

The Question as to Why We Have to Live Out the Agony of Our Epoch and its Fundamental Un-Answerability: A Reading of the Preface to the 1967 Edition of Klossowski's' Original 1947 *Sade My Neighbor*

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Abstract: This paper excavates certain impulses that are buried in Pierre Klossowski's 1968 edition of his original 1947 work, *Sade My Neighbor*. We argue that the self-suffocating nature of our historical present reveals the problem of an epochal threshold: in which twenty-first century democracy itself is threatened with death and violence in delusional neofascist attempts at national self-preservation. This speaks to a deeper enigma of time, epochal shifts, and the mystery of historical time; but it does so in a manner that escapes classical problems in the philosophy of history. Rather, by returning to Klossowski's late 1940s and late 1960s contexts while reoccupying the New Testament question of Jesus's foresakeness on the Cross, we unravel a series of paradoxes and aporias that attempt to deepen metaphysical problems of time, death, and the sovereign autonomy of human freedom and existence. Ultimately the paper concludes by offering certain speculative philosophical constructions on why today's self-cannibalization of democracy has its roots in unresolved tensions that span these two poles: a.) the primordial secret of early Christian proclamation of Jesus's death and b.) the post-Christian Sadean experiment of a philosophical revolution that was doomed to implode when the valorization of pain, suffering, and death fails to fill the vacuum left behind by atheism.

Keywords: metaphysics, democracy, death, time, epochal shifts.

Introduction

In the 1991 English translation (Klossowski 1991) of the 1967 French Edition of Klossowski's *Sade My Neighbor*, originally published in 1947, one is startled about something as simple as the succession of the publication dates. Here we are in 2021, thirty years after the English translation, which was almost twenty-five years after the Second Edition of Klossowski's *Sade My Neighbor*, which was twenty years after the original publication in 1947. Through these long arcs of historical time, we will try to link Klossowski's 1947 present passing through the 1967 Edition to our 2021 present without collapsing one into the other, conflating them or superficially dividing them in chorological time. This is not the work of

empirical intellectual history either, if the reader is curious why we are invoking chronological dates as signifiers of massive epochal thresholds in Western modernity. We are interested in the liminal interrelations of relations and differences between the two historical presents of Klossowski's and our epoch.

For both 1947 and 2021 descend from the late eighteenth century, the context of which Klossowski philosophizes, namely the era of the French Revolution and the imprisonment of the notorious libertine, perhaps the most notorious, the Marquis de Sade. We recognize the countless studies of Sade in twentieth-century continental philosophical thought, particularly French thought, namely those by Bataille, Blanchot, Lacan, Deleuze, Foucault, and others who do not immediately come to mind (Gutting 2013). We will be mindful of this infinitely rich corpus. But our focus will be on Klossowski's text, particularly with a slow reading of the translated Preface of the 1991 English Edition of the 1967 Second Edition.

One should not neglect the full text of Klossowski and all its miraculous chapters and sections, particularly, "The Philosopher-Villain" and "Sade and Revolution," "Outline of Sade's System," and "Under the Mask of Atheism" (Klossowski 1991). Yes, we must not lose sight of those elegant and philosophically profound reflections. However, given the depths of sensitivity, creativity, nuance, and path-breaking intuitive bursts that Klossowski generates in the Preface, we cannot do justice to his entire text on Sade, at least in this one article. Therefore, we will restrict ourselves to his short Preface, and in that only a few of its initial propositions. It would appear that beginning a slow reading of the beginning of the Preface alone, and not in its entirety, preoccupies us given the monstrosity, terror, solemnity, unfathomable vertigo and bewilderment of trying to live moment to moment, day to day, and week to week of our historical present at the start of 2021. There is much to say about the Preface, alone, which is where we will stay and remain throughout this essay.

Klossowski reflects in his Second Edition of 1967 of what he should have continued to pursue and develop at the time of the original publication of 1947. In a humble honesty, he says he should have 'persevered in the original design' of "Outline of Sade's System" (Klossowski 1991, 5). For he would have, then, tried to develop a 'more rigorous examination of Sade's relationship to reason' (Klossowski 1991, 5). He then develops these six major areas of investigation or what he terms 'observations' (Klossowski 1991, 5). We will quote in full all six, and then proceed to deconstruct them while filling in the 'lacunae' of his earlier analyses through our own philosophical speculations and wanderings. We speak of an impossible simultaneity and therefore the relative cut within simultaneity of these tasks of reading slowly and writing independently. We have to deconstructively read each of the six and in interrelation to one another through this immersion of the Preface to Klossowski's scintillatingly original work. Quoting the English translation directly:

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(1) Rational atheism is the heir to monotheist norms, upholding a unitary economy of the soul, along with the possession and identity of a responsible ego.

(2) If the sovereignty of man is the principle and the goal of rational atheism, Sade, liquidating the norms of reason, pursues the disintegration of man.

(3) In the absence of any conceptual formulation other than that of the rational materialism of his age (as the "Outline" already notes), Sade made of atheism the "religion" of integral monstrosity.

(4) This "religion" involves an asceticism, that of the apathetic reiteration of acts, which confirms the insufficiency of atheism.

(5) Through this asceticism, Sade's atheism reintroduces a divine character in monstrosity, divine in the sense that its "real presence" is actualized only through rites, that is reiterated acts.

(6), Thus it turns out that it is not atheism that conditions or liberates Sadean monstrosity; rather, this monstrosity leads Sade to derationalize atheism as soon as he tries to rationalize his own monstrosity by way of atheism (Klossowski 1991, 5-6).

With these bold propositions, one can see that it is not wise to run ahead and continue to comment on what follows in the Preface. There is enough here to lose oneself in an abyssal set of philosophical reflections as we respond to the torment we embody or inhabit in our historical present. The historical present pulsates an exteriority (hence never internal to a subject or mind experiencing anything at all), which then threatens to engulf the present by drawing it into a singularity of infinite density without possessing a point in time or space. This bizarre temporalization, not of beings, conceals itself. The mysterious entwinement of being and time, not being in time, the time of being, being as time or time as being fails to reveal itself as it failed to do so for the early and late Heidegger (1927; 1962). One does not need to invoke immediate intuitions, memories, and conceptual configurations of what 'atheism' and 'asceticism' can possibly mean at the outset of our inquiry into time, the epoch and epochal shifts, and the historical present. And this is way before we even attempt an understanding of these remarkably rich registers in Klossowski's text, namely 'divine character in monstrosity,' 'integral monstrosity,' 'derationalization of atheism,' and how this is bound up with a 'real presence' (Klossowski 1991, 5-6). No, we cannot just offer philosophical expansions in a vacuum. Then again, fidelity of getting the right interpretation of the text is not our goal either.

Rather, our uncanny thesis is that Klossowski is speaking to a realm other than atheism. We explore the aporetic, multi-dimensional (therefore neither one nor binary) kind of perversion internal to Christian divinity: one that does not pit atheism against religion, let alone early Gnosticism that was expunged from formal Christian doctrine as heresy and therefore inadmissible in what will follow as mainstream, dogmatic Christian revelation across denominations. Rather, it is about a new creation, an outgrowth and therefore violent attempt to supplant Christianity with something else that can take its place. Therefore, this is not a

work of religious studies, whether motivated by faith or by a pure, secular, atheistic and scientific study of religion. If this were biblical theory, history, and criticism, then one might be tempted to trace the history of heresy and gnosis in the first two centuries CE before: that is before the time when the New Testament canon was crystallized and Christianity was institutionalized as the state of religion of the ancient Roman Empire. But this is not the task at hand, even though Klossowski concludes his Preface with an allusion to heretics and gnosis of the early Church, namely Marcion ditheism and the Carpocratian orgiastic cult (Klossowski 1991, 7). He also admits this is where his 1947 original text falters, at least as he reflects back from the 1967 Second Edition (Klossowski 1991, 7).

Nor is our work a matter of excavating a primordial archē, or opaque preconditions before Christian revelation emerged and was institutionalized as the gentile identity of Western civilization, let alone attempts since Nietzsche to destroy that identity and postulate what could be other to it or post-Christian. Nietzsche was arguably the first to diagnosis the problem of nihilism in his stunning originality, although he had just as profound precursors in Schelling and Kierkegaard who began to sense its cancerous infiltration of nascent Western modernity. His own epoch and origin was split apart between a live birth taking place and a post-natal infanticide given his confrontation with everything that must be transvaluated. All the while and through it all, he succumbed in exhaustion with a new and bold creative attempt to think beyond all that has been thought, but in fragmentary form resulting in the twilight of his own cognitive eclipse, namely the decade long silence before his death in his state of complete mental paralysis. Nevertheless, between early Christianity and Nietzsche, lies the problem of Sade that Klossowski bravely encounters.

Indeed, we must go inside his text, deep inside without knowing from what end we will emerge, if we do at all. This all speaks of an adventure, but also a potential death trap. In an uncanny sense, we know that we are living to pass through the epoch and will risk everything to come out on the other side, but also distend the great possibility of death and a point of no return. Therefore, this is not about beginning and ending, beginning and not ending, not beginning and not ending. Furthermore, all of this has to do, somehow, with the monstrous threshold of the Western secular democratic conception of 'state' and 'people' and where they stand, namely on the brink of desuetude.

Rather than theological exposition or atheistic rebuttal to any revelatory theology, we will attempt an overcoming of any simplistic sense of atheism without reverting back to the original doctrines of a canon, theology, law of a specific religion – in this case Christianity and its various traditions, such as Orthodoxy, Catholicism, and Protestantism. Atheism is not the secularization of religion like Löwith's long-standing suggestion (1949) on modernity as the secularization of the eschatological. Nor will we take up, at least at the moment, Blumenberg's momentous response to all secularization theses by his own novel theory of epochal shifts and 're-occupation' of old premodern questions and

incessant self-assertions at answers without arriving at foundations (1966). We will not speculate of what makes the atheism inherent in rationality or the rationality of atheism operate in its full depths and complexity as countless other philosophers of history have (Taylor 2007). This is not a project in the philosophy of history, the philosophy of religion, and the temporalization of the historiography of the philosophy of history, the latter of which tries to understand temporality, epochal shifts, origins, ends, continuities, discontinuities, thresholds, and ruptures in, as, and of historical time (Blumenberg 1985; Koselleck 1985). How the historiographical imagination temporalizes the history of the philosophy of history without conducting either philosophy or empirical history has to be foreclosed.

Our hypothesis is that this internal critique beyond atheism has to do with the 'monstrosity' of our historical present regarding how a new concept other than religion is being born out of a neo-fascist sovereignty that is hijacking our democratic state. This question of asceticism, incessant material production, Weberian legacies on the critique of the Protestant Ethic notwithstanding, is linked to a new theory: that is, an attempt to understand the neo-fascist psychopathology in the heart of dissolving sovereign democratic state and political power configurations. These strange formations are protruding out of the heart of our secular, constitutional, legal, pluralistic democracy, and more so in the age of anonymous, invisible, technological fabrications of real persons and events. These protrusions, and actually contusions too, both reveal the implosion and supersession of normative conceptions of democracy that have descended to us from the late eighteenth century, namely rule by the people's consent, and the separation of powers between the legislative, executive, and judicial branches. Sacrosanct among them is the notion of free, fair, and transparent elections and peaceful transfer of power when the results are accepted. Yet, this basic idea of democracy is eluding us, revealing an unthinkable moment. Nevertheless, premodern conceptions of constitutional monarchs and monarchical systems are not simply resurrecting themselves out of the death of democratic delimitations of formal tyranny. A non-dialectical movement of interrelated patterns constitute a grander, non-Euclidean event that is engulfing us now and threatens to erase us from historical time. The three axes of physical, measurable time – past, present, and future- cannot help us. Nor do we want to spatialize time in any geometric or symbolic forms. And the notion of a simple, visible, tangible, physical event called the 'historical present' does not present itself as such and such thing, event, action, person, or movement.

Rather, it is when society births its own monstrosity, which then ensnares and erases its birth (and therefore no simple definition of death or end to what is birthing), that we know we are being terrorized by something we cannot see or define. We confront the uncanniness of the question of time, but never as a phenomenon or idea. It is our question, not Klossowski's or Sade's, to understand what constitutes the 'divine' in a new way, an inhuman divine that refuses to speak

to human beings until the conception of human being is completely vanquished. This is not a resumption of twentieth-century totalitarianism as Arendt astutely diagnosed (1951) since something entirely other is emerging in our historical present.

We have to attune our philosophical creativity to what is most preternatural in relation to the Other and as the Other that we are and are becoming. Paradoxically, and in a manner that can never be easily resolved, this points to no recognition of prior selves and identities and their previous epochal identities which are other to whatever present one imagines is being unfolded 'today.' So we must inhabit a relation and non-relation, neither-nor of what is self and Other, the self and other of their relation and non-relation. Our ultimate goal is to explore this philosophically and speculatively, and, therefore, launch from a reading of Klossowski on Sade, an act of self-disappearance. We depart from both their late eighteenth and mid-twentieth century contexts without arriving at a full conceptualization of our time and the thinking of the epoch as our time. As undeniably influential previous influences are, say Foucault and Derrida who loom large, we feel a haunting distance and schism cutting within the surface that we cannot see: that something is still missing in their analyses, whose remnants and traces we do not wish to trace ourselves. Therefore, the theme of 'departure' lies at the heart of what we are trying to assert as a form of extreme philosophical transcendence that does leave the world but burrows into its darkest and deepest singularity. We cannot and do not want to return to those times of the twentieth century (or past centuries) even though our historical present, and whatever sense of 'epoch' it carries within it, is rather unbearable and suffocating. This is what we are trying to articulate in these initial, hesitant remarks. It is like a motion-event that counter-intuitively sucks one into a void where no motion would exist; yet the whole event has its own kind of motility and dynamic manifestation.

We are trying to attest as a form of temporal self-strangulation, the aporetic knot of the historical present cannibalizing itself. The excess of this process becomes the nourishment of a thinking that is not afraid to tackle what is most horrifying, menacing, and threatening to any sense of a 'unified economy of soul' to use the previous quoted phrase (Klossowski 1991, 5). The future offers a proxy of itself, not its 'real' and 'authentic self: where the past should 'historize' in sensing what we will have been without being able to survive our own death if we are in fact no longer in time (Heidegger 1962). But we do not exist after our time either looking back on it like a ghost. Nor are we stretched between a beginning and end without ever knowing where we are. For even its pull, the pull of the future, is nowhere to be found. The future, as the no longer now, is not simply that which has yet to appear, but an internal resistance and refusal of birth, emergence, and recognition of the brand new. Therefore by emerging out of something entirely Other, our historical present does not want to be named or certified by some other higher authority. That itself becomes a question not of identity or non-

identity but the mystery that is the question of time, not its answer. So we speak of an 'un-answerability' that is somehow asserting itself as some strange new content, or, more specifically something other to any kind of phenomenal or noumenal content.

Let us return to Klossowski's propositions before our content becomes completely engulfed by mind-stifling paradoxes about time, historical time, epochal shifts, and the philosophy of history. This will be difficult to keep open so that many interweaving dimensions begin to flicker in tiny sparks as we traverse Klossowski's eerie propositions on Sade. We want to start the fire by rubbing the twigs against each other, and yet all we see is the hint of a beginning, not an actual one. We want to unpack them further while imagining the theory of neo-fascistic implosion of our democracies in our twenty-first century historical present and the strangest question of all: that is the problem of an alternative 'real presence' as the ghost of Christianity's invention but not for the Eucharistic purposes of today's Christian revelation. This is to say we do not want to repeat and resuscitate faith from the original events attested in the *New Testament Gospels* through the Western and Eastern patristics of the ages down to the current doctrinal and ecumenical statements by the religious authorities of the day, say the Vatican and the Pope.

Rather, we are going into the monstrosity to learn what has yet to be said about the meaning of the being of the human and what could be other to that, which the West has never succeeded in articulating. But hauntingly, this means we must inhabit Christian revelation from another side, deep within its horizon, but never articulated within its text; it is an illusory exteriority and the promise of a passage to another side, yet somehow encrypted as a secret locked away in what was, what is, and what is to come. The Johannine revelation does not terrify us with its monstrous content and rich symbolism, but asks for another text to respond to it and not repeat its bizarre late first century or second century CE contents. In principle, such a text, therefore, cannot be included in a fixed New Testament canon; nor is it part of the remnants that exist as non-canonical texts like the Gnostic Gospels (Pagels 1989). This other text is what will attempt in our reading of Klossowski on Sade.

Main Text

In the Gospel of Mark, which is unique, cryptic, and mysteriously terse compared to the other two elongated Synoptics, Matthew and Luke, which draw from Mark's content, let alone the rich theophany of logos that is the Gospel of John, we have one of the basic puzzles of which there are many in the *New Testament* (Lane 1974). Any quick intuition that may descend on us in a human way must be bracketed phenomenologically; nor should we move to circular logical fallacies that spin us around. The question of Jesus's departure is linked to a question of forsakenness. This relation is likened to an event as dissemination without a source. And this uncanny relation, which refuses to present read-made answers,

prefigures a completion to God's life on earth before announcing the breakthrough moment that founds all of Christian proclamation and kerygma, namely a resurrection – 'ἀνάστασις' in the Greek New Testament – and some kind of spiritual bodily – 'σῶμα πνευματικόν' in 1 Corinthians 15:44 – appearance after death to human witnesses. Humans, who do nothing but be born, live and die, cannot possibly understand what it means to witness death, let alone what is other to it as a miraculous reappearance. One cannot think of seeing a friend die one day, and them showing up at your door the next day looking like the way they were before the day they died. In Mark 15:34, which Matthew repeats in 27:46, it says:

Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?" which is translated, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (The New American Bible 1987, 1087)

We will keep this great, yet still to be deciphered Aramaic question from Jesus on the Cross, in the background so to speak. It forms a type of counterpoint as we work our way through Klossowski's propositions on Sade's attempt to go beyond atheism without returning to religious morality. To repeat the hypothesis, this will allow us to penetrate the depths as to why the living agony of our epochal historical present fails to present answers about the utter unpredictability of human history. Scattered through is not the point of finitude in historical time, but the mystery of the finitude of historical time itself, that it – historical time – is never present, but what is before and after is also crossed out. The question is not to divine some end goal towards which history is progressing, but how history itself faces its own historicity, its mortality and finitude, as some other logic of time pulses and throbs with a new possibility for thinking. This would be a name other than 'History,' and hence our historical present. We grow weary of using the term 'historical present' if we do not want to define it in advance to the reader.

Passing through the event on the Cross is not for nothing; it is phenomenologically bracketed to isolate the event, an event of appropriation, and not a reaffirmation of Christian faith contents understood in dogmatic and literal terms. Jesus's agonizing suspension, where no answer is given to the question right at the threshold of his death, is likened to the Sadean question of how a divine monstrosity is concealed within suffering. Both are stretched events from which a mystery begins to reveal a deeper enigma concealed within it – the alterity of God's voice to Himself, which means other than any relation between man and God, let alone the embodiment of God as man, namely Jesus. This is about non-relation, differentiation within the relation, not of an event but the event of difference itself that never appears. This can be contrasted with the rather simplistic distinction of *either* a Godless reality – the atheistic witness that God does not exist when one is abandoned – *or* the Eucharistic 'real presence' in which the sacrifice of Jesus, who really died, and his perpetual memorialization is anticipated in an earlier, Last Supper scene in the Gospels's account of his life.

In that last meal with the disciples, Jesus does not speak of being forsaken at death but betrayed by someone who will catalyze the narrative events that

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ultimately leads to his death. We are not going to unpack these theological mysteries (Lane 1974). As stated before, this is not a logical question or paradox to be solved: that is, how God can forsake Himself if Jesus is the Son of God and co-equal to his Father (John 10:30) as part of an eternal Logos consisting of three Persons of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit with his unique two natures of – human and divine – which neither change or divide the other, nor separate nor mix with the other (Chalcedon, 451 CE). It is not an eternity that can end; nor is it an eternity without origin and end, which human reason cannot conceptualize on the basis of its own experience rooted in mortality and finitude. Rather, it is an affront that a perfect harmony of love results in dereliction. Jesus cannot be like a dying man who keeps his faith to the end that he will be saved, only to be deserted right at the moment of death where all hope evaporates. And the death of all humans means no human comes back to attest to the death that occurred, what it means, and where they are ‘now’ – in a realm beyond death, in a realm beyond events in pictorial linear time: this akin to the great problem Heidegger explored in trying to derive the ‘inauthentic’ linear time from something even more primordial and therefore never present as a ‘now’ (Heidegger 1962, 373). Then again, the Son of God is not some mythological non-human or God-human hybrid incapable of dying even though he takes human form from time to time, i.e. the legacy of Marcion heresy. There is no role for the ancient Greek myths here either like Zeus and Hercules.

Rather, the forsakenness will drive us into the heart of a singular question of dying and death that points to the transcendental horizon of what dying and death mean when it is stretched between these two notions: a.) a singular conception of completion without content/answer or even ethical orientation as to the right and virtuous way to comport oneself to death as a stretched relation to a limit and b.) the suspension of what an answer could look like right before the event of death is realized as a passing through in the heart of divine agony. We will keep this polarity in mind in trying to expand on Klossowski’s un-developed enterprise; or if you will what was forsaken in the 1947 project as attested by the Second Edition of 1968 where Klossowski confesses a lack of perseverance in the pursuit of a system. Something ended in the 1947 project that the 1968 Preface tries to attest in justifying the contents and chapters of its own later edition.

To stretch out Jesus through all these theoretical possibilities carries a series of uncanny resemblances with Klossowski’s ponderings of the true meaning and intentions of Sade beyond the simple notion of his unrestrained immorality, depravity, and ultimately inhuman nature, even evil. Let us return to Klossowski’s six propositions starting from the first:

- (1) Rational atheism is the heir to monotheist norms, upholding a unitary economy of the soul, along with the possession and identity of a responsible ego (Klossowski 1991, 5).

To even attempt a type of rationality to Sadean logic betrays the notion that his punishable otherness, his in-humanity, does not and should not deserve a type of

new moral valorization: one that we must conceive apart from any Judeo-Christian logics of 'though shall not kill' and in the New Testament Christian registers – 'love the enemy' and 'love the neighbor as thyself.' If that were the case, then it must be one that cannot appeal to our humanity in its basic instincts for goodness and hope; but this does not mean its apposite term is some glorified or mythic sense of evil and the demonic, i.e. a type of generic Satanic will apperceived in biblical-faith-based terms. We will assume that this is not Klossowski's intent, which we will argue carries a certain positivity even in a quest that is doomed to fail. It is not about saving Sade from his own reputation imparted to us after his time passed, as of one of the earliest of modern peoples whose viscerally vile and cruel nature cannot be denied. Some could say we hate the Sade because he created us, and yet we did not initiate the event that led to us becoming what we are. This weird creator was a banished created from the original Biblical Creator, an erasure which then becomes the origin of our modern sensibility. Yet even these reflections are a bit reductive; they presuppose naïve notions of time and becoming, and therefore inadmissible for the task at hand. We do not want to parrot what others have intuited about the Sadean epochal threshold (Foucault 1978, 148-149).

Our question is how to leverage the Sadean analysis offered by Klossowski with the question of departure and forsakenness on the Cross in *relation* to the suspension in answering the agony of our epoch as the death of democracy. But this term 'death' is just a placeholder for another term. We are speaking of the increasing neo-fascistic creation of a new type of monstrosity apart from the twentieth century. When we think of the last century, we see purely racist and colonialist ideas of totalitarianism and fascism; the latter threatened the internal development of true, peaceful, secular, constitutional Western democracies and their promises of individual equality, freedom, justice and rights in the previous ages of democratic revolutions of the eighteenth century and the decolonized, nationalist Global South democracies that hatched in the twentieth century. Sade's late eighteenth century is not simply an epochal threshold between the following: a.) the libertine, aristocratic, unrestrained, perverse creativity of what a modern psychological conception would construe today as 'psychotic' and b.) the modern democratic, social contractual constraints on a freely accepted, anonymous distribution of rights and duties to mitigate harm for any individual or group in a state of nature. It would seem that is what is criminal about democracy is that it miniaturizes the vast possibility of a soul that could be distended in a million different directions down to the individuated subject isolated to its boring, banal, and bounded point of invisible citizenry. It is tempting to expand on what this means for our empirical political present. However, Klossowski offers us the link between that eighteenth century context, which will not be elaborated further in our analysis, and the threshold of democratic modernity and its apostolic sanctioning of 'individual rights.' The individual right is not the right of the individual to be free of all individuals. Instead, it means to be free enough, at least

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for the perverted, demonic and evil Sade, from the individual God to rationalize the ascetic will to enjoy the killing of another human being as the final act of transcendence; and this will to kill at the heart of Sadean logic, even as it tries to create a new a-morality against the morality of 'thou shalt not kill,' is what is being enacted today with regard to democracy's self-homicide. And this is what frightens us and stirs to action, namely to destroy this will to kill that was born with our modernity. For us, it serves as a buried possibility to theorize the transition from our historical present to another given the agony of living out this seemingly and indefinitely distended stretch of catastrophic time. Something other is emerging in, as, and in and of the place of our historical present of pessimism and turmoil, but that 'other' as something that remains unrecognized. That means something other than our epoch and its terminal point, or the endless deferral of an end, or embracing endlessness itself as if we could. All are impossibilities and what is other to them all remains concealed from human senses and experience; there is no spatial representation that the imagination can generate.

The triangle of our hypothesis starts to dissolve: Klossowski's Sade, forsakenness as departure from an alleged event of God's revelation nearly two thousand years ago, and the self-strangulation-temporalization of an epoch that is being lived it out in pure agony. It is as if all of Western linear historical time, beginning with the Judeo-Christian narrative and the ancient Greek and Roman pillars, is but a blip or instant that speaks to an-other side of what everything has truly meant but not from our standpoint as retrospective-looking historical present. Rather, the historical present has revealed that a Sadean logic has infiltrated the idea of democracy, a pushing of its limits beyond its metaphysical conception as something necessarily by and for the people. Today, democracy is willing to risk its own extinction, but not just in the passing cult of personality, a new type of anti-democratic sovereignty parading around as populist crystal of true democratic freedom – or the 'actual voice of the people' embodied in one clown-like tyrannical figure whose megalomania knows no bounds and has no moorings in reality. Because that self-denying concoction is being manufactured by a people from within a democracy, we have this disturbing feeling that our present is being held captive in a transcending yet specious social movement that justifies violence against the government and state. And the Hobbesian legacy of the social contract and theory of sovereignty suggest that the state, in this case a democracy and not a constitutional monarchy, has a duty to protect from harm as the ultimate form of well-being, peace, and non-violence. For those who live in them, democracies must be protected from harming themselves.

However, neo-fascism is the use of democracy against itself while a new ethos of self-righteous appropriation of national identity for one people and one leader threatens to dissolve all in its midst: what makes it 'neo' is the fact that it is happening in arguably the world's oldest modern democracy, namely the American one, whose constitutional constraints were created over nearly two and

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half centuries ago as opposed to the twentieth century fascist movements in Europe. Germany, of course, is the most diabolical example, which had no democratic tradition in the nineteenth century, let alone the eighteenth century. All of these statements seem obvious, and perhaps its apocalyptic proportions seem to be exaggerated. But predicting our political future in real-world matters is not our concern. The real question is their deep underlying presuppositions, the dark forces inhabiting the conditions that make the historical present possible while erasing any possibility of how to understand what is happening in all directions and in accelerated fashion, almost day by day, and in some instances, moment by moment. This requires a return to the Klossowskian theoretical expansion of Sade and Sadean experience and its bizarre temporalization. Klossowski reveals to us a series of interlocking, aporetic knots, which are difficult to disentangle while eluding any linear unfolding of a clear argument and analysis.

The Haunting in Klossowski's Text

Starting with the first of Klossowski's six propositions, these are the terms of our analysis quoting his actual words and phrases:

Rationalization of atheism

Monotheistic Norms

Unitary Economy of the Soul

Responsible Ego

Sovereignty of Man as Goal of Rational Atheism

Disintegration of man

Rational Materialism

Atheism as Religion of Integral Monstrosity

Religion – Asceticism and Apathetic Reiteration of Acts

Insufficiency of atheism

Asceticism – Divine character in monstrosity

Divine as Real Presence – Actualized through rites as reiterated acts

Monstrosity derationalizes atheism while Sade tries to rationalize the monstrosity by way of atheism (Klossowski 1991, 5-6)

For Klossowski, one could assume that trying to rationalize atheism, to give it a self-justification is futile: because at the surface, it appears to be a type of liberation or freedom that reveals ironically not something gained but in fact that something is actually lost. And this subtraction is not simply this common notion that has been advanced perhaps since the eighteenth century Enlightenment and certainly during the nineteenth century: the act of killing God, denying the existence of the conception of God, or deciding to live apart from or in the absence

of any conception of God, is an act from which we have yet to recover. Those are the classical registers of atheism, and many in the West, perhaps more so in the younger generations, usually cling to them because they are easy to grasp. Moreover, one may assume the epochal shift is one of premodern, pre-Enlightenment monotheistic religious 'norms' as Klossowski says (Klossowski 1991, 5), whereby the distinction is not yet between a religious or atheistic self, to how the 'unitary economy of the soul' and 'responsible ego' (Klossowski 1991, 5) normalize in the modern secular context. For modernity is supposed to contrast discontinuously with what was simply the product of the Creator-God in the medieval, feudal, pre-modern Christian context. However, this is not the shift Klossowski is concerned with in his analysis of the perplexing figure of the Sade. Again, we are not, at least at the outset, investigating debates about secularism, atheism, religion and the origins of modernity (Blumenberg 1985).

The question is this: how does the 'unitary economy of the soul' and 'responsible ego' congeal out of the passage between a formal epochal manifestation of the soul seeking to join the transcendental, invisible, 'living' God with the successor epoch when that ascent to reconciliation is no longer desired or possible. What is supposed to grow out of this transition to atheism is the belief in the 'sovereignty of man' (Klossowski 1991, 5), the individual as free (unbound) and whose freedom is constitutionally defended. One belief is replaced with another: the movement is from a.) The non-sovereign nature of man's debt owed for the original sin he committed and therefore must be expiated for salvation to b.) The acceptance of man as free unit of existence where even the feeling of absolutism becomes non-existent even when the origin of such freedom remains obscure. Yet this new state is actually undetermined. And therefore there can never really be a true state of atheism, and not because God exists as a prohibition or commandment against His own defiance and denial. The impossibility and possibility of God to exist in so far as this is understood always as man's relation to that impossibility or possibility is never reducible to human reason alone; then again, it is not a question of validation or hope in something faith can prove. What Klossowski sees in the Sadean moment is not a reconstitution of a new being – be it God or man – but actually a 'disintegration of man' (Klossowski 1991, 5).

Let us unpack these first set of reflections within our hypothetical structure of Klossowski on Sade, departure and forsakenness at the Cross, and our attempt to theorize the neo-fascistic implosion of normative democracy. What the death of democracy, or the belief in individual equality and liberty protected by the state, can possibly mean, after the so-called triumph of democracy over twentieth century totalitarianism and fascism, remains an open question for now. How are all three interrelated and not just as a question of succeeding epochs: the historical Jesus of the first century to the eighteenth-century Sade to our twenty-first century enigma that refuses total comprehension and understanding but exacerbates agony in living it out as an indefinite stretch of impossibility. It seems we will never become or overcome the stretch because we cannot even live in the

now or the moment or even identify with them. The ecstatic stretch, as Heidegger showed, is never reduced to a present now, let alone a present recollection of a past present or a present anticipation or expectation of a future present (Heidegger 1962). Perhaps we have never lived at all, and all that is and has been is just one long nightmare from which we cannot awake; so even the notion of facticity and the basic state for us is to be-in-the-world (Heidegger 1962) is also under question. We may not even exist at all as this historical present, which raises the stakes of how to deconstruct the limits of our own thinking. If there is a linkage of rethinking atheism and attesting to the pain of living out the historical present, then perhaps we should return to the forsakenness while incorporating what Klossowski says in these initial moments.

The Cross is not just a symbol, which has a central place in one particular world religion, namely Christianity. It is also a phenomenological bridge whose simple intuitions must be suspended: the total completion of an obedient will to live and die in all the pain and ignominy of a persecuted human being requires the utter annihilation of the total person, both body and soul, and its last second clinging to what could be beyond as one approaches the limit of non-being. To go forever into the abandonment is not proof of faith or acceptance of what is to come – namely a promised resurrection and therefore death means nothing, and in fact never occurs. Or death is just the ruse of its real possibility or the ultimate joker who can convince people of a reality that actually does not exist. Whoever said he we have to name cessation of physical life as this thing called ‘death’?

For Klossowski, this ‘inheritance’ of ‘monotheist norms’ (Klossowski 1991, 5) makes the project of an atheistic self-responsibility linked to the paradoxical goal of total sovereignty and individuality – the human as free from everything – while also a ‘disintegration’ ensues. This entropic disorder is the necessary rebuke for anything that can be identified as the moral value of obedience of will to death for another, Jesus’s God (*Eloi*), to the necessary self-implosion of the democratic sovereign self that would rather kill the social body in the name of perseverance. The Sadean moment is not simply the eighteenth century figure who was imprisoned after democracy was born. It harbors the secret of what sadism even means. This requires rethinking departure and forsakenness in general, but in non-Christological terms and the consequent destruction of political sovereignty. It is our task to define what these non-Christological terms are given what we have inherited down the ages in terms of Christian theology and its various traditions-Orthodoxy, Catholicism, and Protestantism. Our intuition is that this onto-theological construction of Western metaphysics is somehow bound up with a material apocalyptic: that is when even a democracy fails to defend itself from its own collapse into neo-fascistic, life-denying transcendence against the banal form of peaceful democratic transfer of power. The psychopathology of this whole movement awaits a more comprehensive metaphysical elaboration.

A cracking and splitting starts to appear between two poles, what we can term pre-democratic religious sadism and post-democratic and post-atheistic

generalized social sadism. It is the invisible space of difference between them that cracks or fissures, and therefore what appears are two counter-directions for analysis at the same time. But the point of origin of the crack remains hidden; the trace of that origin cannot be identified. The crux of the matter is an epochal threshold, whose temporalization is rather indiscernible, and not our empirical historical present, our current political crisis and the rise of right-wing authoritarianism and hyper-nationalism (U.S., Brazil, India), climate change, pandemics, the normalization of mass, violent social movements, and massively stifling inequality (socially, culturally, economic, politically, racially, sexually, etc.).

Rather, we need to understand how the non-dialectical relations and differences between atheism, monotheism, and democratic secularism instantiates a non-psychoanalytic yet sensualized ecstasy of religious pain and violence committed to an individual body, beginning with Jesus, to the sadistic generalization of purposeful and distributed pain and violence committed to today's democratic social body. A macro-suicide of democracy itself points to a 'beyond' state of its death that cannot be conceptualized in either pre-democratic (constitutional monarchical or tyrannical forms) or today's Western democratic norms of republicanism and parliamentarianism, say an election or constitutional crisis. Executive power and its abuses are not simply the matter, which is omnipresent as today's outstanding legal and constitutional question when a democracy is under threat. Democracy in many ways is the highest peak of illusion that monotheism demands when is committed to the notion of being One. Perhaps, democracy has always been an impossible idea, a necessary illusion. Atheism fulfills its conception in democracy, which fails to see where it's true birth lies. Inversely, one can say that democracy's own being towards its birth is never a possibility; only something that teases those who live within it, and yet are marginalized and oppressed under the veneer of equality and liberty. In fact, there is no real and universal truth as to why democracy had to be born at all, regardless of all those philosophers of history who proclaim teleologically that it is the 'end of history' (Fukuyama 1989). Let us remain in the crucible of this matter for some time before moving on to the remaining propositions on the 'religion of integral monstrosity,' 'religion as asceticism and apathy in constant repetition,' 'the divine character in monstrosity,' and finally what can only be explored in anti-Christian terms, this profound question of presence. Those terms are critical to reveal another kind of 'real presence' (Klossowski 1991, 6), a non-Eucharistic body, that is looming over us in this dark age of violence and disillusionment from both dogmatic religion and self-asserting atheism as valued in its own right. Atheism deceives itself as the successor to all dogmatism, and the utter impossibility to continue in this indefinite stretch of epochal agony. At the end of the day, atheism is meaningless. History may be meaningless for some, but when history consumes all meaning without a trace, then we have another matter altogether.

The cracking between the poles requires us to look at the cracks in each pole while trying to see the non-spatialized, intertwining-chiasm of how all points

intersect in interrelational patterns of movement in the arduous ask of thinking. The hardest thought is not some kind of sadistic enjoyment of Jesus's alleged masochism at that moment of abandonment on the Cross. Going towards death and running ahead to a transcendence that was preordained but not typified in a post-death resurrection appearance is likened to the infinite intensification of the will to be obedient to the will to death. Yet this will to will as death indefinitely stretched is a real possibility, but not for the sake of one's self-annihilation (suicide). Jesus did not commit literal, symbolic, or political suicide by being who he was, is, and to come. Rather, it is a commitment to the Voice speaking to itself of the highest act of sacrifice; nobody can enter into this secret messianic-consciousness as the infinite approach to death is actually culminated in the articulation of something that has already left, namely the protector waiting at death's gate. The receiver is not there, but that means where Jesus's cry was going is something so transcendent that it defies any simplistic notion of where God 'is.' One cannot even interpret his last question by playing with the notion of 'forsakeness' as something twofold – as in why is he being given up, as in offered as a sacrifice in addition to being left behind and alone in pure anguish. The two together form an aporia for which one side cannot speak for the other. The asymptotic approach of an infinite obedience as infinite act of love conceals another kind of finitude that defies human reason's philosophical and mathematical definitions of the infinite and the finite. This, paradoxically, is how the death of God can be *completed* so that God can be vindicated of any alleged lie that the death was just a trick or not real. God is not the joker par excellence. God did promise to come back by giving someone up completely, where no return is possible: the paradox is that this God and someone else are one and the same Logos (John 10:30).

The Cross splits apart between these vectors: a.) the infinite longing to die stretched out in agony because of the original obedience or the equality of Jesus the real Man who fails pain like us and the ineffable, omnipotent, omnipresent present monotheistic God or the Preexistent Logos that can never be approached by man; b.) the returning and encroaching moment of its transcendent temporalization precisely in the paradoxical act of withdrawal and abandonment; and c.) the increasing dramatic excitation that one is about to die alone in the name of an Other that is carrying over and beyond the possibility of death itself. But this Other, who deserted only but itself, crosses out the aloneness, for it is not a more sinister version of itself: like a copy watching itself in such pain but also in a sadistic excitement, just waiting in laughter at the humiliated body, to see what will actually happen at the event of death when one cries out for death to arrive. Rather, this condition of the highest religiosity prepares the way but also threshold between repeated, retrospective memorialization of the God-man who died that one Friday morning and the instantiation of the 'heir' to monotheistic theophany: namely Sade's 'rational atheism' inscribed in the very birth of democracy, the 'principle and goal' of which is the 'sovereignty of man.'

(Klossowski 1991, 5). As strange as this linkage is, we must keep in mind that we speak of the mystery of the epochal threshold, and not some empirical proof of a real historical connection between the Cross and Sade. Most would say any conflation of the two is completely absurd and morally repugnant, and for religious authorities, the highest form of heresy.

The path from Jesus's abandonment on the Cross to Sade's rational atheism flickers in an instant, and has nothing to do with a seventeen hundred year separation between two real historical beings. For the other pole, the post-democratic and post-atheistic historical present requires a set of reflections on what it means when democracy dies, and the horizon of Being beyond religion and atheism starts to appear. This is where we turn our reflections now, the splitting apart of relations and differences within this impossible question: if religion to atheism creates the democratic sovereignty of individual man, then what is the crossing of atheism to a realm beyond itself in the dissolution of the sovereign notion of democratic existence, whose metaphysical foreboding frightens us to the core. Taking away real equality and liberty from one who is legally and conceptually free is like taking away a security blanket from a child. What happens when a democracy starts to swallow itself up? The question could have been ludicrous decades ago, but today all norms have been thrown out the window.

This is where we can challenge simple notions of asceticism as the repetition of acts emptied of content and meaning, for example when a political election is not real or does not mean anything and whose reality can be questioned, just like the God who abandoned Himself at the moment of his own death. Repeating false elections that do not mean anything is not like the repetition of Jesus's hopeless and absconded deliverer from death, not the death and resurrection memorialized in repetition in Christian faith and practice, i.e. Eucharistic connectedness of past and future. Rather, we speak of that which is other to democracy, and not a simple repetition of the passage from religion to atheism. The passage from atheism to another is what we are considering as the post-Sadean psychopathology of a neo-fascism, one which rationalizes the self-destruction of the democratic social body. By trying to understand, we are trying to vanquish it. Would it be naïve in putting forward this intuition while claiming, perhaps disingenuously, that we are not able to represent our historical present whose shape and form refuses to present itself, refuses to answer us in the agony of our delayed completion? When dying becomes impossible is when democracy as the embodiment of the politics of finitude is under real threat.

The only way out of both poles crossing themselves out without suffocating within our own 'present' that is crossing itself out is a return to a speculative metaphysical theory. But not just any other metaphysical redux of the past, but rather, one appropriate and appropriating for our times and therefore unlike any other previous metaphysical tradition. The investigation must ask now what exactly Klossowski is speaking about regarding a type of new invention that emerges out of the Sadean historical threshold of experience. It is a threshold

because what is before and after do not appear in any simple apparition. Rather, we must go deep inside this black hole so to speak and try to decipher what exactly is being articulated in his remaining propositions.

Now we can turn to the abundant richness of propositions 3 to 6 to round out the last section of our investigation. The key terms for proposition 3 are 'rational materialism' and 'atheism as the religion of integral monstrosity.' As we have seen before, any common or intuitive senses of the distinction between atheism and religion evaporate, as does secularism as a substitute for atheism in contrast with religion. A philosopher of religion might try to probe what all these terms mean today, for example why the secular age does not replace religion but proliferates its senses and manifestations in new ways (Taylor 2007). But in Klossowski's strange and new ponderings, the traditional three moment Hegelian dialectic collapses and numerous other possibilities begin to proliferate. The linkages with current notions of ethics and communitarian justice are not so clear because, for us, a strident and self-conscious deconstruction of the emerging neo-fascism – and its underlying sadistic structure – require our unrelenting philosophical and metaphysical attention. That will require speculative philosophical wanderings because it is the groundswell of intuitions rooted in an anxiety that has more to do with fundamental questions of metaphysics rather than our current enslavement to the incomprehensibility of our empirical historical present. Let us venture some of those possibilities in this last section of our investigation.

For Klossowski, Sade, as impossible as it may seem to those who are 'normal' and do not or do not desire to do what Sade advocates, there is some rational connection, even in the absence of a 'conceptual formulation,' that links a 'rational materialism' with atheism as the "religion" of 'integral monstrosity' (Klossowski 1991, 5-6). There is no simple declaration of the obsolescence of religion and therefore the disavowal of a dogmatic concept of Godhead, which would anchor one down to prohibitions, taboos, and commandments that one can never transgress. Instead, something else is occurring. The material age one can say is the extension of Christian delay on the Cross as the embodiment of death takes shape as forsakenness; if one is not received after death, then one remains and this is transmuted into an internal spirituality of self-reproducing death that will eviscerate all matter. Atheism is not the absence of the Godhead and therefore the dialectical opposite of dogmatic religions, say Judaism and Christianity and their distinct revelatory structures. Rather, for Klossowski, it is in the Sadean threshold that we have the mystery of a transmutation: atheism *becomes* a "religion" of 'integral monstrosity' (Klossowski 1991, 5). What is this term 'religion' as it is being used here? What is the meaning of 'integral monstrosity'?

Before we analyze how Klossowski answers these weighty questions with the germinal formulations of propositions 4 through 6, let us take a step back. We will have to return to questions of 'asceticism,' 'apathy,' 'reiteration of acts,' and 'rites' (Klossowski 1991, 5-6) in the Sadean event of destruction. A type of

perverse positivity imagines a type of religion of the thanatological will to death that Klossowski says, at least here in this Preface, which Sade is initiating. The question is how to interweave this back to the problem of the epochal threshold. This is long before one even dares to confront propositions 4-6 on 'divine character in monstrosity,' the "real presence," and what we interpret as the non-circular twist in proposition 6: the last proposition is on how 'Sadean monstrosity is liberated' by 'derationalizing atheism' paradoxically by trying to 'rationalize the monstrosity' (Klossowski 1995, 6). We hypothesize that a phenomenologically complex robust and embodied notion of radically singular, individuated, non-relational, and non-transferable atheism is buried here; by that we do not mean an external frame that individuals enter into like they would a communal religion, but what is Other to any theocratic contract of this worldly-beings. One can say it is an atheism of one who is none other, and therefore other to atheism in group thought. Our interpretive assumption is that all of this points to a macabre yet mystical content waiting to be articulated. In our hypothesis, there is some buried linkage between forsakenness on the Cross (before Christian proclamation of resurrection is revealed in the Appearance to the disciples) and our historical present's self-consuming democratic sovereignty, which is the problem of an epochal threshold.

Turning to the propositions, let us philosophize about the layers of content buried in them. The 'religion of integral monstrosity' suspends any simple notion of departing from sacred commandments on not killing, which itself can invite the sanction of the death penalty. To punish the body and witness death is the passage between prohibitions to a heightened sense of freedom as if one were not reversing the Fall that gave birth to death and sin. But, rather, we have a rewriting of a pre-Fall state where pleasure is articulated in pure principle of freedom as evil. This is not the serpent suggesting that an apple should be bitten by the first two divinely created ancestors of all humanity. Rather, for Sade, the transcendence of a restricted conception of the human does not lead to a trans-human monster or inhuman, but a deeper level of interiority bordering on the mystical. The repetition of acts that creates excitation in the punishment of the body points to the liminal moment when one is approaching one's own death: the stretching event as pure expulsion of one's own self-consciousness of body and soul to a body becoming monstrous. But instead of consuming the monster's body as an anti-sacrament, the apex called death is transferred to the violated other, the one who is brutally subjugated, as the only way to rationalize a type of 'monstrosity.' This is not circular but an ecstatic event of interrelations that requires greater probing. Atheism is the content of this monstrosity. And the form takes on a 'religion' unlike any other existing world religions, which would negate atheism and promote compassion and justice for those who suffer.

Contrast that Sadean monster-event with the forsakenness on the Cross. For God to empty Himself completely in the event of death forces us humans to relate to an unanswered question when Jesus cries out about being jilted; the long

stretch of his approach to death shows another type of completion taking place. And this will to obedience to the Father's command to accept death founds Christianity's tropes of mercy, love, justice, and compassion for all who suffer. Believers no longer suffer in vain because suffering is not without hope given Jesus's death for humanity's sins and his triumphant resurrection. The Sadean threshold, which Klossowski miraculously unfolds in his unsurpassed analysis, has something to do with a confrontation with what would be other to the Cross. For us, this has some erratic linkage, although it appears to be a leap in logic, to the historical present on the self-suffocation of democracy whose logical extreme is maximum sovereignty of individual man blown up to all of society, not God or an individual emperor. Sade, in a way, shows a precondition of democracy as a monstrosity of infinitized individual sovereignty in the banal and abstract constitutional concept of a 'citizen' – when such a privileged right is discarded. One is free to do things allegedly in a democracy in contrast to a totalitarian dictatorship, but not whatever they want. Sade's monstrosity is also restricted because it cannot escape the threshold between Christian sacrifice and secular, constitutional democratic modernity. For us, however, not Klossowski, we are concerned with the rise of neo-fascism today, when all is sacrificed for an irrational drive to controvert all norms, procedures, and techniques of self-restraint that would otherwise guarantee a democracy from imploding. The first step is the fabrication of a threat to democracy that must be preserved; and in the perverse logic of saving democracy from an illusory threat, democracy itself must be destroyed. At that threshold moment a new totalitarianism begins to be conceived. Some other form as perpetual terror and self-destruction attempts to replace the concept of democracy.

Christianity cannot complete its own conception outside of the New Testament canonical text culminating in the supernatural tale of good at war with evil. In response to this inconsumable exteriority that Christianity cannot see, Sade becomes the material substitute of what would be Other to that longing, anticipation, and temporalization of the relation to God in a second act of reconciliation yielding a new creation. That is, after the first Reconciliation – or 'when the time was fulfilled, God sent his son' (Galatians 4:4) – but not to live but to die and reconcile all humanity back to God, which had previously fallen into sin. For Sadean monstrosity and its 'derationalizing of atheism' (Klossowski 1991, 6), it is possible that the human can approach its own divinity if it reaches a point of pure apathy and detachment in the repetition of acts that becomes the Sadean experience of pleasure when orchestrating and finally entering into the death of the other body. The time is unfulfilled and what is sent or delivered is a false sense of freedom whose pathetic reality is nothing but matter, blood, and remnants of flesh of the other. Such a 'real presence' is futility and forsakenness extolled to a pure and eternal abstraction, and hence a 'divine character in the monstrosity' (Klossowski 1991, 6). The real monster is that what born out of individual sovereignty. This is not a bounded object but the presupposition and purpose of

all democracy shape shifts; it becomes the tyrannical will to terrorize in the absence of dogmatic religious and moral constraints. What emerges is an embodied atheism that tries to articulate self-consciousness of its own content in the form of ecstatic, frenzied Sadean commitment to kill to satisfy pleasure. It turns out that killing God is not the most unthinkable event, but historical man killing himself.

Conclusion

For our epochal threshold, we can take this inverted relation between the Cross and Sade and try to situate it without collapsing its poles in to each other. The point is to bring to expression the haunting and anxiety of how History stands at the threshold of pure extinction: what should have culminated in the sustained, self-reproducing peace and eternal kingdom of a normal, stable, functional democracy, where no blood is shed, becomes its opposite. History is the memorialization of what has become extinct, but the idea of the extinction of History itself is not simply a negation of negation. It is a crossing to an-other side, a side other than History, which the monster of the neo-fascist historical present is trying to birth. Unlike Sade, this is not a matter of the individual unit, the basic atomic mass called the citizen that creates their own democracy for one, where only their rules apply and all other human beings are subject to a non-monarchical and non-state actor, namely the sadist who operates in secret and alone. The sadist transcends the highest justification which the state accords only to itself since the beginning of the social contract: the right to kill. However, with the historical present, this is now raised to the level of the entire democratic social body, when society as one large Human is not the preserved Leviathan of Hobbes in its pristine state, but, rather, a living megalith and a new idol. Its purpose is to destroy everything, including itself, and thus becomes the object of a national patriotic sacrifice that has no logic. To ask citizens to destroy the very thing that makes their freedom possible is like an inverted Sade, or rather Sade generalized to the idea of a new polis, the psychopathology of the neo-fascism of the historical present. To do the unthinkable and take pleasure in bloody revolution in the heart of a democracy with no end game in mind – this is our depraved state. But the reasons for why this malaise is the case – the time of the epoch – elude everyone in the present. That is the ultimate extension of, and not discontinuity from, the Sadean logic that failed to replace the forsakeness on the Cross.

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