

Phantoms of Desire. Visions of Masochism: Peter Weibel (1989), Neue Galerie Graz,  
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## Masochism as a Post-Phallic Mandate (2007)

S.P.-16

### 1 The cruel woman The masochistic construct of the femme fatale and the vamp between nature and machine

#### Duino elegy I

And if I cried, who'd listen to me in those angelic  
orders? Even if one of them suddenly held me  
to his heart, I'd vanish in his overwhelming  
presence. Because beauty's nothing  
but the start of terror we can hardly bear,  
and we adore it because of the serene scorn  
it could kill us with. Every angel's terrifying.  
So I control myself and choke back the lure  
of my dark cry.

Rainer Maria Rilke, 1912/22'

Reacting to the industrial revolution driven by machines, a male-dominated culture conjured up a new image of woman. In an overreaction, women were either naturalised resp. renaturalised. This led to the myth of the *femme fatale*, which developed particularly in the period 1860-1910, or (post 1910) it led to the construct of woman as a machine. The "machine-ised" technoid woman, for example "Maria" in Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* (1927), derived from the same source of fear as the naturalisation of woman. Both were seen as threatening the male, as beauty without pity and mercy, the "Belle Dame Sans Merci" (cf. the painting by John William Waterhouse). Keat's poem *La Belle Dame Sans Merci* is about an innocent knight who is bewitched by a beguiling woman with very long hair:

She took me to her elfin grot,  
And there she gaz'd and sighed deep,  
And there I shut her wild sad eyes –  
So kiss'd to sleep.<sup>2</sup>

The part-object "long hair" became a trademark of *femmes fatales*, as Percy Shelley wrote:

Beware of her hair, for she excels  
All women in the magic of her locks  
And when she twines them around a  
young man's neck

She will not ever set him free again.

The fetish hair takes the man captive and deprives him of his freedom. The woman as the abyss

where the man perishes is only a reflection of the male fear of the knowledge of his own drives. Clytemnestra murdering Agamemnon, Cleopatra giving poison to the condemned or Salome demanding the head of John the Baptist – all these stories and images depict women with a craving for murder, cruel women who bring disaster. The visions of the Symbolists, which depict women as enigmatic hybrids of cheetahs and humans, lionesses and humans, fish and humans, sphinxes, circes, nymphs and sirens, reveal in their mythological naturalisation of woman the male fear of falling victim to a war of the sexes, or are projections of the man's fear of his own sex life on to the apparent cause of his libidinal urges, namely woman.

The man looks into the abyss of his drives, but blames the abyss on the woman. Artists from Fernand Khnopff and Odilon Redon to Edvard Munch or Joseph von Sternberg with his film *Blue Angel* show women as bloodsuckers and vampires. Thus a mythology evolved that has lasted a century. It focuses on *femmes fatales*, vamps, dangerous beauty, beauty without pity and the terrors of beauty (cf. Rilke). The man is frightened of the libidinal chaos that beauty triggers off in him. This fear is a projection on to beauty itself, on the woman, the aim being to ward off desire. Discovering that he could perish on his own drives, suffer from his own desires and become a victim of his sex life, the man directs his self-protective mechanisms against the woman. The man sets up in culture the myth of the blood-dripping murderess whose victim he is. He projects his own sadistic or masochistic urges on the woman, who arouses and excites the drives latent in him. He thereby either makes himself executioner and the woman the victim (as for example in the mythology of witches, who rob men of reason through their beguiling beauty, i.e. bewitch them) or the man makes the woman the executioner and himself the victim (like Circe, who turns the companions of Odysseus into pigs, or the sirens, whose mellifluous voices lure sailors to destruction in the Straits of Messina). *Odysseus* is the paradigmatic tale of a rejection of pleasure, the fear of the abyss of one's own sex life that can rob a man of his reason, and is thus also a rejection of woman, who is the source of this risk of excessive, fatal, deadly, instinctive arousal.

"But truss me with ropes till it hurts, so that I cannot move and am bound upright to the mast block, tied by the ropes to the mast. And if I beseech you all and command you to release me, you must then bind still more ropes about me."

This is perhaps the quintessence of a masochistic scene. It describes a craving, a craving for pleasure that is refused, absolutely refused. The bondage is painful, but serves to ward off pleasure, thereby replacing pleasure auto-erotically. Bondage – pain – thus itself becomes the source of pleasure and craves still more pleasure, demanding that the fetters and constraints be doubled. The protective mechanism (the force, the fetters) against the pleasure that women provide becomes a part-object or fetish, which is preferred to the woman.

At the same time, the *Odysseus* myth provides information about itself. Painfully bound and tied to the mast, *Odysseus* is finally captivated by the bondage itself. He recognises that he is himself the dark force, the dangerous drive. He is not in danger but is himself the danger. In Freud's categories of moral and erogenous masochism, we can describe the masochistic aporia thus: as a moral masochist, *Odysseus* allows himself to be tied up in order to avert seduction by the woman and his sexual pleasure; as an erogenous masochist, it is the bonds themselves on the erogenous zones of the skin that give him pleasure. That is the paradox of masochism – self-bondage is supposed to prevent pleasure morally but at the same time engenders it physically.

Thus pain develops into pleasure. He gains pleasure from averting it. Pleasure is torment, but torment gives rise to pleasure. The fettered body or the fettered part-objects, from the breast to the phallus, are symbols and heirs of the *Odysseus* myth. The body is fettered in order to stop it deriving enjoyment. But this fettering, and the experience and sight of it, themselves constitute pleasure. Thus *Odysseus* remains fettered to enjoyment (pleasure) by being fettered (pain). The fettered body – the expression and instrument of averted pleasure – itself becomes the source of pleasure. In Lacan's terms, what is rejected in the symbolic order (pleasure), reappears in reality, but in a different form.

Flagellation is a similar mechanism of masochism. It was originally a punishment for violating the law, for crimes of commission and omission, i.e. a deterrent and painful warning not to repeat the deed – a moral defensive mechanism, in fact. But exactly as with bondage, flagellation can act as erogenous masochism, a source of pleasure. Bondage and flagellation, perhaps the most prevalent phantasms of masochism, follow an economy of maximising pleasure. The subject enjoys the

sin and the punishment, enjoying both the trespass itself and the punishment of it – he gains pleasure by averting pleasure.

The birth of the cruel woman in Sacher-Masoch's *Venus in Furs* (1869) must be seen in this context of fateful, deadly women between 1860 and 1910 as a new variant of the *femme fatale*.

The demonisation of women as plants and animals, creatures of the air or sea, sorceresses or murderesses, which accorded with the Romantic ideal of women as a residuum of nature in an increasingly industrialised world, corresponds with the demonisation of women as a part of this industrial, machine-based world. The woman as machine or murderess is devoid of pity, devoid of soul. Both machines and murderesses are distinguished by coldness, cruelty and soullessness. The beauty of the machine reinforces the beauty of woman and her terrible nature. The fear of machines and fear of women are linked. Whether woman or machine, both are beauties without pity and distribute poison to the condemned, the labour slaves, just like Cleopatra. The "machinisation" of women, which goes hand in hand with a mechanisation of the sex life, the construction of a combinatory calculus and economy of the sex life, constitutes an even more radical expropriation of the woman than renaturalisation, as the purpose of it is to rob her of sexual reproductive capacity, the quintessential natural quality of woman, as countless models of "bachelor machines" (*machines célibataires*) by the Dadaists and Surrealists bear out. The Dadaists and Surrealists had no scruples in depicting women as machines. In Surrealism, male desire goes beyond the wish to reduce women to the status of part-objects. On the one hand, the Surrealist heaven is crowded with part-objects and fetishes, from the eyes to the feet, on the other hand, Surrealism defines women as machines so volubly that the wish-notion that women are like tools, instruments serving male pleasure has an almost compulsive effect. The mechanisation and "machinising" of women corresponds to a machinising of the libido, a rationalisation and technicisation of women, which likewise constitutes a defence mechanism and derives from the masochistic phantasm. Especially in Duchamp, this masochistic desexualisation is recognisable in the machine that strives for sexuality without human genitalia, without biology, flesh or reproduction – in fact, *machines célibataires* of auto-eroticism.

The notion of women as machines anticipates the molecular idea of sexuality in an age of cloning technology. Though women are not birth-giving machines here – a concept which vulgarly reduces

women to nature and an apparently natural function – women as machines are models of a feared subject in the age of industrialisation that must be disarmed by having this birth-giving function removed or devalued. Mechanised women and the depiction of the sex life as mechanical are anticipations of molecular biological reproduction, which can likewise get by without the sexual act and the sexual organs. One could therefore say that the naturalisation of women and “machinisation” of women alike derive from a masochistic fantasy. Both are formulations of sexuality in reaction to the industrial age. There is thus a correspondence between machine and masochism on which Deleuze’s concept of masochism in continuation of Surrealism is based. A basic feature and rule of the aesthetics of the masochistic phantasm is the replacement of nature by machines. Thence comes the “coldness”, the anorganic aspect, the lifelessness, moonlight and anaemia of the masochistic universe.

## 2 Wish-machines and part-objects

*Anti-Oedipus*, published in 1972 by Félix Guattari and Gilles Deleuze, came up with a theory of *machines déstranges* that turned everything in a machine, from desire to capitalism. In this, the concept of the machine can be understood as an ongoing arrangement of heterogeneous parts that can be anything that develops in the various ontological registers and vehicles and that can also include technical objects. The concept of wish-machines combines two different worlds – the mechanism and the organism, the technical and the psychic. The authors have a long tradition behind them. Human behaviour has been described and explained by means of technical metaphors since the 17th century. Freud himself made manifold use of technical metaphors and models to elaborate his theories, and talks of the psychic mechanism, the mental apparatus and psychic automatisms, etc. In Deleuze and Guattari, the subject itself is “machinised”, with even the unconscious being compared with a machine. For our purposes the reference to a machine is less interesting than the idea of “machinisation” as a critique of the Oedipus complex. It goes so far as to propose substituting the machine myth for the Oedipus myth, hence the title *Anti-Oedipus*. The reference to the Oedipus myth is replaced by a reference to the machine, to the factory and industry. The wish-machine is thus in line with Surrealist tradition.

It is shown that the Oedipus complex must be seen as the result of accommodation, socialisation, intimidation and suppression. The metaphysics of the unconscious are critically analysed for their social and

material implications. Formations of the unconscious include paranoia, miracle-machines and *machines dilibataires*, wish-machines and bodies without organs. Bodies without organs are generated in the inter-connections of wish-machines. The remarkable machine terminology of *Anti-Oedipus* relates to a conflict between the movements that wish to form the organism and those movements and tendencies that reject any organisation. Melanie Klein’s theory of “part-objects”, i.e. parts such as mouth and breast, or “organ machine and source machine” in Deleuze, aims to explain what the wish-machines that take their places want, i.e. to harmonise the id and ego as effective polarities. It is the role of the phallus to take over the integration of the erogenous part-zones and attune them to each other. The phallus’s role in this is not that of an organ but is the expression of this integration.

The concept of bodies without organs and organs without bodies goes back to Antonin Artaud, who describes scenes of the “subjectile” with them (a neologism made up of “subject” and “projectile”), likewise anti-Oedipal subject models. Artaud himself often used machine metaphors, e.g. *la machine de l'être*. Wish-machines and bodies without organs are basic forms of the unconscious. Wish-machines resemble part-objects. The paranoia machine derives from the conflict between wish-machines and bodies without organs. Paranoia projects aggression on a part-object that seems dangerous and (for example as a breast) wishes to poison and swallow the subject. In Klein’s psychoanalysis, the breast is looked on as the child’s most important part-object. But she also mentions the smell, voice, etc. We may recognise from this that the myth of the cruel woman is the projection of an aggression in which the woman herself is reduced from her totality to a part-object, because the projecting subject obviously lacks the capacity to synthesise the part-objects. It is evident that the cannibalistic, sadistic aspect occupies the foreground in this projection. Sadistic impulses are projected on to the breast because the latter has previously been transformed into an aggressor. The attuning of erogenous zones by the phallus has failed. The paranoia reflects the resistance of the body without organs to this hierarchical and harmonising order. Indeed, the body defends itself against the integrating function of the phallus, i.e. the genital organisation of the organs, and therewith against the primacy of the phallus.

*Anti-Oedipus* is thus an anti-phallic work, a “tomb for Oedipus”, as it is called in *La Révolution moléculaire* (1977) by Félix Guattari. The theory of organ machines endeavours to relativise not only the Oedipus

complex but the whole primacy of the phallic organisation of part-objects as well. The theory of the wish-machine is therefore anti-Oedipal and anti-phallic, and thus amounts to a general theory of part-objects. Klein’s analysis of the mouth-breast relationship carries over to other organ relationships, thus eroding the importance of the phallus. Part-objects are interpreted irrespective of their functionality for the totality of the whole object. Instead of totalisation, the whole object is conceived as diversity. The independent reality of the diverse part-objects replaces the integrating control of the phallus. The part-objects are allowed to develop independent relationships with reality. The phallus becomes one part-object among many other part-objects of equal status. The emancipation of part-objects is particularly clearly discernible in the art of the Surrealists. All organs, from hand to foot, from ear to mouth, from breast to leg, are isolated and multiplied. The isolation of part-objects, which amounts to the subjugation and rejection of the phallus, is logically followed by the multiplication of the organs. Instead of one body and one primordial object, the phallus, the wish-machine disintegrates into a multiplicity of organs. The multiplication of the organs is thus the result of the body without organs. The body without organs as a full organism without parts is contrasted with a multiplication of organs without bodies. This disintegration into part-objects and bodies without organs demolishes the frontier between the id and the ego, depriving the superego of power. The Freudian drive-model with its primacy of genital maturity and the hegemony of the phallus is criticised. Organ machines (wish-machines, part-objects) become conceivable that can be realised outside an “organismic” body or genital sexuality. The masochistic body is a body of this kind.

“Every three months a man of about forty-five years old would visit a certain prostitute and pay her ten francs for the following act. The girl had to undress him, tie his hands and feet, bandage his eyes, and draw the curtains of the windows. Then she would make her guest sit down on a sofa, and leave him there alone in a helpless position. After half an hour she had to come back and unbind him. Then the man would pay and leave perfectly satisfied, to repeat his visit in about three months.” (Richard von Krafft-Ebing, *Psychopathia sexualis*, 1912).

In this masochistic pleasure, there is no physical sexual contact, let alone the sexual act. On the contrary – this is an extreme case of sensory deprivation. Lacking genital sexuality, a body without organs realises a primeval trust in existence. Its temporary state of helplessness may be a regression to infant condition,

where the infant does not know if its mother will return. The masochist thereby gets his pleasure from the abstract absence, from a vacuum, from a desideration, from the torment of absence, but not from physical torment and humiliation and not from sexual arousal and the fullness of phallic presence.

These ideas are the basis with which Deleuze shaped his theory of masochism. The primordial role of the satisfaction of drives is challenged by giving preference to the object-relationship. The separation of drive-energy (libido) and apparatus (object) led in Freud to satisfaction – the objective of the drive – being overvalued. In masochism, satisfaction is no longer in the foreground: the libido is no longer primarily in search of pleasure but looking for an object-relationship. The object-relationship itself is as such pleasurable, even in its negativity. A body logic is discernible in masochism that no longer has anything to do with phallic body logic and its familiar procedures. The phallic organ organisation falls apart, to be replaced by a flat, democratic, transverse diversity of organs and objects. The drives derived from the part-objects or linked with them are likewise emancipated. Auto-eroticism, the projection of satisfaction-objects onto the self and in which the ego delights, is part of a strategy for dissolving the power of the id and ego and thus an expression of a paradoxical desexualisation. Deleuze already described this process in his cryptic sentence about masochism: masochism “has a very strange way of desexualising love and sexualising the whole history of humanity.”

Part-drives have found their partisans in Surrealism. Though they developed their machine-terminology by turning women into machines, this “machinisation” of the unconscious and sex life, particularly in Dalí, did away with the despotism of the phallus and signifiers and opened the door to a polymorphous, perverse realm of freedom beyond phallicity that extends from sexualised objects, symbolic objects and fetish objects to sexualised rooms. The realm of the masochistic phantasm ranges from the fur-filled rooms of Adolf Loos to Meret Oppenheim’s fur-lined teacup and the fur-lined table of Victor Brauner.

## 3 Fetishism

The part-object is part of a whole, as the term clearly indicates. The breast or the fetter, the eye or the gaze, the mouth or the voice can feature as parts of a whole body or person. This listing of a number of part-objects shows that we may thus designate not only the body organs themselves but also the activities associated with them and that we can derive part-drives from part-objects.

Part-objects are thus more than just erogenous zones of the body – they can also be functions of the body.

Part-objects and part-drives are classically taken to be only part-functions, i.e. substitutes and surrogates. The desire that is then directed apparently only at these substitutes generates the fetish object and is degraded because it seemingly lacks the whole of the body and person. Fetish objects constitute those famous obscure objects of desire whose lovers enjoy some notoriety, because extreme fetishism counts as a perversion. Love of a woman is valued as positive, love of her breast less so, but love of her bra or the water she washed her breasts in that morning is completely despised.

The question then is whether the gaze only substitutes the presence of the body or whether the gaze is not itself the whole object that merits love and desire. Can the eye only act as an agent, as a representative of and substitute for the body? Can the mouth only speak as a representative of and substitute for the body? Whose body, whose subject? Is it not the case that art shows us – as for example in Francois Villon's famous line: "I am so wild for your strawberry mouth" – that the mouth is loved for itself, independently of the subject who says these words?

Is it not the case that the history of 20th-century art – particularly Surrealism in the historic moment in 1927 when Freud published his basic work on fetishism – suggests that part-objects, from the eyes to the toes, from the bottom to the legs, from the hands to the chin, are objects capable of being admired and desired for themselves? This isolation and absolutism of part-objects as whole objects in the terms of the masochistic phantasm might form a central contribution to a study of sexuality that could form a basis for understanding consumer fetishism as exploited commercially in the industrialised world. Both in contemporary fashion and the ideal physiques achieved by specific body cults (e.g. body-building), it is evident that pleasure in torment is a universal pre-requirement for attaining the socially conditioned ideal ego, thereby providing the ego with the power to subject the id to the social superego. The fantasies presented in the mass media reveal a contemporary society that is structured in a profoundly masochistic way. In Lacan's theory, the subconscious is structured as language. Deleuze and Guattari developed this idea, claiming that the unconscious is structured as a machine (*L'Inconscient machinique*, 1979, by F. Guattari). This machine-like character reveals itself as a masochistic engine in all contemporary society. Most fantasies in contemporary fashion and the mass media, from the fascination with telematic pornography to the flood of Benetton advertising posters, are masochistic in origin.

The expression "fashion victim" shows clearly that willing sacrifices are made in the high-performance society to keep up with the competition, and that the consumer is a "willing victim" of consumer culture, to borrow a title from a music performance by Lydia Lunch. Masochism is thus a suppressed term, a taboo that indicates a repressed central mechanism of society. (See Valerie Steele, *Fashion, Sex, and Power*, Oxford Univ. Press, 1996).

Does the subject itself become an object as a result of the fetishes because fetishes are objects? Does tattooing serve to identify oneself as an object, as the object of someone else, the property of someone else, in the way animals are marked as property by being branded? Is a connection visible here between brands and brand articles and fetish objects? Do people themselves become brand articles in the universal barter society – product fetishes and fetish products? Is someone who gets tattooed the one who is at least aware of this state of affairs, and does not conceal it, whereas the untattooed are the real barbarians and naïve savages who conceal the state of the product society from themselves? Fetishism represents more than part-objects. Though fetishes are "substitute limbs" both visually and as objects, as fetish substitutions they create a libidinal world of their own. In classic theory they are transitional objects. Being separated from its mother is very distressing for an infant. In classic theory, a transitional object has to be found to alleviate the distress of this separation. That would be the function of fetish objects and substitutions.

We see the fetish nature of the product world (Coca Cola) and body world (high heels) from Andy Warhol to Allen Jones without acknowledging its fetish character. We could designate part-objects, like unreferenced, free-floating signifiers of the sign world (Baudrillard), as free-floating signifiers of the object and body world that do not refer to the whole body. Fetish objects are free-floating objects that are not subject to the symbolic ordering and hierarchical arrangement of the phallus. On the contrary, they represent a disruption of the symbolic order. Part-drives are guerillas in the phallogocentric system – they blow it up and destroy it, sabotage it and overcome it. Voyeurs and boot fetishists move on a satellite that no longer revolves round the sun of the phallus. Fetish objects travel alone in a universe whose focal point is not the phallus. Arousal triggered off by fetish objects can but does not have to end in genital enjoyment. Looking at photos of the objects of desire or licking shoes as three-dimensional images of the objects of desire are pleasures in themselves, leading to an excitement that can be self-satisfying and does not have to end in genital pleasure. Thus basically masochism

and masochistic pleasure do not need a partner, an opposite, togetherness, an accomplice, as Baudelaire so strikingly observes:

"What makes love so tiresome is the circumstance that it is a crime that cannot be committed without accomplices." Because of this specific nature of part-objects, masochism is close to the phenomena of narcissism and auto-eroticism.

In the sexualised universe of the fetishist and lover of part-objects, almost any object can become a sexual object, from the spoon that takes the soup to the mouth to the shoehorn. Desire glides over part-objects as it does over the chain of signifiers, which is not a chain of substitution (body, foot, shoe). The independence gained by part-objects really requires a re-designation. In this new scheme in which part-objects are no longer pars pro toto for the body as a whole, we should not speak of part-objects any more but whole objects, i.e. drive-objects or wish-objects. Part-objects and fetish objects are therefore the delirious "wish-machines" of Deleuze and Guattari. The most famous inhabitant of this paranoid planet of delirious wish-machines was Salvador Dalí, whose artistic universe remains to this day the most comprehensive expression of the masochistic phantasm, the universe that Freud called "polymorphous-perverse". Andy Warhol's silver aesthetic likewise stems from the masochistic phantasm, but being an opportunist artist with social aspirations and therefore obliged to accommodate the puritanism of American society, he froze the fetishist aspects of his work in the muted, chilled aesthetic of advertising and the consumer industry, from his early shoe series to his Coca Cola cans, his voyeurist films and photographs to the silver furnishing of his Factory. The masochist's colour is silver, as his universe shines only in the moonlight (of part-drives) and in the brilliance of ice fields, not in the light of the sun (of the phallus).

"My hands ran wild over her hair and over the gleaming fur that rose and fell with her breast like a moonlit ocean, and threw my senses into confusion." (*Venus in Furs*)

#### 4 The second skin

The skin is a central location of the masochistic phantasm, because the masochist loves Venus not naked but only in her second skin, fur. Fur and velvet are the best-known materialities of the second skin, along with lacquer and leather, rubber, brandings and tattoos, from the labia to the upper arms. Clothing, bodices, corsets, lacquered, leather and rubber suits, but also flagellated skin, scratched skin, tattooed skin, injured skin, painted

skin, pierced skin – these all involve a frontier, the frontier between system and environment, inside and outside, the self and the world. The skin is the frontier, the location where masochists endeavour to establish a balance between the ego and the world, but also between the id, ego and superego. They shift the battle between the conflicting parties from within as far to the outside as possible, to this outermost frontier, namely the skin, because they know no other way of putting up with or overcoming this battle.

"Always for the first of every new series my head would be pulled round, to see how a hard white ridge, like a railway, darkening slowly into crimson, leaped over my skin at the instant of each stroke, with a bead of blood where two ridges crossed ... I remembered the corporal kicking with his nailed boot to get me up; and this was true, for the next day my right side was dark and lacerated, and a damaged rib made each breath stab me sharply. I remembered smiling idly at him, for a delicious warmth, probably sexual, was swelling through me; and then that he flung up his arm and hacked with the full length of his whip into my groin." (T. E. Lawrence: *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, 1926)

This quotation is taken from a masterpiece of masochism that describes the body as a "breathing phantom", and tells of desires to be beaten down, deliverance from torment and the cruel pride in humiliating the body. "So we wrote our verdict on the condemned man's skin with a bullet or whip." – These words clearly describe the skin as the scene of writing and the law, of symbolic order, the name-of-the-father and the Oedipus myth. This frontier becomes unstable in masochists because they do not accept the symbolic order, the father's seat remains empty and they replace the Oedipus myth with the machine myth. The frontier has therefore to be reinforced by a second skin.

The most touching pictures of masochists are those when they wear whole-body rubber suits and give each other artificial respiration through tubes. They thereby acknowledge their total interdependence. They exist only for each other, admitting the weakness of their egos. Their masochism is completely asexual, and has on the contrary a profoundly existential dimension. They exist as breathing phantoms – that is the real import of the "Phantom of Desire" title of the present project.

If it is said that the ego-frontiers of masochists are poorly defined, the relevant consequences have to be accepted. The very fact that the frontiers are so weak relocates the conflict of driving forces between Eros and Thanatos – the forces that generate life and those that tend to destroy it – to this frontier. The very fact that this frontier is so weak enables energies to penetrate

unhindered from outside inwards or from within to the outside. Masochists therefore experience an unusual diffusion outwards or armour themselves inwardly in unusual fashion. In every case they need a second skin. That is what they wish for with the greatest longing – an artificial second skin constructed and controlled by themselves that is as impermeable as possible, as closed as possible and as firm and invulnerable as possible in order to protect their all too vulnerable, unprotected natural first skin. They wall themselves in with a second skin, armour themselves with leather or metal, either partially or wholly, depending on their instability. They are focused on leather from head to foot, or armour themselves with real metal armour. Corsets stiffened with whalebone are a similar sort of armour, a second artificial skin to protect the first skin. From the laced-in bodice of the Empress Elizabeth of Austria, which when imitated by the lower classes led to the legendary wasp waists of fin-de-siècle Vienna, to the loose metallic dresses of Paco Rabanne; from the silver leather clothes of Courrèges to the plastic clothes of Mary Quant, from the laced-up clothes of Versace (remember the legendary occasion Elizabeth Hurley turned up at the Oscars wearing a dress only held together at the side by a huge safety pin) to the safety pins, piercings and tattoos of punk culture that have encroached on the sophisticated world of haute couture and fashion models; from the clothes of Helmut Lang, who communicates the vulnerability of the second skin by suggestions of sticking plaster and small slits and invites an inversion, to the clothes that only consist of slits and glimpses anyway, like for example Christina Aguilera in her music video *Dirty*. Fashion is nothing but a single gigantic second-skin industry that in the second half of the 20th century subscribed completely to the aesthetics of masochism, not to mention the frenzy of plastic surgery, which like masochism has trod the path from horror cases to the normal thing.

At the frontier of the second skin and its masks and at the frontier of the first skin and its dramas – because tattoos, piercings, etc. are small theatrical events on the surface of the skin, the skin itself being the stage – the drama of the law takes place: submission and rebellion.

### 5 Masochism and power (Kant with Sade, Hegel with Masoch)

A critique of the bourgeois subject as constructed by Kant and the Enlightenment via the work of Sade has taken two approaches. Sade can be analysed with Kant, as Adorno and Horkheimer did in the *Dialectics of the*

*Enlightenment* (1944/69) or Kant analysed with Sade, as Lacan did in 1963 in his essay *Kant with Sade*. In both cases, the aim was to show the consequences of structuring the subject as master, as “reason without direction by others”, i.e. the issue was unchecked subjectivisation, which as a form of power has paradoxical features and extreme consequences.

If we continue our previous arguments, we can recognise a post-phallic practice in masochism which involves not so much taking part in power or sharing it as doing away with it, or at least the conditions in which power operates. Sexuality as a mirror of social aspects means discovering new, anti-Oedipal subject models in masochism. A post-phallic masochism is for example discernible in the theories of Judith Butler (*The Psychic Life of Power. Theories in Subjection*, 1997), where she accounts for the subject not in dominance but in subjection, as a development of Hegelian theories about the relationship between master and servant.

In the first half of the 20th century, theoreticians from Ivan Bloch to Sigmund Freud looked more at the clinical aspects of masochism as an individual drive complex. With Theodor Reik's definitive work of 1940, *Aus Leiden Freuden. Masochismus und Gesellschaft* (*Masochism in Modern Man*, New York, 1941) more emphasis was put on the cultural forms and social structures of masochism. This was possible on the basis of Freud's views, which themselves had undergone manifold changes. Freud called masochism one of the most common and important of all perversions. According to him, masochism takes three forms: 1. as an attitude to life, as moral masochism, which in the form of neuroses as the determining factors is not restricted to individuals but can permeate the life of social groups, nations and religious communities, 2. as an expression of female nature, as feminine masochism, which is typified by quasi-female characteristics, and 3. as a characteristic of sexual arousal, as erogenous masochism, sexual excitement connected with areas of the body that we call erogenous zones, and particular strata of the body which also permit sexual excitement as a by-product even during pain and aversion. To these three, Reik added “social masochism”, and endeavoured to build a bridge between masochism as a sexual perversion or compulsion and an attitude to life imposing submissive and suffering behaviour on the ego. The name of this bridge in his theory is the feeling of guilt, because culture forces all of us to suppress aggressive drives, and as they are suppressed, so the unconscious guilt feeling grows. The exaggerated feeling of guilt about our own aggressive thoughts and power-hungry pleasures gives rise to a need for punishment, and thereby

a readiness for suffering and aversion. Privations and sacrifices, asceticism and martyrdom accompany the development of every cultured person as a masochistic fantasy in the conflict between the demands of our drives and social expectations. In 1967, Gilles Deleuze's ground-breaking work *Présentation de Sacher-Masoch. Le froid et le cruel* (*Coldness and Cruelty*) appeared, presenting a different Sacher-Masoch, in which the complementarity of sadism and masochism was rigorously contested for the first time.

If therefore the most successful fashion of the 20th century is masochistic, it can only be successful because it encourages and serves the masochistic needs of the population. The unleashed masochistic aesthetics of fashion stem from the unleashed masochism of society. Masochism replaces sadism as the culminating social structure that dominates the formation and constitution of subjects. There is cause therefore to ponder upon new models of the subject that draw their legitimacy not from mastery but from submission.

When Deleuze asserts “there are not so much masochistic phantasms as a masochistic technique of phantasm”, this applies exactly to Hegel's famous passage about the relationship between master and servant in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Clearly Butler also bases her model of the subject on Hegel's sentences:

“Self-consciousness attains its satisfaction only in another self-consciousness. It is a self-consciousness for a self-consciousness. They acknowledge each other as mutually acknowledging each other.”<sup>5</sup>

With this concept of acknowledgement, the doubling of self-consciousness in its unity, Butler puts the construct of acknowledgment in place of Foucault's construct of power, transforming a theory of power into a theory of acknowledgment. She knows that Hegel himself developed his theory of self-consciousness from the power construct, i.e. the relationship between master and servant.

“They are thus two opposed forms of consciousness: one of them the independent one for which the essence is self-subsistence, the other the non-independent one, in which life or being are for another; the former is the master, the latter the servant.”<sup>6</sup>

Hegel accuses the master of being a “purely negative power” because the master has the consciousness of being only for himself, the self-subsistence. Hegel demanded that acknowledgement should mean mutual acknowledgement, and that self-consciousness only attains satisfaction in another self-consciousness, i.e. the master lacks the reflection in the consciousness of the servant.

“But an element is missing for real acknowledgement, namely that what the master does to

others he also does to himself, and what the servant does to himself he also does to others. It is a one-sided and unequal acknowledgement that has arisen thereby.”

In the case of the master, no bipolar acknowledgement is involved, no power with a bipolar structure, but an asymmetrical, unipolar exercise of power, an one-sided and unequal power politics. In so far, it is the servant who gives up this feeling of self-subsistence and is ready to grant others what he allows towards himself. He is in possession of real independent consciousness, as his self-consciousness is doubled in its unity, to be his own doings as well as the doings of others, to be therefore the self-consciousness of another self-consciousness. Hegel therefore comes to the astonishing insight that constitutes the actual basis of any revolution and a central axiom of the masochistic universe:

“The truth of independent consciousness is accordingly the servant's consciousness.”<sup>7</sup>

When therefore at the beginning of *Venus in Furs* the hero meets his goddess in a dream, and, rudely awakened, a book by Hegel drops from his hand, it could not be clearer whom the author considers the source of his universe and his masochistic techniques. If Hegel turns up in such a central position right at the beginning, i.e. as a key to decode the dream with, it is advisable to follow up the author's clue and to see in the apparently erotic fable of *Venus in Furs* an utopian plan for overcoming the historical master-servant relationships and an outline for new models of the subject beyond classical subjectivity, as Judith Butler does convincingly in her book.<sup>8</sup>

The political interpretation of Sacher-Masoch's novella is also made easier and backed up by the insistence on the dream character of the first meeting with Venus. Dreams are transference techniques, linguistically woven on the model of condensation and displacement, metaphor and metonymy. If fetishes are transference objects, dreams are windows on their origins. The metonymical reading of dreams can be illustrated from a well-known dream. If the son dreams he is sitting on a horse and wearing his father's suit, it is clear that he would like to take his father's place. The second skin, the suit that hugs the body of the son depicts a metonymic process, indicating that the son would like to be the body of the father holding the reins firmly in his hand and directing the horse. The dream is thus a typical Oedipal dream tending towards patricide. In the dream of the *Venus in Furs* hero, the second skin is a fur, as the title suggests. But where does this fur come from, and who does it stand for? The masochist does not love Venus naked, and does not love the fur by itself

either, quasi as a metonymic, contiguous representative, as a part-object of Venus, as he might love her stockings, hair, underpants, boots, shoes and bodice as well, but loves both at once, Venus and her fur. The furry skin of a creature living in nordic coldness evokes not just the litany of the chain of signifiers, "coldness" and "cruelty". It is a false trail that the author himself sets us on again and again, but it does have the benefit of confirming our original, initial thesis that the woman in masochism is either mechanised as a machine or naturalised as a femme fatale. As the woman is symbolically turned into an animal and nature by the fur, she can be as cruel as nature. The cruelty of the woman is not therefore a quality of the woman herself but is a construct of the man. This cruelty is demanded of the woman per contract. It is therefore an artificially produced cruelty produced under civil law, not of animal or natural origin. In fact, it protects the contractual partner against real natural cruelty, because real cruelty, the actual power of fate, is contingency, blind chance. Thus, protected by a contract that acts as a second skin and which is therefore similar to the fur as a second skin, the masochist enjoys the cruelty of existence and the chasm of his drives. The contracted cruelty thus protects him from real cruelty. The contract is a kind of fetish.

This contractual cruelty recalls the famous "social contract" of Rousseau. The apparently purely libidinal contract is the mirror of a social contract. Masochism reflects the function of the specific civil contract known at the time as a copulation contract, i.e. marriage in a Kantian sense – a contract between "two persons of different sexes for the lifelong mutual possession of their gender qualities". Every contract is an agreement mutually acknowledged whose end is to raise man from the state of nature into a social state. Society exists through contracts. The masochistic contract in *Venus in Furs* raises the natural state of sexuality into a civil state. The masochist therefore enjoys sexuality only within the framework of a contract, i.e. according to agreed rules which he himself set up in advance. He enjoys nature (inasmuch as we see sexuality as nature) only in the form of its civilisatory mask. In terms of developmental history, masochism is thus the most civilised form of sexuality, even though most people see it as the most abysmal. The masochistic technique of phantasms thus anticipates not only the body without organs but also sex without sexual organs. In place of the primary and secondary sexual organs as fetish objects comes the contract as a fetish object. Masochistic sex that gets along without sexual organs anticipates molecular sex in the age of genetic artificial reproducibility.

Back to the political origin of the dream. A second interpretation of the fur as a dream-technical displacement might be found in Sacher-Masoch's economic and social environment. His childhood was marked, perhaps even branded and dominated, by large, fine, heavy furs, i.e. those worn by the Slav gentry, members of the ruling class. He thus transferred the fur coats of the masters, the gentry (as befits a dream as a transference technique) on to those subjects who at that time occupied the status of slaves in the social hierarchy, i.e. women. In the age of industrial revolution, only the male body counted. Women's bodies were only needed for biological reproduction. To keep to the dream vision, Sacher-Masoch transferred the male suit on to the woman, the master's suit on to the servant, and thereby trained, declared and empowered the slave into a mistress. This is how the image of the pre- or post-Oedipal power of the mother arises, the phallic mother with a man's power, to whom the son subjects himself as a slave in order not to lose her. The construct of the cruel woman could also mean however that Sacher-Masoch's aim was a servants' revolution in the sense outlined by Hegel, whose book the dreamer was holding in his hand as he dreamt. While the masochist transfers power to the servant during the process of mutual acknowledgement and by means of his power empowers the other to exercise power as well, there arises in masochism for the first time a vision of bipolar power, a model hitherto inconceivable. Power here does not mean domination, the subjection of someone else, control of another, but in giving the other party the power to which I temporarily subject myself, I also receive power, albeit with the risk that the other party may fail to honour the contract. This structure of bipolar power in masochism destroys, disrupts and liquidates the former power model of sadism. Masochism is therefore more than the former vision of subjection but the vision of a post-phallic power model, the smashing of the rule of the phallus. The 20th century was de Sade's century. The 21st century will be Sacher-Masoch's century.

- 1 Reiner Maria Rilke, *Duino Elegies and the Sonnets of Orpheus*, trans. by A. Poulin, Mariner Books, 1997.
- 2 The first known version stems from 1819. The version here was one printed in 1820.
- 3 G. W. F. Hegel, *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt 1986, p. 144-145. cf. *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. by A.V. Miller, Oxford Univ. Press, 1979.
- 4 G. W. F. Hegel, *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt 1986, p. 150.
- 5 G. W. F. Hegel, *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt 1986, p. 152.
- 6 Judith Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection*, Stanford Univ. Press, 1997.

## The Mortar

For centuries, in the iconography of the Christian Occident "the woman" was considered a tool of the devil. In the graphics of Otto Greiner, which appeared in 1900 (see *Phantom der Lust*, vol. II, p. 49), it is the monstrous male sex organ that is presented as an instrument of devilish destruction, operated by two malicious, laughing giants – giant when compared to the two Lilliput-like women. The one in the back could have arisen from the criminal records of Lombroso; whereas the one in front, with a bat's pointy ears and claw-like fingernails, shows the traits of a satyr, the antique precursor to the Christian devil. These faces are ugly, yet this outer ugliness is the expression of a psychotic disposition: the sadistic hatred of "the wench".<sup>1</sup> "The" wench? In contrast to the monolithic phallus, she appears as a threatening multitude. Many against one: the multitude is a constant expression of threat – as chaos, an undefined mass. The female is fantasized as something unlimited, unstructured, formless, which is opposed by the phallus, a clear exclamation mark of unity. The destructive desire of the two fauns must be fed by this threat. In patriarchy, the erect phallus was considered the symbolic Vendôme Column of proud masculinity. But here, suppression of the woman turns into extermination. A victory that rests on the destruction of the other – in order to avoid being destroyed oneself? This violence lacks the sovereignty of the ancient patriarchy. Even earlier, in ancient religions that honored the fertility cult, the phallus was constantly a symbol of procreative power. Here, in contrast, it is an instrument for the destruction of all that is living. What is it in man that so greatly intensifies the feeling of being threatened? Here, the print gives us an almost word-for-word hint: it is two hands that reach into the print from the left and lead the little female bodies into the mortar. "Emancipo": "Out of the hands of the master." Is it the beginning of woman's emancipation in the second half of the nineteenth century that gives the men such fear? The phallus's over-dimensionality can also be explained by this fear – as a complement to the threat of castration, which was felt through the rise of the woman. We know images of the idealization of the woman under patriarchy, images that elevate her to chaste icons, spiritual and beautiful. Here, however, we experience the reverse of this idealization: the woman is devalued through de-individualization and mass proportions. Are these two sides of the same coin?

The phallus loses its genital function. The fact that the women are pounded into mush in a mortar makes them equivalent to amorphous excrement. Within the trinity of fear, hatred, and destruction the male organ is given an anal function. As a man, the knowledge of feeling sexually at the same time dependent on the woman can result in hatred of one's own instincts, which is expressed as male self-hatred. Is this the deeper reason for the ugliness of the Gulliver figures represented here? In this graphic, the real dimensions are reversed into their opposites: that which is fantasized as a great threat is made smaller, and that which for fear threatens to shrink to the smallest size is made larger. These are the mechanisms of dream work as Freud describes them in his concurrently published book, *The Interpretation of Dreams*. The graphic depiction of the sheet follows a logic comparable with a dream. Freud saw the dream's essential formal characteristic in its graphic qualities. Flowing into the dream are mainly all elements that have a connection to non-integrated scenes in the unconscious. Here, the dream logic, which determined many works arising at the turn of the century, can offer insight into the "underworld" below the "official" culture. The emerging field of psychoanalysis cast a light into the darkness of the soul – and discovered an abyss: An abyss that showed itself independent of the soul, and at the same time in other cultural manifestations. Therefore, these works are not to be interpreted only in terms of individual psychology, but rather in terms of the cultural atmosphere of the times. The fact that such inscrutable works, that so openly reveal the non-integrated, are at the same time banned and persecuted, corresponds with the logic of the real world. Erotic art showed an underground tremble that suggested fear, power, and destruction at the beginning of a new century, which on the surface dreamt optimistically of a world full of technical progress and feasibility. Yet only a few were capable of interpreting art's heavy dreams as a warning sign. At the bottom edge of the picture: the first remark. It shows a little cancan dancing figure, completely full of life and playful, who, turned away from the viewer, turns her face expectantly and receptively to the phallus, as though awaiting good things from above. She is unaware of the devilish, exterminating game of the "battle of the sexes" in which she finds herself. Otto Greiner's grotesque sheet leads the ideology of male dominance ad absurdum.