

« It is through deprivation that nature starts to disclose us the key to her secrets and we can know it thoroughly only outraging it. »

# SADE

## OPUS CONTRA NATURAM



by and with **Enrico Frattaroli** (libertine author)  
from the work of the **Marquis de Sade**  
**Franco Mazzi** and **Anna Cianca** (philosophers)  
**Galliano Mariani** (priest) **Catia Castagna** (accomplice)  
**Enrico Venturini** (live percussion on midi-device)

Production **Neroluce**,  
In collaboration with **Florian** - Teatro Stabile di Innovazione

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# Opus contra naturam

Alchemists imagined the *opus contra naturam* like a process of deformation: «to serve nature, the alchemic work had to deform nature. To set free the animated nature it had to hurt the natural nature (to boil, to cut off, to skin, to dry, to putrefy, to choke, to drown, etc.)»<sup>1</sup> According to Freud and Jung, the work of the *opus contra naturam* is to make conscious the unconscious: the dream, which is par excellence the instrument of it, works according to the same process of the alchemic deformation: «Putrefaction and blackening, horrible wounds and purulent sores, ritual slaughtering or murrains or massacre of animals» are the images through which the conscience abandons the superior world of nature to reach the inferior one of psyche.

In Sade, it is the same work of writing that implies a double process of deformation and conscience. In his *Idée sur les romans*, Sade gives the writer the responsibility of showing man «not only how he is or shows to be, but also how he can be or can become in comparison with the mutations of vice and the repercussions of passions», because «it's the nature which has to grasp [...] the heart of man, the most peculiar of its work». Therefore it is insight depravation that Sade recognizes the privileged process of deformation through which to understand the mystery of the human heart inside the wider mystery of nature: «it has sensed man it will paint him».

In my theatrical project, the principle of the *opus contra naturam* works as a focusing and investigation principle of either Sade's writing or the theatrical style designated to represent it. An *opus contra theatrum*,<sup>2</sup> therefore – and theatralis at the same time – that from 2002 to 2007 has generated:

## **SADE opus contra naturam**

*It is through depravation that nature starts to disclose us the key to her secrets  
and we can know it thoroughly only outraging it*

Rome, Former Prison of Correction of Saint Michael (April 2007)

## **SADE per speculum**

*Lesson on the anatomy of desire*

Production Teatro Comunale di Ferrara, Neroluce  
Ferrara, disused Church of Saint Francis (May 2004)

## **SADE ex machina**

*Non serviam for quartets in voice sound action coercion silence*

Production Comune di Terni - Assessorato alla cultura, Centro MultiMediale, Neroluce  
Terni, Videocentro (June 2003)

## **SADE cum figuris**

*From the soliloquy about the murderer of Pope Pio VI Braschi*

Production MRF - Incontri Festival 2002, Comune di Roma - Assessorato alla cultura  
Rome, Palazzo Braschi (December 2002)

## **SADE neroluce**

*A darkness shining in the brightness which brightness could not comprehend*

Production MRF - Incontri Festival 2001, Comune di Roma - Assessorato alla cultura  
Rome, Former Prison of Correction of Saint Michael (January 2002)

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<sup>1</sup> The quotations of the paragraph are taken from James Hillman, *The dream and the inferior world*.

<sup>2</sup> Cfr. Enrico Frattaroli, *SADE : opus contra theatrum*, in "Sade au théâtre : La scène et l'obsène", *Annuaire Théâtral - Revue Québécoise d'Études Théâtrales* (n. 41, Ottawa 2007).

# Performing Sade?

The form of the theatrical performance runs through all the works of Sade, in different ways and intensities. Anyway, there is a performable Sade and an unperformable Sade on the stages of what we usually call theatre. The discrepancy is not related to the difference of themes or genres, but to the real nature of the representation, i.e. the substantial diversity of the prospective from which Sade proposes to analyze the man.

If I had chosen to stage one of his *pièce*, I would have presented his presentable theatre, representing what Sade tried in vain to represent, without any problem of form or censure. On the contrary, if I had chosen to adapt one of his narrative texts to the theatre, *120 days* included, in other words Sade's unplayable theatre, I would have limited the theatrical operation to a false problem of form: how to reduce, to represent, to sort out... in other words, how to reconduct to a theatrical convention, more or less innovative or unconventional, what exceeds it essentially. The theatre would have stayed untouched and Sade would have stayed, once again, out of the theatre, not represented or unplayable – as he has always been .

But I was not interested in making a pure theatrical representation or an operation of direction. What I urged to do was to disturb the theatre – mine, first of all – imagining to represent exactly what cannot be represented, what is a problem on the stage, because it is a problem for our conscience long before it is a problem for our theatre. Then I am not talking of a problem of form or censure but of truth: that it is the real scandal of Sade.



SADE : *opus contra naturam* (frame)

My theatrical work on Sade was possible just on the condition to “stay out of theatre”, firmly connected to the nature and to the rhythm of my proceeding into Sade and of Sade in me, dissociated on principle from the spaces, the times and the way of production and distribution of the theatre in Italy. Reading the work of Sade and conceiving its representation meant, for me, to work sadianly. And it doesn't mean that I confused or identified myself with Sade, but it means that I set out myself to an excessive reading (integral and continued), an excessive dedication (without limits of willingness and times), an excessive involvement (beyond the professional limits usually ascribed to my role).

## Libertine author

As a good «friendly reader», I wanted to follow to its extreme the «school of libertinage» of the *120 days of Sodoma* making mine his recommendations: I enjoyed the «splendid banquet of six hundred courses», «I looked for what could meet my taste» and «I lost sperm there». And here I am, as a libertine author, to stage the system of “my reading”, not in the usual sense of “my interpretation” of Sade, but in the peculiar meaning in which Sade describes and proposes it to his «friendly reader». Here I am, besides the professional boundary that would have left me, as author and director, out of the scene: but what Sadian sense could have had “my reading” if it had not invested as well as the imaginary, the body and desire of those who imagine?

Then I did not stage Sade's character or the characters of his poetical universe, but myself as Sadian «reader»: irreplaceable imaginal and physical subject, not reducible to a role, not interpretable by anybody else but myself, author and «reader». I did not stage one of Sade's work, but what Sade's work has staged in myself: as I could not offer such a large variety of passions, I offered a diversity compatible with my imaginary and my body: with the imaginary and the body of

my theatre. I did not risk to stage Sade involving his writing in a impossible representation, I preferred to risk that Sade staged myself, leaving that his writing crossed my theatre – in other words myself – and making of this crossing a theatrical process. What I represent happens on “my scene”, on the scene of “my theatre”, that is on the scene of “my imaginary” of man and of theatre man: not the *one hundred and twenty*, but *my day of Sodoma*.

## Silling theatre

The Sadian representation system – not the one of the «man as he is or shows to be» in action in the theatrical *pièce*, but the one of the man «how he can be or become in comparison with the mutations of vice and the repercussions of passions», completed in *120 days* – is unrealisable in any theatre which has not been erected in the Silling Castle. Those scenes cannot live outside of that castle, that theatre, those characters, those imaginative worlds, they can only resound in other places, on condition that have repercussions in other bodies, in other imaginations.



*SADE : opus contra naturam* (frame)

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## Convivium

I found in the *convivium* the dramatic principle that can combine philosophical dissertations and libertine actions, the only one that can unite the pleasure of the knowledge experience, the cognitive value of the erotic experience and the nature implicitly theatrical of the imagination. And it is a *convivium* form that I gave to “my reading” of Sade’s work in the theatre, that is to my clear, empathic and theatrical representation of his writing.

Being Sade’s work my real passionate and cognitive object, my “peculiar pleasure” is not to make them to tell me «all the different deviations of the dissolutions», but it is to listen to the dissertations of the majority of the libertines on the strategic themes of the Sadian philosophy while, as a libertine subject, I execute an orgiastic sequence modulated on the four grades in which Sade divides the passions in the *120 days of Sodom*. It is not possible to imagine Sade’s orgies neither out of the conceptual perspective of the dissertations nor out of the orgiastic conceptual perspective where they take form. In Sade, libertinage and philosophy find themselves mutually and indissol-

ably implicated, because if it is true that you reach libertinage only through a philosophical operation the contrary is also true, that there is a knowledge that you can only attain through libertinage. In Sade's work, *philosophy* and *orgy* work in a poetic way like forces mutually inalienable, in action either in the writing or in the phenomena that the writing describes.



*SADÉ : opus contra naturam* (photo)

ing erotic ceremonials, organised in a meticulous way like real theatrical representations. So my theatrical representation re-peats itself, clearly identical to itself, passionately different every night, according to exact rituals and rhythms, with the same characters and in accordance to singular scenic ceremonies, articulated in a me-ticulous way like a real libertine passion.

Philosophical levels and passionate levels go on at the same rate: as a libertine I bring my passion to the murderous level because of the philosophy through which I can sustain it: the destroying operations of the reason and the analyses serve to set free the obscure forces of the imaginary from logic and prejudice. While the philosophical dissertations move on the four themes of Religion, Libertinage, Crime and Murder, my libertine action, in concert, from *Simple* becomes *Double*, then *Criminal* and at last *Murderous*.

The depravation of the Sadian libertines never manifests itself as brutal expressions of instincts, on the contrary, libertine art is to perfect, to refine passion the more it becomes cruel, closer to murder. The libertine passions more refined and complex often repeat themselves identical, according to exact cadences and rituals, with the same characters and in accordance with stupefy-

## Guests

Sade's theatre cannot be assimilated to a "theatre of cruelty" but inscribed, for its nature, in the perspective of a "theatre of pleasure". I have never aimed to treat the audience as potential victims – to shock them and gain their adhesion with the pornography of the violence – not even to involve them, calling demagogically "participation" their uneasiness. On the contrary, I wanted to consider them, in all respects, potential libertines: philosophic and erotic subjects of pleasure starting from their position – theatrical position – of listeners, of onlookers. The «friendly reader» to whom Sade talks resounds in all of them: in the procession of the images that pass and change from an imaginary to the other, I am the last libertine, the last subject in order of imaginary, but it is in the imaginative world of the onlookers, of my guests, the scene on which – and with which – my representation ends.

*Enrico Frattaroli*

### CONTACTS

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