

From here to there, from there to here: notes on reception of *Philosophy in the Bedroom* as theater of animation

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ABSTRACT – From here to there, from there to here: notes on reception of *Philosophy in the Bedroom* as theater of animation – The article deals with the theatrical reception of the play *Philosophy in the Bedroom*, presented by the group Pigmalhão Escultura que Mexe, from the perspective of two authors: a Brazilian actress-researcher who performed for a French public and a French philosopher-spectator who watched the Brazilian show. The Brazilian author introduces the process of creating the play and its repercussions among the public. The French author then wanders through his impressions from watching the show in Charleville-Mézières in 2015. The objective of the text is to provoke reflections by juxtaposing these two perspectives, situated in different geographical, political, and cultural terrains, on the staging of a French text by Brazilians.

Keywords: *Philosophy in the Bedroom*. Marquis de Sade. Theatrical Reception. Puppet Theater. Pigmalhão Escultura que Mexe.

RÉSUMÉ – D'ici à là, de là à ici: notes sur la réception théâtrale du spectacle *La Philosophie dans le Boudoir* – L'article traite de la réception théâtrale du spectacle *A Filosofia na Alcova*, du groupe Pigmalhão Escultura que Mexe, du point de vue de deux auteurs: une actrice-chercheuse brésilienne qui présente au public français; un philosophe-spectateur français qui regarde un spectacle brésilien. Dès lors, l'auteur brésilien construit une écriture introductive sur le processus de création du spectacle et les répercussions de la pièce sur le public. Dans un second temps, l'article s'ouvre à une déambulation de l'auteur français sur les impressions qu'il a eues de l'émission, lors de sa visionnage à Charleville-Mézières, en 2015. L'objectif du texte est de provoquer des réflexions à partir de la juxtaposition de ces deux perspectives, situés dans des terrains géographiques, politiques et culturels différents, sur l'assemblage d'un texte francophone par des Brésiliens.

Mots-clés: *La Philosophie dans le Boudoir*. Marquis de Sade. Réception Théâtrale. Théâtres de Marionnettes. Pigmalhão Escultura que Mexe.

RESUMO – De cá pra lá, de lá pra cá: notas sobre a recepção teatral do espetáculo *A Filosofia na Alcova* – O artigo trata da recepção teatral do espetáculo *A Filosofia na Alcova*, do grupo Pigmalhão Es-

cultura que Mexe, sob a perspectiva de dois autores: uma atriz-pesquisadora brasileira que apresenta para o público francês; um espectador-filósofo francês que assiste a um espetáculo brasileiro. Para tanto, a autora brasileira constrói uma escrita introdutória sobre o processo de criação do espetáculo e as repercussões da peça junto ao público. Em um segundo momento, o artigo se abre para que o autor francês deambule sobre as impressões que teve do espetáculo, ao assisti-lo em *Charleville-Mézières*, em 2015. O objetivo do texto é provocar reflexões a partir da justaposição desses dois olhares, situados em terrenos geográficos, políticos e culturais distintos, sobre a montagem de um texto francófono por brasileiros.

Palavras-chave: ***A Filosofia na Alcova*. Marquês de Sade. Recepção Teatral. Teatro de Formas Animadas. Pigmalião Escultura que Mexe.**

From here to there (by Mariliz Schrickte)

Pigmalião Escultura que Mexe¹ [Pygmalian Moving Sculpture] is a theater group founded in the city of Belo Horizonte, Minas Gerais, Brazil. Moving through encounters of the visual arts with the theater arts, it has constructed a trajectory in the puppet theater in which philosophy and politics permeates its shows. Its poetics is pervaded by the expression of the potential of animated forms as objects of aesthetic appreciation. Mikel Dufrenne (1998, p. 23-31) conceived of aesthetic objects as ideas present in sensory form. By allowing free agreement of the imagination and the intellect, simultaneously conjuring sensitive and signifying processes, these objects mobilize the souls of those who see them more readily than any other object. It is in this appeal to poetry through reason, in which images carry structures of meaning, that the Pigmalião group seeks to stimulate the public's active participation in the construction of dialectical, reflexive and questioning interpretations of their own realities.

The repertorie of the Pigmalião group includes six spectacles, three short skits, two interventions and more than ten workshops and laboratories, which circulate through various cities of Brazil and abroad. Since its formation in 2007, Pigmalião has been concerned with the construction of an authentic discourse. In this search, it has strived to solidify its bases in a theater of animation made exclusively for adults. In this way, it tries to promote a perception that is distant from the idea that this language is always associated to theater for children. The design, construction, and handling of the puppets thus try to avoid childish caricatures. The refinement of its marionettes, which are considered sculptures, as the group's name

suggests, are created considering the philosophical effects of the aesthetic pleasure preconized by Dufrenne (1998).

The group's first large project, entitled *A Filosofia na Alcova*² [*Philosophy in the Bedroom*], which is the object of analysis of this article, is a staging of a polemical text by the Marqués de Sade with this title, supposedly written in 1795. The group wanted to use this production to highlight entrance to a space that it wanted to conquer: recognition as a theater group that works with a contemporary language and generates an international circulatory flow with its plays. In this play, for most of the puppets, the technique of string marionettes was chosen (Figure 1), with the puppets acting directly on the stage, with the actors and actresses that conduct them dressed in black in sight of the public.



Figure 1 – Scene: Arrival of the Le Chevelier de Mirvel. *Philosophy in the Bedroom* (Pigmalião Escultura que Mexe). Photo: Eduardo Santos (2015).

Philosophy in the Bedroom or *The Immoral Preceptors* narrates the trajectory of young Eugénie, 15, who travels to the home of the libertine Madame de Saint-Ange, with the authorization of her father, to be educated about libertine precepts. Assisted by her brother the Le Chevelier de Mirvel and the perverted Master Dolmancé, Saint-Ange proffers sexual, moral and religious lessons in a theoretical and practical manner, distilling the extreme of Sade's libertinism. The climax of the story is accompanied by the arrival of Eugénie's mother, who personifies punitive and coercive institutions, and has come to *save* her daughter (Figure 2; Figure 3). The plot of the story, in the synopsis of the play, is presented by Pigmalião in the following manner:

The marionettes here have no limits: sex, violence and all kinds of religious and moral questioning make this play a strong catalyst of questioning and reflection. It is an adaptation of [a book by] the polemical Marqués de Sade written more than two hundred years ago, but which continues to shock for its perversions of good customs (Felix, 2011)³.



Figure 2 – Scene: Arrival of Senhora de Mistival. *Philosophy in the Bedroom* (Pigmalião Escultura que Mexe). Photo: Amira Hissa (2011).



Figure 3 – Scene: Sewing the mother. *Philosophy in the Bedroom* (Pigmalião Escultura que Mexe). Photo: Eduardo Santos (2015).

Sade's text was adapted by the director of the group, Eduardo Felix, who described the work of the French author as:

An absolutely controversial text, which in its direct discourse makes a radical defense of sexual liberty and places pure pleasure above anything else. The text combines a collection of contradictions and involves the reader through the author's perversions, but gradually takes on a shocking and repulsive cruelty. At the same time that Sade makes a logical defense of indefensible practices, such as rape, murder, theft, and violence, he creates images that lead the reader to loath and condemn these practices. [...] We know, warned by Sade himself, that only part of the public will perceive the criticisms that are between the lines, and interpret the horror staged as criticism and not as an apology. We believe that even those who leave the theater horrified by all the evil exposed, will be obliged to reflect on that which they witnessed, and perhaps we will reach what Aristotle points to as a formula to attain catharsis: horror followed by piety (Felix, 2020, p. 33-34).

It should be emphasized that this was the work that marked my definitive entrance as a member of the Pigmalião group. As a young actress who recently arrived in Belo Horizonte, I entered for the first time in the *alcove* of the puppet theater to interpret and manipulate Eugénie, the virgin protagonist of Sade's novel. I still did not have a deep knowledge of the author or his work, although at the time I had heard of some polemic films. Thus, the reading of the *Philosophy in the Bedroom* reached me as a cathartic breath: I did not know if I truly had the courage to utter Sade's words (2003) with my mouth, but I was certainly enchanted by the distinct way that he ignited contradictory themes such as religion, abortion, sex and incest.

The spectacle opened in 2011, in Brasília, and soon had a run in Belo Horizonte. A short version was presented that year at the *Festival de Formes Brèves Marionnettiques Orbis Pictus*⁴, in the city of Reims, France. The following year, the play returned to France for a presentation at the *Festival Le Manifeste*⁵, in the city of Grande-Synthe, a festival known for its political engagement. The distinction that I found in these first presentations in Brazil and France was that the reaction of the public "there" and "here" was different at two moments of the play. Here, the public reacted with laughter in the first part, when the marionettes executed true sexual acrobatics, and became quiet during religious scenes. In France, the public was shy

during the erotic scenes and clearly enjoyed the mocking of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, staged at the 28th minute of the play. In the perspective of French critic Coline Merlo (2011), about the presentation at the *Le Manifeste* festival (translation ours)⁶:

In the background of the scene, in his jail cell, the Marquês is immeasurable. Drive is a disproportional force. From the free flow that Sade leaves us, we move very quickly, in a suave movement, to the demand for liberation. Not from the Church, which is less evident in Brazil than in our land, but not for that reason a delegation of responsibility, an accepted heteronomy.

In 2014, the play was presented at the *Festival Nacional Pau Brasil*, in the city of Ouro Branco, in the interior of Minas Gerais. It was the first time that the public was mostly residents of the city and not from the artistic community. This fact, which was determined by counting by the director of the festival, made it different from other presentations of the play. According to the director, 47 people left in the middle of the play, after the scene of the Gospel according to Marquês de Sade. Perhaps the religiosity of the population of Minas Gerais could not accept watching Jesus Christ, the Virgin Mary and other characters of the biblical narrative portrayed as felt puppets of pigs. They are the only puppets in the play that do not have realistic features and a refined finish, revealing a contrast that animates suggestions of precariousness and improvisation (Figure 4). The history is ironically staged in tones of bad theater, as a metaphor of the narrative about the crucifixion of Jesus. Below is a passage of the text pronounced by the character Sade, in the adaptation of the *Philosophy in the Bedroom*:

Brothers, *God*, had a son. An only son generated in an incomprehensible manner. You see, if a man fucks he wants his *God* to fuck as well. In those days, it was imagined that *God* would come to earth in celestial rays amid a procession of angels, acclaimed by the entire universe...but it was in the womb of a pig, in a sty, that Earth's savior was announced. As a child, the boy *God* did small deeds, quite libertine, for the sacerdocy of the temple of Jerusalem. After unexplainably disappearing for fifteen years, he reappears in Judea, proclaiming himself the Child of *God*, equal to his father (Felix, 2011, scene 9).



Figure 4 – Scene: Gospel. *Philosophy in the Bedroom* (Pigmalião Escultura que Mexe).
Photo: Guilherme Pedreiro (2016).

The excerpt from the French critic Coline Merlo and the episode of the departure of the public in the interior of Minas Gerais inspires us to try to understand the differences of the religious situation there and here. According to Brazil's 2010 Census, 86.6% of the population declared themselves to be Christian, including 64.6% Catholic and 22.2% Evangelical (IBGE, 2012). In France, a 2012 study by *Gallup International*¹ found that only 39% of the population say they are religious, while 29% say they are convicted atheists. Although both countries have lay states with a separation of politics and religion, history shows the latent influence of religious issues on political opinion. The growth in religious influence in Brazilian politics is notorious with the increase of the power of Evangelicals in Congress and other institutions. There have been many absurd episodes like the recent inclusion of the Bible, a book that tells the ancient story of the Jewish people and of the messiah Jesus Christ, as a cultural and immaterial heritage of the state of Rio de Janeiro, under law nº 9.177 (Barbosa Júnior, 2021).

In the wake of laws that illustrate the close relationship between politics and religion other data contrasts there and here. In France abortion has been decriminalized since 1975 (Santos, 2012, p. 134), while in Brazil it is still a crime, with its legalization increasingly unlikely given Brazil's political situation. There is the case of a 10-year-old girl in the state of Espírito Santo, who had been raped since the age of six by her uncle and was authorized

by the courts to have an abortion in August 2020. Abortions in case of rape have been legal in Brazil since 1940, and the courts should maintain the anonymity of the victims, but this case gained national repercussion and protests of opposition motivated by the very Minister of Women the Family and Human Rights in the current federal government (Jiménez, 2020).

The differing relationships of each society with the forced interruption of gestation may generate different receptions to scene 11 of the play (Figure 5), when three foam fetuses dialog about abortion and two of them defend its realization in cases when contraceptive methods are not efficient. In the adaptation of the text of Sade's *Philosophy in the Bedroom*, the fetus-version of the character Saint-Ange says:

And if all fails and a unfortunate pregnancy occurs, abortion in the first seven or eight weeks, so that the baby leaves smoothly. [...] We, women, can do what we want with that which we carry in our uteruses. The mother has all the rights over her children, whatever their age (Felix, 2011, cena 11).

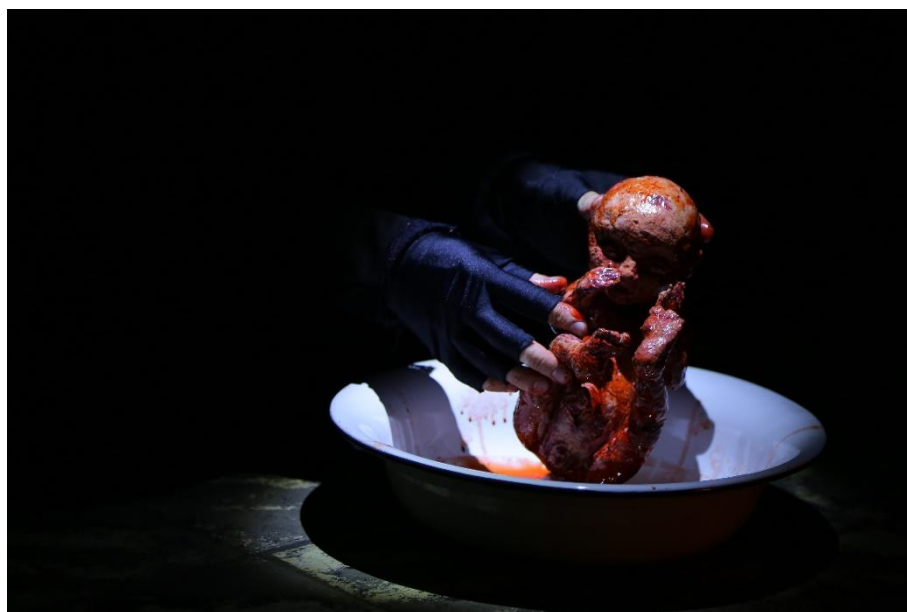


Figure 5 – Scene: Fetuses. *Philosophy in the Alcove* (Pigmalião Escultura que Mexe).
Photo: Guilherme Pedreiro (2016).

The excerpt reveals Sade's philosophy, which is pronounced by puppets portraying *victims* of abortion. This friction between text and image allows a reading that shifts between criticism and apology of a social question that has different repercussions in the two geographic contexts presented. According to Kristeva (2012, p. 185),

Poetic meaning relates to other discursive meanings, so that various other discourses are legible in the poetic utterance. [...] From this perspective, of course the poetic meaning cannot be considered to be dependent on a single code. It is the intersection of various codes (at least two), which are found in a relation of denial with each other.

From spectators who stay until the end of the play it is not uncommon to hear impressions about a constant sense of guilt upon feeling pleasure in watching the horror that is portrayed on stage. For the director Eduardo Felix, this is an “Aristotelian catharsis” (Felix, 2020, p. 34). But we can raise Nietzsche’s interpretation which compares this effect to the sensation of pleasure caused by the annihilation of the hero in Greek tragedy. The German philosopher saw this as a purgative effect of catharsis, like a pinprick that ruptures the noxious excess of accumulated compassion (apud Desgranges, 2017, p. 60-61). This stimulates an important reflection on Christian guilt as an instrument of control and its influence on the reception of political discourses addressed in artistic representation.

Participation in the *World Festival of Puppet Theaters in Charleville-Mézières* (2015)⁸ allowed the group to take the play *Philosophy in the Alcove* once again to the French public and to receive new responses, like that of the critic Philip de Saintange (2015, translation ours)⁹:

The puppeteering that takes your breath away continues, but we shift continent, register and type of puppets. Brazil with string marionettes. The plural of the word string [which is explicit in Portuguese and French] makes complete sense when we count the number of cords that allow the puppets to be animated like humans. But what human? The most abject among all the disgraceful, the most perverse of the sadists: the Marqués de Sade. If wooden puppets are usually made to walk and are given the opportunity to make a few hand gestures and head movements, when Sade and the *Philosophy in the Bedroom* are announced, even the less cult among us will easily imagine that it is another member of the body that should be brought to life and in the most beautiful way possible.

This declaration by Saintange, who coincidentally has the same last name as a character in the play, confirms the greater intimacy that the French have with Sade’s writings and biography. The writer, who many referred to as the philosopher of evil, spent 30 years in prisons and sanitariums and wrote his first work in the Bastille (Figure 6). Born in Paris, in

1740, he lived during the Ancien Régime and the French Revolution and amid all the repression of his time, wrote a vast body of work permeated by eroticism, cruelty, atheism and a break from moral values. His work scandalized his time, crossed the nineteenth century condemned to silence and even in the twentieth century was censured by French courts under the allegation that it offended morals and good customs (Moraes, 1991, p. 7). His work disturbs readers until today, although this is an effect known to the French, unlike Brazilians, who perhaps know the adjective *sadist* better than the origin of the term.



Figure 6 – Puppet of the Marquês de Sade, transformed into a character in the adaptation of the work. The Philosopher in the Bedroom (Pigmalião Escultura que Mexe). Photo: Gustavo Stockler (2014).

The staging of a text by Sade realized 200 years after its writing stirs questions that involve Haroldo de Campos's concept of *transcription*, and that consequently inspire reflections from other authors such as Walter Benjamin. Campos (2011) conceives translation as a creative transposition, a recreation by the translator. On this basis he raises some problematics that can arise in the adaptation of a literary work to a theatrical text to be staged. These include the untranslatability of poetry, which makes its transformation something else, a new creation and or criticism of the original work. This is caused by the existence of an expectation by those who know the original work. Translation is understood as an operation of *estrangement* from the original text, and not as a utilitarian and accommodating function. Benjamin also understands that translation has a semiotic function, which would be to revive the “mode of re-presenting”, that is, to recreate

the *modus operandi* of poetry and not its significant content itself (Campos, 2011, p. 27-28).

In this line, Campos recalls the mutable character of texts, as conceived by Benjamin, which attests that contents are under constant renovation not only in translations and transformations but in the original work itself. This transmutation can be motivated by a text's dislocation from its original geographic and cultural context, or from its temporal context. For example, in the adaptation of *Philosophy in the Bedroom*, the age of the protagonist is maintained, but gains another meaning when staged in the society in which we live. In eighteenth century France, when the original work was written, young girls could marry when they had barely reached 13, and were inserted in sexual and reproductive life. Today a 15-year-old girl, the age of the character Eugénie, is considered an adolescent, a category created only in the nineteenth century, which puts off sexual maturity and the understanding of her formation as a woman. In addition, the situation in which we live, with daily cases of rape and violence against children and youth, shocks society, and therefore generates another meaning for spectators who "watch" Sade's philosophy today. The option to maintain and reveal the age of the character in the adaptation of his work is a planned choice that can generate a new layer of meaning for the play.

All of the observations mentioned can be related to the concept of literacy that gained strength in education in the 1980s and which relates reading and writing with social practice. It is as if everyone could read plays, but understanding is directly related with the social field of the spectators. In the words of Deleuze and Guattari (1995, p. 12),

There is no meaning independent of the dominant significations or subjectivation independent of an established order of subjection. Both depend on the nature and transmission of the words of command in a given social field.

Pigmalião uses these possibilities for manipulating text and image to promote scenarios that stimulate identification, shock and catharsis in its public. In this way the group proposes a questioning of certain structures crystalized by language and cultural, social, historic, religious and political imaginary. The group seeks to promote artistic work that, in keeping with the thinking of Roland Barthes, "destabilizes the reader's historic, cultural,

and psychological bases, the consistency of their tastes, values and memories” and “causes a crisis in their relation with language ” (Barthes, 1987, p. 21).

By working this way, the group is always surprised by the reception of its different publics, as on the occasion of the closing lecture of the 3^o. *Pro-Vocação - Encontro Internacional sobre Formação no Teatro de Animação* – in May 2019, in Florianópolis, led by philosopher and professor Philippe Choulet. At that time, when I was present in the audience, I was able to capture (with my basic French) something he said like “the marionette play *Philosophy in the Bedroom* presented in 2015 in Charleville-Mézières no longer shocks us”. This stimulating affirmation inspired me to seek out professor Philippe Choulet to present his version, which, below, carries all of the profusion of connections, reverie and memories particular to his process of artistic reception and cultural references.

From there to here (by Philippe Choulet)

How can we, how do we dare stage the ghosts of Marquês de Sade in puppet theater? This is the feat that was realized by the Brazilian company *Pigmalião Escultura que Mexe...*

It was a beautiful day in late September 2015 (precisely on 22 and 23 of September, in the *Salle du Bois Crancê*), in Charleville-Mézières (France), which is a somewhat sulfurous city because it was the birthplace of Arthur Rimbaud, a precocious, original and scandalous poet (his love for Verlaine...), who wound up as an arms dealer and in excruciating agony in Marseille... but also the city of Michel Fourniret, a pedophile and serial killer (of children and adolescents) and of the Kouachi brothers, who were the authors, in name of a puritan, intolerant and fanatic Islam, of the attack against the satiric journal *Charlie-Hebdo...* The city has thus hosted a quite disturbing cast. But it can be proud for organizing the *World Festival of Puppet Theaters* every two years, in which this *Philosophy in the Bedroom* took part.

The dramatization of the *Philosophy in the Bedroom (La Philosophie dans le boudoir)* by Marquês de Sade, who in France we dare to call, with a touch of irony, the divine *Marquês*, was simultaneously attractive and disturbing.

Sade in France

It was *attractive* because my generation (educated in literature in the 1970s and afterwards and particularly in vanguard, modernist and libertine literature...) knew Sade very well, as well as his commentators, epigones, defenders, and glossarists (Georges Bataille, Pierre Klossowski, Maurice Blanchot, Yves Bonnefoy, Jacques Lacan, Gaétan Picon, Pierre Naville, Roland Barthes, and Annie Le Brun...) – and we can say that the reading is no longer shocking. In fact, there is a *Sade-culture* in France, and this is because of the successive scandals of literary editions of his work...

This is to insist on the fact that Sade is truly part of the French unconscious and body of knowledge, and at two points:

1° – The first point was at the political revolution of 1789. Although he was convicted and jailed, he was a beacon of liberty, as a libertarian (roughly speaking, an excessive Diderot, a Diderot with no inhibition, without a superego, or he was sufficiently daring to provoke this superego...). He escaped movements of purification against the aristocrats (the Terror)... and we owe to him the celebrated phrase ‘Frenchmen, one more effort if you want to be republicans’ (which is very current), and let us read his correspondence, full of political considerations, critical of institutions and the powerful – particularly judges... which shows that Sade cannot be reduced only to the sultry side of his sexual perversions or *sadism*...

2° – The second point is that of the Revolution of customs, characteristic of the French spirit since Rabelais... and even if Sade is not read very much – but is indicated as a *libertarian* (and even to affirm feminine sexuality – shocking, right?), that is, he is an icon...

Sade’s texts certainly faced some obstacles... Thus, it was necessary to wait until the 1960s to see published what was, at the time, thought to be the *complete work* of the Marquês, under the direction of Gilbert Lely (in the *Círculo do Livro Precioso*, with prefaces, postfaces of the cited Bataille, Klossowski, Lacan, Bonnefoy, etc.). Later, in 1986, Jean-Jacques Pauvert (*Fonds Pauvert*) published an edition with a preface by Annie Le Brun... and finally, the publisher Gallimard issued the *La Pléiade* collection in 3 volumes, edited by Michel Delon, 1990-1998.

I recall that when I was a student I found some writings in a *pocket-book*, thus in very popular versions, even *La Philosophie dans le boudoir*, or *Justine...* and the infernal *Opus pistorum* by Henri Miller, a masterpiece of pornography, or even the terrible *Jardin des supplices* by Octave Mirbeau... I do not remember the censors being very active at the time...

This is to say that in France Sade was part of the common literary and cultural landscape – even if we did not truly read him, not with great frequency – and was not shocking. Spontaneously, unconsciously, we knew that he was only telling of the horrors common to humanity: our literature and history professors never hid from us the ultraviolence of the tyrants and despots, brutes and criminals, from Calígula and Nero to Landru¹⁰, including Dr. Petiot¹¹, Jack the Ripper, Gilles de Rais¹²... I add that the 1960s and 1970s saw a cultural recognition of Sade's importance, thanks to the work of historians and to certain television programs in particular, to the understanding of the camps – concentration camps, extermination camps, work camps, the Soviet Gulag and Chinese Gulag¹³... Art history also contributed to reopening the Sade dossier, with German expressionism (Grosz, in particular)... At the time, nothing could be surprising about humanity... we were even surprised that we could be surprised.

Sade, the realist

It is true that Sade's universe is frightening. But since then humanity has seen others as or even more frightening, in the colonizations and mounting of nineteenth century empires, in the two world wars, in the extermination camps, guerrilla wars, civil wars, etc. And obviously there has been no end. Sade's perversions are only a tiny portion of the sexual perversions invented by some humans, and particularly those aimed at other humans, to impose a type of recognition through pain, evil, cruelty, torture.

We should constantly recall Nietzsche's phrase: "No one is such a liar as the indignant man" (*Beyond Good and Evil*, § 26). In other words, the Marqués de Sade taught us to be realists and to face human ultraviolence. *Ultraviolence* is a term that appears in the cinema of Kubrick (cf. *Paths of Glory*, *Spartacus*, *Full Metal Jacket*, *Clockwork Orange*, *Shining*, and others).

In sum, we know very well what man can do to other men. None of this can surprise, offend, or scandalize us. We are not unaware, we are not

without ignoring (which is to say the same thing, but ‘we are not without ignoring’ has an ironic touch, precisely because the expression is aimed at the probable repression of this knowledge...). The moral condemnation of the Marqués de Sade (his censoring) is mainly the act of ignorant people or of people who do not want to understand that Sade at least had the virtue of teaching us to no longer be hypocrites. We do not forget that even vicars and priests indulged in all types of violence – will the sexual deprivations of the priests be forgotten?

Sade is a memorialist of Evil. He was a writer who dared to take the narration of Evil to a climax, while we recall that reality always exceeds fiction: Nero, Calígula, Vitélio... If we want to begin a list of tortures and pleasure in torture, transcribed in literature, begin with Sade... This is proof that literature is like an optical tool, as Proust affirmed. And he too knew affective and mundane sadism and even more so masochism (read *Sodoma e Gomorra!*). Sade, heir to Machiavel (note: we say *Machiavellian*, and *sadist/sadistic* ...), Hobbes, Spinoza, and a precursor to Nietzsche, Freud, Bataille. Sade, whose writing motivated a special categorization, that of a type of pleasure (enjoyment) taken from the pain and suffer of the other as victim and therefore from transgression: the Sadistic drive (cf. Freud, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, 1905). As Kafka is *Kafkaesque*... the privilege of the originality in Machiavel, Sade and Kafka is that of having *named* something that we know (the greedy cynicism of the Machiavellian, the pleasure of cruelty, the administrative labyrinth), but we did not have a name for it¹⁴.

Sade, who inspired Octave Mirbeau (*Torture Garden*), André Breton, Clovis Trouille, Max Ernst, Dali, Georges Bataille, Kubrick and many others... Lacan perceived Sade’s decisive moment, rising at the same time as Kantian morality (*Sade with Kant / Kant with Sade*): two absolutes, one of sexual drive (with the imperative of pleasure), the other of the categoric imperative of moral law (sadistic in its genre) ... A century after Sade, Freud, in fact, made official and instituted the *sadistic* discovery in human science, psychoanalysis, with the notion of *the sadist*, of the anal-sadistic phase in children (in this case, the human science in question is firstly a *science of the inhumanity in man!*).

Sade on stage

I said: going to this play put me in a state of curiosity and excitement.

In relation to the theatrical representation, however, I was concerned: how *in the devil* will they do this? (The presence of the *devil* goes without saying!) How can the scenes of torture be realized? What a challenge it is in fact to stage this cruel and demonic text! And we can think of other texts, *Justine or the Misfortunes of Virtue*, or *The 120 days of Sodom...* Curiously, I think that only South American artists could accept the challenge (do not ask me why – perhaps precisely as a protest movement against the oppression lived, suffered, religious, political or moral, oppression that is first aimed at sexual bodies, who knows...).

And then it was necessary to think of the public, the public of Charleville... And this brought contentment and is worthy of praise: the dialogs in French had captions...At least the audience could not pretend not to understand what was being presented.

The room was full. To my left and right were women of respectable age (mine), and anticipating their reactions I imagined a small ironic scene: one would leave offended, grumbling I don't know what (insults certainly, a moralizing curse: *shameful!*); the other would remain stoic, because she paid for her seat, and wanted to see how far it would go...I thought that it may remind her of her first experiences with curiosity about the difference between the sexes...

The emotion also came from there, from the incredible *pro-vocation* of a courageous company, or better: an *imprudent* one, before a public with good manners, petty bourgeois morals (the proletarians do not go much to the theater, not even puppet theater, and today they are as moralist as other citizens!...).

In brief, I was a bit afraid...

And then, nothing. Nothing happened. That is: the women seated on each side of me, like the audience, remained wise, attentive, focused, reading the text that passed by, observing the terrible scenes that followed, without wavering, nearly neutral, anesthetized – while I was disturbed, not by the content of the scenes, but by the form of its presentation, its playful-

ness, by the baroque audacity and the ingenious discoveries of the arrangement of things too delicate to show – it is delicate because it is violent!

Soon after the end, we got up and put on our coats. I asked them what they thought. One said; “It is interesting, I never dared to read Sade, I will read him”. The other said to me: “Yes, it is interesting, it speaks of us”. This “speaks of us” stayed in my memory. She understood that Sade was dealing with a universal problem of humanity, the recognition and acceptance of its fundamental aggressivity, of its fundamental violence. She perhaps had even understood that the sadistic scenes were part of her experience (repressed experience, fortunately!), of her hate, of her desire to kill, of her distaste for life (“O mother, why did you give birth to me?” ... and “moreover, in this world?”)¹⁵, of her sexual and genital servitude, of her hate as a parturient, even ... if she had had children....Who knows? ...A theater is not an analyst’s couch, but I felt that the spectacle had touched a sensitive place...

We exchanged some words and went to the stage to see the props, the scenery, the puppets that had been used for the play, and what impressed me was the silence that all three of us had, they and I were now accomplices because we had shared that, even though we did not know each other – and they did not know each other either...It was a moving moment, this silence, composed of looks, while many other spectators came to congratulate the artists, and speak with them ...as is common. We did not, we did not want to talk. I only said one word to a young artist who was there: *Bravo, magnífico!* (in French!). A bit simplistically... I could not express my admiration, to be honest...the words only came later.

Sexuality in puppets...

What I found truly captivating in the play was that these artists understood (perhaps without conceptualizing) the entire artistic benefit that we can gain from the radical distancing that puppets offer, and they attained beautiful imagery and gestures: it was impossible for the public to identify with this puppet (whether it interprets or simulated the executioner or the victim). It was also certainly impossible for the actors-marionetteers-puppeteers to metamorphosize into their heroes or into their characters (without sadism or masochism, without expecting piety – even so I do not

doubt there was some confusion when faced with the sequence of horrors to be imitated, to be simulated by the puppets...). Need we recall that a puppet is nothing more than an empty and inert vessel of our projections and that it is stupid to project ourselves in it?

In this way they found a vein that, despite everything, tends to disappear a bit, even if it is being renovated by means of some efforts (as we saw in Ilka Schönbein, for example). Actually, we have traces of this audacity that consists in staging erotic, pornographic scenes, even marked by the ultraviolence of the puppets – and precisely because they are puppets this allows greater liberty and even a certain respect from the public...in fact, a puppet can interpret acts that the human body *in praesentia*, on stage, would only be able to represent by leaving the public very uncomfortable (and probably the actors themselves, despite their activism). In the 1970s we saw some things, in the form of *happenings*, especially from the Dutch scene...Not that it was *shocking*, no, but it was not artistically constructed and we could not have any true aesthetic pleasure... And it was also not arousing. The realism placed us before scenes of various facts or quite common behaviors and it was frustrating. But it was also the fashion.

A puppet, however, has the disposition to present this precisely with the art of manipulation and the distancing required to be able to receive the shock – which manifests its condition as a transitional object, producing, on its own, by means of its appearance, the potential/transitional (Winnicott) space, which is enough to allow us to contemplate the scenes with pleasure, with true pleasure. Note that to see Sade in puppets is also not arousing (frankly, this is not the purpose! Except for the excitement to reflection: it offers food for thought). On the other hand, there is a true aesthetic pleasure and an admiration for the work, for the solutions found to the delicate problems and for the virtuosity of the execution¹⁶.

The discovery of this unique strength of the puppets – that which consists in a power to simulate prohibited acts, taboos, without being insupportable – must have been made a long time ago, even if censorship made us ignorant of the history of these transgressions...But, it is likely that in the time of Aristophanes, or mainly the Romans, who were specialists in this type of licentiousness, this type of secret show existed, *underground*, as we would say today. We know that the English Renaissance (Shakespeare,

Ben Jonson, Marlowe...), had this type of enjoyment (we can imagine *The Taming of the Shrew* interpreted in this way...). It was particularly in the eighteenth century (the century of libertines) and the nineteenth century that these representations developed, satisfying a popular, working class and proletarian culture, very far from the moralist and puritan sensibilities of the bourgeoisie.

In the Second Empire, around 1860, there was an *Erotikon Theatron* which presented performances that linked prostitutes, depraved women to clients, the bourgeoisie, pimps...and with humor, far from the dominant hypocrisy¹⁷ (Henri Monnier, Paul Ranson, in the Cabaret *Le Chat Noir* – there is a puppet elegy to Yvette Guilbert...). This tradition culminated with the puppet theater of Alfred Jarry and his *Ubu Roi*, *Ubu Cocu*, etc., also represented as puppets (we often forget, but they are so good for this purpose!), in which nothing is dissimulated: stupidity, ferocity, vulgarity, violence, and infamy...They were less *prudish* than we are, and this is not something to be proud of. I am not sure that humanity is advancing, if true progress, according to Nietzsche, consists in learning to accept the truth...

Obviously, it is a shame that we do not have narratives, descriptions, or scripts for all these representations, but this shows that the art of simulating sexuality from all its angels, without taboos, did not wait for cinematographic pornography.

It was by good luck that this performance of *Philosophy in the Bedroom* (*La Philosophie dans le Boudoir*) has rekindled the flame, to the great pleasure (I repeat) and surprise of all...The *Brazilian body*, if I may say, incarnates a form of resistance to more retrograde ideologies and to forms of institutional violence (including censorship, which can even lead to prison), even if it lives and survives in an ultraviolent society that does not dare look forward¹⁸. Paradoxically, there is a moral, ethical and sociopolitical value in this.

Returning *here* (by Mariliz Schrickte)

Returning to Philippe Choulet's statement, which sparked our encounter and the writing of this article, I can affirm that I now understand why *Philosophy in the Bedroom* is "no longer shocking": Sade's fiction has been surpassed by the atrocities of humanity. I agree with the philosopher,

and with his citation of Nietzsche, to affirm that true progress involves accepting the truth, given that barbarity perpetuates until today. And it should always be recalled that the burden of truth carried by a European *survivor* and a South American *survivor* is always different, considering the diversity of political-social-cultural contexts, legacies, references and colonial regulations that characterize such different ways of seeing, living and thinking. Perhaps for this reason, as I commented at the beginning of the article, the reaction of the Brazilian public had been so different from that of the French public. Thinking of this, I affirm that the objective of this article was to present these two points of view: mine, as an artist acting in the process of the play, a Brazilian; and that of Philippe Choulet, a French philosopher and spectator, in an effort to create a dialectical movement in the reader's analysis, beginning with the observation of the different cultural realities of each author.

From this aspect, it is important to reiterate Philippe Choulet's surprise to learn that Sade is at times seen as a libertarian icon of female sexuality, considering his male view of sex and women. Despite recognizing the importance of this discussion, this is not the place for these reflections, given that they are not the objective of the article. However, I cannot fail to mention the influence of Sade's book (and the play) on my life, or how I was *rattled* by new ways of being and acting as a woman. Beyond agreeing or disagreeing with what Sade said, I perceive that my experience permeates the "aesthetics of risk" of Postdramatic Theater (Lehmann, 2017, p. 388), when I propose that more than presenting a message in a traditional and informative sense, *Philosophy in the Bedroom* causes horror and disorientation and calls on the public to pay attention to and think of certain issues.

It is in this line that the artistic proposals of the Pigmalião group are found when it seeks to revive Sade's mode of *re-presenting*, in an effort to have the theatrical spectacle lead its public to imagine another world. The puppets are tools for recreating this world from the inside out, distanced supports that allow a greater liberty in pornographic and ultraviolent scenes that, according to Philippe Choulet, leaves the public less uncomfortable. In this sense, the puppets give the group the courage and the imprudence needed to take the stage with Sade's blasphemy. Sade's cruelty is thus justified by this questioning function of representing extremes and is borrowed

by Pigmalhão to exercise a criticism of the circumstances of its time using *Brazilian bodies*. Contrary to what Philippe Choulet believes, in my perspective, the group dares to look at its reality head-on and strives to awake an infinity of sensations and reflections.

Notes

- ¹ Website of the group at: <https://www.pigmalhao.com>. Accessed 02 June 2021.
- ² *A Philosophy in the Bedroom* (2011). Play by the Pigmalhão Escultura que Mexe. Adapted for the stage and directed by Eduardo Felix. *Teaser* for the play available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Dei2QHxwEqc>. The playwright Eduardo Felix mainly used the translation to Portuguese of the work by Contador Borges, published by editora Iluminuras, in 2000. Many passages were translated by Felix directly from Sade's text.
- ³ Synopsis available at: <https://www.pigmalhao.com/espetaculos>. Accessed: 2 June 2021.
- ⁴ Festival website: <http://www.lejardinparallele.fr/festival-orbis-pictus/>. Accessed: 2 June 2021.
- ⁵ The last edition of the festival was in 2019. Festival website: <https://lemanifeste.com/>. Accessed: 2 June 2021.
- ⁶ In the original in French : *Enfond de scène dans sa cage, le marquis est incommensurable. La pulsion est une force démesurée. Du libre-coursque lui laisse Sade, on passe très vite, dans un déplacement sans heurts, à la revendication de l'affranchissement. Plus d'Eglise, c'est moins une évidence au Brésil que sur nos terres, mais non plus de délégation de la responsabilité, d'hétéronomie acceptée.* Disponível em: <https://lantispectacle.wordpress.com/2013/08/03/marionnettes-incendiaires/>. Accessed: 17 March 2020.
- ⁷ Data Gallup International 2012. Available at: <https://sidmennt.is/wp-content/uploads/Gallup-International-um-tr%C3%BA-og-tr%C3%BAleysi-2012.pdf>. Accessed: 8 Sept. 2020.
- ⁸ Festival website: <https://www.festival-marionnette.com/fr/>. Accessed: 2 June 2021.
- ⁹ In the original in French: *Restons dans des manipulations à couper le souffle, mais changeons de continent, de registre et de type de marionnettes. Le Brésil avec des marionnettes à fils. Le pluriel du mot prend tout son sens quand on compte le*

nombre de cordons qui permettent aux pantins de s'animer comme des humains. Mais quel humain ? Le plus abject parmi tous les infâmes, le plus pervers parmi les sadiques : le marquis de Sade. Si généralement il s'agit de faire marcher des poupées de bois et de leur donner la possibilité de faire quelques gestes de la main et des mouvements de tête, lorsqu'on annonce Sade et la Philosophie dans le boudoir, les moins cultivés d'entre nous s'imaginent aisément qu'il est un autre membre du corps qu'il faudra faire vivre et de la plus belle manière qui soit (Saintange, 2015).

- ¹⁰ Translator's note (N. T.): Henri Désiré Landru was a French serial killer, who was known as Bluebeard. Source: https://pt.wikipedia.org/wiki/Henri_Désiré_Landru. Acesso em: 9 fev. 2021.
- ¹¹ N. T.: Dr. Marcel Petiot, was a French doctor who during World War II robbed and killed Jews under the pretext of helping them to escape the Nazis. Available at: <https://enciclopediavirtual.com.br/historia/dr-satan-dr-marcel-petiot-o-assassino-em-serie-dr-jekyll-e-mr-hyde-da-vida-real/>. Acesso em: 9 fev. 2021.
- ¹² N. T.: Gilles de Rais, was a knight and lord from Brittany, Anjou and Poitou, a leader of the French army and a companion in arms of Joan of Arc. He is best known for his reputation later as a confessed serial killer of children. Source: https://pt.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gilles_de_Rais. Accessed: 9 Feb. 2021.
- ¹³ N. T.: Gulag was a system of forced work camps for criminals, political prisoners and any citizen in general who opposed the regime in the Soviet Union. Before the Revolution, the Gulag was known as Katorga, and applied to precisely the same thing: a prison sentence, sentence to forced labor and the death penalty. Source: <https://pt.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gulag>. Acesso em: 9 de fev. 2021.
- ¹⁴ Cf. Nietzsche: "Originality.—What is originality? To see something that does not yet bear a name, that cannot yet be named, although it is before everybody's 208eyes. As people are usually constituted, it is the name that first makes a thing generally visible to them.—Original persons have also for the most part been the namers of things." (The Joyful Wisdom, <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/52881/52881-h/52881-h.htm> § 261). "O que há de original no homem é que ele vê algo que todos não conseguem ver"[What is original in man is that he sees something that all are not able to."] (*Gai savoir, fragment posthume* § 12-80, Gallimard, 2ème édition, p. 459).

- ¹⁵ N. T.: Passages spoken by the characters in the play.
- ¹⁶ There is a film by Henri Xhonneux and Roland Topor, entitled *Marquis*, from 1989, made both as a comedy and with animation, and which focuses on Sade's life and work.
- ¹⁷ There is in fact a *Machiavellian* virtue to puppet theater, because EVERYTHING can be shown in it, EVERYTHING can be simulated without harm. *Machiavellian* is to say: we show the hidden truth of things (what Machiavel shows of the politics of César Bórgia) which the Maquevelian politician obviously does not want to show (Frederick II of Prussia would write an *Anti-Machiavel*, accusing Machiavel of a lie and protesting his good faith and good will...). We should thus distinguish *Machiavellian* when used to mean (critical thinking and perspective, realism: to show what is) from *Machiavellian* when used to mean (avid search for self-interest, even if this means using lies, force and trickery).
- ¹⁸ In early 2019, the *Centre National de la Danse* in Paris hosted the *Festival Carioca Panorama*, scheduled, but it was canceled in Rio de Janeiro...

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