Introduction

David B. Allison, Mark S. Roberts, and Allen S. Weiss

The name "Sade," previously the cause of visceral disquietude and moral panic, now sends us directly to the archives. What was once scandalous is now part of our literary heritage, a "classic." To introduce the present volume, we might briefly consider the conditions by which this drastic change of reception occurred, and the reasons why, despite the entry of Sade into "acquired knowledge," this philosopher of the bedroom still claims a decisive role in understanding both the limits of human possibility and the emerging critique of culture in postmodernist discourse.

Nineteenth-century belles-lettres abound in references to Sade by the most diverse group of writers, including such figures as Michelet, Stendhal, Baudelaire, Flaubert, Fourier, Huysmans, and Swinburne. These writers demonstrated varied interest in Sade's work, although most, like Swinburne, admired it from afar. This interest was countered, at the end of the century, by a vehement disapproval in other quarters: namely, the appropriation of Sade's name by numerous "scientific" medical authorities, who stigmatized it with a psychological reference of violence and opprobrium – sadism.

It was not until the rediscovery of Sade by Apollinaire and, later, by the Surrealists in the 1920s, that he came to play a central role in modern intellectual history. This interest was in great part made possible by Maurice Heine's efforts to establish and distribute an accurate contemporary edition of Sade's works. The Surrealists – most notably Breton, Aragon, Eluard, Char, and Peret – who celebrated Sade's work did so with a double intent. There was an activist, even

revolutionary, motivation aimed at overthrowing bourgeois mentality and culture (certainly derived from the Dadaist desire to *"épater le bourgeois"* – hence the Surrealists' thrill at the extremes of Sadean outrageousness). But there was also an aesthetic, psychological motivation, aimed at appropriating Sade's thought as a singular precursor to Surrealism. This was due to its eminence within the broader literary genre of the fantastic, as well as to its preoccupation with limit experiences, especially regarding the relations between death and eros, two favorite Surrealist themes. Yet even here, the name of Sade was often invoked – and apologized for – with regard to the scandalous nature of the allusion, rather than in reference to the content of his discourse. This is apparent, for example, in the classic Surrealist film, Buñuel and Dalí's *L'Age d'or* (1930), where reference to Sade's *The 120 Days of Sodom* in the film's epilogue is made with appropriately shocking and scandalous effect.

The year 1930 saw a rupture in the Surrealist movement, marked by the publication of Breton's *Second Manifesto of Surrealism*, in which Georges Bataille in particular was denounced and expelled from the movement for what Breton (being a somewhat traditional moralist in the guise of a revolutionary) saw as Bataille's baseness and vileness, his interest in what was most unseemly and corrupt. The ensuing polemic centered around the figure of Sade, and Bataille responded to Breton's accusations by claiming that in fact the Surrealists were but apologists for Sade, mere utopian sentimentalists, further accusing them of "pretentious idealist aberrations." In thus parting from the Surrealists, Bataille professed a "heterology" of base materialism, founded on a sociological and literary analysis of the relations between contemporary society and the sacred, excessive, wasteful, and sacrificial aspects of culture. In the context of his critique of Western rationality, Bataille found Sade to be a key figure in the analysis of what he termed sovereign inner experience. It was this debate which marked the beginnings of the modern investigation of Sade's work as an independent and coherent system of thought.

Pierre Klossowski was part of Bataille's entourage during

the period following the break with the Surrealists, which culminated with the founding of the journal *Acéphale* and the Collège de Sociologie. Klossowski, too, found Sade central to every stage of his work, and in 1947 he published a collection of brilliant essays, *Sade mon prochain*, which continues to be one of the seminal texts of Sade scholarship. Here, the relation between the existence of evil, presented by Sade in its hyperbolic and encyclopedic form, and the existence of God is examined. Employing the theme of a destructive theology, where Nature itself is the very principle and source of evil, Klossowski showed how Sade demanded the substitution of radical evil for God. Unlike rationalist forms of atheism – which invert monotheism by replacing God with man – Sade, basing his thinking on a radical materialism acting as a transcendental fatalism, proposed to substitute an omnipotent natural system of causality for the notion of Divine causation.

We find a somewhat different version of this Sadean *amor intellectualis diaboli* in the sections devoted to Sade in Adorno and Horkheimer's *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1944). In Sade, the manipulation of rational thought is utilized as a critique of rationality itself; Sade's efforts are compared to those of Nietzsche, in the light of the contemporary political implications of Fascism, as an aberration of instrumental reason. Thus, in this modern version of an old moralizing theme (using Sade as a hyperbolic and perhaps ironic example), Adorno and Horkheimer see Sade and Nietzsche as providing a devastating critique of rationalist, Kantian, utopian models – i.e. of the very notion of truth itself – with all of its horrifying political ramifications.

The year 1947 was important in Sade scholarship. Along with the publication of Klossowski's work there appeared Maurice Blanchot's "A la rencontre de Sade" (republished two years later in his *Lautréamont et Sade*), as well as the first volumes of Jean-Jacques Pauvert's edition of Sade's complete works. Blanchot saw Sade as providing the first instance in which philosophy itself is taken as the product of mental aberration, a deviant construction of the passions – in Sade's case, the result

of his lengthy incarceration. Thus, Blanchot accounts for the extreme, monstrous forms of sovereignty manifested in Sade as the very apogee of Sade's philosophical system. The effects of aberrant theorization and narration – i.e. the subversion of classical reasoning – in turn serve to liberate the reader's own irrational forces.

Following these key publications, and the appearance of the complete edition of Sade's writings, there were numerous studies of Sade by such notable figures in French intellectual life as Simone de Beauvoir, Maurice Nadeau, Raymond Queneau, Albert Camus, and Jean Paulhan. There also followed, in 1957–58, the infamous trial of Pauvert on charges of distributing pornography (a case which, for that moment at least, he lost). Yet in contradistinction to this notoriety and to the rather negative reconsideration of the ethical elements in Sade's texts both in literary criticism and in the courts, this decade also witnessed the publication of Gilbert Lély's monumental critical biography of Sade, *La Vie du Marquis de Sade* (volume I appeared in 1952, volume II in 1957).

The 1960s saw the efforts which were finally to establish Sade – despite, or perhaps because of, his subversive, revolutionary and perverse attractions – in the literary canon. The highpoints of this re-evaluation and minor canonization were the Colloque d'Aix in 1966, the proceedings of which were published in 1968 as *Le Marquis de Sade*; the republication of Klossowski's *Sade mon prochain* with a major new article, "Le philosophe scélérat" (published in translation in the present volume), in 1967; and in the same year, a special issue of *Tel Quel* (no. 28) on Sade, with articles by Philippe Sollers, Klossowski, Hubert Damisch, Michel Tort, and Roland Barthes (an article which was to be part of his major work, *Sade, Fourier, Loyola*, published in 1971). It was the readings of those associated with the then influential review *Tel Quel* that established Sade as a figure central to the discourse of poststructuralism; a discourse which included the writings of Foucault (on the relations between transgression, politics, and discourse), Deleuze (on the radical difference between sadism and masochism, as a critique of

psychoanalytic theory), Barthes (on the rhetorical and poetic rules of the Sadean text), and Lacan (on the subversion of the Kantian ethical imperative by the Sadean imperative of pleasure). The major thrust that connected all of the above works was a concerted, collective attempt to reconcile Marxian dialectic with psychoanalytic metapsychology, in the light of semiotics – thus to establish a theory of subjectivity according to the historical-material conditions of signifying practice. Sade's place in this contemporary project parallels that assigned by *Tel Quel* to Artaud and Bataille, the renegade Surrealists, as models for a new, heterogeneous, revolutionary practice marked by an avant-garde mode of textual production.

Now well established as a "literary" and philosophical figure – yet with little or no loss of his radicalness as a writer – Sade continued to attract interest through the 1970s and 1980s. In 1977 there appeared a special issue of *Obliques* dedicated to Sade. It was edited by Michel Camus, and included documents and articles by most of the major scholars in the field. Numerous books also appeared, notably Françoise Laugaa-Traut's *Lectures de Sade* (1973), Philippe Roger's *Sade: La Philosophie dans le pressoir* (1976), Marcel Hénaff's *Sade: L'Invention du corps libertin* (1978), and Chantal Thomas's *Sade, l'œil de la lettre* (1978). In 1981 a Colloque de Cérisy devoted to Sade was organized by Michel Camus and Philippe Roger, the proceedings of which were published as *Sade, écrire la crise* (1981).

The growth of interest in Sade did not go unnoticed in the arts. The most notable dramatic works were Yukio Mishima's 1965 play *Madame de Sade*, and Peter Weiss's *Marat/Sade* (1965), both of which were widely produced. Sylvano Bussoti wrote a musical composition entitled *La Passion selon Sade* (1965–66), and Pier Paolo Pasolini produced a film, *Salò o le 120 giornate de Sodoma*, worthy of mention not only for its cinematic interest but also for its continued notoriety.

Interest was drawn to Sade in the English-speaking world by such texts as Geoffrey Gorer's *The Life and Ideas of the Marquis de Sade* (1962), but peaked with the Grove Press translations

of Sade's major works, accompanied by several of the already classic critical texts by Klossowski, Blanchot, Paulhan, and de Beauvoir. Grove Press later also published a translation of Lély's biography of Sade. Early scholarly attention was focused in the important 1965 issue of *Yale French Studies*, followed by later critical works, such as Angela Carter's *The Sadeian Woman and the Ideology of Pornography* (1978) and Jane Gallop's *Intersections: A Reading of Sade with Bataille, Blanchot, and Klossowski* (1981).

Currently, there is a strong continuation of this interest in Sade, in great part spurred on by Pauvert's republication of Sade's complete works (long out of print), accompanied by a book-length introduction by Annie Le Brun, *Soudain un bloc d'abîme, Sade* (1986), and a new biography in three volumes by Pauvert, *Sade vivant*. This sixteen-volume project will be followed by another major series, edited by Maurice Lever and Sade's descendant, Thibault de Sade, consisting of six volumes of previously unpublished tales, theater, poetry, letters, and essays, as well as an entirely new biography utilizing much previously unknown material, as well as extensive documentation and information from the Sade family archives. Finally, as the ultimate canonization of Sade in the literary hierarchy, the first of a three-volume set has appeared in Gallimard's series La Pléiade, edited by Michel Delon and prefaced by Jean Deprun. With the dramatically increased attention given to Sade recently, there is thus little doubt that this once scandalous and intentionally ignored figure has taken up a central place in current literary and philosophical scholarship – a secure place in the archives.

Despite the burgeoning renewal of interest in Sade's work, his intellectual legacy has hardly been resolved. Nonetheless, in recent years, most significant discussion has tended to focus upon a few areas: the explicitly libidinal components of Sade's work and the effects they engender; the textual apparatus which supports these operations: the ethical and political concerns which mark the effects of the Sadean œuvre; and the problematic issues surrounding the conceptual closure of

representation. These general areas of interest have of late been discussed in terms of particular philosophical problems, such as the constitution of subjectivity and gender identity, the question of classical rationality and the moral imperatives it engenders, the limits of practical and intellectual categories and what escapes or precludes these defining sets – the imagination, the excesses of rapture, erotic possession, and violence – in short, what challenges every form of coherency and meaning, transgression itself. It is perhaps under the rubric of transgression that one most dramatically arrives at the "danger" of Sade's enterprise. At issue, for our present concerns, is the radical heterogeneity of libidinal productions, which subtends Sadean transgression and which lends a heretofore unthinkable volatility to the very codes which govern civilized existence.

It was Bataille who first showed the enormous importance of transgression by demonstrating that the composition of the civil subject is effectively that of a fully coded subject. As such, the individual finds his identity, his very interiority, in the interstices of social, economic, ethical, religious, moral, sexual, and linguistic encoding. Sade's extraordinary preoccupation with codes, laws, rules, and classifications of all kinds presented an exemplary terrain for Bataille's investigation. If Sade were thus to have a "use value" as Bataille claims, it might be analogous to the role of Freud's *Civilization and its Discontents*, in that he reveals what subtends the veneer of rational and civil society – the monstrous, uncontrolled, anarchic series of drives and passions. In this sense, what is conventionally termed "sadistic" is but one of the many perversions wrought by civil conformity itself. For Bataille's Sade, on the contrary, it is the enormous set of possibilities tied to the productions of libidinal heterogeneity, unconstrained by limits, bonds, and "good taste," which offer up to us the spectacle of the Sadean individual's "base materiality." As a "trangressive" subject, cast in opposition to these codes, the Sadean figure stands as a veritable indictment of the civil order. All that is most repulsive – revealed in Bataille's concepts of heterological practice, his excremental vision – stands as the emblem or

inscription of the otherwise unrepresentable libidinal drives. Exceeding every canon of Western discourse and literature, Sade's texts are thereby empowered, indeed driven, by this set of libidinal forces – hence the disgust they traditionally provoke.

The notions of perversion, anomaly, and integral monstrosity, so central to the Sadean enterprise, are forcefully articulated by Pierre Klossowski in his "Sade, or the philosopher–villain." The terms all refer to those singularities that are excluded from universal reason. Thus these terms contest the laws of utility, conservation, and rationality, in that they are the very reverse of procreation, of what Freud called the "life drive." The height of such libertine perversion is, according to Klossowski, the practice of sodomy. Sodomy is the extreme form of the transgression of norms, a wasteful, unproductive, and useless simulacrum for "normal" reproductive sexuality. As such, it specifically entails the reversal of everyday morality and rationality, not as its simple negation, but rather through a cultivated intellectual apathy and waste, through an "economy" of unproductiveness, one no longer guided by teleology, profit, or even by the "natural" production of pleasure, i.e. orgasm.

The set of monstrous perversions, so excluded from universal reason, is likewise unassimilable to any strictly political economy. Nonetheless, the libertine subjects of the Sadean enterprise have already sublated, through an ironic reversal, the political dimension to the libidinal: hence, each is considered a member of another economy (however fleeting), namely, that of the "Society of the Friends of Crime." In the absence of any natural or political "rights" – indeed, of any transcendental grounding whatsoever – Klossowski argues that Sade's famous injunction, "One more effort, Frenchmen, if you are to become republicans," can only be seen as a hideous derogation of revolutionary idealism.

Exploring the workings of a libidinal economy, as envisioned by Klossowski, Jean-François Lyotard demonstrates how the terms of classical economic exchange are inverted to become mere simulacra of rights – guaranteed by no one, by no thing.

The vaunted egalitarianism of republican ideals is but a set of momentarily agreed-upon fictions to serve as diversion for the Society's members – but only and exclusively within their restrictive enclaves, i.e, in the celebrated "houses of libertinage." In contrast to traditional "social contract" theory, where overarching civil goals condition rational political strategy, for Sade there are only transitory tactics, only improvised rules and alliances, created for strictly temporary reasons, according to a heterogeneous set of motives – desire, boredom, pride, vanity, greed, etc. – motives which, in the end, merely reflect the "passions of the soul." According to Lyotard, Klossowski interprets Sade's model in such a way that, far from being a claim to the equality of the rights of man, it is in fact driven by an insatiable profusion of erotic fantasies and the endless production of libidinal intensities. In this respect, he extends Klossowski's reading, and thus reveals Sade's model to be homologous with the machinations of advanced capitalism, wherein even the minimal constraints of production and exchange value are transcended by the ceaseless profusion of "wild" capital.

Unlike Lyotard, Philippe Roger argues against the very possibility of appropriating Sade politically, characterizing him as "a political minimalist." Due to their fictional nature, a double ambiguity obtains within all political enunciations in Sade's writings. On the level of explicitly political statements, we can never determine whether it is the author or the character who maintains the stated position; on the level of the mode of discourse, we can never determine if the statement is serious or parodic. Thus, the articulations of Sade's political enunciations are determined by the rule of uncertainty and undecidability, without any unequivocal point of view ever emerging. Sade's thought, therefore, proffers a sort of critique of political reason. Neither political nor apolitical, his is an *impolitic* thought founded on the notion of absolute sovereignty: politics is not governed by rationality, but rather by the caprices of sovereign individuals. The effect of this impolitic thought is not social edification, but agitation. Its very articulation constitutes a vacuum. Ultimately, this

empty space of "politics" would be metaphorically located somewhere between the ordered law of states and the purely practical arrangements of anarchic bandits.

If the Sadean project imperils the governance of politics, and renders the order of economics risible, it likewise subverts the oedipal "law of the father." In its ostensible role of organizing desire and signification, the phallic law is constantly undermined by the mobility and perpetual transformability of libidinal energy. Erotic objects are not viewed merely as a skein or system of intelligible significations (as was maintained by many proponents of structuralist theory) but rather as a nexus of intensities, of figures, images, and desire-formations – as Lyotard, Deleuze, Guattari, and others would argue. Commensurate with this view, Alphonso Lingis, in "The Society of the Friends of Crime," opposes the phallocentric tendencies of both psychoanalytic and philosophic discourse, arguing within the narrative-fictive structures of his piece that these tendencies forcibly corrupt language for the sake of establishing the insidious, imperative necessity of the universal. Sade moves away from a purely phallic or "centric" eroticism toward a libidinal polymorphism. And yet, Lingis suggests, this expression is in some strange way "rational," insofar as Sade's absolute desire to compile the most convincing empirical evidence of perversion nonetheless creates a "normative" discourse of sexuality. Only the terrifying sovereignty of Sadean libertinage, however, is sufficient to express the intense and multiple formations of this libidinal energy.

The critique of the "phallocentric position" can be more broadly extended to address the status and function of gender in Sade's text, as Jane Gallop does in her "Sade, Mothers, and Other Women." Her critique focuses on Sade's near-obsessional use of the "mother-image," an image he utilizes in a divided and paradoxical way. In the Sadean text, a characteristic hatred toward the mother is invariably affected by a more profound love–hate relation toward "Mother Nature." All libertines aspire to embody the perfect, unencumbered evil of nature, but at the same time they must hate her – as a