of thinking can ever fall into it. Gravity must be caused by an Agent acting constantly according to certain Laws; but whether this Agent be material or immaterial, I have left to the consideration of my readers” Newton, letter to Richard Bentley, in Osler 2010, 161.

“Have not the small Particles of Bodies certain Powers, Virtues, or Forces, by which they act at a distance, not only upon the Rays of Light for reflecting, refracting, and inflecting them, but also upon one another for producing a great Part of the Phenomena of Nature? For it's well known, that Bodies act upon one another by the Attractions of Gravity, Magnetism, and Electricity” (Newton, *Principia*, in Osler 2010, 157).

*libertines* are internally synchronized to this *material movement*, to the variation between sensation (pleasure/ pain), and non-sensation (death, apathy); in fact, they are constituted through this *sensuous irregularity*:

Our constitution, our scheme, our organs, the flow of liquids, the animal spirits' energy, such are the physical causes which in the same hour make for the Tituses and the Neros, the Messalinas or the Chantals. (*Philosophy in the Boudoir*, 254)

However, the Sadean *libertine* is not merely concerned with his own living in and through this *vital activity* of matter, but also with intervening upon it, and acceding to it for his own purposes. Therefore, by establishing a new type of (sovereign) relation with bodies 'programmed' for life/ death via sexual pain/ pleasure, the Sadean *libertine* sets himself up as the non-mechanic machine, the political *mechanism* in the domain of the *living*, capable of instrumentalizing an infinite number of other human bodies, and also capable of *imagining*, and *experimenting*, infinite modalities of power in the production of one effect - its own living and sovereign perpetuity<sup>35</sup>.

On the other hand, the 'Leibnizian' paradigm, although less pronounced, nonetheless underlies important areas of Sadean thought, such as Sade's republican project announced in *Yet Another Effort, Frenchmen*. Leibniz's theory of the most perfect among possible worlds, postulating a functional universe with minimal laws capable of generating the maximum of material phenomena (Toma 1982), transpires both through Sade's republican utopia<sup>36</sup>, and through the libertine fantasy of one singular 'criminal' gesture determining, through its perpetual self-excelling self-reproduction, the absolute annihilation of the living<sup>37</sup>. Moreover, the Leibnizian concept of 'monad' as the *singular*, indivisible *substance*, qualitatively distinct from all other substances, self-

---

35 H elvetius, in *De L'Esprit*, writes that "The Savant (is) the one to have realized within a certain domain all possible combinations" (in Toma 1982, 193). As such, the Sadean libertine is the supreme "savant in human mechanics" (*idem*), concerned with his "government, whose sole duty consists in preserving, by whatever may be the means, the form essential to [his] continuance" (Sade *Philosophy in the Boudoir*, 315).

36 "It is a terrible injustice to require that men of unlike character all be ruled by the same law: what is good for one is not at all good for another. [...] but laws can be lenient, and so few in number, that all men, of whatever character, can easily observe them. Furthermore, I would demand that this small number of laws be of such a sort as to be adaptable to all the various characters" (Sade *Yet Another Effort*, 310).

37 "I would like to find a crime whose perpetual effect would be exerted even when I no longer acted, so that there would never be a single moment of my life, even when asleep, that I was not the cause of some disorder and that this disorder might spread to a degree where it would induce a general corruption or a derangement so absolute that even beyond my lifetime the effect of it would still continue" (Sade *Juliette*, in Bataille 1991, 181).

contained and perfectly secluded from them, is in tandem with Sade's isolationist politico-etiological myth<sup>38</sup>, excepting monadology's theological dimension according to which monads, being emanations from God, are divinely harmonized independently from each other (Toma 1982). The notion of blindfolded harmony as the sole rapport monads entertain with one another is extrapolated to the Sadean relation of conditioning between individuals and the mechanisms of the environment they inhabit:

What man on earth, seeing the scaffold a step beyond the crime, would commit it were he free not to commit it? We are the pawns of an irresistible force, and never for an instant is it within our power to do anything but make the best of our lot and forge ahead along the path that has been traced for us. There is not a single virtue which is not necessary to Nature and conversely not a single crime which she does not need and it is in the perfect balance she maintains between the one and the other that her immense science consists; but can we be guilty for adding our weight to this side or that when it is she who tosses us unto the scales? (Sade *Dialogue between a Priest...*, 173-174)

The “monad,” Cassirer further argues, functions as a representation of the living insofar as it captures an *energy* moving in tandem with its own laws of becoming, with “a continuous transition from one new state to another as it produces these states out of itself in unceasing succession” (2009 [1951], 29). The Sadean *libertine* similarly embodies a force in perpetual action, whose unique law consists, in Giordano Bruno's words, in continually “proceed[ing] along [the] proper path” of its uninterrupted movement (in Cassirer 2009 [1951], 44). Yet the *libertine*, unlike the Leibnizian ‘monad,’ does not exist according to a law of change accounting both for the individualizing particularities of his life-movement, and for this movement's total inscription within a general pattern of becoming, characteristic of all beings. Escaped from the theological grid of universal harmonies, the *libertine* becomes the law of his own being in the very act of being – expressing the sovereignty of a form of life which creates itself in living itself, whose

---

38 Sade's *isolationism* relies heavily on the Hobbesian theory of “state of nature,” whereby life is intrinsically asocial and modeled after a war relationship in which what is at stake is individual survival and individual happiness: “Are we not all born solitary, isolated? I say more: are we not come into the world all enemies, the one of the other, all in a state of perpetual and reciprocal warfare?” (*Philosophy in the Boudoir*, 284). Against Locke, Sade divorces natural laws, which conduct individual life, from divinity, individual happiness from benevolence, individual private good from public social good: “Those laws [human laws], being forged for universal application, are in perpetual conflict with personal interest, just as personal interest is always in contradiction with general interest” (Sade *Dialogue* 166). For a discussion of Locke's concept of “natural law” see Charles Taylor. 1989. “Locke's Punctual Self.” In *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*.

immanence bespeaks a new *organic* conceptualization of 'life' (Canguilhem 2008, 62).

Such developments in the realm of philosophy, whereby a mechanistic concept of 'matter'<sup>39</sup> is gradually opening into a non-mechanistic concept of the 'organic',<sup>40</sup> have their equivalents in the medical domain. French 1740s experiments regarding animal generation – effected by Leclerc Buffon, Moreau de Maupertuis, and Turberville Needham among others, with the help of the recently invented microscope – have lead to a polarization between preformationists, such as French anatomists Du Verney and Winslow, and epigeneticists, such as doctor Lémery. What is at stake in this debate is the confrontation between mechanistic and vitalist principles of life-formation and development within animal reproduction, insofar as they have political consequences at the level of public education, moral reformation, and pseudo-eugenic projects in pre-revolutionary France (Quinlan 2006b; St.-Martin 2009). Additionally, the iatrophysicist descriptions of the human body's functioning (Quinlan 2006b) are gradually undermined by medical practitioners like Albrecht von Haller and Théophile de Bordeu (Porter & Vigarello 2008a), who return to bodily sensation as to the locus where 'the living' might be potentially captured in the process of its unfurling. I will return to this historical, philosophic-scientific context in more detail in the next chapter. However, what is important at this point is that *libertine* knowledge-production, especially the writing of erotic fiction, is constituted at the junction of these intellectual and socio-scientific 'events,' as the “site of experiment where Enlightenment theorizing” on 'matter,' 'life,' 'organism,' 'sensation' takes place in even more

---

39 As previously shown in relation to the Newtonian world-view, but traceable to the Cartesian analogies between Creator/ watchmaker and creature/ mechanic device, as well as the Cartesian body imaginary, 'mechanistic' materialism postulates that the universe is composed of a uniform yet infinitely plastic substance called 'matter,' characterized by a movement penetrating all parts of matter according to their form, qualities, and functions. This movement (Law of Nature) can be logically inferred in its totality from the effects it produces within matter, for it invariably unfurls within it according to a determinate pattern. Usually, mechanistic materialism explains the ways in which the change is produced in matter, and not the cause of the changeability of matter, which is ultimately left unexplained, or defined in relation to God. See Margret J. Osler. 2010. *Reconfiguring the World: Nature, God, and Human Understanding from the Middle Ages to Early Modern Europe*.

40 The concept of the 'organic' develops starting with the natural philosopher Leclerc Buffon, who reconceptualizes matter as intrinsically self-organizing, self-reproducing, aggregate of 'molecules,' animated by forces unexplainable in terms of the mathematical laws of physics of chemistry (Hanns Reill 2005). The life of an organism is ultimately explainable only through itself, through a “vital principle” whose effects within matter cannot be predicted (Canguilhem 2008, 62).

extreme forms (Berrett Brown 2009, 98). *Libertine* literature can be considered a “laboratory” (*idem*), where 'matter' becomes a *living substance* organizable into *organic bodies* via the testing of responses to pain/pleasure, and where contemporary theories and conjectures are applied in *imagined case studies* (Bender 2010, Poovey 2008).

The eroticization of materialism and the eroticization of medical writing<sup>41</sup> are both premised upon the grounding of philosophical concepts of 'matter,' and physiological theories of 'life,' in a *sensible* notion of organized, corporeal substance, affected by sensations of pain/pleasure. The eroticization practices of the *libertine* novel are therefore not Sade's invention, but in a sense guaranteed by Epicureanism, on the one hand - to the extent that it defines living bodies within a *sensuous order of matter* 'naturally' seeking the maximization of pleasure and the minimization of pain (Osler 2010, 77-78) - and by empiricism, on the other hand, to the extent that these sensitive living bodies are the subject and object of human knowledge precisely because of their sensitivity. Natania Meeker argued that French 18<sup>th</sup> century 'scientific' materialism, although trying to purge itself from its Epicurean 'origins,' was still at grips with its remnant neo-Epicurean variant, premised upon a theory of pleasure actualized in and through writing, especially in the case of La Mettrie and Sade (2006, 7-8).

Sadean libertinage can work only with a concept of 'human being' as an *organism* naturally following Epicurean Laws of Nature (one's instincts, one's senses, one's desires), while reason is being instrumentalized as the medium through which the decipherment of sensations is realized. The 'reasonable' thing to do, in this sense, is to let oneself live through one's body, and thus reasonableness is embodied in the springiness and plasticity of the desiring flesh, because flesh is already marked by the imprint of Nature, and in order to live 'according to nature,' which is also to live rationally, one must retrieve the natural signatures and follow them purposefully without

---

41 In 1679, Regnerus de Graaf, anatomist, writes in his *Histoire anatomique des parties génitales de l'homme et de la femme qui servent à la génération* [Anatomical history of the male and female genital parts instrumental in reproduction]: “Voilà grâce à Dieu le Traité [...] achevé avec assez d'exactitude, que je donne non pas pour servir au libertinage, mais à l'avancement de la vérité et de la médecine” [Here it is, thank God, the Treatise [...] finished with enough precision, and which I offer not to serve libertinism, but the advancement of truth and medical knowledge] (in St.-Martin 2009, 153).

being misled by “absurd doctrines” (Sade *Dialogue between a Priest and a Dying Man*, 166)<sup>42</sup>. La Mettrie was similarly arguing:

Nous sommes dans ses mains [de la nature], comme une pendule dans celles de l'horloger; elle nous a pétris comme elle a voulu, ou plutôt comme elle a pu; enfin nous ne sommes pas plus criminels, en suivant l'impressions des mouvements primitifs qui nous gouvernent, que le Nil ne l'est de ses inondations, et la Mer de ses ravages.

[We are in her (Nature's) hands, as a watch is in those of the watchmaker; she built us the way she wanted, or rather the way she could; finally, we are no more criminals in pursuing the impressions of the primitive movements that govern us, than the Nil is of its overflowing, and the sea of its havoc]. (in Brix 2007, 15)

However, the philosophical and medical friction points successfully captured by Marquis de Sade's work cannot be separated from the French Revolutionary political context.

### **3.4. Libertine (Medicinal) Politics: French Republican Sexuality**

Admittedly, Sade is part of a literary culture “interpreted as the cause or effect of the monarchy's dismantling, or both cause and effect” - the culture of *revolutionary pornography*, “inextricably linked with the social and political turmoil of the time” (Evans & Griffiths 2008, 13). The period is not only marked by such clear-cut historical events as the fall of the Bastille (14<sup>th</sup> July 1789), the overthrow of the French monarchy (10<sup>th</sup> August 1792), or the death of Robespierre, one of the main Revolutionary leaders (9<sup>th</sup> Thermidor 1794), but also by subtler and more prolonged phenomena, such as the constitution of a folk imaginary of royal sexuality, the spreading of medical discourses pathologizing moral (class-dependent) viciousness, and the popularization of sexual scandals within the French court in the hybrid form of a political pornographic satiric genre (Quinlan 2006a & 2006b; William 2007; Swann 2007; Guyon 2008). At the center of these manifestations lies the public opprobrium stirred by the sexuality of Louis XVI, whose affairs with 'courtesans' such as Mme de Pompadour and the Duchess du Barry were

---

42 “By Nature created, created with very keen *tastes*, with very strong *passions*; placed on this earth *for the sole purpose of yielding to them and satisfying them*, and these effects of my creation being naught but *necessities directly relating to Nature's fundamental designs* or, if you prefer, naught but *essential derivatives proceeding from her intentions* [...] all in accordance with her laws” [Italics mine]. In *Dialogue*, 165.



acquiring dangerous political implications (Guicciardi 2007, 89), and by the 1779-1789 Versailles “orgies” of Marie Antoinette, accused of incest and traitorous “criminal and culpable liaisons” with enemy states (Hunt 1991, 110). These sexual scandals cannot be extricated from the socio-economic precariousness of the population, a context of 'scarcity' (Foucault 2007) resulting from war, unfavorable climatic conditions, and ineffective public administration.

In “Inheriting Vice, Acquiring Virtue: Hereditary Disease and Moral Hygiene in 18<sup>th</sup> Century France,” Sean Quinlan relates the mid 18<sup>th</sup> century medical preoccupations with transmissibility of hereditary diseases and potential sexual degenerateness within the population, to king Louis XIV's immorality and sexual excesses, drawing on the already entrenched conflation of theological and medical vocabularies of regeneration (de Baecque 1997 [1993], 132-134). A 1791 political pamphlet makes the link between class (aristocracy) and (sexually transmitted) disease explicit:

burning, consuming the body, drying out the muscles, impoverishing the blood, weakening the resources, to the point that the machine, once dismantled, burnt to a cinder and destroyed, offers nothing but the sad spectacle of a hideous skeleton. [...] To acquire a just and precise notion of these sad extremities, can only be accomplished by contemplating the monsters of our emigrated aristocracy (in de Baecque 1997 [1993], 172)

The pathologization<sup>43</sup> and bestialization<sup>44</sup> of the French upper-classes, by means of two contradictory discourses providing incompatible physiognomical and anatomical models of (class-dependent) 'abnormality,' does not put into question the scientific status of, or the rationality underpinning, these medical discourses of aristocratic flabbiness/ ferocious irritability. What it does is highlight the ways in which difference (class difference in this case) functions as the

---

43 In February 1789, the French lawyer of the Third Estate, Mr. Target, writes the pamphlet entitled “Plan for matrimonial alliance between M. Third-Estate and Madame Nobility” (de Baecque 1997 [1993], 95). The discursive feminization of the aristocracy simultaneously enacts its medicalization through the gendered languages of delicacy, feebleness, and laxity (Koumba 2009, 32), in a time where “delicacy has turned into energy [and] [t]he heat of enthusiasm has become [the] natural heat” of the French citizen (Cérutti 1790, in De Baecque 1997 [1993], 181).

44 “How ugly is the true face of the aristocrat! This monster presented itself to me in the form of all its vices: its eyes were red, inflamed, its pupils glinting, its forehead wide and flat, its eyebrows black, thick, each forming a half-circle, its nose eaten away [...] its mouth open because of two frightful tusks that came out, as if to show the ferocity of the animal” (pamphlet 1789, in de Baecque 1997 [1993], 178).

context in which, and means through which, a specific discourse of power<sup>45</sup> becomes instrumental in what Foucault terms, in Lecture 3 from *Society Must Be Defended*, “biologico-social racism” - power's self-legitimizing act whereby, in the name of a field of human life which it must direct, life is split from life along a racial (ever-shifting) line that “permanently, ceaselessly infiltrat[es]” the living and whose elimination once with a designated portion of the living leads only to its “constant re-creat[ion] in and by the social fabric” (Foucault 2003 [1997], 61). To the extent that the medico-racializing discourse constructing the aristocracy as a separate species to be eliminated for parasitically “attach[ing] itself to a real nation” (*Essay on Privileges*, in de Baecque 1997 [1993], 85) is left intact in content, and only reversed in terms of reference in Sade's work<sup>46</sup>, what is at stake here is not, in Agamben's words, a question of a living body *pre-marked* for elimination by power (*questio facti*), or a question of a rule through which living bodies can be constantly marked in predictable ways for elimination (*questio iuris*)<sup>47</sup>. As I shall further expand in chapter 5, what this strategical discursive gesture suggests is that difference in itself is a constant act of sovereign power within a field of life, unpredictably effecting what Agamben calls *the biopolitical body* - not as the result of the application of a rule, and not as the result of a body's identification via a difference, but as the very fact of deciding on difference, of what difference means and what it does within a power relation. What I call the “libertine/ non-libertine difference” in the work of Marquis de Sade is precisely an attempt at breaking the sovereign modality of power apart from specific bodies or specific rules, in order to trace how sovereignty feeds on the fact of 'deciding on' while engaging in the continuous production of

---

45 In 1790, Joseph-Antoine Cérutti, author of *Portable Dictionary of Exaggerations*, named this particular discourse of power 'exaggeration': “Today, exaggeration dominates French thinking. [...] Exaggeration [...] is divided into two dialects, of which one expresses all that is marvelous, and the other, all that is terrible. The marvelous and the terrible, which are the two extremes of nature, are for that very reason the two extremes of our sensations” (in de Baecque 1997 [1993], 181-182). Exaggeration here can be thought of as a discursive technology of power producing/ inhabiting differences at the level of bodies individual (via sensations), in a manner that is political insofar as it functions independently of any other factors than the 'fact' of difference, intelligible in its turn only with reference to a fictive general(izable) norm (nature).

46 For different purposes, Sean Quinlan quotes Sade's *History of Juliette* on this matter, in “Medicine in the Boudoir: Sade and the Moral Hygiene in Post- Thermidorean France”: “The man of the people is simply the *species* that stands next above the chimpanzee on the ladder and the distance separating them is, if anything, less than that between him and the individual belonging to the superior caste” (241).

47 See Giorgio Agamben. 1998 [1995]. *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*. 94-100.

instrumentalizable difference, of difference *in excess*, as the signifier of this activity only.

In Sade, the “libertine/ non-libertine difference” is produced within the field of sexuality, as a “variation [...] felt morally, physically, politically, on the whole and in the details” (*The Political Painter* 1789, in de Baecque 1997 [1993], 137), with an impact at both individual and population levels, as Foucault would argue (1990 [1978]). In the following chapter I will look at the production of this difference within the field of the living (conceptualized not yet in relation to 'biological,' but to 'sensuous' material). I will consider how the sovereign decision instantiates both the life-domain and the difference within it (as a difference in life/ death, and in pain/pleasure), by disambiguating the fact of deciding (which I will term political experimentation) from its effect (which I term sensuous experience, the fact of sensing oneself alive). Finally, the emphasis is on the difference resulting from a political decision, independently from the epistemological value of the scientific, medical, and philosophical discourses conjured up around it – the intelligibility, the truth and the operativeness of these discourses are in themselves an effect of power<sup>48</sup>.

---

48 In *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, H. Dreyfus and P. Rabinow cite Foucault on the relation between power and knowledge: “The analysis of statement, then, is a historical analysis, but one that avoids all interpretation: it does not question things said as to what they are hiding, what they are 'really' saying, in spite of themselves, the unspoken element that they contain...; but, on the contrary, it questions them as to their mode of existence, ...what it means for them to have appeared when and where they did – they and no others” (in 1983, 51). Power decides on knowledge – its status, its organization, its effectiveness, in short, its *mode of existence*.

## CHAPTER 4 The Question of Expérience, and Its Libertine

### Answer: The (In)Sensitive Politics of Experiencing/ Experimenting on The Living, with Sovereign Effects

#### 4.1. Introduction

Before being able to approach the figure of the Sadean *libertine* from the perspective of his *sovereign activity* within the domain of (sexual) human life, and before disentangling the ways in which the *libertine* constitutes himself as such precisely in the moment of sovereignly assuming, within the relation of power, the biopolitical decision on the life/ death of the respective domain<sup>49</sup>, a question first needs to be addressed. What is the material with which, and through which, the *libertine* acts with sovereign power? What exactly in this material enables the sovereign rationality to unfurl through the *libertine's* decision? In Michel Foucault's and Giorgio Agamben's works, this material is referenced as 'the living,' where biological forms of life and political rationalities of intervention merge into each other to their ultimate inseparability<sup>50</sup>. It is precisely their distinction that is the task of, while at the same time instantiating, the sovereign modality of power. Although Sade does not explicitly mention 'organisms', or 'biological' life in his work, I would argue that the 'biological,' 'organic' existence of bodies is re-captured in the fragmentary

---

49 My full discussion of 'sovereignty' and 'biopolitics,' dwelling on Michel Foucault's and Giorgio Agamben's perspectives, is located in Chapter 2 and is part of my methodological excursus. All the ideas advanced here are reformulating central tenets of their theorizing.

50 It is worth remembering here the oft-quoted passage from Foucault's *History of Sexuality Vol.1*, which dwells precisely on this convergence between the biological and the political in power's intervention on/ within/ between bodies: "Western man was gradually learning what it meant to be a living species in a living world, to have a body, conditions of existence, probabilities of life, and individual and collective welfare, forces that could be modified, and a space in which they could be distributed in an optimal manner. For the first time in history, no doubt, biological existence was reflected in political existence; the fact of living was no longer an inaccessible substrate that only emerged from time to time, amid the randomness of death and its fatality; part of it passed into knowledge's field of control and power's sphere of intervention [...] For millennia, man remained what he was for Aristotle: a living animal with the additional capacity for a political existence; modern man is an animal whose politics places his existence as a living being in question" (1990 [1978], 142-143). In *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, Agamben reformulates this process of increasing coincidence as the "entry of *zōē* into the sphere of the polis – the politicization of bare life as such" (1998 [1995], 10).

physiologies of sensation (the modalities through which a body can be said to live in relation to a 'sensation' or 'experience' of itself and others) reconstructible from Sade's erotico-scientific descriptions, procedures and practices of intervention on bodies, and objectives of intervention<sup>51</sup>.

The present chapter is devised to meet this question in the context of 18<sup>th</sup> century debates (originating in, or brought to, France) around 'sensibility' and 'sensation' in relation to contemporary needs to define and evidence 'life'. One of the central premises of the proposed inquiry consists in 'life' being, in Sadean texts, as in much of 18<sup>th</sup> century philosophical and scientific writings, conceptualized in relation to bodily sensuous experience, or sensation. The main argument of the chapter is that 'sensuous experience' cannot exist outside the sphere of a (sovereign) decision predicating what 'sensation' is, and what it is not; what actually *is*, or what only *resembles*, 'sensation;' which type of 'sensation' deserves acknowledgement, and which does not. In a sense, the field of the living is the field of embodied sensation, and it emerges as such only through a *political experiment* (the *libertine's* sovereign decision) which establishes a pre-political, apolitical and non-political material to be taken hold of. *Experience* would thus be that which *experimentally* emerges as fundamentally non-experimental, and this differentiation is political insofar as it constitutes a sovereign logic of action within a field in which sensation is the indeterminant which needs be decided upon<sup>52</sup>.

For instance, Sadean writing presents us with Rodin, the artist-anatomist of the novel *Justine, or Good Conduct Well Chastised* (1791), so desirous of performing vivisection upon his own daughter Rosalie in order to examine “the vaginal canal of a fourteen- or fifteen-year-old child who has expired from a cruel death” (1791, 59), by means of a 'properly scientific' experiment – one that not merely adds to, and purposefully overshadows, the disorderly and imprecise research

---

51 For a discussion on the compatibility between erotic and scientific (especially medical) vocabularies, procedures for presenting/ handling bodies, settings, see Kozul. 2009. “Physiologie du Corps Érotique, Imaginaire de la Science” [Physiology of the Erotic Body, Imaginary of Science] & St.-Martin. 2009. “Le Corps-Spectacle dans le Roman Érotique: entre l'Anatomie et le Libertinage” [The Body-Spectacle in the Erotic Novel: between Anatomy and Libertinage].

52 See Schmitt 2004. “Definition of Sovereignty” & “The Problem of Sovereignty as the Problem of the Legal Form and of the Decision.” *Political Theory: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*. Chicago: Chicago University Press. 5-35 for the co-constitution of decision and sovereignty.

carried out in the nation's "hospitals [...] where similar experiments [take place] by the thousand" (1791, 59), but also one that delimits and extracts the meanings of a body, a blood relationship, a family organization, an ethics of parental duty in relation to the rules of conduct within scientific expertise. Moreover, a Count de Gernande also appears, scalpel in hand, ready to make his wife's "blood [...] spur out under greater pressure" (1791, 113) in order that, through careful and exact manipulation of the vital fluid's circuit within another living body, his orgasmic pleasure is achieved. Sixteen children are removed from their 'natural' social environments, and carried to the château of Silling where, "enclosed in an impregnable citadel [...] beyond the reach of [...] friends, of [...] kin," are unwilling participants into the experiment of vivifying and (re)enacting taxonomized sexual hypotheses of *libertinage*, ultimately testing both the limits of human bodies, and of the *reality* of their livingness – although "already dead [...] yet breath[ing] by [libertine] pleasure, and for it only" (*The 120 Days of Sodom* 2002 [1785], 47-48). Finally, *Yet Another Effort, Frenchmen, If You Would Become Republicans* (1990 [1795]) reads as a manual for the preservation and enhancement of French republicanism by means of the political instrumentalization of "vitality," "energies," "actions, passions," "perfidious sensibility" and "apathy" (*idem*, 296, 299, 342) – concepts transferred from natural philosophy, vitalist physiology and empiricism, and tactically inserted into the post-revolutionary, post-monarchical technologies and modalities of power for administering individual life and conduct. These are merely a few examples extracted from the Sadean *oeuvre*, evincing the identity between the 'stuff of experience' and the product of calculated experimentation. Moreover, they point to the processual coming-into-being of an organic community within the Republic, where "individuals brought together form another individuality; the former [being] destroyed and the latter only appear[ing] by their destruction" (Oken, in Canguilhem 2008, 41). What is thus inaugurated is a new modality of relating the individual to the ensemble of individuals that constitute the state, in contradistinction to the Hobbesian mechanistic concept of civil society, whereby the relations between part and whole are "heteropoietically" modeled (Canguilhem 2008, 9) upon those existing between mechanical

system and its component parts. No longer merely 'cogs' in the State-machine, predictably instrumentalized in a system somewhat rigid, and premised upon attrition of forces, the individuals and the State are implicated in a relation that requires power to constantly reinvent, with minimal effort, its modalities of intervention, and the bodies it intervenes upon, in order to keep the relation open to the aleatory element<sup>53</sup> (which is also the element of power, namely the living). Since it is within the space of the governmental that man is effected by means of being affected - "it is the government that makes man" (Sade 1990 [1795], 338), the political task as contoured by de Sade is that of constantly placing "man" differently at the convergence between sensory experience (one's senses, sensibilities, tastes and passions) and experimental facts, methods, enterprises. In-between, the "human" is both the medium, and the mediation.

The present chapter suggests that, despite the continuous slippage, because of their ambiguous delimitation, between the concepts of *experience* and *experiment* in the philosophical and scientific discourses of the time, they manifest, in Marquis de Sade's texts, a 'will to discontinuity,' political insofar the *libertine* can act sovereignly by deciding on the difference between sense experience and experiment, and on the truthfulness of sensation. The second part of the chapter serves, in Marquis de Sade's words, as "lantern and stimulant" (1990 [1795], 312) by, on the one hand, contextualizing Sadean sensualism in relation to a constellation of 17<sup>th</sup> - 18<sup>th</sup> centuries sensualist empiricist theories, French materialist natural philosophy, and vitalist physiological and medical writings. On the other hand, the sub-chapter evinces the blurriness of *expérience*, which makes the sovereign decision on the difference between non-political bodily *experiencing* of life, and political implications of the body in the *experimentation* with/ on life, both necessary and absolutely political. The third part of the chapter will examine some passages from Sade's

---

53 That is why Sade, in *Yet Another Effort, Frenchmen*, argues for a re-invention of the manner in which power relates to bodies, towards an increased efficiency with a minimal apparatus for intervention: "In pointing out, as I have just done, the nullity, the indifference of an infinite number of actions our ancestors [...] beheld as criminal, I reduce our labor to very little. Let us create few laws, but let them be good; rather than multiplying hindrances, it is purely a question of giving an indestructible quality to the law we employ, of seeing to it that the laws we promulgate have, as ends, nothing but the citizen's tranquility, his happiness, and the glory of the republic." (2002 [1795], 338).

*Philosophy in the Boudoir*, in order to advance the hypothesis that it is through *apathy* (indifference to sensation, un-sensed sensation, impotent sensation) – therefore through sensation disarticulated from itself – that a space for experimenting on the living body emerges. What counts here is no longer the relationship between cause (sensation) and its potency to suggest its own means for action (the possibility to experiment) - which begs the question of the validity/ invalidness of the results - but rather the relation between the means (experimentation) and the designed goals (political administration of life).

## 4.2. Experience, Experiment: Tales of Indistinction

Taken at face value, the experience/ experiment difference might seem clear-cut. On the one hand, experience is related to the capacity for feeling that is actualizable through bodily sense organs. Experience is the technique through which sensation defines bodily existence as a locatable, specific element within a sensory field, by means of a continuous interplay between acting and being acted upon (Aristotle, *De Anima*, in Heller-Roazen 2009). In the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Tommaso Campanella designed a theory of sensation by “mutation” in his 1598/99 *De sensu rerum et magia*, whereby the sentient being and the sensed enter into a relation of mutual transformation so that “the sentient being acquir[es] a *likeness of the sensed*” (Heller-Roazen 2009, 170). Sensation acts as an interface that enhances the intimacy, and the potential harmonizability between the individual and the world<sup>54</sup> – it is, ultimately, a modality of knowing and a mode of living into/ with the world: “the sense [or sensation, *sensus*] with which animals seem to be

---

54 The potentiality of 'sensation' to act as both means and medium for the relation of power between two entities, two bodies, two life-forms – at the moment where a 'difference between' exists that enables the passage from the 'one' to the 'other' – justifies my understanding of 'sensation' as a biopolitical space. It is not incidentally, I argue, that Agamben brings in, although in a different way, the concept of 'sensation' in relation to politics and life. In *Homo Sacer*, he quotes Aristotle at length, fully accepting the argument Aristotle makes on the difference between physical/ biological/ non-linguistic (*representation of*) *sensation*, and political/ linguistic *sensation*: “Among living beings, only man has language. The voice is the sign of **pain** and **pleasure**, and this is why it belongs to other living beings [...] But language is for manifesting the fitting and the unfitting and the just and the unjust. To have the **sensation of the good** and **the bad** [...] is what is proper to men as opposed to other living beings, and the community of these things makes dwelling and the city” (in 1998 [1995], 12). Emphasis mine. My argument goes in the direction of asserting that *sensation* as such cannot exist separately from its intelligibility through *forms of its representation*, and the ways in which these forms are organized and separated into human/ nonhuman, political/ nonpolitical is not a self-evident fact, but the product of a decision of power.



equipped and which seems to distinguish them from inanimate things can be found in every thing,” thus “the world is an extremely sensitive animal” (Campanella, *Compendium physiologiae*, *idem* 172). Experience seems to 'happen' of itself, requiring a relationality (between the sensing and the sensed), within the same, or between multiple bodies. It requires life, it sustains life: its premise is inseparable from its conclusion – it is the minimal condition of operation of any sense experience. The *Encyclopédie* (1751) had termed the ability to “perceive impressions of external objects” *sensibility*, while the “movement” produced in the sensible creature as a result of engaging with perceptions, *sentiment*. Additionally, Denis Diderot (1760) had defined sensibility as “the vivid effect on [one's] soul of an infinity of delicate observations” (in Riskin 2002, 1). Consequently, I take sensibility to mean capacity for experience.

On the other hand, experiment can be thought of as conditioned experience, (re)constructed within a specific environment, according to specific rules, using specific instruments, “considérée sous certains points de vue plus particuliers” [considered from more specific points of view], to borrow a phrase from physiologist Cabanis (in Barroux 2009, 180). Although 40 years after the period that concerns us (end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century), Auguste Comte, in his 1844 *Cours de philosophie positive*, in a lecture titled “Considerations on Biological Science as a Whole,” offered the following definition for *experiment*, which I think gives a fuller account, and supplements while connecting various ideas disseminated in the 3 entries on *expérience* (section Medicine, Natural Philosophy and Philosophy) in the *Encyclopédie*, written by César Chesneau Dumarsais (1676- 1756) and Arnulphe d'Aumont (1720 -1782)<sup>55</sup>:

An experiment is always aimed at discovering on the basis of what **laws** each of the

---

55 *Encyclopédie, ou dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers*, ed. Denis Diderot and Jean le Rond D'Alembert. University of Chicago: ARTFL Encyclopédie Projet (Spring 2010 Edition), Robert Morrissey (ed), <http://encyclopedia.uchicago.edu/>. Dumarsais presents us with a concept of 'experiment' in relation to the science of Physics, as comprising the modalities through which the mechanism of natural phenomena is explained, emphasizing the need for “precision and exactitude.” “Les spéculations les plus subtiles et les méditations les plus profondes ne sont que de vaines imaginations, si elles ne sont pas fondées sur des expériences exactes” [The subtlest speculations and the profoundest meditations are merely vain imaginings if not grounded in exact experiments]. D'Aumont, relating 'experiment' to the medical domain, defines it in terms of an operation on the body with a view of producing specific effects (termination of illness). Experiment is the product of “assiduous observation and long practice,” and consists in the introduction of a novel element (“un moyen, une opération, une drogue” - a means, an operation, a medicine) in the environment of the body.

determining influences or modifications of a phenomenon participates in the realization of the phenomenon, and it consists, in general, in **introducing a well-defined change** to each condition in order to directly assess the corresponding variation in the phenomenon itself. The entire **rationality** of such an **artifice** and its incontestable success depend on 2 fundamental conditions: (1) that the change introduced be fully compatible with the existence of the phenomenon studied [...]; (2) that the two cases being compared differ in **only one** regard, for otherwise the interpretation, though direct, would be essentially equivocal. (in Canguilhem 2008, 10)

Experimentation is the mechanism not of arriving at a living body through the continuous actualization of sensuous variables, but the technology of arriving at knowledge of the body in a specific environment, and the condition for hypothesizing on, and devising its mobilization, its operativeness, under various (other) conditions. However, if experimentation has had its results and its procedures questioned, either for relying on sense experience, which has been deemed relative and incapable of sustaining epistemological claims<sup>56</sup>, or for being unable to capture sense experience without in the process modifying it<sup>57</sup>, experience itself underwent skeptical criticism, for it too relies, in the manner of experiment, on rules, modalities, and properties that belong to the activity of sensory organs – sensation too is limited and relative, and it borrows the limitations of the organic apparatus. This is why Buffon, in his 1749 *Histoire naturelle, générale et particulière*, was able to interrogate the accuracy and truth-claim of sensory perception thus:

---

56 Diderot made a bizarre argument against the veracity of the senses (their ability to tell us the 'truth' about the world): "What difference is there, for a blind man, between a man who urinates and a man from whom, without his complaining, blood pours forth?" (in Riskin 2002, 61). Also, in her book *Science in the Age of Sensibility: The Sentimental Empiricists of the French Enlightenment*, Riskin discusses optical illusions and the controversies they brought to 18<sup>th</sup> century philosophical conversations.

57 Marcel Hénaff, in his 1978 book *Sade: The Invention of the Libertine Body*, posits the libertine body in a medial position, at the crossroads of experience (desire, passion) with experiment, whereby all that is left of the sensuous body is a "programmed and dissected body with no secrets and no interiority [...] wholly turned over to the scalpel of classifying reason" (1999 [1978], 84). Moreover, in *Knowledge of Life*, Canguilhem makes a similar argument about the nature of experiment, and cites 20<sup>th</sup> century poet Paul Valéry on the matter: "Artificial, human, or anthropomorphic are distinct from what is only living or vital. Everything that comes to appear in the form of a clear and completed goal becomes artificial [...] It is also the work of man when he imitates an object or a spontaneous phenomenon as closely as possible. Thought that is conscious of itself makes itself into an artificial system. If life had a goal, it would no longer be life." (in 2008, 172) In 18<sup>th</sup> century physiological experiments, the notion of teleology was dominant in scientific analysis of organism, and yet the notion of design, or the theological aspect of teleology was becoming obsolete. As I shall discuss further, Swiss anatomist-physiologist Albrecht von Haller advances a theory of the living organism resting on the "descentralization" of vital forces within the animal economy: "animal fibers [possess] a power of sensation, and of generating motion, without [having been] superadd[ed] or unit[ed] to [...] an active PRINCIPLE, as the SUBJECT and CAUSE of these" (Robert Whytt, in Hanns Reill 2005, 131).

Should we not believe that these qualities that we take for principles are nothing other than ways of seeing? And could we not think that if our senses were different than they are, we would recognize in matter qualities that are very different from those we just enumerated? Only wanting to admit to matter the qualities that we know it to have seems to me a vain and unfounded pretension. (in Hanns Reill 2005, 43)

Ultimately, the 'problematics' of experience focuses upon its intrinsic *experimentalism*, whereas the 'problematics' of experiment seems to reside precisely in the *experiential* material it works with. The sensuously living, in order to become intelligible and instrumental to the field of power, has to be produced at the point of tight imbricatedness and confusion between experience and experiment, via a decision premised solely on its necessity. In what follows, I will exemplify this paradoxical relationship with respect to the rapports between “irritability” and “sensibility” as discussed most prominently by Albrecht von Haller (1750s) and the Montpellier vitalist school of medicine (Pierre Roussel, Jean Barthez, Charles Louis Dumas, Théophile Bordeu) - debates carried over into physiologist *Idéologie* at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Destutt de Tracy, Pierre-Jean-Georges Cabanis)<sup>58</sup>.

### **4.3. Haller's Irritability/ Sensibility Problem**

The topic of 18<sup>th</sup> century 'sensibility' is rather multivalent, encompassing a plurality of historical discourses (philosophical, scientific, social, moral), multiple conceptions of the 'physical' in its relation to the 'moral,' while being indexable of various political systems: it “cut[s] across disciplinary boundaries [and can] represent several things at once” (Vila 1998, 1). Sensationalism, as an epistemological and methodological cluster of theories, experimental orientations and procedures, can be traced back to the Lockean theory of the sensuous origins of thought, developed in the 1690 *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (Riskin 2002, 1). Locke's essay postulated sensation and perception as the origin of human knowledge (*nihil est in intellectu*

---

58 My discussion is informed by: Anne C. Vila. 1998. *Enlightenment and Pathology: Sensibility in the Literature and Medicine of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century France*; Josiane Boulad-Ayoub & Alexandra Torero-Ibad. 2009. *Matérialismes des modernes: nature et moeurs* [Materialisms of the moderns: nature and manners]; Jessica Riskin. 2002. *Science in the Age of Sensibility: The Sentimental Empiricists of the French Enlightenment*; Peter Hanns Reill. 2005. *Vitalizing nature in the Enlightenment*.

*quid non fuerit in sensu*) and strongly argued against 'innate ideas.' It helped, as Ernst Cassirer suggests in *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment* (2009 [1951]), reconceptualize reason as a “kind of energy, a force, which is fully comprehensible only in its agency and effects” (13), through the shift from the 17<sup>th</sup> century onto-theological perspective, which identified reason with “eternal verities [...] held in common by the human and the divine mind,” to the 18<sup>th</sup> century instrumentalist view. Passing from a content-concept to a function-concept in relation to experience, human reason could be represented as a taking hold of experience, as an experiment upon the sensory material that would (re)produce the sensed as intelligible, organized, ordered, and separable from the act of sensing itself: “the 'togetherness' of facts must be transformed into a CONJECTURE; the initial mere co-existence of the data must upon closer inspection reveal an interdependence; and the form of an aggregate must become that of a system” (Cassirer 2009 [1951], 21). A similar interpretation could be given to the publishing, in Locke's *Essay*, of the famous Molyneux Problem, a philosophical controversy over whether a blind-born man, once his sight restored, could distinguish between two geometrical bodies, or between two colors. The debate, bringing philosophers and surgeons together, had the effect of emphasizing that, innate ideas aside, thought did not however originate in physical sensation directly, but in the continuous experiencing of a sensation, in a sort of experimental variant of that experience, in a pattern that could be subtracted and abstracted from the flow of sensory data in time, through an intellectual process (Riskin 2002, 23).

The projects subsumed under sensationalist empiricism were largely couched in, or developed in relation to, the languages of materialism<sup>59</sup>. Mechanistic materialism, popularized by Boyle, and then adopted by such diverse philosophers as Descartes, Gassendi, Leibniz, Newton, Boerhaave, is but one such dialect. In the realm of empirical sensationalism, for instance, mechanism is represented by Karl Figlio's “impression theory of sensation,” which maintains that

---

<sup>59</sup> For a detailed account of philosophies of matter, before and in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, see Chapter 3, sub-chapter “Philosophical Libertinage: Thoughts on Matter, Material Thoughts.”

the impact produced by an external object upon one of the sense organs takes place through an ethereal medium, rehearsing in a different context the physics underpinning Newton's theory of vision, whereby light produces vibrations affecting the optic nerve, which then reach the brain by 'traveling' through the ethereal substance contained in the nerves' filaments (Riskin 2002, 23). As argued in the previous chapter, it was Newton's gravitation force, re-interpreted by Buffon 'vitalistically' as an "internal" force animating matter (Hanns Reill 2005, 43), that initiated a re-interpretation of matter, from a "homogeneous, extended, hard, impenetrable, movable but not self-moving" (*idem* 34) element, into an organic composition, capable of spontaneous self-generation and manifesting the "tendency to live" (Riskin 2002, 83). Philip Sloan has termed Buffon's intervention by means of his 1749 natural history corpus, the "Buffonian revolution" (Hanns Reill 2005, 52), enabling concepts of organicity and vitality to attach to bodies and modes of living.

Additionally, a major contribution supervened from the area of animal generation, where 'mechanistic' theories of "divine preformation," coupling botanic theory of germs and ontological claims regarding the pre-existence of germs in any living individual<sup>60</sup>, were gradually replaced by "epigenetic" theories, most explicitly advanced by Maupertuis in his 1745 *Vénus physique*. Epigeneticism argued that organic particles randomly move within an individual's seminal fluids, continuously recycled so as no asexual reproduction can take place in complex animals, until, during coitus, the "point of combination" or the "living point" supervenes, the new individual being thus created as a middling entity between its ancestors (*idem*, 56-68). The gradual shift between the two theories amounts to the *vitalization* of matter. Whereas 'preformationism'

---

60 George Cheyne, for example, explained preformationism as follows : "since there is no necessity to think God Almighty is confin'd to a new Creation, in every Generation of an Animal, and that these Animals themselves are conspicuous in all Male Seeds hitherto examined, it is plain that they must have been all created at once; and lodged in the Loyns of the Original Pair of all the Species of Animals" (in Hanns Reill 2005, 57). Moreover, Bernard Nieuwentijt, in *The Religious Philosopher*, described the process as a gradual unfolding of the individual in space and time, with no regard for inner modification potentially affecting the individual's organic existence: "This however is sure enough ... that all living Creatures whatever proceed from a Stamin or Principle, in which the Limbs and Members of the Body are folded and wound as it were in a Ball of Thread; which by the Operation of adventitious Matter and Humours are filled up and unfolded, till the Structure of all the Parts have the Magnitude of a full grown Body" (in Reill 2005, 57).

functions within a mechanical understanding of ontogony, allowing for theological explanations to be advanced in relation to life development – and, in a sense, to have the 'life' of the organism unproblematically defined *a priori* as a known variable of the field of its environmental interactions, epigeneticism affords 'life' an intrinsic unpredictable, spontaneous element under the guise of its internal, undetermined movement.

Hanns Reill contends that 18<sup>th</sup> century vitalism posited itself as a middle-ground between mechanistic and animistic materialist philosophies – on the edge between an understanding of living matter as a machine-like process regulated by laws pertaining to mechanics, physics or chemistry, and an understanding of matter, as Mirko Grmek put it in his 1997 *Histoire de la pensée médicale en Occident*, that places “toutes les activités organiques, des mouvements volontaires aux mouvements involontaires, des instincts aux émotions, des sensations plus ou moins obscures aux déséquilibres psychiques” [all organic activities, from voluntary to involuntary movements, from instincts to emotions, from the most obscure sensations to psychical disequilibriums] under the empire of the soul (in Barroux 2009, 188).

In this context, Albrecht von Haller is the vitalist physiologist of the 18<sup>th</sup> century to define “irritability” and “sensibility” in relation to the living organism, moving away from his mentor Herman Boerhaave's iatromechanist view of the body as an assemblage of corpuscles “adher[ing] [to the whole] with varying degrees of cohesiveness” (Vila 1998, 17). The corpuscles were thought to enter the composition of both fluid and solid parts: the 'fluid' corpuscles obeying the laws of hydrostatics, hydraulics, and general mechanics<sup>61</sup>, whereas the 'solid' corpuscles constituted props, conductors and filters for the 'fluids.' In 1752, Haller breaks with this vision when, in the aftermath of 190 animal vivisections, he publishes his *Dissertation on the Sensible and Irritable Parts of Animals*, where somato-mechanics is replaced with a “topology of sensible and

---

61 Branches of mechanics just developing in the 18<sup>th</sup> century: for instance, classical hydrodynamics began with the 1738 *Hydraulica* of Swiss Daniel Bernoulli, followed by d'Alembert with the 1744 *Traité de l'équilibre et du mouvement des fluides*, culminating with 1757 Leonhad Euler's papers. For a fuller account of the period, see Moritz Epple. 2008. “The Gap between Theory and Practice: Hydrodynamical and Hydraulical Utopias in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century” and Thomas Brandstetter. 2008. “Sentimental Hydraulics: Utopia and technology in 18<sup>th</sup> Century France.” In Claus Zittel, Gisela Engel, Romano Nanni et al. *Philosophies of Technology: Francis Bacon and His Contemporaries*.

irritable fibers and organs” (Vila 1998, 20).

The fiber is registered as the minimal unit in the organization of the living body, variably characterized by (1) contractibility; (2) *vis insita* or immanent excitability – the capacity of fibrillar material to act independently of the nervous system; (3) *vis nervosa*, or the capacity of fibrillar material to act according to the nervous system's impulses (*idem* 1998, 20-21). At least on a theoretical level, Haller is able to claim that the body's organic components (tissues, organs) are generally capable of contracting upon external stimulation, yet with a difference: whereas the 'muscular' bodily constituents possess contractibility as *irritability* - motile, *insensitive* property (the action in the muscular fiber is not registered by the nervous system, and remains therefore unsensed sensibilia), the 'nervous' fibers are possessed of *sensibility* - contractibility as a *feeling* property whereby all localized reactions to external stimuli are accompanied by responses in the nervous system, usually in the manner of uneasiness/ pain or pleasure. Even as early as 1725, Franklin, whose influence in France has been already documented, advanced in his *Dissertation on Liberty and Necessity* a mathematical economy of feeling as the springboard of life within the animated organism: when “a Creature is form'd and endu'd with Life, 'tis suppos'd to receive a Capacity of Sensation of Uneasiness or Pain,” where the telos of the living is precisely the avoidance of pain<sup>62</sup> (in Riskin 2002, 79). Following a similar line of thought, Théophile Bordeu (1722-1776), the French vitalist of the Montpellier school of medicine studying the organization and functions of glands, claimed a *vital* relation between the nervous system and the capacity for life: the first sustains the latter by feeding upon it, like “an insect whose claws penetrate all living parts” of the organism (in Hanns Reill 2005, 131).

In “‘Originated Neurology’: Nerves, Spirits and Fibers,” George Rousseau, cultural historian of the nerve and the nervous system, presents the 17<sup>th</sup> - early 18<sup>th</sup> centuries concept of the 'nervous system' as a medial element ambiguously integrated to both the physical and the

---

62 Franklin continues: “[...] the Desire of being freed from Uneasiness is equal to the Uneasiness, and the Pleasure of satisfying that desire equal to the Desire, the Pleasure thereby produc'd must necessarily be equal to the Uneasiness or pain which Produces it” (in Riskin 2002, 79).

spiritual dimensions of the living<sup>63</sup>. As the product of the brain (already the locus of the soul by early 18<sup>th</sup> century), the nervous system was a space where the material and the immaterial articulate, and work upon each other – a relation suggested in Marquis de Sade's *Philosophy in the Boudoir*, when the 'moral' constitution (vicious/ virtuous) of Neros and Tituses is “cause[d] [by] constitution [...] flow of liquids [...] animal spirits” (2002 [1795], 254). The concept of the 'animal spirit' (entity invisible at the time due to lack of necessary optical instruments) itself is inscribed with this ambiguous correlation between matter and spirit (Rousseau 2004). The *monstrous neurological infrastructure* of the brain (the complex of nervous fibers), carrier of both information and feeling, conducive of both passions and analytical processes, is something the libertine must fully inhabit as subject, and at the same time overcome as sovereign. That is why La Mettrie could write that “the more mind one has, the more one has a penchant for pleasure and voluptuousness... [F]ools, limited minds, are commonly the most indifferent and the most restrained,” or, in *L'École de la Volupté*, that “[o]nly man, that reasonable being, can elevate himself to voluptuousness” (in Riskin 2002, 50). Such divers intellectuals and scientists, as doctor and physiologist Antoine Le Camus, or naturalist and philosopher Charles Bonnet, or La Mettrie, could weave a discourse where pain/ pleasure, reason and life crossed each other and attached to one another: the passions are “the unique Motor of Sensible Beings, and of intelligent Beings” (Bonnet, in Riskin 2002, 51), or the organs' messengers, “attach[ing] [one] to life” (La Mettrie, in Riskin 2002, 51).

The difference between *sensible* and *insensible* fibrilar movements recalls Francis Bacon's conceptual pair, “perception” and “sensation,” in relation to a living human body placed within, and overflowed with, the continuum of the perceptible (*ubique denique est Perceptio* – there is

---

63 George Rousseau cites Descartes' definition of the 'nerve' at p. 22: “The Nerves are nothing else but productions of the marrowy and slimy substance of the Brain, through which the Animal spirits do rather beam than are transported.” The nervous system, or the “originated neurology” as John Evelyn (1620 – 1706) called it (in 2004: 3) is the complex apparatus containing all the nerves, and all the nerves' relations within the body, as produced by the brain. Although in the Aristotelian medical tradition the nervous system was rather related to the functioning of the heart (seat of the passions), and had a role in the Animal spirits' circulation with(in) the blood – idea reinforced by Harvey's blood circulation theory – a shift was produced with Galen, who linked the nervous system to the brain. In Evelyn's words, the brain was the “seat [of] the soul” (in 2004: 3).



Perception everywhere), and capable of making sense of itself and of its own livingness only through the *reductio* of perception, via consciousness, to sensation<sup>64</sup>. Later, Leibniz postulated a similar theory, of “small perceptions,” whereby all life activity of the body unfurls within a medium of sensed/ unsensed responses to internal/ external stimuli that continuously pass over into each other, in Heller-Roazen's terms, like through a threshold that “link[s] every state of consciousness to the infinity of unconsciousness from which it arose and to which it could always return” (2009, 178). Although Haller aimed for a precise delimitation within the body of the *irritable* from the *sensible* of the body, of the loci of 'unconscious' perception and involuntary response, from the loci of 'conscious' sensation and voluntary movements, and despite his assumption of the quantifiability and experimental plasticity of both, he ultimately had to admit to the ambiguity of the body's sensorial capacities. Even if he claimed that irritability is “so different from sensibility, that the most irritable parts are not at all sensible, and vice versa, the most sensible parts are not irritable ... irritability does not depend upon the nerves, but on the original fabric of the parts which are susceptible of it” (Vila 1998, 23-24), the problem rests precisely with demonstrating in what they differ, and how this difference might be packaged into scientific evidence, given that at a visible level, bodily 'signs' of irritability and sensibility (especially in the context of animal experimentation) might appear quite similar.

Haller implicitly uses a Baconian<sup>65</sup> tactic of rhetorical scientificity in founding his irritability/ sensibility distinction upon specific bodily signs of pain, or lack thereof. On the one hand, signs of pain/ painlessness acquire meaningfulness only in the context of a historical and

---

64 “[...] no body when placed near another either changes it or is changed by it, unless a **reciprocal** perception precede the operation. [...] they should have examined the difference between **perception** and **sense**, not only in sensible as compared with insensible bodies, one body with another; but also in the sensible body itself they should have observed what is the reason why so many actions are performed without any sense at all; why food is digested and ejected; humours and juices carried up and down; the heart and the pulse beat; the entrails, like so many workshops, perform every one its own work; and yet all these and many other things are done without sense” (in Heller-Roazen 2009, 176-177).

65 Mary Poovey, in “The Modern Fact, The Problem of Induction, and Questions of Method,” links the birth of the 'modern (scientific) fact' to the Baconian (stylistic-) empiricist revolution, whereby science's experimental method grounded itself in the de-metaphorization of language (and in a decision upon the status of linguistic metaphoricality in relation to standards of truth and rationality). See Poovey. 2008. “The Modern Fact, The Problem of Induction, and Questions of Method.” *A History of the Modern Fact: Problems of Knowledge in the Sciences of Wealth and Society*. UCP. 1-25.

cultural interpretation of a constructed 'average standard' of pain/ painlessness. Even if these signs, which Haller takes at face value, would be able to stand on their own as accurate *representations* of pain/ absence of pain (regardless of whether these representations are amenable or not to stand in for something entirely different), animal experiments would also have to account for the fact that animal bodily responses are being interpreted in relation to a historical and cultural language of human bodily reactivity. Can one tell when someone's body is being *just* irritated or when *truly* painful sensation takes place? Of course, Haller named organs irritable apart from sensible organs, but I argue that the uncertainty persists. How do I know you *truly*, *really* suffer? And what does it mean to *truly*, *really* suffer? How do I know a bodily response is disarticulated from sensation, and how do I know it is not? Rehearsing Diderot's already mentioned question on how one can tell the urinating man apart from the bleeding one just by sound perception, how can one know from evidence of bodily contractibility that a body is in pain or just involuntarily responds to some external / internal stimuli without pain-sensation? Questions such as these acquire far greater importance in Marquis de Sade's writings, where the libertine *must* know, for another's pain is one's pleasure. I would argue that this might be the reason why Marquis de Sade pushes the 'experiments,' the search for pain, to the extreme, to the limit, to the moment when pain must rise and speak itself, for itself, through the body, through the decomposition and death of the body, without the interference of symptomatic language. The Sadean libertine must *learn to recognize pain*, he must answer whether *there is pain* and to what extent *there is pain*. The experiments are meant to end what actually triggers and sustains them: the ambivalence of experience, the fact that there is no experience outside the models suggested by experiments for grasping it and utilizing it. In this case, the experiment is the more so an experience in itself, ultimately failing, for it depends on another experience, which continuously refuses itself to scientificity, fact, calculation, operationalization. I will briefly comment upon some passages from *Philosophy in the Boudoir* (1795), in order to ask if, and how, Sade chooses to differentiate experience from experiment, irritability from sensibility, and to what political end.

#### 4.4. Sadean Cruelty: Sadism as Political Decision upon Experience/ Experiment

In *Philosophy in the Boudoir*, Sade exposes a lesson in sovereignty by means of preaching pleasure to its most cruel consequences:

you [will] have learned the art of doing whatever you please. [...] Cruel pleasures [...] [are] today exceedingly common amongst men, and here is the argument they employ to justify them: we wish to be roused, stirred, they say, 'tis the aim of every man who pursues pleasure, and we would be moved by the most active means. Taking our departure from this point, it is not a question of *knowing whether our proceedings please or displease the object that serves us; it is purely exposing our nervous system to the most violent possible shock...* (Sade 1795. 252)

Indeed, it cannot be a question of knowing the other's pain/ pleasure – which, in the light of the above discussion, is both unknowable and, to a certain extent, irrelevant – but of being in a position of power enabling the operationalization of sensuous material (other bodies) towards the production of effects (the “violent shock<sup>66</sup>”) perpetuating one's power position, and legitimizing it by translating it from *experiment* on others into one's *experience*. But, Sade warns us immediately, a decision on the other's pain/ pleasure has nonetheless to be made, even if scientifically unsubstantiated, because the *libertine*'s pleasure, and power, prompting the differentiation, is grounded precisely in its already effected (power) difference from pain:

there is no doubt that we are much more keenly affected by pain than by pleasure: the reverberations that result in us when the sensation of pain is produced in others will essentially be of a more **vigorous** character, more **incisive**, will more energetically resound in us, will put the animal spirits more violently into circulation and these, directing themselves toward the nether regions by the retrograde motion essential to them, instantly will ignite the organs of voluptuousness and dispose them to pleasure (Sade 1795, 252)

Ultimately, Sade adopts the generalized epistemological value of pain as that which supports power more fully to the extent that “pain's telling effects cannot deceive” (1795, 252), and yet does he believe that the Sadean *libertine* knows *pain* when he encounters it? If pain is the

---

66 For a discussion of the physiological discourse of “shock” in 19<sup>th</sup> century British literature, see Jill Matus. 2009. *Shock, memory and the unconscious in Victorian fiction*. At stake in the necessity of 'shock' in Sadean literature is perhaps the very fact of the existence of power relationships in which the tension of difference inhabits differently the elements related. The 'shock' reads as both the very fact of sensing and an experiment on the limits of sensation – a movement of power which both feeds, and annihilates, the 'living'. 'Shock' is the modality of power through which 'the living' is negotiated.

true voice in which power speaks, why is the *libertine* vaunting his pleasure? What if pain is not an element of the sensuous, embodied somewhere out there as such, waiting for power to point it as its support, but a modality of power through which it folds the continuum of the (non)sensible in upon itself, violently producing, by breaking them apart, pleasure and pain, sensation and non-sensation? The acknowledgement of the pain/ pleasure's ultimate unknowability, beyond their necessary *political* separation with a view to instantiating the sovereign act of power, consists in Sade's appeal to the concept of *apathy*, in the refusal of the *reality* of *libertine* pleasure as an act of *pleasure* (only power can afford to deny itself).

In chapter 3, “Libertine Apathy, or the Pleasures of Methodology,” of his 1978 book *Sade: The Invention of the Libertine Body*, Marcel Hénaff argues for the strategical conceptual redeployment of “apathy” in Marquis de Sade's oeuvre, in contradistinction to the concept's Epicurean origins. Epicureanism, largely known as the philosophy of pleasures, conceived of apathy as a moral target that would ultimately function as ethical catalyst for a way of life whose sole purpose and task is personal pleasure. However, Sadean apathy is not desired in and for itself, but rather as a “technique for exacerbating and increasing the passions” (1999 [1978], 86). Citing Blanchot on this occasion<sup>67</sup>, Hénaff equates apathy with a libertine methodology of experimentation meant to qualitatively improve the results. To illustrate the case in point, towards the end of the 5<sup>th</sup> Dialogue from *Philosophy in the Boudoir*, one of libertines, Le Chevalier, enters an argument with Dolmancé, the libertine mentor, on the relationship between 'moral' sensibility and libertinage's propensity to sensuous enjoyment:

Leave religious principles far behind you – very well, I approve it; but abandon not the virtues sensibility inspires in us; 'twill never be but by practicing them we will taste the sweetest, the most exquisite of soul's delights. A good deed will buy pardon for all your mind's depravities, it will soothe the remorse your misconduct will bring to birth and [...] you will find consolation for the excesses into which your errors will have dragged you. [...] I am libertine, I am impious, I am capable of every mental obscenity, but my heart remains to me, it is pure and [...] it is with it I am consoled for the irregularities of my age. (341)

---

67 “Sade insists that for passion to become **energy** it has to be compressed, it must function at one remove by passing through a necessary phase of insensibility; then its full potentiality will be realised”(in Hénaff 1999 [1978], 89).

Dolmancé, on the other hand, immediately advises against “perfidious sensibility”:

the heart deceives because it is never anything but the expression of the mind's miscalculations [...] I only use the word to denote mind's frailties. One single, one unique flame sheds its light in me: when I am whole and well, sound and sane, I am never misled by it; when I am old, hypochondriacal, or pusillanimous, it deceives me; in which case I tell myself I am sensible [...] the delights born of **apathy** are worth much more than those you get of your sensibility; the latter can only touch the heart in one sense, the other titillates and overwhelms all of one's being.

Yet this is but one modality of understanding apathy. I would argue that it is also a modality of responding to the uncertainty of the perceptible, to the ambivalence of the sensible living body, and to the need to decide upon the value of the signs of another's sensations. It is a sovereign attitude that, even though decides (because the libertine can achieve or fail to achieve pleasure), it leaves the decision at the level of the material upon which the decision is made: ambiguous sensuousness. It also enables decision (upon the meaning of the first), where the libertine can decide, at the level of *representation* and language, that he has had pleasure or not, despite previous effects, and act consequently with respect to both his own, and other, bodies.

On the one hand, the pain of others is the key to the libertine's pleasure, as shown by Dolmancé's answer to his pupil's curiosity on the effects of pain on sexual enjoyment:

To be sure, 'tis much to be preferred [...] this being the case, the repercussion within us is much more pronounced, and much more energetically and much more promptly launches the animal spirits in the direction necessary to voluptuousness. (344)

However, the explanation of the process is not physiological, but rather a translation into physiological language of a political economy of pleasure, as evinced in the following passage:

What is it one desires when taking one's pleasure? That everything around us be occupied with nothing but ourselves, think of naught but of us, care for us only. If the objects we employ know pleasure too, you can be very sure they are less concerned for us than they are for themselves, and lo! Our own pleasure consequently disturbed. **There is not a living man who does not wish to play the despot** when he is stiff: it seems to him his joy is **less** when others appear to **have as much as he** [...] he would like to be the only one in the world capable of experiencing what he feels: the idea of **seeing** another enjoy **as** he enjoys reduces him to a kind of **equality** with that other, which impairs the unspeakable charm *despotism* causes him to feel. [...] by causing [...] hurt he experiences all

the charms a **nervous personality** relishes in putting its strength to use [...] Think not that it is silent during such episodes. [...] Would pleasure's climax be a kind of fury were it not the intention of this mother of humankind that behavior during copulation be the same as behavior in anger? (344-345)

The libertine desires to have his pleasure, under the form of individual property, unshared, non-transmissible, and circumscribed. It is a form of ascertaining his existence as individual: "I sense, therefore I am" (Heller-Roazen 2009, 61), precisely because he is the only one experiencing *his* sensation at a particular time, in a particularized way. Sensation is the organic law of the individual body, and it is specific: the problem is, again, how the "I" emerges through sensation as distinct from others, when the cultural codes in which a sensation is rendered intelligible (expressions of "anger" in this case) flattens the sensation, abstracting it and subtracting from it that which makes it the sensation of one "I" rather than that of another. The political language of sovereignty and the economic language of private property do nothing but figure the anxiety of the human 'self' in relation to an experiencing, living human body, stuck to this 'self' in ways that other bodies are not. By positing pain as a compromise solution, the riddle remains unsolved: what is the pain of the other, and will I know it when I, precisely, *see*<sup>68</sup> it (not experience it)? It points back to Haller's case, to the difference between organic pain and its possible (adulterated, unfaithful, illegible) expressions. And, despite the claim that the libertine's pleasure, tasted through the pain of the other, is vocalized, violently manifested, spasmodic, there are number of libertines who turn to apathy and erase all the potential signs of their pleasure, leaving behind just cruelty for cruelty's sake, beyond sadism, purposeless sadism, because death must happen, and it matters to whom, and who decides it. In *Histoire de Juliette*, for instance, the new ideal of the senseless is more clearly contoured:

It is no longer contested, Madame, that libertinage leads logically to murder; and all the world knows that the pleasure-worn individual must regain this manner of committing what fools are disposed to denominate a crime: we subject some person or other to the maximum of agitation, its repercussion upon our nerves is the most potent stimulant imaginable, and to us are restored all the energies we

---

68 The primacy of vision and visibility as privileged instrument, medium, and technology of power is emphasized by David Morris, who defines Sadean literature "in [its] treatment of pain and sexuality" as the "pornographic extension of the new clinical gaze" (in Steintrager 2004, 96).

have previously spent in excess. [...] but it is not true that in order to commit murder, one has got to be mentally in a libertine furor. (in Hénaff 1999 [1978], 86-87)

The libertine's action upon the other is an experiment independently of both his and his object's experiences, while their experiences are being continuously re-affirmed/ contested within these experiments. Purposeful insensitivity, or apathy, is a modality of tracing a 'political' or strategical difference between experience/ experiment, sensation/ senselessness, by virtue of which a sexual encounter with another can take place, and life can be decided upon. There where the stuff of experience is messy, ambiguous, hard to categorize, there where no experience or experiment can pronounce on the issue of the pain or painlessness of the other, the libertine recurs to the dis-activation of his sentience in order to preserve the potential distinction between experience and experiment, irritation and sensibility, pain and painless, as meaningful categories through which he can still operate, through a decision, upon the life/ death of others. The libertine thus works to the keeping of, in Jean Starobinski's words, that "dangerous privilege to possess in [one's] own nature the powers by which [one] combats that nature and nature itself" (in Heller-Roazen 2009, 235).

## CHAPTER 5 “*Libertinizing*” the Sadean Body: Deus et (Fucking) Machina, Biopolitical Sadism, and the Desire for (anthropo-political) Difference

### 5.1. Introduction

In the previous chapter, I have discussed the ways in which 'biological life' is produced as a field of power, through and for, while disarticulated from, the 'experiment' of a sovereign political act which decides precisely on what 'living' signifies in relation to 'sensation,' 'pain/pleasure,' or lack thereof. The present chapter focuses on the rationality underpinning the production of 'biological life' as decidable upon, and thus differentiable across a variety of lines of power, so as life/ death are simultaneously inscribed within it. I concentrate upon the ways in which the life-material is continuously at stake in power's deciding, through the instantiation of a kind of difference (that will also be a difference in life/ death) stemming directly and only from the very fact of the necessity of the sovereign decision – what I call the “libertine/ non-libertine difference,” whose plasticity and pliability in relation to other kinds of differences evinces power's *decisive* excess - the simple fact of power's need to constantly reinvent its modalities, technologies and procedures in order to reach specific bodies for specific reasons.

In the Sadean universe, difference, similarly construed by power and operationalizing it, produces *reference*: "The universe would cease on the spot to subsist were there to be an exact similarity amongst all beings; 'tis of this **disparity** there is born the order which preserves, contains, directs everything" (1791, 191). Moreover, a specific *desire for difference* is voiced when, in *Histoire de Justine*, *libertines* argue that "the pleasure of comparison [follows the need] the better to establish that distinction indispensable to happiness," since "wherever men may be found equal, and where these differences do not exist, happiness shall never exist either" (1791, 138). Within



the political culture of the period, marked by the gradual discreditation, and eventual "coupure irréversible" [irreversible cut] (Delon, in Guyon 2008, 100) of the monarchy's (male and female<sup>69</sup>) heads (Guicciardi 2007; Swann 2007), by the Revolution, and by nascent Republican ideals of *citoyenneté*, to question indistinction, similitude, and implicitly, equality, might suggest a different kind of reading, situated rather in the domain of political critique. I am rather interested, at the level of a 'biopolitical' theory of power inspired by the works of Michel Foucault and Giorgio Agamben, in the politico-philosophical implications of the desire for, and subsequent production of, *(non)libertine difference* as rule-blind, body-blind difference in life/death in-between and across bodies, male and/or female, young and/or adult, aristocratic and/or plebeian, royalist and/or republican, heterosexual and/or non-heterosexual, in the Sadean corpus selected for analysis. The present paper sets out to explore the generation and *differential* distribution of this *difference* in terms that render it a *biopolitical technology* of entering human flesh, for its sustenance, for its annihilation, or for its sustenance through annihilation.

Crucial for both Foucault's and Agamben's theorizing is the reconfiguring of the political, and of the political existence of the subject, by setting physiological life on the *threshold* between political (non)value<sup>70</sup>, through a constant decisive re-evaluation of life's political worthiness implicit in its potential quantifiability, usability, and exhaustiveness. As already argued in previous chapters, Foucault understands the *biopoliticization* of power in relation to the birth of the species-body of the population as target for life-management and regularization by a 'governmentalized' State, in which death is justifiable only through the racist apartheid between those 'made live' and those 'let die' (Gordon 1991). Agamben, on the other hand, puts the "biopolitical body [back into] the original activity of sovereign power" (Agamben, in DeCaroli 2007, 53), by placing the

---

69 See Lynn Hunt. 1991. "The Many Bodies of Marie Antoinette: Political Pornography and the Problem of the Feminine in the French Revolution." In *Eroticism and the Body Politic*. Lynn Hunt (Ed.) John Hopkins University Press: 108-130; Lynn Hunt. 1992. "The Bad Mother." In *The Family Romance of the French Revolution*. University California Press. 89-123.

70 In *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, Agamben cites 20<sup>th</sup> century German doctor Binding on the debate around the question of the lawfulness of euthanasia: "Are there human lives that have so lost the quality of legal good that their very existence no longer has any value, either for the person leading such a life or for society?"

life of (individual or collective) bodies on the *threshold* between power relationality and the non-relational. In “Giorgio Agamben and the Politics of the Living Dead,” Andrew Norris refers Agamben on this constitution of the “biopolitical body” as invested by power precisely through its own disinvestment, through its potential (not) to be taken hold of and included in the workings of power, and therefore in the kinds of life granted by power (2000) – a potential whose instantiation is already an effect of power. The body is produced through the perpetual sovereign (re)instantiation of the biopolitical difference (between organico-political life/death) in a site of undecidable non-differentiation.

Sadean texts are *demonstrators* of the omnipresence of the biopolitical difference wherever there are bodies-to-be-handled, politically because sexually<sup>71</sup>, while the specific historical moment translates this doing of power in the cultural idiom of bodily (non-) *libertinization*. In this sense, life and death are political becomings collapsed in the flesh, enfolded, yet also dis-articulable possibilities of (re)making the flesh vis-à-vis a set of philosophical, scientific, theological and ethical discourses, (non)institutionalized practices, social relations, constituting a (meta)physics of *libertinage* in pre-/ post-Revolutionary France. In *The 120 Days of Sodom*, “the plan was to have *described* [...] in the greatest detail and in due order, every one of debauchery's extravagances, all its divagations, all its ramifications, all its contingencies, all of what is termed in libertine language its passions [for] he who should succeed in isolating and categorizing and detailing these follies would perhaps perform one of the most splendid labors which might be undertaken in the study of manners” (2002 [1785], 23). Itemizing, taxonomizing, detailing, ordering: Sade is the *demonstrative anatomist*, the “démonstrateur de théâtre anatomique” [demonstrator in the anatomical theater] (St.-Martin 2009, 154), the anthropo-scientist who wants to discern, in the middle of the “mixte incongru d'animal humain mécanique” [incongruous mix of mechanical human animal] (*idem*, 159), the biopolitical flesh-fold, since even if “it is cruel to have to describe [...] were there

---

71 For Foucault's discussion of 'sex' as the ultimate point for political intervention, at levels both individual and collective, within a 'governmental,' biopolitical State, see *History of Sexuality: Vol.1*, 145-146.

nevertheless some good engendered of the demonstration, would one have to repent of making it?" (1791, 3). Of course, de Sade ironically inscribes the rational, scientific validation brought about by the philosophical rhetoric of "sadistic theorems" (Deleuze 1991, 19) - which require the "employ[ment of] the boldest scenes, the most extraordinary situations, the most dreadful maxims, the most energetic brush strokes" - within the Enlightenment project of "human edification" (1791, 2). Yet, as Goulemot argues not so ironically, "by offering to the body an infinite of disponibilities and possibilities for action, [18<sup>th</sup> century literary pornography] belongs, in its own way, to an ideology of progress, to a belief in the unlimited perfectibility of the human being" (in Corbin 2008: 186).

Nonetheless, the act of critically reflecting on, and of de-naturalizing, the production of the biopolitical split by locating it in the "(non)libertine difference," tactically furthers the biopolitical management of bodies by masking the ways in which power's decided life/death fracture is always already displaceable unto various other kinds of differences. Moreover, contra Agamben<sup>72</sup>, thought does not solve, but reproduces and furthers the (biopolitical) work of power: in "Monstrous Reflection: Sade and Masoch – Rewriting the History of Reason," Dorothea Olkowski argues that the Sadean libertine, while "wish[ing] to demonstrate that reason itself, the very process of demonstration, is a form of violence, a form of violence carried out by the calm and logical demonstrator" (1990, 193), also documents the process whereby "pornography arises not from without but as a function of what has been understood as the only methodology suitable to philosophical thought" (*idem*, 196) and which is, additionally, a political doing, an effect and symptom of a historical resignification of the place of man, and of human sexuality, in relation to shifting power regimes and body-oriented technologies during the 18th century.

---

72 This analysis opposes Agamben's conceptualization of thought as the messianic place of the 'politics-to-come': "only if it is possible to think the relation between *potentiality* and *actuality* differently, - and even to think beyond this relation - will it be possible to think a constituting power wholly released from the sovereign ban. Until [then] a political theory freed from the aporias of sovereignty remains unthinkable" (Agamben *H.S.*, in Connolly 2000, 27).

In what follows, I have devised my analysis in two sections: (1) the setting up of a Sadean *libertine* figure, conceptualized as a Sovereign (Fucking) Machine – a space within which and through which the sovereign decision on life/ death of bodies is instantiated; (2) the tracing of the “(non)libertine difference” across "bodie[s], [their] posture[s] and [their] coupling[s], as well as [within] a cruelty of language" (Michel Porret, qt. Corbin 2008: 185), in relation to the biopolitical rationalities of 'sadism' and non-reproductive sexuality.

## **5.2. *Deus et (Fucking) Machina: 'You Suffer, Therefore I Am'***

On the margins of "Animal Sex," a vibrating inquiry into the libidinal intensities connecting (non)human bodies to their own death performances, Elizabeth Grosz briefly refers to the French sociologist Roger Caillois' writings on the decapitated male mantis' livingness-beyond-death. The headless insect, gradually devoured during coitus by its female partner, mechanistically persists in the sexual act like a “fucking machine” (1995, 193), like an organic *automaton* robotized by its biological capture within reproductive functionality. The organism's life extends beyond the organism's annihilation, evincing a series of potential ends that exceed the categories of bodily life and death, realizing themselves in their transgression:

[T]he fact is that there are hardly any reactions that it is not also able to perform when decapitated... In this condition it can walk, regain its balance, move one of its threatened limbs autonomously, assume the spectral position, mate, lay eggs, build an ootheca, and, quite astoundingly, fall down in a false corpse-like immobility when confronted by danger or following a peripheral stimulation. I am deliberately using this indirect means of expressing myself because our language, it seems to me, has so much difficulty expressing, and our reason understanding, the fact that when dead, the mantis can simulate death.

(Caillois, in Grosz 1995, 193)

The headless male that keeps on fucking, the self-immolation of the sex-machine: the Sadean *libertine* figure occupies a similar paradoxical position in relation to his/her own bodily livingness, and this strange life/ death simultaneity (the immortality of a never-ending near-death experience) has seemed a just motive for allowing this text to be a source of inspiration for my

reading. However, the 'machinization' of the *libertine* needs be first understood not in the light of a post-human sexual performance, but of contemporary mechanistic-materialist philosophies that reduce the human body to the status of *matter*, mechanically obeying the laws of iatrophysics and physico-chemically reacting to the stimuli in the environment<sup>73</sup>. Giorgio Baglivi, in his 1696 *De Praxi Medica*, defines this machine-body as an "ensemble of chemico-mechanical movements that depend on the same principles as the mechanical movements themselves" [my translation] (qt. Porter & Vigarello 2008: 424). The concept of *motion* is crucial, even if it encompasses within activity the notion of patience understood as 'being the patient of, undergoing, suffering,' and therefore the meanings of inactivity, in the context of the movement's cause being externally located with respect to 'matter' (in a sense, matter being moved and not self-moving)<sup>74</sup>. John Locke, in his *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690) had already added something *vital* to this mechanistic picture: the Boerhaavian iatrophysicist conceptions of the human constitution as a hydraulic device, directing the interactions and circuits of corporeal fluids within the 'vessels' and 'tubes' of the human mechanism (*idem*), come increasingly in tension with the collapse of flesh and intellect into an organic apparatus both *sensitizable* and *irritable*<sup>75</sup> (Toma 1982, 185).

In *The 120 Days of Sodom*, the Duc du Blangis states from the very beginning: "I am in her [Nature's] hands but a *machine* which she runs as she likes" (1985, 9). Similarly, women are "machines designed for voluptuousness" (1971, 92), and more often the male member is a machine: "he discharged from a limp machine" (1785, 207), "his machine required no touching, but remained limp throughout" (*idem*, 235), "its hole was so gaping, sprung, and rugose that the bulkiest machines could, without her knowing a thing, penetrate it dry" (*idem*, 26). Koumba, in

---

<sup>73</sup> In *Histoire de Justine* (1791), Father Clément exposes a materialist vision of the world molded after the functioning of the body: "what is to become of your laws, of your ethics, your religion, your gallows, your Gods and your Heavens and your Hell when it shall be proven that such a *flow of liquids*, this *variety of fibers*, that degree of *pungency in the blood* or in the *animal spirits* are sufficient to make a man the object of your givings or your takings away?" (88)

<sup>74</sup> See Chapter 3 for a more detailed account of mechanistic materialism.

<sup>75</sup> See chapter 4 for a discussion of these concepts as designed by vitalist physiology, and their contribution to a definition of 'life' in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

“La Représentation du Corps chez Sade: Visée Encyclopédique et Régénérescence du Corps” [Bodily Representation in Sade: Encyclopedic View and Bodily Regeneracy], drawing on contemporary 'fiber' theories of the human body, charged with adjacent social imaginaries of force, vigor, and virility (Porter & Vigarello 2008), emphasizes a *hardening* of the male *libertine* body that might refer to the machinization that the human body undergoes in this period, but that does not fail to have sexual connotations:

[...] le corps fort [...] est le corps qui s'approprie son destin. Il oscille entre une jeunesse indéterminée et une vieillesse tout aussi indéterminée, bénéficiant d'un visage variant du séduisant au monstrueux. [...] Il est gigantesque, robuste et fort, mais on en rencontre parfois qui soit efféminés. Libertin, il n'a rien de flexible. Euphorique et tyrannique à souhait, il se nourrit de cruauté et de férocité. Dans la nature, il s'identifie au tigre et au loup. Le corps fort est souvent masculin. Il arrive qu'il soit féminin<sup>76</sup> (2009, 32).

For instance, in *Histoire de Justine*, this phallic stiffness of the flesh, this becoming-metal of the flesh, is *naturalized* and rendered a *species characteristic*:

It is only too common to find men in whom pity has been obliterated by libertinage, whose ordinary effect is to *harden*: whether it be that the major part of his excesses necessitates apathy in the soul, or that the violent shock passion imparts to the nervous system decreases the vigor of its action, the fact always remains that a libertine is rarely a man of sensibility. But in addition to this *harshness* native to the species... (1791, 32)

In this sense, the metaphor of the "machine" is not automatically de-humanizing (as one might be tempted to think), it is rather paradoxical: at first, it tends to inscribe within the category of the natural, and subsequently of the living human, those bodies that regularly, optimally, mechanically function according to the Laws of Nature by properly decoding and responding to sensory information. On the other hand, especially in the second part of *The 120 Days of Sodom*, when the *libertine-machines* tend to be replaced by, or coupled to, actual torture devices, with similar destructive effects upon the patients, the metaphor becomes a sign announcing death, and de-

---

76 “[...] the strong body [...] is the body that assumes its destiny. It vacillates between an indeterminate youthfulness and an equally indeterminate old age, benefiting from faces ranging from seductive to monstrous. [...] it is gigantic, robust and strong, but one sometimes encounters also bodies which are effeminate. Libertine, it has nothing flexible in it. Euphoric and tyrannical at will, it feeds on cruelty and on ferocity. In nature, it is identified with the tiger and the wolf. The strong body is typically masculine. Sometimes it happens that it should be feminine” (my translation).

humanization, for all bodies engaged in the encounter. In *Histoire de Justine*, the female character is submitted to the operations of both the 'body-machine', and the 'machine-machine':

He spreads, he presses, thrusts, tears, all his efforts are in vain; in his fury the monster lashes out against the altar at which he cannot speak his prayers; he strikes it, he pinches it, he bites it; these brutalities are succeeded by renewed challenges; the chastened flesh yields, the gate cedes, the ram bursts through, terrible screams rise from my throat. (70)

[...] the whip's long and supple strands, penetrating into the interior with much more facility than could withes or ferules, leave deep traces of his rage; now he strikes one, now his blows fly at the other; as skilled as a horseman as he is an intrepid flagellator. (86)

The libertine's usage of his/her own flesh is a tactic of splitting open, of traversing, of cutting through, the body of the other: of *deciding* which others will be penetrated with/ by power, to what extend, and with what results. The body of the other, in its biological existence, is targeted for sex, torture, control, punishment, persuasion; it is the *living substance* on which power feeds, and which power (re)produces according to its specific hunger: "[...] as I am incredibly fond of *what can be drained from her living body*, I will *keep her alive* as long as possible" says Comte de Gernande, the libertine bleeder, in *Histoire de Justine* (1791, 106). The libertine is not a killer, he rather plays the decision-maker: on who lives and who dies, for how long, and for what purposes. But when Duc de Blangis claims that he is merely a "machine in Nature's hands," does this *libertine* self-subjection still afford a reading of *libertine* acts as modalities of acting with sovereign power, as sovereign power? As it stands, emptied out of itself and entirely occupied by a natural mechano-ethics, seeming to obey a kind of "cosmic Malthusianism," whereby the natural balance between the good and the evil directs all human action in the universe according to necessity (Heumakers 1989, 117), can the *libertine body* thus configured be said to indicate both *a sovereign power* and *a sovereign rationality*? My answer is that it suggests a specific rationality of power in its management of life, rather than an identifiable source of power, or definite structure in which that power would be caught and operationalizable. The libertine is not a *sovereign*, yet acts *sovereignly*. He does not 'have' the power, because power is not something to 'have.'

In the language of de Sade, power is in Nature, it circulates within, cuts across, suffuses

and organizes Nature; Nature and power ground and constitute each other: one might even say that they are correlative: the power of Nature is *positive* (in the sense that de Sade's nature is all-powerful), while the nature of Power is also *positive* (in the sense that power relations are natural, whatever their configuration; their existence derives from, and re-traces *difference*). Yet the *libertine*, as both effect and medium of power, has, in a sense, to serve the biopolitical decision by taking it; he has to let himself be one with the decision that is made not by him, but through him, a decision that takes itself within bodies (and the Lockean notion of the individual as support and container of worldly phenomena that exist not *for him*, but *through him*, only furthers this conclusion): "does not the most fleeting glance at natural operations reveal that *destructions are just as necessary as are creations?* That the one and the other of these functions are interconnected and enmeshed so intimately that for either to operate without the other would be impossible? That nothing would be born, nothing would be *regenerated* without *destructions?*" (*Philosophy in the Bedroom* 1795, 274-275).

Michel Foucault, in *History of Sexuality Vol. 1*, designates sexuality, the "individual detail of individual sexual conducts" (Gordon 1991, 5), as the *primum mobile* of biopolitical governance and a technological convergence for life-imparting power procedures meant to assign livability or unlivability to individual and population bodies. In the writings of Marquis de Sade, sexuality is also the place produced by and for power, so as the (dis)attachment of life to bodies is made variable, decidable, and continuous. However, *libertine sexuality* is another name for a *paradoxical* ambiguity where death/ life and self/ other are collapsed. The sexual act becomes the site where the libertine, hit in his/her very flesh by the strongest sensations, *comes into being, comes to life* as the *receptor* and *support* of those impressions. The *libertine* body survives nervously, sensorily, bodily but precisely by putting aside one's body and becoming-one with that which, outside the body, penetrates and fills it up:

One never better irritates one's senses than when the greatest possible impression has been produced in the employed object, by no matter what devices; therefore, he who will cause the most tumultuous impression to be born in a woman, he who will most thoroughly **convulse this woman's entire**



**frame**, very decidedly will have managed to procure himself the heaviest possible dose of voluptuousness; *because the shock resultant upon us by the impression others experience, which shock in turn is necessitated by the impression we have of those others*, will necessarily be more vigorous if the impression these others receive be painful. (HJ 1791, 91)

Feeding and growing alive on the sensual substance received from the mortified object, the *libertine* individuality is necessarily dividual and dependent upon others' annihilation, considered the strongest sensation, and the most substantial life thrill to be incorporated and consumed. In this context, the *libertine* utopia is anti-social insofar as the body refuses its own annihilation, refuses the ultimate death-turn that would lead to another's preservation and enjoyment:

I am alone here, I am at the world's end, withheld from every gaze, here no one can reach me, there is no creature that can come nigh where I am [...] I am free. (1785, 179)

The knowledge that one's livability is lived as another's unlivability, that the one is the other, that the sovereign 'I' is constituted only through and at the moment of the expenditure, or in Foucault's terms, *prélèvement*, of another's life resources, renders sovereignty less sovereign, and forces the elimination of the object from the discourse of libertine existence: *my being is no longer interlocked to your being, but integrated into a logics of life commanded by Natural Laws* whose self-evidence and calculated effects (should) remain un-interrogated:

*By Nature created*, created with very keen tastes, with very strong passions; placed on this earth for the sole purpose of yielding to them and satisfying them, and these effects of my creation being naught but *necessities directly relating to Nature's fundamental designs* or, if you prefer, naught but *essential derivatives* proceeding from her intentions [...] all in accordance with her laws. (*Dialogue* 1782, 165)

Yet, the orgasmic moment that announces the concurring coming-to-fullness, or enlivenment of the one, and the partial or complete undoing, or deadening of the other, is also a moment of recognition – whatever the *libertine* lives now is not, and does not belong to him, but it is an appropriation of the *outside* into the *inside*, it is the turning of the *outside* into the *inside*, it is the *including* of the *excluded* by destroying the possibilities of the excluded to live as actually outside. Sex opens up a visceral space and a visceral moment when *becoming* and *unbecoming* are one, when the libertine's power and control over translates as lack of control and powerlessness,

when the constitution of the 'I' within a relation of power is simultaneously a state of *besideness*, of *being beside oneself*. *A taking-out-of-the-inside*:

It will be shortly into this hole, I will drive this member which affrights you; it will be run every inch of the way in, it will tear you, you'll bleed, and I will be beside myself. (*HJ* 1791, 131)

[Rodin] puts his hands upon the molested parts, touches, squeezes, worries them, seems to be readying them for further assaults [...] not a cut he bestows is unaccompanied by a curse, a menace, a reproach... blood appears... [...] he begins to tyrannize anew; Rodin whips with might and main [...] *He no longer knows* who he is or where; *his delirium has attained to such a pitch the use of reason is no longer available to him*; he swears, he blasphemes, he storms, nothing is exempt from his savage blows, all he can reach is treated with identical fury, but the villain pauses nevertheless, he senses *the impossibility of going further without* risking the loss of the powers which he must preserve for new operations. (*HJ* 1791, 51)

his ecstasy seemed to *annihilate* the libertine. (*120 Days* 1785, 86)  
[...] he is drunk with lust, pleasure's excess finally transports him completely. (*Idem*, 150)

[...] our man is *beside himself* with joy, he falls upon his own excrements, daubs his face with them, wallows in them, feeds upon them. (*Idem*, 169)

Conversely, the bodies used during the sado-sexual encounters are not merely exposed to death, turned into "nothing more in [their] butcher's eyes but lacerations and bleeding stripes" (*120 Days* 1785, 86). In view of the materialist conception of the perpetual flow of life/death within the circuit of matter, killing is transformative, regenerative, and constitutes a chance for re-embodiment. The body itself is the break within the biological continuum between the exhausted flesh of one species, and the life potentialities of the flesh of another: in Marquis de Sade's terms, the body is "transspeciated" (*The 120 Days of Sodom* 1785, 40), traverses multiple types of tissues, of organic organizations, of individualities, of species genealogies.

[...] every form is of equal worth in Nature's view; nothing is lost in the immense melting pot where variations are wrought: all the material masses which fall into it spring incessantly forth in other shapes [...] what difference does it make to her creative hand if this mass of flesh is today wearing the conformation of a bipedal individual is reproduced tomorrow in the guise of a handful of centipedes? (*Idem*, 39-40)

[...] all men, all animals, all plants growing, feeding, destroying and reproducing themselves by the same means, never undergoing a **real death**, but a simple variation in what modifies them... (*Idem*, 40)  
[...] from an oblong portion of matter I shall have formed three or four thousand round or square ones (*HJ* 1791, 92)

By being taken from itself, outside itself and through its own dispossession of itself, the *non-libertine* body concretizes as such in its very painfulness, in its very exteriority, on its very surface: its sense of interiority is disseminated across its contours, its lines, its margins: *the inside is out, outed from the body, it is (because of) whatever happens on the outside*:

Then by means of their cravats, their handkerchiefs, their braces, they make cords wherewith I am tied instantly, in keeping with their plan, that is to say in the cruelest and most painful position I imaginable [...] it seemed they were rending me limb from limb and that my belly, facing downward and strained to the utmost, was about to split at any moment [...] *I no longer existed save through the violence of pain.* (HJ 1791, 32)

[...] no longer conscious of my existence save through my pain and my tears [...] (Idem, 71)

(Justine:) I am the *focal point* of these execrable orgies, their *absolute center and mainspring* (Idem, 167)

Within the orgiastic space, the flesh and all its erotic possibilities becomes *exceptional*, in the sense that it comes to foster a disquieting *amorphousness, indistinguishableness, undecidedness*: "there were moments when all those bodies seemed to form but one" (HJ 1791, 166) where "everything shall be pell-mell [...] shall change, shall co-mingle, entwine, couple incestuously, adulterously, sodomistically" (120 Days 1785, 44). The coincidence, "the undecidability of *nomos* and *anomie* in the living body" of sovereign power (Agamben 2005, 70) becomes, in Marquis de Sade's script, the instrument of a biopolitical (non)libertine differentiation in and through the sexual act, a mutable line of power that slides along a hierarchized matrix of differences, historically and culturally variable (sex, class, age, sexual orientation, political identity). These differences are to be contextualized in the next section.

### **5.3. Biopolitical Sadism: On Women, Reproduction, and the Poor**

As it has been argued so far, to 'put sadism in sex' results in what Patricia MacCormack calls an "[un]safe and [un]predictable experiment" (2005), on the one hand for it brings the life/death of the bodies involved under direct power maneuvers that (re)produce these bodies

differently precisely by potentially undoing their initial structuring and modalities of functioning; on the other hand, for it is, in 18<sup>th</sup> century philosophical thought, an actual testing of/on the body, of the epistemologies and imaginaries constructed around it, of its use-functions and futilities. The experiment on *human life* interlocks the sexual and the scientific<sup>77</sup>: in *The 120 Days of Sodom*, one of the libertines deplores his inability to emulate the ventures of Kie, Emperor of China, who reconfigured the threshold between life and death, in the form of immanent pain, as the desired condition of human existence:

such a state of *suffering* that they were constantly on the verge of expiring but never quite able to die, for those monsters administered that kind of aid which made them flutter between relief and torture and only brought them back to life for one minute in order to kill them the next. (1785, 137).

The scientificization of sexual and non-sexual sadistic manipulations of the body further consolidates the sovereign order within which the libertine is situated. As an experimentalist on *human flesh*, the libertine assumes the double-role of Demiurge (Deus) and Meat Mincer (Machina), and draws both sensual and intellectual pleasure from being both a first-order and a second-order observer of bodies: the affective respondent to a cruel scene, and the detached examiner of all the sensory responses implicated, as well as of the act of examining itself (Steintrager 2004, 99). This aspect collides with a strong cultural anxiety, manifested in 18<sup>th</sup> century moral sentiment theories, over the possibility of the anatomist/ scientist to be a pervert, erotically stimulated by the dissection of corpses (Steintrager 2004, 116-119). The Sadean libertine rightfully poses as the *anatomist* of the body, the machine digestive of human flesh and producing knowledge, pleasure, even reproducing the power of Nature herself. In Marquis de Sade's novels, but especially in *The 120 Days of Sodom*, the body is cut open, chopped up, dismembered, broken

---

<sup>77</sup> Armelle de St.-Martin, in the article "Le corps-spectacle dans le roman érotique: entre l'anatomie et le libertinage" [The body-spectacle in the erotic novel: between anatomy and libertinage], argues that 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century French anatomical manuals on the one hand, and libertine novels on the other, share a certain cultural representational model of the body inspired by French Baroque techniques of spectacularization, excess, fragmentation, and motion (2009, 147-148). Moreover, while the anatomical treatises functioned not only as vehicles for medical knowledge, but also as pathways for the transmission of specific anthropocentric theological doctrines (although they also contained piquant case studies often read as erotic pastiche) the secular pornographic novel emphasized the erotic excess by keeping with a specific *anatomical* frame of presentation (*Idem*, 159-160).

to the bone, flattened out, flayed, burnt, amputated, sewn up, shred into pieces, bled, waxed, and dissolved:

He employs a machine involving a hollow steel bit which bores holes in the flesh and which, when removed, takes with it a round chunk of flesh which is as long as the drill has penetrated; the machine bores on automatically if not withdrawn. (1785, 345)

an ingenuous machine to chop the girl into small pieces (*Idem*, 366)

[...] the flesh is peeled away from the bones of her arms and legs, which bones are sawed in several different places, then her nerves are laid bare in four adjacent places, the nerve ends are tied to a short stick which, like a tourniquet, is twisted, thus drawing forth the aforesaid nerves (*Idem*, 376)

[the scalpel] rumag[es] about in her entrails (*Idem*, 376)

[they] split her belly, opened her [...] scalpel in hand, the Président burrows in her chest and harasses her heart, punctuating it in several places. (*Idem*, 377)

[...] a wheel upon the girl is strapped and which, rotating uninterruptedly, bears against an outer circle studded with razors which everywhere scratch and tear and slice the unfortunate victim, but the blades do not bite deep, only superficially, she turns for at least two hours before dying. (*Idem*, 384)

Drawing on 18<sup>th</sup> century French debates on the relation between cruelty, 'humanity', and the lawfulness of inflicting death, Marquis de Sade uses the *aporia* of Malebranche's nervous model of compassion to demonstrate the potential eroticization of pity, and the humanness of the enjoyment of cruel acts. In the treatise *The Search after Truth* (1709), Malebranche claims that:

the sensible sight of the wound a person receives produces another wound in those who see it, that is greater in proportion as they are weaker and more delicate. This is so because sensible sight, pushing the animal spirits powerfully into the parts of the body corresponding to those they see wounded, makes a greater impression in the fibers of a delicate body than in those of a strong and robust one. (in Steintrager 2004, 108)

However, the 'natural' wiring into the human network of compassion is interrupted if "the flow of these spirits is not turned elsewhere, by deliberately stimulating with some force, a part of the body other than that seen to be injured" (*Idem* 2004, 109). The sadist libertine is a human being that orgasmically responds to cruelty precisely because of his humanness; moreover, in the case where the paining objects are displaced from humanity unto animality, for instance,

unjustifiable cruelty becomes legitimate, and even a ground for self-(re)humanizing, through its appropriateness as human response to the 'inhuman' (Steintrager 2004, 116). But the question of sadism goes beyond moral sentiment theory – it involves the interrogation of power structures that denounces the impossibility of the social contract, and of citizen sociability.

In 1775, Jacob-Nicolas Moreau had published his treatise *Les Devoirs du Prince Réduits à un seul principe* [The Duties of the Prince reduced to one principle], where human beings are defined as naturally social by force of their co-dependence for the fulfillment of their needs (Merrick 1998, 24). Marquis de Sade would claim that it is precisely this dependency that anti-socializes the human by pitting individuals against each other in a Hobbesian warlike race for profit and self-gratification:

The cessation of the victims' existences is as nothing compared to the continuation of ours, not a mite does it matter to us whether any individual is alive or in the grave; consequently, if one of the two cases involves what in the smallest way affects our welfare, we must, with perfect unremorse, determine the thing in our favor; [...] we should [...] undoubtedly act so as to turn it to the profitable side. (*HJ* 1791, 23).

In *Histoire de Justine*, various debates on the utility or on the fictitiousness of the social contract are carried to their ultimate, embodied, limits: bodies, and attached identities and social relations, are unassimilable through the social contract, for the contract presupposes the equality among beings that it actually strives to establish. For instance, Justine suggests the political necessity of the social contract as the reasonable solution to the traditional conflict between self-interest and collective welfare, between the individual as an element of power and its coherent integration within the systems of the State so as the short-circuit of power relations can be avoided:

How would you have him not perish who through blind egoism wishes all alone to strive against the combined interests of others? Is not society right never to suffer in its midst the man who declares himself hostile to it? And can the isolated individual fight against everyone? Can he flatter himself he is happy and tranquil if, refusing to submit to the social contract, he does not consent to give up a little of his happiness to insure the rest? (1971, 24).

The discourse of the social contract is based on two mutually-reinforcing premises: on

the one hand, that those included into, and captured within, the new governmental regime of State power are bodies-to-be-governed, having their protection ensured by the security mechanisms set in place, a bio-social corpus preserved and optimized at the macro-level<sup>78</sup>; on the other, that those excluded are not politically relevant and consequently can be abandoned to themselves. Coeur-de-fer, a *libertine* malefactor in *Histoire de Justine*, turns the discourse upon its head by asking if the modalities of management, and the effects resulted therewith, are homogeneous across the population socialized into the nation via the social contract. Does not the frame of the current power regime allow for a repetition of a similar in/out division within the social body itself, and are there no differences along which the biopolitical distribution of livability/unlivability can be effected? He claims:

What one terms the interest of society is simply the mass of individual interests unified, but it is never otherwise than by ceding that this private interest can accommodate and blend with the general interest; well, what would you have him cede who has nothing he can relinquish? And he who had much? (1791, 24)

All men are born isolated, envious, cruel and despotic; wishing to have everything and surrender nothing [...] the legislator comes up and says to them: Cease thus to fight; if each were to retreat a little, calm would be restored. [...] two species of individuals cannot and ought not submit to it, ever; those who feel they are the stronger have no need to give up anything in order to be happy, and those who find themselves the weaker also find themselves giving up infinitely more than what is assured them. (*Idem*, 25).

In the context of a satirical polemic about social contract theory, 'sadism' becomes the sign of a difference that can be biopolitically used to the preservation or destruction, of individuals, parts of, or entire populations. It indicates knowledge of the fissures of the self in which power can insinuate itself, which it can occupy, stretch further or heal. Antoine de Baecque provides an extremely ingenuous analysis of corporeal metaphors in political pamphlets in France between 1770 and 1800, and he cites Sieyès' definition of State power as "political mechanics" or the "political machine" (in 1997 [1993], 78): "Art [that] belongs to us, philosophers. Speculation,

---

<sup>78</sup> The discursive tactic of self-legitimization deployed by governmental power is oriented towards the *care* and *securitization* of the population through the "setting in place of mechanisms of security [...] this is what becomes the basic objective of governmental rationality" (Foucault, in Gordon 1991, 19).

synthesis, and experiment also belong to us: yet, of all the arts, undoubtedly the first is the one that deals with ordering men among one another, on a level most favorable to all" (from Sieyès' 1788 *Views on the executive methods that could be used by the representatives of France in 1789*, in *Idem*, 78). Sade's insight into the 'sadism' inherent in the workings of the State political machine, in that it has to divide individuals, classify them, hierarchize them, put them to use or make them idle, keep them alive or let some perish, conduct them, and conduct them to self-conduct in particular ways and at particular times (Foucault, 1990[1978]), under the objective of a "level most favorable to all" (also formulated as the 'general good' of the population), is replicated at the level of the individual *libertine*, or of the *libertine* society, although the re-conceptualization of 'general good' hardly transcends the sum total of the individual interests accounted for.

Hence, the 'bio-sadic' rationality of body government is rendered more explicit in two particular instances: (1) the situation of women under the *libertine* regime, the elimination of reproduction and of the family from the new power structures; (2) the de-humanization of the poor, and the discourse of their extermination through cruel (sexual) employment.

Although *libertinage* is not either a biological, or a social category, since it is not necessarily intrinsic to a particular type of body (male) or to particular social attributes of the body (aristocratic), but rather a philosophical category reuniting the material of the body and the operations of power in a transformative encounter, the '*libertinizing*' of the body is a 'happening' that, directed by specific rationalities towards specific goals, does seem to privilege certain bodies over others, or at least to be assignable by degrees, designating a new type of *norm* that functions as an *anti-norm*. Gender, class, age are crucial in this scalarization from the *non-libertine* to the *libertine*. As Dardigna argues, the sadistic libertine holds a "fascination for an extreme form of power over the bodies of others, in particular those of a humanity that is proclaimed to be inferior and whose lives count for little compared to the '*jouissance*' of the masters" (in Frappier-Mazur 1991, 142).

Illustrative on this point, Lynn Hunt's analysis of the concept of the family in Marquis de



Sade's writings, in the chapter "Sade's Family Politics" from her book *The Family Romance of the French Revolution*, implies that the vacillating place occupied by women in the power-fueled libidinal economy of the Sadean universe can be explained with a view to the surging tensions between the ambivalent position of women within the public/ private of the Republican state and ideals of citizen equality (Hunt 1992, 131). Moreover, similar arguments have been put forth by Linda Schiebinger in *Nature's Body: Gender in the Making of Modern Science*, in a different context: that of a gendered politics of science-making, through which female bodies, partially des-anthropomorphized for naturally chained in the bonds of (instinctual) maternity and reproduction, would be rendered biologically, and socially, improper for the, at least at a discursive level, flexible post-Revolutionary public space (1993, 40-74). Recalling at this point the tactics of inferiorization and de-humanization serving to normalize the rationality of power, whereby some bodies are rendered *lawfully killable*<sup>79</sup>, - a discursive tactics that Steintrager implicitly referred to with respect to the 18<sup>th</sup> century debate on the legal and ethical status of the practice of vivisectioning criminals (2004, 116-119) -, Marquis de Sade's initial non-differential animalization of women can be coherently integrated into the cultural and philosophical discourses of the period. Thus, through the mouth of a *libertine*, the following definition is provided, additionally functioning as an explicative *primum movens* of the repetitive targeting of women and girls as victims of (non/sexual) sadistic death:

A puny creature, always inferior to man, infinitely less attractive than he, less ingenious, less wise, constructed in a disgusting manner entirely opposite to what is capable of pleasing a man, to what is able to delight him... a being three-quarters of her life untouchable, unwholesome, unable to satisfy her mate [...] of a sharp turn of humor, shrill, shrewish, bitter, and thwart; a *tyrant* if you allow her privileges, mean, vile, and a sneak in bondage; always false, forever mischievous, constantly dangerous; in short, a being so perverse that [...] the question was very soberly agitated [...] whether or not this peculiar creature, *as distinct from man as man is from ape*, had any reasonably legitimate pretensions to classification as human [...] I see [...] women treated, in a word, like *beasts* one stables in a barn and puts to use when the need arises. (HJ 1791, 115-116)

---

<sup>79</sup> For a broader discussion of the figure of *homo sacer* or *sacred man*, as that body that can be killed without violation of the law occurring, and without a sacrificial ritual taking place, see Giorgio Agamben. 1998[1995] *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*. 47-66.

However ironical it may be that women's bestialization partially rests with a set of characteristics that are concentrated in the Sadean masculine ideal of the despotic *libertine*<sup>80</sup>, there is yet one crucial aspect of the female body that is repeatedly emphasized as unforgivable: reproduction (despite the obviousness of women's inability to reproduce by themselves), or rather the politicization/ domestication of women's reproductive functions: “the lives of all women who dwell on the face of the earth are as insignificant as the crushing of a fly” (*120 Days* 1785, 48), since “there were even to be found certain races which condemned women to death immediately they were born into the world, and of their numbers retained only those few necessary to the race's reproduction” (*Idem*, 117). Moreover, an entire (historical or imagined) anthropology of sexual relations is invoked in order to justify the general enslaved status of women, and their subsequent *animalic social* class:

I behold [woman] imprisoned throughout Asia and serving there as *slave* to the *barbarous* whims of a *despot* who molests [her], torments [her], and turns [her] sufferings into a game. In America I find a naturally human race, the Eskimos, practicing all possible acts of beneficence amongst men and treating women with all imaginable severity: I see them humiliated, prostituted to strangers in one part of the world, *used as* currency in another. In Africa [...] I notice them toiling in the manner of *beasts of burden*, tilling the soil, fertilizing it and sowing seed, and serving their husbands on their knees. (*120 Days* 1785, 116)

Unsurprisingly, the women in charge of both material and biological reproduction of the human race are discursively taxonomized as domestic animals: “consider that it is not at all as human beings we behold you, but exclusively as animals one feeds in return for their services, and which one withers with blows when they refuse to be put to use” (*Idem*, 49), while the *libertine* bodies are also animalized, but in a very different way: hirsute as “the fauns described in fables” (*HJ* 1791, 152), gigantesque, fierce and “satyric” (Clément's portrait in *HJ* 1791, 65), wild and ferocious like “raging tiger[s]” (Duc du Blangis in *120 Days* 1785, 10)<sup>81</sup>. The differential

---

<sup>80</sup> In *Histoire de Justine* (1791), one of the libertine male characters, Comte de Bressac, is portrayed as follows: “All the vices which characterize the villain's genius were to be encountered in his: never had wickedness, vindictiveness, cruelty, atheism, debauchery, contempt for all duties and principally those out of which Nature is said to fashion our delights, never had all these qualities been carried to such an extreme” (34).

<sup>81</sup> There is a special episode from *120 Days of Sodom*, highly illustrative of the kind of bestialization undergone by the *libertine* body, namely one the 150 murderous passions presented towards the end of the novel:

animalization of (non)libertine bodies would somewhat counter-argue Giorgio Agamben's claim, in *The Open: Man and Animal*, that to 'bare' the life of the body by rendering it useless to power except in its annihilation is also to split the human into the (non)human, or the human and the animal within the human, and to isolate for extermination the animality of the human, its organic living, the non-anthropomorphic *nudity* that is also a political dis-investiture (2004, 33-38). Sadean writing dislodges the biopolitical split from the space of human livingness (biological vs. political), moving it at the level of life itself, at the level of the animateness/ inanimateness, organicity/ inorganic of matter – even kinds of non-human life have a potential for political investment, since it is at the level of 'animal spirits,' of 'animalcules' and vital flows that difference is both decided upon, and decisive in its effects.

Women inhabit a rather contradictory place due to their reproductive capacities. Through the politicization of female fertility, the stability of political organization around reproduction (family/ state) is opposed to emergent (proto-capitalist) economic circuits attempting to disrupt its propertization. As Sade reminds us, women's bodies and their reproductive capacities have been monogamously occupied within families, for the family is, in 17<sup>th</sup> century political thought, the foundation of State sovereign power and, in the words of Jacob-Nicolas Moreau, “domestic docility [is] the model for political subordination” (in Merrick 1998, 23). This restrictive political economy contravenes the free circulation of bodies and bodily resources that starts being suggested as desirable within the realm of free trade and market organizations:

here on earth, child, nothing but what brings in **gain** or **insures power** is accounted; and what does the virtue of women profit us? It is their **wantonness** which serves and amuses us; but their chastity could not interest us less. When, to be brief, persons of our sort **give**, it is never expect to **receive**; well, how may a little girl like yourself show gratitude for what one dos for her if it is not by the most complete surrender of all that is desired of **her body**.” (*HJ* 1791, 10)

The libertines are able to *asexually* yet *eroto-philosophically* reproduce, through the assemblage

---

“He is bound hand and foot, as if he were a wild beast, and he is draped in a tiger's skin. When thus readied, he is excited, irritated, whipped, beaten [...] opposite him is a plump young girl, naked and tied by her feet to the floor, by her neck to the ceiling, in such wise she cannot stir: when the roué is all a-sweat, his captors free him, he leaps upon the girl, bites her everywhere [...] He roars and cries like a ferocious animal.” (1785, 342)

of orgiastico-demonstrative acts that put their theoretical expositions into practice: in a way, they save reproduction from women by de-biologizing it. The divine *libertine* is no longer an unintelligible metaphor if we remember Elizabeth Grosz's reference to ethology in her "Animal Sex" chapter: "it is significant that the simplest of living organisms, amoeba and other single-celled organisms, those which do not reproduce sexually through interchange with the "opposite sex" but reproduce through the division of cells, are considered immortal" (1995: 201). In a rather godly manner, *libertinage* spreads through and with the Word, the semen being completely superfluous on this point, rather a vehicle for pleasure than for procreation:

nocturnal pollutions, the inutility of semen during the periods of woman's pregnancy, are they not authorized by her [Nature's] laws, enjoined by them, and do they not prove that, very little concerned for what may result from this liquid to which we so foolishly attach a disproportionate value, she permits us its **waste** with the same indifference she herself causes it every day to be wasted; she tolerates reproduction, yes, but much is wanting to prove reproduction is one of her intentions [...] refusals to produce, waste of semen employed in production, the obliteration of that seed when it has germinated, the annihilation of that germ even long after its formation, all those, Thérèse, are imaginary crimes. (*HJ* 1791, 22)

Adjacent to this discussion, because of generalized references to animality, is the colonial context of the political rhetoric surrounding the Revolution. If women are once more relegated to domesticity as animals of burden, libertine acts are generally characterized as barbarous, savage, cannibalistic (when they are not in fact acts of cannibalism) and monstrous:

At first, he tries a few blows, it seems they are merely intended as a prelude; soon inflamed by lust, *the beast* strikes with all his force; nothing is exempt from his *ferocity* [...] my breasts are at the *brute's* mercy, he irritates them, uses his teeth upon them, *the cannibal* snaps, bites [...] (*HJ* 1791, 70)

Rodin ties her to the stake as he tied his scholars, and while one after another and sometimes both at once his domestics flay him, he beats his daughter, lashes her from her ribs to her knees, he flagellates: his *thongs bite deep everywhere, and wherever they fall, there immediately he presses his lips* [...] *everything is devoured by his suckings* (*Idem*, 53)

The *cannibal* who had cast me into their hands could have pulverized me, had he wished to, with one blow. (*Idem*, 106)

'But the man you describe is a *monster*.'  
'The man I describe is in tune with Nature.'

'He is a *savage beast*.' (*Idem*, 92)

In “Sex, Savagery, and Slavery in the Shaping of the French Body Politic,” Elizabeth Colwill argues that the 'civilization' debates in France critically turn, from the civilizability of the colonies, to the relation between the 'civilizedness' of the French population and citizen civility. Invoking Bordel's pamphlets titled *Opinion sur la régénération des mœurs* [Opinion on the regeneration of manners], where financiers, ecclesiastics, prostitutes, and celibates are designated as dangers for the civilizational rebirth of the French Republic (1998, 1998-200), Colwill in fact thematizes a local foreignness, an *inhumanity of our own*. Savagery (animality) and civilization (humanity) are, in the words of Julia Douthwaite, conceptual reductions of “the gamut from pseudo-scientific inquiries into humanity's original nature and institutional schemes for improving society through control of 'undesirables' to sensational fictions of exotic peoples and eyewitness views of anthropomorphic apes” (in Colwill 1998, 201). “Race” is slowly adopted, expanded, and reshaped in France, so as to encompass class and gender classifications as well (Tessie Liu, in Colwill 1998, 204).

The gendered *differential* grounding of reproduction, in biological sexuality or in logos, is erasable: within “sodomitic anality,” as Lucienne Frappier-Mazur argues in “The Social Body: Disorder and Ritual in Sade's *Story of Juliette*” (1991, 133), the gender difference is potentially negated, with a class-twist to it (the gender power difference being rendered inoperative in case the woman libertine possesses a higher social status than the male (non-) libertine, while it is reactivated by an unfavorable class difference).

The wealth you [Juliette] enjoy, your mind and your character lift you entirely out of this slavery. I only place there women-wives or whores, and in so doing I follow the laws of nature, which, as you see, only allow those beings to crawl. Mind, talent, riches, and credit lift up from the *weaker classes* those whom nature has placed there; and as soon as they enter the *class of the strong*, all the rights of the strong – tyranny, oppression, impunity, and the full exercise of all crimes, become entirely permitted them. I want you to be woman and slave with me and my friends, and a despot with all others. (in Frappier-Mazur 1991, 141)

Subsequently, biopolitical ‘sadism’ might, and might not, move along gender lines into a

(non)libertinization of the body, with direct life/death implications. When it fails to inhabit the gender fracture, it slips into class difference. The concept of “class,” just as Michel Foucault's concept of “race,” collapses multiple axes of differentiation, biological, social, political, epistemological. “Class” is the epistemological product of an act of classification that, as Foucault argues in *The Order of Things*, takes up various modalities and technologies of differentiation only to eventually collapse classifiable difference in the intelligible continuum of life (1973, 160-162).

Marquis de Sade formulates the problematics of class in the following terms:

the *offspring of the poor are exposed*, or are *put to death*. What is the good of *letting those creatures live* who, no longer able to count upon their parents' aid either because they are without parents or because they are not wanted or recognized by them, henceforth are *useful for nothing* and simply weigh upon the State: that much *surplus commodity*, you see, and the market is glutted already; bastards, orphans, malformed infants should be condemned to death immediately they are pupped: the first and the second because, no longer having anyone who wishes or who is able to take care of them, they are mere dregs which one day can have nothing but an undesirable effect upon the society they *contaminate*; the others because they cannot be of any usefulness to it; the one and the other of these categories are to society what are *excrescences* to the flesh, battenning upon the *healthy members' sap*, *degrading them*, *enfeebling them* [...] they are like those vegetable parasites which, attaching themselves to sound plants, cause them to deteriorate by sucking up their nutritive juices. [...] these alms are destined to feed the scum [...] as if human species were so rare, so precious one had to preserve it down to its last vile portion! But enough of *politics* (HJ 1791, 11)

Politics is defined, according to libertine thought, as precisely the work of classification of the biological resources of the State: politics is a work on and with life, for the life of those decided to be “useful,” and for the death of those decided to be cumbersome, unproductive, unmanageable, ineffective, briefly, more useful death than alive. What de Sade is introducing, in a mixed language of biological contamination and economic stagnation, is a bio-economy of State power, the *political economy of life*. Echoing many of Foucault's insights into the operations of modern government<sup>82</sup>, the libertine necro-philosophy demonstrating the rationality of the elimination of 'the poor' places biological life/death at the center of political existence. Furthermore, it creates the biopolitical difference, in terms of self-sustenance, self-regularization

---

<sup>82</sup> See Michel Foucault. 2003[1997]. *Society Must Be Defended: Lectures at Collège de France 1975-1976*. Trans. David Macey, Lecture 11. 239-264.

and productivity, between the living body of the State, and the extra-Statist parasitical existences that feed upon the State from within and lead to its ruin: it points to the internal enemy that the State must be purified from, or in an Agambenesque formulation, that the State must abandon. Economic non-existence translates into political and eventual biological death. This is the logic of Marquis de Sade's sadistic politics, because politics itself is impregnated, in its dealing with life, with the sadism of necropolitical reasoning (Mbembe 2008). The only solution offered to these inutile bodies is a different kind of usefulness: sexual. In *Histoire de Justine*, Monsieur Dubourg, one of the capital's richest tradesmen, asks “what right have you to expect the wealthy to relieve you if you are in no way useful to them” (Sade 1791, 10), since “it is essential that the misfortunate suffer; their humiliation, their anguishes are included in what Nature decrees, and their miserable existence is useful to the general scheme, as is that of the prosperity which crushes them” (*Idem*, 25).

The biopolitical discourse of the Sadean novels is extended, through what Foucault aptly termed State racism, in a version of 'class struggle' with potential to transcend, on certain occasions, the limits and possibilities of “class,” by extending itself across several “classes,” or axes of differentiation: it may be one explanation for the fact that aristocratic bodies, especially young girls, but also young boys, are targeted as well, as bodies-to-be-sadistically-used. But such a slippage from the difference of class to that of gender and eventually age recasts the question of reproduction in a different context.

the needy individual is to the State as a *parasite* branch is to the peach tree: it causes it to wither, drinks its sap and bears no fruit... My desire is that instead of bestowing a groat upon these misfortunates we concentrate our efforts on *wiping them out*; my desire is that they be totally *eliminated, extirpated*, exterminated; ... *killed* as one kills a *breed of noxious animals*.

(*Histoire de Juliette*, in Quinlan 2006a, 245)

[The poor are] like those vegetable *parasites* which, attaching themselves to sound plants, cause them to deteriorate by sucking up their nutritive juices [...]

(*Philosophy in the Bedroom*, in Quinlan 2006a: 241)

One of the foremost of this nation's defects consists in a population by far too numerous, and much is wanting when such overabundances become considered the State's riches. These supernumerary beings are like unto the *parasitical branches* which, living only at the trunk's expense, always bring it to final decline. [...] No asylum for the shameful fruit of debauchery; *it is not preserved; it is abandoned*, just

as are the aftermaths of digestion no establishments for poverty.  
(*Philosophy in the Bedroom* 1795, 216)

We have more subjects in France than are needed; given the mechanism's elastic capacities for production, the *State can easily afford to be burdened by fewer people*.  
(*Histoire de Justine* 1791, 11)

However, the plasticity of the *race-class* concept, together with its biopolitical nuances, can be better comprehended when looking at pre-Revolutionary political pamphlets in which a French disease is proclaimed (in time for a Revolutionary healing): “in the trunk that forms the administration of the State [there is a] deep wound that has long been open, that has been imperceptibly gotten larger, and that does not cease enlarging” (in Baecque 1997[1993], 80). Similarly, the political thinker The Abbé deplores the unhealthiness of the French state: “Let me say frankly, I find [the body of France] depraved, and the vice of it seems enormous to me. That is because it tends to debase the great body of citizens” (*Idem*, 84). In the (aristocratic) libertines' discourse, the decadence of the political machinery was mainly economical, whereas the revolutionary pamphlets point to a moral disease associated to the aristocratic constitution:

In the heart of the *privileged* one is born the need to command, an insatiable desire for domination. This desire, unfortunately all too similar to the human constitution, is a true antisocial malady, and if by its very essence it must always be injurious, consider its ravages when opinion and law come to lend it their powerful support. [The privileged] thinks of himself as forming with his colleagues a separate order, a chosen nation within the Nation. There no longer exists that body of which he was a member, no longer the people, the people who soon in his language, as in his heart, are nothing but a congeries of *worthless* persons, a class of men created expressly to serve, while he is made to command and enjoy. Yes, the *privileged really come to regard themselves as another species of man*.  
(From *Essay on Privileges*, in Baecque 1997, 84)

In the political debates on the need to regenerate the French nation, it is the aristocratic body that, “lack[ing] useful organs,” is unable “to exist by itself” save from acting “like those parasitic growths that cannot live except on the sap of plants that they exhaust and deplete” (in Baecque 1997, 85). The language of power is reversely instrumentalized, and where in Marquis de Sade the poor class is designated as the economical money-sucker of the State, the privileged of the political satire is the biological blood-sucker of the population: “Businessmen who sucked the blood of the people in the nascent dawn [...] these real suckers of blood did not live in the



cemeteries, but in splendid palaces,” reads Voltaire's *Encyclopedia* entry on “Vampires” (in Baecque 1997[1993], 178). And the Sadean libertines admit to their hunger for flesh: they “promote commercial and economic fluctuations or instigate the rise of prices which, enlarging the poverty-stricken class, depriving it, on the one hand, of possibilities of work and on the other rendering difficult those of survival, increases according to a predictable ratio the total number of the subjects misery puts into [their] hands” (*HJ* 1791, 122).

The central argument of this chapter has been that: (1) the Sadean *libertine* functions as a space and as a means for a sovereign decision intrinsic to power to take place; this decision, insofar as it deals with a 'living material' that it both produces and instrumentalizes via a differentiation it itself posits, affects not only what can be counted as 'living material,' and what cannot, but also the livingness/ death conditions of this material; (2) 'sadism' is biopolitical insofar it is the modality of the sovereign decision allowing for the emergence of a “libertine/ non-libertine difference” that traverses and slaloms across various interlocking axes of difference (gender, class, age, non/ reproductive sexuality). This difference is an act of self-exposure, through which power's tensionality within and between bodies illuminates through the flesh.

## CONCLUSION

Indeed, I find it very hard, if perhaps not impossible, to sum up in a statement what I have been trying to do with the present thesis, in the company of Sade, Foucault and Agamben. I might argue that I have been following (and constructing?) a logic of action which power employs in its grappling with the living and the dying of concrete, material, specifiable bodies, toward its infinite and infinitesimal re-inscription in unpredictable ways. I might add that 'abstracting' this logic of action from the apparently 'baroque'<sup>83</sup> couplings of bodies evinced within Marquis de Sade's *libertine* novels is not perhaps without consequence for re-thinking the meanings attributed to 'Enlightenment,' the modalities in which such qualifications have been inscribed within history, and histories of thought, and what is precisely at stake within such (re)positionings. Dare I say that the kind of 'abstraction' I am performing when looking at the ways in which bodies come together, in sex and in torture, in pain and in pleasure, in living and in dying, is not separated from this same very logic of power that I have attempted to sketch as if potentially traceable only elsewhere, and not also in the very process of analyzing (toward) it. Dare I count among the meanings of 'Enlightenment' the very fact of proceeding to 'abstract' this sovereign logic of power from the muddy and messy encounters bodies have, and have had, with each other, whether in orgies or in massacres.

I have rethought Sadean writings through the prism of the biopolitically re-signified concepts of 'sovereignty,' 'cruelty,' and 'libertinization.' I have defined 'sovereignty' as the *modus operandi* of power premised upon a decision on human life, and upon its constant re-definition through a differentiation between pain/ pleasure, life/death, libertine/ non-libertine bodies. This

---

83 "Baroque" is a term used to identify a series of pan-Western European artistic, cultural and social phenomena taking place during the 17th century, as distinct from both Renaissance and Classicism, although the idea of a "Baroque age" has largely remained under-theorized. "Baroque" refers to the preoccupation with paradox and contrast, with asymmetry and distortion, with imagery and sensual detail" (Schuster 2008). As such, it is also a 'style of thought' (Gabrielle Perretta 2007, Giuseppe Patella 2007).

libertine/ non-libertine difference has been foregrounded as the excesses of difference – the fact that there is a process in the workings of power which allows *some* difference always to be made, over and against all other differences (in gender, sexual practices, class, age etc.) so as a redistribution of life/ death can always take place. 'Sadism' has been reconfigured beyond its psychoanalytic significance, as the manner in which any relation of power is lived in/ through difference-making in the field of the 'living', in ways unpredictable and always shifting. Yet this does not seem to say much. What did I argue which I could not have argued if I hadn't chosen Marquis de Sade for experimental material? Is it just that the quantity of bodies killed, mutilated, bled, sexually molested enables, at a certain point, a qualitative statement to emerge with respect to what Marquis de Sade's work can do for us today?

I believe these questions need both pondering upon, and relocation within the thematics of 'Enlightenment.' I hope I will be able to target this issue in the following project, by expanding both the analyzed literature (from Marquis de Sade to French 17<sup>th</sup> -18<sup>th</sup> century erotic writings more generally), and by focusing on a topic which has always constituted the thorny side of Enlightenment knowledge-production, state politics, and inter-body traffics: sensation – especially the separability of pain/ pleasure- as a sovereign space of the (bio)political. Nonetheless, even for the purposes of the present study, it seems too early to conclude. I want to keep on asking for a while: What does Enlightenment have to do with torture have to do with non/ reproductive sex have to do with living/ dying have to do with power have to do with women/ children/ poor/ racial others/ animals have to do with knowledge and its specialized philosophico-scientific languages have to do with the fact that I am suggesting this question as important in any way.

## A. Primary Sources

de Sade, Marquis. 1990[1782]. "Dialogue between a Priest and a Dying Man". In *Marquis de Sade: Justine, Philosophy in the Bedroom & Other Writings*, ed., comp & trans [1965] R. Seaver & A. Wainhouse. 165-175. Grove Press.

de Sade, Marquis. 1791. *Justine, or Good Conduct Well-Chastised*. At Globusz Publishing <http://www.globusz.com/ebooks/Justine/>

de Sade, Marquis. 1990[1795]. "Philosophy in the Bedroom". In *Marquis de Sade: Justine, Philosophy in the Bedroom & Other Writings*, ed., comp & trans [1965] R. Seaver & A. Wainhouse. 185-367. Grove Press.

de Sade, Marquis. 2002[1785]. *The 120 Days of Sodom*. Trans. R. Seaver & A. Wainhouse. Digitized & typeset by Supervert 32C Inc.

## B. Secondary Sources

Achille, Mbembe. 2008. "Necropolitics." In *Foucault in the Age of Terror: Essays on Biopolitics and the Defense of Society*, ed. Stephen Morton and Stephen Bygrave, 152-182. Hampshire & New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Agamben, Giorgio. 1998 [1995]. *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*. Trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen. California: Stanford University Press.

Agamben, Giorgio. 2000 [1996]. "Form-of-life." In *Means Without End. Notes on Politics*, 3-12. Minneapolis & London: Minnesota Press.

Agamben, Giorgio. 2004. *The Open: Man and Animal*. California: Stanford University Press.

Agamben, Giorgio. 2005 [2003]. *State of Exception*. Trans. Kevin Attell. London: Chicago Press.

Agamben, Giorgio. 2009. "What is An Apparatus?" and Other Essays. Ed. Werner Hamacher. Trans. David Kishik and Stefan Pedatella. California: Stanford University Press.

Agamben, Giorgio. 2009. *The Signature of All Things. On Method*. Trans. Luca D'Isanto and Kevin Attell. New York: Zone Books.

Ahrens, Jörn. 2005. "Freedom and Sovereignty. A fatal Relationship Outlined with Jean-Luc Nancy and Marquis de Sade." *Law and Critique* 16: 301-313.

Allison, David, and Roberts, Mark, and Weiss Allen. 2006 [1995]. "Introduction." In *Sade and the Narrative of Transgression*, ed. David Allison, Mark Roberts and Allen Weiss, 1-15. Cambridge & New York: Cambridge University Press.

Baecque de, Antoine. 1997 [1993]. *The Body Politic: Corporeal Metaphor in Revolutionary France, 1770-1800*. Trans. Charlotte Mandell. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Barroux, G. 2009. "Regards anatomiques sur le corps pathologique et sur le corps monstrueux dans la médecine du XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle" [Anatomical views on the pathological and the monstrous body in 18<sup>th</sup> century medicine]. In *Le Discours du Corps au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle: Littérature-Philosophie-Histoire-Science* [The Discourse on the Body in the 18<sup>th</sup> century: Literature-Philosophy-History-Science], ed. H. Cussac, A. D.-Tunney and C. Seth, 325-336. Canada: Presses de l'Université Laval. 325-336.

Barroux, G. 2009. "Vitalisme et anthropologie au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle en France: L'exemple des recherches de Théophile de Bordeu sur les glandes" [Vitalism and anthropology in 18<sup>th</sup> century France: The case of the Théophile de Bodeu's research on the glands.] In *Matérialismes des modernes: nature et moeurs* [Materialisms of the moderns: nature and manners], ed. Josiane Boulad-Ayoub and Alexandra Torero-Ibad, 179-219. Quebec: Presses de l'Université Laval.

Bataille, Georges. 2006 [1995]. "The Use Value of D. A. F. Sade (an open letter to my current comrades). In *Sade and the Narrative of Transgression*, ed. David Allison, Mark Roberts and Allen Weiss, 16-32. Cambridge & New York: Cambridge University Press.

Bataille, Georges. 1991. "What I Understand by Sovereignty." In *The Accursed Share: An Essay in General Economy*. Vol. III. Trans. Robert Hurley. 197-257. New York: Zone Books.

Bataille, Gorges. 2004 [1985]. "The Solar Anus" & "The Practice of Joy Before Death." In *Visions of Excess. Selected Writings, 1927-1939*, ed. Allan Stoekl. Trans. Allan Stoekl, Carl Lovitt and Donald Leslie Jr., 5-9 and 235-239. Cambridge & New York: Cambridge University Press.

Beirne, Piers. (1993). "Toward a Science of *Homo Criminalis*: Cesare Beccaria's *Dei Delitti e Delle Pene* (1764)." In *Inventing Criminology: Essays on the Rise of Homo Criminalis*. Albany: State University of New York Press. 11-64.

Bender, J. 2010. "Novel Knowledge: Judgment, Experience, Experiment." In *This is Enlightenment*, ed. C. Siskin and W. Warner, 284-300. Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press.

Benjamin, Andrew. 2008. "Particularity and Exceptions: On Jews and Animals." In *The South Atlantic Quarterly* (Winter) 107. 1: The Agamben Effect, 71-87. Durham: Duke University Press.

Benrekassa, G. 1998. "Libertinage and Figurations of Desire: The Legend of a Century." *Yale French Studies* 94: Libertinage and Modernity, 29-51. Trans. Sophie Aslanides. Yale University Press.

Boulad-Ayoub, Josiane and Torero-Ibad, Alexandra. 2009. "Introduction générale. Matérialismes des modernes: nature et moeurs" [General Introduction. Materialisms of the moderns: nature and manners]. In *Matérialismes des modernes: nature et moeurs*, ed. Boulad-Ayoub and Torero-Ibad, 7-14. Quebec: Presses de l'Université Laval.

Bouveau-Devos, K. 2009. "Le Paradoxe de la Nudité chez Sade" [The Nudity Paradox in Sade]. In *Le Corps Romanesque: Images et Usages Topiques sous L' Ancien Régime* [The Romanesque Body: Topical Images and Usages during Ancient Regime], ed. Monique Moser-Verrey, Lucie Desjardins and Chantal Turbide, 119-129. Quebec: Les Presses de l' Université Laval.

- Brandstetter, T. 2008. "Sentimental Hydraulics: Utopia and Technology in 18th Century France." In *Philosophies of Technology: Francis Bacon and his Contemporaries*, ed. C. Zittel, G. Engel et al., 495-513. Intersections: Yearbook of Early Modern Studies 11/1. Karl Enenkel (Gen. Ed.) Leiden & Boston: Brill.
- Brix, Michel. 2007. "Sade est-il un philosophe des Lumières?" [Is Sade an Enlightenment Philosopher?]. *Trans/Form/Ação* 30 (2): 11-22.
- Brown, D. B. 2009. "The Female *Philosophe* in the Closet: The *Cabinet* and the Senses in the French Erotic Novels, 1740 -1800." *Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies* 9.2 (Fall/ Winter): 96-123. Indiana University Press.
- Canguilhem, Georges. 2008. *Knowledge of Life*. Ed. Paola Marrati and Todd Meyers. Trans. Stefanos Geroulanos and Daniela Ginsburg. New York: Fordham University Press.
- Carter, A. 2009 [1979]. *The Sadeian Woman: An Exercise in Cultural History*. London: Virago Press.
- Cassirer, E. 2009 [1951]. "The Mind of the Enlightenment." In *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment*. 3-92. Princeton University Press.
- Connolly, W. 2007. "The Complexities of Sovereignty." In *Giorgio Agamben: Sovereignty & Life*, ed. M. Calarco and S. DeCaroli, 23-42. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Colwill, Elizabeth. 1998. "Sex, Savagery, and Slavery in the Shaping of the French Body Politic." In *From the Royal to the Republican Body: Incorporating the Political in Seventeenth and Eighteenth-Century France*, ed. Sarah Melzer & Kathryn Norberg, 198-223. Berkley, Los Angeles & London: University of California Press.
- Corbin, Alain. 2008. "Intalnirea corporilor" [The Encounter of Bodies] & "Dureri, suferinta si mizerii ale corpului" [Pains, Sufferings and Miseries of the Body]. In *Istoria Corpului Vol. 2: De la Revolutia Franceza la Primul Razboi Mondial* [History of the Body Vol 2: From the French Revolution to the First World War], ed. A. Corbin, J.-J. Courtine & G. Vigarello, 163-306. Grupul Editorial ART.
- Crozier, Ivan. 2004. "Philosophy in the English Boudoir: Havelock Ellis, Love and Pain, and Sexological Discourses on Algophilia." *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 13.3 (July): 275-305. University of Texas press.
- Cusset, Catherine. 1998. "Editor's Preface: The Lesson of Libertinage." *Yale French Studies* 94: Libertinage and Modernity, 1-14. Yale University Press.
- Cusset, Catherine, and Sollers, Philippe. 1998. "What is Libertinage?" *Yale French Studies* 94: Libertinage and Modernity, 199-212. Trans. Roger Celestin. Yale University Press.
- DeCaroli, Steven. 2007. "Boundary Stones: Giorgio Agamben and the Field of Sovereignty." In *Giorgio Agamben: Sovereignty & Life*, ed. M. Calarco & S. DeCaroli, 43-69. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Delon, Michel. 1987. "The Priest, The Philosopher & Homosexuality in Enlightenment France." In *'Tis Nature's Fault: Unauthorized Sexuality during the Enlightenment*, ed. R. P. MacCubbin, 122-131. Cambridge & New York: Cambridge University Press.

- Deleuze, G. 1991. *Masochism: Coldness and Cruelty*. New York: Zone Books.
- Derrida, Jacques. 1987. "The Parergon." *The Truth in Painting*, 37-82. Trans. Geoff Bennington & Ian McLeod. Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press.
- Dreyfus, Hubert, and Rabinow, Paul. 1983. *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*. The University of Chicago Press.
- Dubost, Jean-Pierre. 1998. "Libertinage and Rationality: From the "Will to Knowledge" to Libertine Textuality." *Yale French Studies* 94: Libertinage and Modernity. 52-78. Yale University Press.
- Epple, M. 2008. "The Gap between Theory and Practice: Hydrodynamical and Hydraulical Utopia in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century." In *Philosophies of Technology: Francis Bacon and his Contemporaries*, ed. C. Zittel, G. Engel et al., 457-493. Intersections: Yearbook of Early Modern Studies 11/1. Karl Enenkel (Gen. Ed.) Leiden & Boston: Brill.
- Evans, D. & Griffiths, K. 2008. "Introduction." In *Pleasure and Pain in Nineteenth-Century French Literature and Culture*, ed. Evans & Griffiths, 9-27. Amsterdam & New York: Rodopi.
- Ferguson, Francis. 1991. "Sade and the Pornographic Legacy." *Representations* 36 (Autumn): 1-21. University of California Press.
- Foucault, Michel. 2007. *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at Collège de France 1977-1978*, ed. M. Senellart. Trans. Graham Burchell. Hampshire & New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Foucault, Michel. 2003[1997]. *Society Must Be Defended: Lectures at Collège de France 1975-1976*, ed. Mauro Bertani & Alessandro Fontana. Trans. David Macey. New York: Picador.
- Foucault, Michel. 1997. "Friendship as a Way of Life." In *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth: The Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984*. Vol.1. Ed. Paul Rabinow. 135-140. New Press.
- Foucault, Michel. 1996. "What is Critique?" In *What is Enlightenment?: Eighteenth-century Answers and Twentieth-Century Questions*, ed. James Schmidt, 382-398. Berkeley, Los Angeles & London: University of California Press.
- Foucault, Michel. 1991. "Governmentality." In *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality*, ed. Burchell, et al., 87-104. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Foucault, Michel. 1990 [1978]. *History of Sexuality Vol. 1.: The Will to Knowledge*. Trans. Robert Hurley. New York: Pantheon Books.
- Foucault, Michel. 1984. "What is Enlightenment?" In *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow, 32-50. New York: Pantheon Books.
- Foucault, Michel. 1973. "Classifying." In *The Order of Things: Archeology of the Human Sciences*. 125-165. New York: Vintage Books.
- Frappier-Mazur, L. 1991. "The Social Body: Disorder & Ritual in Sade's *Story of Juliette*." In *Eroticism and the Body Politic*, ed. Lynn Hunt, 131-143. Baltimore & London: The John Hopkins University Press.

- Frappier-Mazur, L. 1998. "Sadean Libertinage and the Esthetics of Violence." *Yale French Studies* 94: Libertinage and Modernity. 184-198. Yale University Press.
- Gillan, R. 2008. "'Cet esprit le plus libre qui ait encore existé': Sade and the Spiritual Libertines." *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies*. 31.4: 513-528.
- Genette, Gerard. 1997. *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*. Cambridge & New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Gordon, Colin. 1991. "Governmental rationality: an introduction." In *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality*, ed. Burchell, *et al.*, 1-51. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Goulemot, J.-M. 1998. "Toward a Definition of Libertine Fiction and Pornographic Novels." *Yale French Studies* 94: Libertinage and Modernity. 133-145. Trans. Arthur Greenspan. Yale University Press.
- Grosz, E. 1995. "Animal Sex: Libido as Desire and Death." In *Space, time, and perversion: Essays on the politics of the body*. 187-205. New York & London: Routledge.
- Guicciardi, J.-P. 1987. "Between the Licit & the Illicit: The Sexuality of the King." In *'Tis Nature's Fault: Unauthorized Sexuality during the Enlightenment*, ed. R. P. MacCubbin, 88-97. Cambridge & New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Guyon, L. 2008. "Le Sex-Appel de la Veuve: Guillotine et Fantasmies Romantiques" [The Widow's Sex-Appeal: The Guillotine and Romantic Phantasms]. In *Pleasure and Pain in Nineteenth-Century French Literature and Culture*, ed. Evans & Griffiths, 99-109. Amsterdam & New York: Rodopi.
- Hanns Reill, P. 2005. "Storming 'the temple of error': Buffon, the *Histoire Naturelle*, and the Midcentury Origins of Enlightenment Vitalism." In *Vitalizing Nature in the Enlightenment*. 3-71. Berkeley, Los Angeles & London: University of California Press.
- Hanns Reill, P. 2005. "Within the Circle of Organized Life." In *Vitalizing Nature in the Enlightenment*. 119-158. Berkeley, Los Angeles & London: University of California Press.
- Hanns Reill, P. 2005. "The Metamorphoses of Change." In *Vitalizing Nature in the Enlightenment*. 159-198. Berkeley, Los Angeles & London: University of California Press.
- Hayes, J. C. 1989. "'Aristocrate ou démocrate? Vous me le direz': Sade's Political Pamphlets." *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 23 (Autumn) 1: 24-41.
- Heller-Roazen, D. 2009. *The Inner Touch: An Archeology of a Sensation*. New York: Zone Books.
- Hénaff, M. 1998. "Naked Terror: Political Violence, Libertine Violence." *SubStance* 86: 5-32.
- Hénaff, M. 1999 [1978]. *Sade: The Invention of the Libertine Body*. Trans. Xavier Callahan. Minneapolis & London: University of Minnesota Press.
- Herman, Jan, and Hallyn, Fernand. (ed.) 1999. *Le Topos du Manuscrit Trouvé: Hommages à Christian Angelet*. [The Topos of the Found Manuscript: Homages to Christian Angelet]. Louvain & Paris:



Éditions Peeters.

Heumakers, A. 1989. "De Sade, a pessimistic libertine." In *From Sappho to de Sade: Moments in the History of Sexuality*, ed. Bremmer, 108-122. London & New York: Routledge.

Heyd, Michael. 1995. *"To Be Sober and Reasonable": The Critique of Enthusiasm in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*. Leiden: Brill.

Houdard, Sophie. 2001. "Vie de scandale et Écriture de l'obscène: hypothèses sur le libertinage de mœurs au XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle" [Life of scandal and obscene writing: hypotheses on the licentiousness of manners in the 17th century]. *Tangence* 66: 48-66.

Hunt, Lynn. 1991. "The Many Bodies of Marie Antoinette: Political Pornography & the Problem of the Feminine in the French Revolution." In *Eroticism and the Body Politic*, ed. Lynn Hunt, 108-130. Baltimore & London: The John Hopkins University Press.

Hunt, Lynn. 1992. "The Bad Mother" & "Sade's Family Politics." In *The Family Romance of the French Revolution*. 89-150. Berkeley & Los Angeles: University California Press.

Israel, Jonathan. 2001. "Introduction." In *Radical Enlightenment: Philosophy and the Making of Modernity 1650-1750*. 3-13. Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press.

Israel, Jonathan. 2008. "Early Enlightenment, Revolution, and the Modern Age." In *Enlightenment Contested: Philosophy, Modernity, and the Emancipation of Man, 1670 – 1752*. 3-15. Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press.

Israel, Jonathan. 2008. "Men, Animals, Plants and Fossils: French Hylozoic *Matérialisme* before Diderot." In *Enlightenment Contested: Philosophy, Modernity, and the Emancipation of Man, 1670 – 1752*. 733 -750. Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press.

Karavanta, Mina and Morgan, Nina. 2008. "Humanism, Hybridity, and Democratic Praxis." In *Edward Said & Jacques Derrida: Reconstellating Humanism and the Global Hybrid*, ed. Karavanta & Morgan, 1-21. Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

Kavanagh, T. M. 1998. "The Libertine Moment." *Yale French Studies* 94: Libertinage and Modernity. 79-100. Yale University Press.

Klossowski, Pierre. 1965. "A Destructive Philosophy." *Yale French Studies*. 35: The House of Sade. 61-80. Yale University Press.

Klossowski, Pierre. 2006 [1995]. "Sade, or the Philosopher-Villain." In *Sade and the Narrative of Transgression*, ed. David Allison, Mark Roberts and Allen Weiss, 33-61. Cambridge & New York: Cambridge University Press.

Koumba, B. 2009. "La Représentation du Corps chez Sade: Visée Encyclopédique et Régénérescence du Corps." [Bodily Representation in Sade: Encyclopedic view and bodily regeneracy]. In *Le Discours du Corps au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle: Littérature-Philosophie-Histoire-Science* [The Discourse on the Body in the 18<sup>th</sup> century: Literature-Philosophy-History-Science], ed. H. Cussac, A. D.-Tunney & C. Seth, 31-42. Canada: Presses de l'Université Laval. 31-42.

Kozul, M. 2009. "Physiologie du Corps érotique, Imaginaire de la Science" [Physiology of the

Erotic Body, Imaginary of Science]. In *Le Discours du Corps au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle: Littérature-Philosophie-Histoire-Science* [The Discourse on the Body in the 18<sup>th</sup> century: Literature-Philosophy-History-Science], ed. H. Cussac, A. D.-Tunney & C. Seth, 11-29. Canada: Presses de l' Université Laval.

La Mettrie. 1994. *Man-Machine, and Man a Plant*. Introd. Justin Lieber. Trans. Richard A. Watson & Maya Rybalka. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company.

Latour, B. 1993 [1991]. "Constitution." *We Have Never Been Modern*. 13-48. Trans. Catherine Porter. Cambridge & Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.

Leon, Alberto Pinzon. 2004. "Foucault contra Sade o Foucault con Sade? Del Sadismo al Sadomasoquismo" [Foucault against Sade or Foucault with Sade? From Sadism to Sadomasochism]. *Antroposmoderno*. 1-19. P.I.C.A.S.O. Editions. Retrieved at [http://www.antroposmoderno.com/antro-articulo.php?id\\_articulo=700](http://www.antroposmoderno.com/antro-articulo.php?id_articulo=700)

MacCormack, Patricia. 2005. "Necrosexuality." *Rhizomes*. 11/12. Retrieved at <http://www.rhizomes.net/issue11/maccormack/index.html>

Martin, C. F. 1998. "From the Mark to the Mask: Notes on Libertinage and Utopianism." 101-115. *Yale French Studies* 94: Libertinage and Modernity. Yale University Press.

Mayer, R.-O. 2009. "Jean Meslier: curé, athée et enragé!" [Jean Meslier: priest, atheist and angered!]. In *Matérialismes des modernes: nature et moeurs*, ed. Boulad-Ayoub and Torero-Ibad, 105-130. Quebec: Presses de l' Université Laval.

Matus, Jill. 2009. "Introduction: The Psyche in Pain." In *Shock, Memory and the Unconscious in Victorian Fiction*. 1-19. Cambridge & New York: Cambridge University Press.

Muir, Edward. 2007. "The Libertines." In *The Culture Wars in Late Renaissance: Skeptics, Libertines, and Opera*. 61-107. Cambridge & London: Harvard University Press.

Meeker, Natania. 2006. *Voluptuous Philosophy: Literary Materialism in the French Enlightenment*. New York: Fordham University Press.

Merrick, J. 1998. "The Body Politics of French Absolutism". In *From the Royal to the Republican Body: Incorporating the Political in Seventeenth and Eighteenth-century France*, ed. Sarah Melzer & Kathryn Norberg, 11-31. Berkeley, Los Angeles & London: University of California Press.

Miller, N. 1998. "Libertinage and Feminism." *Yale French Studies* 94: Libertinage and Modernity. 17-28. Yale University Press.

Niranjana, T. 1992. "Introduction: History in Translation." In *Siting Translation. History, Post-Structuralism, and the Colonial Context*. 1-47. Berkeley: UCP.

Norris, Andrew. 2000. "Giorgio Agamben and the Politics of the Living Dead." *Diacritics*. 30.4 (Winter): 38-58. The John Hopkins University Press. Retrieved on 08/04/2010 at <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1566307?origin=JSTOR-pdf>

Olkowski, D. 1990. "Monstrous Reflection: Sade and Masoch – Rewriting the History of Reason." In *Crises in Continental Philosophy*, ed. Arlene B. Dallery & Charles E. Scott, 189-199. Albany: SUNY Press.

Osler, Margaret J. 2010. *Reconfiguring the World: Nature, God, and Human Understanding from the Middle Ages to Early Modern Europe*. Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press.

Patella, G. 2007. "Giambattista Vico o del Barocco filosofico" [Giambattista Vico, or on Philosophical Baroque]. In *Barock, ein Ort des Gedächtnisses: Interpretament der Moderne/Postmoderne*, ed. C. Moritz & F. Celestini. Wien: Böhlau.

Perretta, G. 2007. "Immagine, parossismo ed intensità di percezione. Critica e teoria del ridondante tra Benjamin, Debord e Deleuze..." [Image, paroxysm and intensity of perception. Criticism and theorization of the redundant through Benjamin, Debord and Deleuze...]. In *Barock, ein Ort des Gedächtnisses: Interpretament der Moderne/Postmoderne*, ed. C. Moritz & F. Celestini. Wien: Böhlau.

Phillips, J. 2005. *The Marquis de Sade: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford & New York: OUP

Poovey, Mary. 1998. "The Modern Fact, The Problem of Induction, and Questions of Method." In *A History of the Modern Fact. Problems of Knowledge in the Sciences of Wealth and Society*. 1-25. Chicago/ London: The University of Chicago Press.

Porter, Roy & Vigarello, Georges. 2008. "Corpul, sanatatea si bolile" [The body, its health and diseases]. In *Istoria Corpului Vol. 1: De la Renastere la Secolul Luminilor* [History of the Body Vol 1: From the Renaissance to the Enlightenment], ed. Alain Corbin, Jean-Jacques Courtine, Georges Vigarello, 406-447. Grupul Editorial ART.

Quinlan, Sean. 2006a. "Medicine in the Boudoir: Sade and moral hygiene in post-Thermidorean politics." *Textual Practice* 20(2): 231-255.

Quinlan, Sean. 2006b. "Inheriting Vice, Acquiring Virtue: Hereditary Disease and Moral Hygiene in Eighteenth-Century France." *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 80.4 (Winter): 649-675. The John Hopkins University Press.

Rasch, William. 2007. "From Sovereign Ban to Banning Sovereignty." In *Giorgio Agamben: Sovereignty & Life*, ed. M. Calarco and S. DeCaroli, 92-108. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Riskin, Jessica. 2002. *Science in the Age of Sensibility: The Sentimental Empiricists of the French Enlightenment*. Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press.

Roger, P. 2006 [1995]. "A political minimalist." In *Sade and the Narrative of Transgression*, ed. David Allison, Mark Roberts & Allen Weiss, 76-99. Cambridge & New York: Cambridge University Press.

Rousseau, George S. 2004. "Originated Neurology: Nerves, Spirits and Fibers, 1969-2004." In *Nervous Acts: Essays on Literature, Culture and Sensibility*. 3-80. Hampshire & New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Rousseau, George S. 2004. "Nerves, Spirits, and Fibers: Toward the Origins of Sensibility (1975)." In *Nervous Acts: Essays on Literature, Culture and Sensibility*. 157-184. Hampshire & New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Russo, E. 1997. "Sociability, Cartesianism, and Nostalgia in Libertine Discourse." *Eighteenth-*

*Century Studies* 30.4 (Summer): Models of Virtue and Vice. 383-400. The John Hopkins University Press.

Saint-Martin, A. 2009. "Le Corps-Spectacle dans le roman érotique: entre l'anatomie et le libertinage" [The Body-Spectacle in the Erotic Novel: between anatomy and libertinage]. In *Le Corps Romanesque: Images et Usages Topiques sous L' Ancien Régime* [The Romanesque Body: Topical Images and Usages during Ancient Regime], ed. Monique Moser-Verrey, Lucie Desjardins & Chantal Turbide, 147-170. Quebec: Les Presses de l' Université Laval.

Salcedo, J. J. 2004. "La mécanique du plaisir: les espaces privés et les machines dans quelques romans du XVIIIe siècle" [The Mechanics of Pleasure: Private Spaces and Machines in Some Novels of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century]. *El texto como encrucijada: estudios franceses y francófonos* [The Text as Intersection: French and Francophone Studies], ed. Ignacio Iñarrea Las Heras & Maria Salinero Cascante, 1: 225-232. Retrieved at <http://dialnet.unirioja.es/servlet/libro?codigo=5269>

Schiebinger, Londa. 1992. *Nature's Body: Gender in the Making of Modern Science*. Massachusetts: Beacon Press.

Schuster, J. 2008. "What was the Relation of Baroque Culture to the Trajectory of Early Modern Natural Philosophy?: A Historiographical Reflection, Inspired by Maravall's Culture of the Baroque – Analysis of a Historical Structure." For the 2nd International Workshop of the Baroque Science Project, HPS Unit, University of Sydney, Feb 2008. Retrieved from [http://sydney.edu.au/science/hps/baroque\\_science/bscicon\\_feb\\_audio.shtml](http://sydney.edu.au/science/hps/baroque_science/bscicon_feb_audio.shtml)

Schmidt, James. 1996. "Introduction: What is Enlightenment? A Question, Its Context, and Some Consequences." In *What is Enlightenment?: Eighteenth-Century Answers and Twentieth-Century Questions*, ed. James Schmidt, 1-45. Berkeley, Los Angeles & London: University of California Press.

Schmitt, Carl. 2004. *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*. Chicago: Chicago University Press.

Silverman, L. 2001. *Tortured Subjects: Pain, Truth, and the Body in Early Modern France*. Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press.

Spica, A.-E. 2009. "La Représentation des corps mourants ou morts dans les fictions narratives en langue française au XVIIe siècle" [The Representation of dying or dead bodies in French and Francophone fictional narratives during the 17th century]. In *Le Corps Romanesque: Images et Usages Topiques sous L' Ancien Régime* [The Romance Body: Topical Images and Usages during the Ancient Regime], ed. Monique Moser-Verrey, Lucie Desjardins & Chantal Turbide, 131-145. Quebec: Les Presses de l' Université Laval.

Spink, J. 1947. "Libertinage et 'Spinozisme': La Théorie de l' Âme Ignée." [Libertinage and 'Spinozism': The Theory of the Inflamed Soul]. *French Studies* 1(3): 218-231. Downloaded from <http://fs.oxfordjournals.org/content/1/3/218.full.pdf+html?sid=8ba7ab2e-6471-496f-8227-c969ea7003c8>

Steintrager, J. 2004. "The Model of Moral Monstrosity," "The Paradox of Inhumanity," "Science and Insensibility" & "The Ethics and Aesthetics of Human Vivisection." In *Cruel Delight: Enlightenment Culture & The Inhuman*. 3-33 & 87-145. Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.

- Stewart, P. 2009. "Faire souffrir" [Making suffer]. In *Le Corps Romanesque: Images et Usages Topiques sous L' Ancien Régime* [The Romance Body: Topical Images and Usages during the Ancient Regime], ed. Monique Moser-Verrey, Lucie Desjardins & Chantal Turbide, 25-55. Quebec: Les Presses de l' Université Laval.
- Swann, J. 2007. "Silence, respect obedience!': Political Culture in Louis XV's France." In *Cultures of Power in Europe during the Long Eighteenth-Century*, ed. H. Scott & B. Simms, 225-248. Cambridge & New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Taylor, Charles. 1992. *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity*. Cambridge & New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Thorndike, Lynn. 1929. *A History of Magic and Experimental Science Vol. 1*. New York: The Macmillan Company.
- Toma, Radu. (1982). *Epistema, ideologie, roman: secolul XVIII francez* [Episteme, Ideology, Novel: The French 18<sup>th</sup> Century]. Bucharest: Univers Press.
- Turner, J. 1987. "The Properties of Libertinism." In *'Tis Nature's Fault: Unauthorized Sexuality during the Enlightenment*, ed. R. P. MacCubbin, 75-87. Cambridge & New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Van Walle & Musham. 1995. "Fatal Secrets and the French Fertility Transition." *Population and Development Review* 21.2: 261-279.
- Vila, Anne C. 1998. "On Sensibility, the Sensible Body, and the Frontiers of Literature and Medicine." In *Enlightenment and Pathology: Sensibility in the Literature and Medicine of 18<sup>th</sup> century France*. 1-10. Maryland & London: The John Hopkins University Press. Retrieved 05/04/11 at [http://books.google.com/booksid=5ZNBeTDWciAC&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs\\_ge\\_summary\\_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false](http://books.google.com/booksid=5ZNBeTDWciAC&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false)
- Vila, Anne C. 1998. "Constructing a Vital Property: The New Physiology and Psycho-Philosophy of Sensibility." In *Enlightenment and Pathology: Sensibility in the Literature and Medicine of 18<sup>th</sup> century France*. 13-37. Maryland & London: The John Hopkins University Press. Retrieved 05/04/11 at [http://books.google.com/booksid=5ZNBeTDWciAC&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs\\_ge\\_summary\\_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false](http://books.google.com/booksid=5ZNBeTDWciAC&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false)
- William, D. 2007. "The French Revolution and the Abolition of Nobility." In *Cultures of Power in Europe during the Long Eighteenth-Century*, ed. H. Scott & B. Simms, 289-303. Cambridge & New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Wolfe, C. T. 2010. "Why was there no controversy over Life in the Scientific Revolution?" In [HOPOS 2010: The International Society for the History of Philosophy of Science](http://philsci-archive.pitt.edu/5409/) (Budapest, 24-27 June 2010). Retrieved at <http://philsci-archive.pitt.edu/5409/>