THE FILMS OF JESS FRANCO

EDITED BY
ANTONIO LÁZARO-REBOLL AND IAN OLNEY

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An Editorial Note on Film Titles and Dates

As readers familiar with the director will already know, Jess Franco's filmography is famously tangled and hotly contested. Apart from there being no consensus about the total number of movies he made, there is little agreement about the official titles and release dates of many of his films. And no wonder: some of them have been released (and rereleased) in a variety of different cuts, under disparate titles, in diverse markets, and on assorted formats over the years. The reasons for this—including Franco's fast and loose working methods and the fly-by-night nature of the European exploitation film industry within which he operated for much of his career—are examined in more detail in the introduction. The challenge such uncertainty poses for a volume like ours is obvious. Which titles and dates should we and our contributors use when referring to Franco's films? How can we ensure that readers are able to track the discussion of his films across the essays that make up this book? For the sake of consistency and clarity, we have adopted the approach outlined here. Each time a Franco film is introduced in the chapters that follow, it will be with its original title and release date. In cases where the movie has received an American release, either theatrically or on home video, the title under which it is most widely known or available in the United States today will also appear. All subsequent references to the film will be made using this American title. In cases where a Franco film has received

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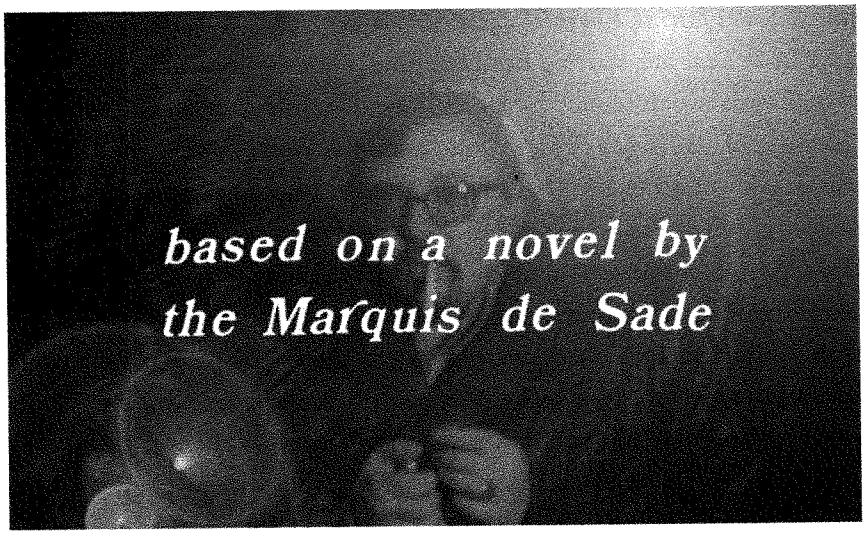
Elective Affinities

Another Sade of Jess Franco

Alberto Brodesco

Among the main sources for Jess Franco's cinema are the literary works of the Marquis de Sade, of whom the director declared himself a "devoted reader" (qtd. in Aguilar, *Jess Franco*: 150).[1] The Sadeian universe is for Franco a fantasy space open to elaboration, an arena that offers him the opportunity to experiment with his two favorite pairings: love and death, and sex and fear. As Franco put it: "The work of Sade is melodrama. . . . I always thought that a melodrama, to be interesting, needs to be both romantic and perverse" (qtd. in Aguilar, *Jess Franco*: 150). But Franco's Sadeian cinema is much more than a tribute to an author by a book lover.[2] We see in it a remarkable superimposition of intentions, impulses, and styles. Jess Franco's "adaptations" (we will see that quotation marks are necessary) borrow and transform a number of Sadeian figures and topics—the innocent female victim of evil and misfortune (from *Justine*); the vampish mistress of her own destiny (from *Juliette*); incest (from "Eugénie de Franval"); the sexual initiation, education, or corruption of a virgin (from *Philosophy in the Bedroom*); lesbian love (from "Augustine de Villeblanche")—bringing Sade's work to the screen in a unique fashion.

Considered together, these films represent a kind of Sadeian puzzle. Fragments from Sade's novels (circumstances, names, plotlines) combine to form a visual collage of narrative clues. They reveal a contradictory or at best enigmatic approach to Sade: stories from different sources are tangled up, forming modular, contingent, nonsequential compositions. The director keeps coming back to the same topics and characters, creating cinematic mash-ups that involve repetition, variation, and wholesale invention. Sade's opus is for Franco a palimpsest to be written, erased, and rewritten. He adapts Sade's texts without a real interest in being faithful to them. What truly intrigues Franco is the space of possibility offered by the Sadeian corpus. Blending elements of different books, Franco veers between naive symbolism and sophisticated surrealism, trivial illustration and heightened lyricism, banal readings and illuminating interpretations that rework or amplify Sade's themes, scenes, and styles. It is indeed what we expect from good intertextual works: a relationship with the original text that extends (or even distorts) its meaning. "Adaptations"—especially when they are in quotation marks—say in a different way things that the source has already said, but can also open up the unsaid, revealing things that were not in the original text. As Albrecht-Crane and Cutchins suggest, it is in this "space of disjunction" (20) that lies the real interest of intertextual relations.



A self-referential moment in the opening credits of *Eugenie de Sade* uniting Jess Franco and the Marquis de Sade in the glow of the movie projector's beam. (Prodif Ets. and Eurociné. Screen capture.)

A Sadeian Palimpsest

We can differentiate three categories in Franco's Sadeian filmography. The first includes films where the link with Sade is clear and explicit: *Justine* (*Marquis de Sade's Justine*, 1969), *Eugenie . . . the Story of Her Journey into Perversion* (1970), *Eugenie* (*Eugenie de Sade*, 1974), *Plaisir à trois* (*How to Seduce a Virgin*, 1974), *Cocktail spécial* (1978), *Sinfonía erótica* (1980), *Eugenie* (*Historia de una perversión*) (*Wicked Memoirs of Eugenie*, 1981), and *Gemidos de placer* (1983). A second group of films including *Juliette 69* (1976) and *Historia sexual de O* (*The Sexual Story of O*, 1983) has a fainter relation with Sade. In *Helter Skelter* (2000) and *Flores de perversión* (2005), Sade is just used as a "voice-over." A third group of films makes only a generic reference to sadism.[3] Sade's name is used as a catchphrase (sometimes only for a specific national market), as in the cases of *La mano de un hombre muerto* (*The Sadistic Baron Von Klaus*, 1964), *Die Marquise von Sade* (1977), *El sádico de Notre-Dame* (*The Sadist of Notre Dame*, 1981), and *Sadomania—Hölle der Lust* (*Sadomania*, 1981).

Because all of these films are built on a patchwork of references to Sade, the sources for each are not always easy to determine. The bases for *Marquis de Sade's Justine*, *Eugenie . . . the Story of her Journey into Perversion*, and *Eugenie de Sade* are, starting from the titles, quite obvious, even if we have to deal with two different "Eugénies" (one, Eugénie de Mistival, the main character of *Philosophy in the Bedroom*, and the other, Eugénie de Franval, whose tale is told in the eponymous short story). Other productions are more complicated. *Cocktail spécial* essentially takes its core concept from *Philosophy in the Bedroom*, as does *How to Seduce a Virgin* and *Wicked Memoirs of Eugenie*, but the latter two add references to the story of the Bressac family as told in *Justine*. *Sinfonía erótica* and *Gemidos de placer* are founded instead mainly on the episode of the uxoricide arranged by Bressac in *Justine* and do not involve the corruption of a virgin.

In the end, it is perhaps most accurate to say that Franco adapts Sade in part, not in whole. He is less interested in bringing the author's complete works to the screen than he is in sampling and remixing certain of their narrative motifs. We can identify five tropes that are especially important to Franco's Sadeian cinema: (1) the trope "Justine": a girl pays for the unfortunate consequences of her innocence (*Marquis de Sade's Justine*); (2) the trope "Eugenie": the tale of incest between a father and his daughter (*Eugenie de Sade*); (3) the trope "Philosophy in the Bedroom": the story of the initiation of a girl into perversion (*Eugenie . . . the Story of her Journey into Perversion* and *Cocktail spécial*); (4) the trope "Bressac": in an isolated house, a man conspires to murder his wife or his sister (*Sinfonía erótica* and *Gemidos de placer*); and (5) the trope "Philosophy in the Bedroom with Bressac": a combination of the two previous tropes (*How to Seduce a Virgin* and *Wicked Memoirs of Eugenie*). It is from these blocks that Franco's Sade adaptations are built.

Beyond the individual film (more or less accomplished and more or less faithful to its Sadeian source), it is interesting to consider the affinity between Sade's approach as a writer and Franco's approach as a filmmaker. Of Sade's writing, Pier Paolo Pasolini notes:

> De Sade was not a writer of pages, his pages are pretty bad, except for a few phrases that you can privilege and that are very beautiful . . . , but there is one every now and then; he has not the page, he just did not have the quality of the writer of a page [*non ha la pagina, non aveva proprio la qualità dello scrittore della pagina*], there was no chance he could be. . . . He was a writer of structure, and this structure was sometimes quite elegant, firm, well defined, such as in *The 120 Days*, where there is a quite accurate structure's design; other times there were instead infinitely open structures, like an accordion, poorly delineated, without boundaries. (3024)

Likewise, Franco may be called a "structural" director who focuses on the concatenation of events and characters rather than psychological or narrative unity. It is the same irrepressible desire to communicate that compels Sade and Franco to write in one go, valuing rapidity and accumulation more than precision and synthesis. The page, the single film, can certainly be "ugly," but the open, unbound construction of the composition can offer the greatest "structural" beauty.

In essence, the mechanisms of Franco's cinema and Sade's literature are quite similar. The latter works fundamentally on four operations, identified by Marcel Hénaff: planning, execution, variation, and saturation (32). In the first, *planning*, Sade's libertines discuss the terms of their actions and fix their performances. The second, *execution*, sanctions the passage to the act. What follows are *variations*, the play of changes that keep the libertines' desire busy. Each small difference "grounds the singularity of the resulting figure" (33), establishing a new unit and allowing the total sum of variations to increase. In *The 120 Days of Sodom*, especially, the subtle nuances of "passions" allow for the delineation of an original passion and illustrate the mechanics of permutation. Sade's writing strives to find new words to describe identical actions. Gestures that appear flat, monotonous, and reiterative are made fresh and vivid through the search for new descriptions that serve to differentiate the qualities of the sexual acts. The fourth and last operation, essential for the Sadeian combinatory logic, is described by Hénaff as *saturation*. It manifests itself in two subspecies: the first is the saturation of the scene through the addition of a large number of characters involved in the sexual action (with an artistic sensibility that is very close to the principles of an exalted and pansexual Baroque—see Boutoute); the second is the saturation of the body, which must be kept occupied in all of its parts.[4] The Sadeian strategy requires the saturation of space through a mass of bodies based on the saturation of each body involved in that space. What results is a body-mass, an enjoyment machine.

Planning, execution, variation, and saturation. To adapt this scheme to Franco's method, planning can be seen as the general intention to work on a subject—signaled, for example, by an appropriation of certain Sadeian themes. Just as significant, however, is the execution, which, because Franco embraced a production process driven by spontaneous ideas and unplanned moments, takes his work in unforeseen directions. Variation is a central mechanism in Franco's cinema: the same few obsessions (lesbianism, incest, the link between violence and sexuality) are exploited and elaborated over many films and across multiple sequences within the same film, producing "a cinema that never changes in order to always be different, where the compulsion to repeat becomes the means by which to stage a vision of the world that shifts from time to time" (Curti 24). Saturation, in Franco's films, is connected with excessive representation. His work is distinguished by the "frenzy of the visible" (Williams, *Hard Core* 50), especially where representation of the female body—and particularly female genitalia—is concerned. In this respect it is similar to pornography. But pornography has its own grammar, and Franco is not capable of operating like an "average" porn director: he flouts the "rules" of pornography (meat shots, money shots), improvising and following his instinct when photographing the female form. Rather than filming a "proper" pornographic shot, he sets out, in a much more ambitious way, to capture the hidden secret of sexual desire. Franco goes searching for its "very origin"[5] in the most obvious place, saturating the screen with close-ups of female genitalia. The fourth Sadeian operation is fulfilled. But when Franco gets too close, he seems to realize that representing desire is an impossible task. He consequently zooms out, just to be pulled back again, producing the typical movement of Franco's cinema, the zoom-in/zoom-out loop.

Franco uses the Sadeian palimpsest as an unconventional catalyst for "body genre" cinema (Williams, "Film Bodies") featuring ejaculation, blood, and tears. This "lowbrow" treatment of his literary source is productive on many different levels, permitting the director to add his own valuable insights to the discussion surrounding the writer's work, despite the fact that they remain unconsidered, underestimated, or even discredited by Sadeian scholars who have investigated the relationship between Sade and the image (see, for example, Pauvert and Beuchot, and Delon). In the pages that follow, I will try to underline the "elective affinities" between Sade and Franco, investigating a number of artistic and personal obsessions shared by the writer and the director—the pairing of sadism and masochism, the role of philosophy and ideology, certain kinds of spaces (islands, stages), and an interest in incest and voyeurism. The peculiar intertextual relationship between the director's films and their literary sources reveals that Franco does not always treat these subjects the same way Sade does. At some points, Franco's Sadeian palimpsest coincides with the writing

that inspired it; at others, it rewrites Sade. Moreover, as a low-budget exploitation filmmaker, Franco was not always artistically or financially equal to the task of adapting Sade. In some cases, he powerfully captures the essence of the French author's work; in others, he demonstrates an unwillingness or inability to match its terrible and virtuosic qualities. In every instance, however, his engagement with Sade is complex, passionate, and fully deserving of further study.

Sadomasochism, the Gaze, and Space

As they do in Sade's writing, sadism and masochism occupy a pivotal place in Franco's cinema. It is important to expose, as Gilles Deleuze does in *Masochism: Coldness and Cruelty*, the common fallacy that sadism and masochism are simply opposite sides of the same coin. They are not complementary passions. The sadist and the masochist do not share the same stage; indeed, they play in two different theatres. Every "pervert" has to be situated within his or her own "perversion": "Each subject in the perversion only needs the 'element' of the same perversion and not a subject of the other perversion" (Deleuze 46). In sadistic interplay, the victim has to be just and properly a *victim*: "The victim cannot be masochistic, not merely because the libertine would be irked if she were to experience pleasure, but because the victim of the sadist belongs entirely in the world of sadism and is an integral part of the sadistic situation" (Deleuze 41).

That said, Franco's Sadeian palimpsest frequently treats sadism and masochism as intertwined. Staging the parables of Justine and her sister Juliette, for example, Franco sets the trope of the misfortune of a virtuous girl against the trope of the prosperity of a woman who abandons herself to vice. In *Marquis de Sade's Justine*, masochism takes the center stage—and not simply in narrative terms. On the artistic value of the film, opinions are generally negative. Stéphane Du Mesnildot speaks of a carnivalization of the Sadeian novel (30), Ferrán Herranz of a "decaffeinated" Sade (53). The parodic and partly iconoclastic manner in which Franco reads his favorite author is deliberate, however. He declared in some interviews that he was forced to "change the whole story and turn it into a kind of Walt Disney" (qtd. in Aguilar, *Jesús Franco*: 143) by a series of production circumstances—particularly the imposition of the lead actress Romina Power, almost unanimously considered miscast by Franco fans and critics.

One could argue, though, that the Italian actress's flat interpretation of the role perfectly suits the material. In Sade's fiction, the obstinacy with which Justine goes looking for troubles renders her an unbearable character. Unable to evaluate with a modicum of reason the consequences of her actions and the intentions of her neighbors, the innocent maiden remains throughout the story at the mercy of her own stupidity, which leads her to repeat again and again the same mistakes. As Angela Carter writes, Justine's virtue is as self-centered as the libertines' vice, a symmetrical tragedy produced by bourgeois individualism (77). Romina Power's childish, naive, and "annoying" interpretation of the role captures this spirit. Her deficiency as an actor is in paradoxical harmony with the Sadeian character. Her youth (Power was seventeen at the time of shooting) and (at least apparent) innocence, violated in a film with sadistic-erotic components, is perfectly in tune with Justine's errors of assessment. Deciding to appear in a Jess Franco film, Romina Power goes searching for her own misfortune—a mistake *à la Justine*. In this sense, she does not act as a masochist in a scenario where masochism and sadism are compatible, but as a victim in a sadistic context. Her presence in a film directed by Jess Franco and inspired by Sade is physically awkward. She becomes the target of the sadism not only of her fictional tormenters but also of a director who considers her unfit to play the part and of Franco's viewers, critics, and fans. Thanks to Romina Power, Justine's victimization is complete.

We must acknowledge that Jess Franco is much more attracted by *active* female models, by Juliette more than Justine. In Franco's cinema, women realize their happy autonomy from men thanks to the violence of which they are capable (as in *Gemidos de placer*). They perfectly correspond to the model of cruel heroines of Sade's novels, where woman are able to ejaculate or are provided with "erectile clits." Angela Carter's description of the

Sadeian woman captures with amazing accuracy the "vampire lesbians" and their kin in Franco's cinema:

> The virility of these demonic whores . . . suggests male appetites; but, since the avidity of the male appetite is a social fiction, their very insatiability is a mark of their femininity. Clairwil, the man-hater, can exhaust the combined pricks of all the inhabitants of the monastery of the Carmelites, since this insatiability has in itself a castratory function. Male sexuality exhausts itself in its exertion; Clairwil unmans men by fucking them and then retires to the inexhaustible arms of her female lovers. For these women, the living prick and the manufactured dildo are interchangeable. Both are simply sources of pleasure; the body itself, to which the prick is or has been attached, is no more than a machine for the production of sensation. (104)

We witness the presence of the same kind of castrating and/or murderous women in *Shining Sex* (1977) and *Die Marquise von Sade*, where their sexual lure is an uncontrollable and dangerous force. In *Shining Sex*, Lina Romay's vagina hides a poison or a virus killing those who mate with her. In *Die Marquise von Sade*, Romay plays Doriana Grey, another sexual vampire who murders her male and female victims by bringing them to orgasm. Sucking life from the genitals of her victims is apparently what allows her to maintain her youth and beauty. Sex, in a very Sadeian way, keeps her alive at the expense of others. As Sade puts it: "the heaviest dose of agony in others ought, assuredly, to be as naught to us, and the faintest quickening of pleasure, registered in us, does touch us; therefore, we should, at whatever the price, prefer this most minor excitation which enchants us, to the immense sum of others' miseries, which cannot affect us" (*Philosophy* 1975).

In Franco's cinema, the dangers associated with the female body demand a special gaze. For all of their allure, female genitalia evoke the castrating Medusa described by Freud. To survive the sight of them, Franco suggests, one needs to see without being seen, to see and not see at the same time, to watch through mirrors, masks, reflections, or barriers. To avoid being drawn into a ritualistic dance of death, the viewer must become a voyeur, must stare from a distance. Like Perseus before Medusa, one must defend oneself with a shield. Only the ability to accurately measure the space between the eye and the object will protect one from the perils of the "shining sex" while still allowing one to enjoy its gleam. But this is an impossible task. The voyeur and the director are stuck in a double bind. Zooming in and out in search of the "right distance" from the object of their desire is just a futile attempt to break the impasse.

In Sade, watching (at the level of the enunciate) and the internal focus on a character who is watching (at the level of enunciation) are sine qua non conditions for the execution of a passion. The gaze of the libertines is constantly staged: "the pleasure of seeing and, in return, [being] seen, the will to track down the most beautiful victims, to monitor them and contemplate their sufferings are definite proofs of the ocular omnipotence of the libertines" (Sauvage 205). The eyes of Sadeian heroes are described as "penetrating and lascivious" (226), capable of "eye rapes": they devour, burn, kill, paralyze, fascinate. The eye "turns into an instrument of touch, extension or replacement of the 'sex-weapon'" (205).

For Franco, voyeurism works in a similar way. In *How to Seduce a Virgin*, Charles Bressac shows his wife Martine a slide show of their next victim, Cécile, the twenty-year-old daughter of a diplomat. Her entry into their field of vision is the prerequisite for her entry into a space of violence. Scopic drive and sadistic action overlap. Charles announces that he has rented a flat in front of the diplomat's house with an "impressive view of the room of this young woman," from which he took the photos of her. At the end of the sequence, the projector beam shines directly into the camera, dazzling the viewer. The energy produced by the lure of voyeurism blinds the audience watching the film, indulging in the same passion that excites the Bressacs. The couple eventually moves into the apartment in front of the diplomat's house. Like true voyeurs, they are equipped with binoculars. Their voyeurism seems to find a match in the exhibitionism of Cécile, who masturbates in front of her open window. Inflamed by the sight, exchanging the binoculars several times, the Bressacs start

caressing each other. Inside the room, their mute servant Adèle watches them watching, a diegetic presence that once more echoes the position of the film viewer.

In *Wicked Memoirs of Eugenie*, the voyeuristic gaze is again linked with the use of binoculars, which frequently play a key role in films devoted to the theme of voyeurism, such as Alfred Hitchcock's *Rear Window* (1954) and Pasolini's *Salò o le 120 giornate di Sodoma* (*Salò or the 120 days of Sodom*, 1975). Eugenie walks down the beach as Alberto observes her from his apartment while Alba stimulates him sexually. Alba then undresses and takes possession of the binoculars, interposing herself between her husband and the object of his gaze. After a moment, she gives the binoculars back to Alberto and, still positioned between him and Alba, offers herself as a fleshly medium for his voyeuristic fantasies.

Peeping Toms, voyeuristic killers, libertines who like to look . . . In a sort of confirmation or rearticulation of Christian Metz's theory that voyeurism is always (in part) sadistic—Metz states that "there is none which is not so at all" (62)—Franco includes in this rogues' gallery the film viewer, who has to confront the fact that his or her gaze coincides with theirs. In light of the link in Franco's films between voyeurism and violence, the viewer is forced to acknowledge the fact that sadism is inherent in the very act of looking. The notion that a mutually beneficial relationship unites voyeur and exhibitionist (I like to see your naked body / I like my naked body to be seen) is exposed as false. In *Wicked Memoirs of Eugenie*, Eugenie is certainly an exhibitionist and Alberto a voyeur. But the sadistic acts he conceives create a rupture in the allegedly "perfect" voyeur-exhibitionist relationship. The "innocent" voyeuristic game leads to tragic consequences. After killing the voyeur who threatened to kill her, Eugenie ends up wandering in the sands, on the run from herself and her previous role.

What *Wicked Memoirs of Eugenie* then underlines is the falseness of the complementarity not only between voyeur and exhibitionist but also between sadist and masochist.[6] If the masochist Eugenie rushes voluntarily into the arms of a sadist, she will not be able to interact with sadism appearing in its "real," Sadeian form, set against every idea of contract and despising every request from the partner, who is nothing more than a victim. Jess Franco's filmography aligns with the interpretation of Sade and Sacher-Masoch expressed by Deleuze: in their purest elaboration, sadism and masochism are not complementary passions. If watching is the prodrome of killing, the safety of the pact that would establish a mutually gratifying relationship between voyeur and exhibitionist is totally undermined, even in its cinematographic configuration. The exhibitionism embodied with playfulness and unashamed grace by Lina Romay in more than a hundred Franco films is, as a consequence, deeply troubling.

The interplay in Franco's cinema between sadism and masochism, voyeurism and exhibitionism, requires a special space. Franco often sets his Sadeian films on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea, in sunny, even touristic places (like villas with swimming pools and private beaches). These spots might seem a poor match for the dark, somber stories told in Sade's novels. Eschewing traditional Gothic iconography, Franco stages the relationship between Eros and Thanatos not in the shadows but in full sunlight. But there is a deeper affinity connecting the use of space in Sade and Franco: isolation. In the films that find inspiration in *Philosophy in the Bedroom*, we regularly witness travel to an isolated location—sometimes an island—that allows the libertines to perform their rites undisturbed.

Indeed, the sovereignty of the libertine is predicated on isolation. Architectural or natural spaces characterized by remoteness and inaccessibility are a prerequisite for Sadeian ritual. Theorizing this concept, Sade defines it with a neologism: *isolisme*. This condition is ontological, it represents a "philosophical thesis," the "stoic motto of the libertines," a "promise of enjoyment," the "core of Sadeian impoliticness," and "negative anthropology" (Roger 88). Isolation enables the more authentic existential situation of the sovereign man—the "whole man," the One (Bataille 165)—who needs privacy to bring his enjoyment to the maximum degree of intensity. Franco supports this logic, although he does not emphasize the ideology and element of autarchy it implies.[7]

For Franco, *isolisme* is also a way to integrate architecture and character. *Gemidos de placer* features only five people throughout the whole film, but

the isolated villa where the action takes place itself becomes an additional character. This sunny but scary "holiday space"—in association with a filming technique based on long shots and very few cuts—acts like a black hole, immobilizing time, freezing the characters in front a future that is in fact their past, as the whole film is a long flashback begun in the first scene, where we see the dead body of the main character, Antonio. This fits very well with Sade's treatment of temporality: in his writings the isolated castle is also a place where time folds back on itself "like a Möbius strip" (Airaksinen 2). Among the countless types of perversions hosted in the Sadeian space, there is also the perversion of Chronos.

Performance, Masks, and Taboo

Another central condition of Franco's Sadeian cinema is performance, in which role-playing and the donning of masks makes possible the exploration of sexual taboos like incest. For instance, in the last sequence of *Cocktail spécial*, we see an orgiastic masquerade during which the guests mate with masked people they do not recognize. Eugenie's father, who is visiting the house, is convinced to join the group and is pushed into the arms of his daughter, who practices fellatio on him. When one participant orders everyone to take off their masks, mutual recognition occurs. Without any embarrassment, however, father and daughter continue the sexual act until the final cum shot.

What is interesting in this scene is the use of the mask, or the *passage* through it. The father and daughter's phantasm—for Lacan, "the form on which depends the subject's desire" (99)—appears only if it is disguised. It is thanks to the fact that father and daughter are wearing masks that they might take them off. In the film, we observe in fact three levels of relationship between Eugenie and her father: in the first, they are unmasked in their home, in the course of their normal daily life; in the second, they wear masks during the orgy; in the third, they still participate in the orgy, but unmasked. The unmasking that allows father and daughter to recognize each other does not bring them back to the first level: the fall of the mask, like a guillotine, sanctions the abandonment of moral and social conventions. The point at which they meet is no longer that of departure. The first and third levels show different unmasked faces. The disguise is necessary to enable their relationship to leap into the space of the phantasm. The *real* mask is the one worn in the first moment of their relationship, when they are forced by social norms to assume a fictional role. As Slavoj Žižek writes:

> Our social identity, the person we assume to be in our intersubjective exchanges, is already a "mask," it already involves the repression of our inadmissible impulses, and it is precisely in the conditions of "just gaming," when the rules regulating our "real-life" exchanges are temporarily suspended, that we can permit ourselves to display these repressed attitudes. Think of the stereotypical computer nerd who, while playing an interactive game, adopts the screen identity of a sadistic murderer and irresistible seducer. It is all too simple to say that this identity is just an imaginary supplement, a temporary escape from real-life impotence. The point is rather that, since he knows that the interactive game is "just a game," he can "show his true self," do things he would never have done in real-life interactions. In the guise of a fiction, the truth about himself is articulated. (74–75)

Masks also afford the opportunity to play with shifting sexual identities, to switch with the utmost indifference from male to female and vice versa. This "queer motif" in Sade is certainly an additional reason for Franco's attraction to the author. As Edmiston writes, Juliette, in particular, embodies "Sade's queer character par excellence. . . . Anatomically female, she nonetheless reveals a male sexual psyche and speaks of having erections. She crosses gender boundaries throughout her story" (266). Masks also have a central role in Sade's short story "Augustine de Villeblanche," where a young man, disguised as a woman, succeeds in seducing a lesbian. The theme of lesbianism is of obvious interest for Jess Franco, who, in a late production from 2005, *Flores de perversión*, reads in voice-over extracts from this tale. The film is essentially a pornographic *kammerspiel* where the

words from Sade accompany the sexual coupling of two female managers, who are continuously interrupted in their intercourse by business phone calls—a grotesque scene that shows how *isolisme* is unachievable in a contemporary overconnected and hypercapitalist society.

As we have seen, the universal taboo of incest is a personal obsession for both Sade and Franco. Sade insists on pursuing the subject in almost all of his books. His fixation is motivated in part by his view that incest is a disruptive act capable of destroying the whole structure of society, preventing any constitution of social life or passage from nature to culture. Franco does not share Sade's radical nihilism, but is nonetheless very interested in incest as an impulse that undercuts social norms with sexual desire. This impulse manifests itself across Franco's oeuvre. In *Gritos en la noche* (*The Awful Dr. Orlof*, 1962), for example, incestuous desire drives Orlof's obsession with giving a new face to his disfigured daughter. The protective glass under which the girl is placed—an almost transparent border not to be trespassed—defines the incestuous frame of the film (Du Mesnildot 40).

Incestuous desire operates most powerfully in the director's Sadeian cinema, however. In *Eugenie de Sade* (from Sade's short story "Eugénie de Franval"), the moral threshold holding taboo desire at bay is represented by the door of Eugenie's childhood room, which is filled with dolls and teddy bears. But this boundary is fragile. At first, we see Eugenie's father, Albert De Franval, peeping through the open door at the provocatively naked body of his daughter, who is lying on her bed. We witness his hesitation between the social duty not to look and the voyeuristic temptation to look. Father glances at daughter and then departs, slamming the door. His self-discipline does not last for long. And in this morbid family context, his desire for his daughter is answered by her desire for him, which leads not only to incest but also to murder, as they enhance the thrill of their taboo sexual relationship with the random slaying of unwary victims.

The first homicide committed by father and daughter is particularly revealing of the process of overcoming social norms. The couple stand among the audience in a Parisian cabaret called Taboo, but the De Franvals soon leave the show, change their clothes, and take a plane to Brussels, where they kill a model who earns a living by posing naked for amateur photographers. Afterward, Albert and Eugenie change their clothes again and return to the cabaret, where the show is still going on. Entry into Taboo (the taboo of incest) enables them to sadistically kill an anonymous woman. In the second murder, which is shown in detail, the victim is a hippie hitchhiker. The De Franvals, who present themselves as a newlywed couple, introduce her into their residence. After dinner, they ask her to play an erotic game. Eugenie stages a striptease, while the hitchhiker is required to lie on a sofa, pretending to be dead. It is in this moment that Albert kills her by suffocation. In both murders, the mise-en-scène constitutes a fundamental step in the deadly play. As it is for Sade's tableaux—the fixed, frozen, but living compositions, often of orgiastic groups, that are of the utmost importance to the libertines' pleasure (Kozul 44, 193–94)—the spectacle must be enjoyed not just via projection but via intrusion (Barthes 155): the reader/viewer must not simply "identify" with the actors; he or she has to desire joining the actors onstage.

The first murder depends on the following variables: access to the show; wearing a mask; murder; then return to the show. The circularity of the process is complicated by the fact that the model's death takes place in a spectacular context, a photography studio. The frame of the Taboo theater that encloses the murder (and works as an alibi for the couple) contains, *en abyme*, another spectacular setting. The model in Brussels falls into the deadly trap when asked to pose for sadistic photographs: she grabs some chains and simulates a few wounds on her body with red paint. This self-produced entry into Albert and Eugenie's fantasy condemns her. The second murder is built on a similar sequence: mask (or disguise, as the De Franvals pretend to be a married couple); show (the little erotic game staged in the living room); murder. It is again the naive hitchhiker's performative entry into the territory of Sadeian fantasy—her willingness to "play dead"—that ultimately ensures her demise. The homicide is followed by a series of excited, orgasmic cries from Eugenie, who can now run into her father's arms. Murderous ecstasy produces the first real incestuous intercourse

Donning disguises, the incestuous De Franvals, Eugenie (Soledad Miranda) and Albert (Paul Muller), prepare to commit their first murder in *Eugenie de Sade*. (Prodif Ets. and Eurociné. Screen capture.)

between them. As in *Cocktail spécial*, it is the mask, the passage through the mask, that liberates their true selves.

Conclusion

For all of their affinities, Franco's films do not agree with Sade's writing on every point. Take, for example, their differing attitudes toward philosophy and sex. In Sade, sex in itself is not dangerous, while philosophy is. In Franco, conversely, sex inevitably leads to violence. To escape the second, one has to give up to the first. In the stories inspired by the *Justine* episode of Bressac, sex is twice as dangerous: it harms—as her doctor insists—the mental health of the wife, and it hurts because of its sadistic character. In *How to Seduce a Virgin*, Martine Bressac is released from the psychiatric institution where she has been hospitalized. Her doctor prescribes her calm, moderation, continence, and chastity ("like censorship," is the ironic and metacinematic comment made by her husband). At home, a maidservant and a "simple-minded" hunchbacked gardener wait for her return. The servants (retarded, blind, deformed) take on the role of Augustin in *Philosophy in the Bedroom*. The gardener, as presented by Sade, is "as frank as he is fresh," "precious," and "charming" (*Complete Justine* 1606–17), with an incredible sexual power. When it comes to the discussion of philosophy, just before the reading of the pamphlet, *Yet Another Effort, Frenchmen, If You Would Become Republicans*, Dolmancé orders Augustin to leave: "Out with you, Augustin; this is not for you; but don't go too far; we'll ring when we want you back" (2242). In Sade, innocence of spirit is not incompatible with the participation in sexual acts. Augustin can maintain his virtuousness while taking part in the orgies. What really corrupts is the philosophy from which he is excluded. In contrast, Franco's pseudo-Augustins remain innocent only if they do not take part in the orgiastic sex (with a few exceptions, as in *Cocktail spécial*). To save oneself from evil, one must avoid participating in the erotic act, which almost always turns into sadism and murder. Sexuality generates violence as a consequence.

The philosophical layers of Sade's oeuvre, on the other hand, are very difficult for the Spanish director to manage: Franco describes *Philosophy in the Bedroom* as "a terrible story, written with a 'Sadeian' mentality, so to speak, too explicit to be filmed in the way it is written" (qtd. in Herranz: 87). In the films he draws from the book, Franco tries to rival Sade with his own trademark combination of sex and violence (or "horrotica"); it is the ideological component that he eschews. Franco does not give space to Sade's dissertations, fundamental in a literary work conceived as seven dialogues and occupied for about a quarter of its length by the aforementioned revolutionary manifesto, *Yet Another Effort, Frenchmen, If You Would Become Republicans.* If in the novel it is the philosophy that convinces Eugénie to abandon any moral objection to taking part in the orgy, in a film like *Eugenie . . . the Story of her Journey into Perversion* ideology is replaced by drugs, the only possible means of surmounting the barrier of Eugenie's moral education. During the orgies, Eugenie appears dazed, intellectually absent. What is lost is the perlocutory property that Sade attributes to the written word, the procedure at the basis of Sade's work: as Eugénie is

seduced by her guests' philosophy, so will the reader be convinced by Sade's. In the absence of this component of the novel, Eugénie de Mistival (who in the novel, with a gesture that is probably iconic of the whole Sadeian opus, ends up sewing her mother's vagina shut) is just a "nouvelle Justine," a victim of her own innocence. Not being touched by philosophy, Eugenie, naked and still innocent, can wander among the sand dunes of the island at the end of the film. Franco surrenders to the unrepresentability of *Philosophy in the Bedroom*, recognizing that the problem lies in Sade's "mentality," not just in the violent or pornographic content. Franco's relentless focus on the body is precisely the product of this awareness.

Indeed, differences aside, the Sadeian palimpsest offered Franco the ideal opportunity to work on the pleasures and wounds of the body. Franco focused on Sade's "body language," choosing to leave aside the dimension of the mind that is at the core of Sade's writing, where philosophy is the product of the same combination of materialism and unruly imagination that fuels the sexual acts it chronicles. In Franco's cinema, the entrance of a body into the frame is the essential, continually reinvented action that allows the director to produce an infinite set of figurative possibilities. As is the case in jazz improvisation, "unruly" expressive freedom is nonetheless rooted in precise harmonic modulation. For his jam sessions, Franco therefore goes searching for "modes," for "standards"—such as the ones offered by Sade—to rehearse and play, offering his own variations.

The strange affinity between Sade's literature and Franco's cinema certainly depends on the Spanish director's passion for the French writer, but runs deeper than that. It is ultimately rooted in their shared desire for proximity to the reader/spectator, their wish to make him or her feel the breathing presence of the author/director. The characteristic movement in Franco's filming—the incessant zooming in and out—reflects the same theoretical-practical purpose that animates Sade's writing: the stylistic hunt for a haptic and perlocutory form capable of conveying to the reader, through language, the ecstatic and sovereign perspectives of the characters in the novels. In Franco, the ambition to overcome the distance between the film and its viewer translates into the constant attempt to get closer, to look better, to charge the image with a synesthetic intensity, to effect its saturation.

Bridging the divide between text and audience is not an easy task in literature or in film. For Sade, representation involves imitation, repetition, *mises en abyme* of one scene into another (Sauvage 73). Semantically, the word *abyme*, abyss, evokes the ideas of depth, infinity, vertigo, and fall (see Dällenbach). A frustration with the limits of writing—"as if the form of the texts were being devoured by their object" (Hénaff 4)—pervades the Sadeian oeuvre, this immense dream of power and domination written in prison by a man in chains. A similar frustration suffuses Franco's films. Finding the right place from which to stare (at sex) is impossible, since the voyeur has to avoid both being too close and being too far from the object of the gaze. What we are left with is a trembling uncertainty, a perpetual hesitation, before the power of desire. In the end, this profound ambivalence, which Franco compels the viewer to share, is perhaps the defining characteristic of his Sadeian cinema.

Notes

1. All translations from French, Italian, and Spanish are mine.
2. For a general survey and definition of Sadeian cinema, see Brodesco.
3. Sadism is defined by Roland Barthes as "only the coarse (vulgar) contents of the Sadian text" (170).
4. One example from *The 120 Days of Sodom*: "He employs eight men at a time: one in his mouth, one in his ass, one beneath his left testicle, one beneath his right; he frigs two others, each with one hand, he lodges a seventh between his thighs and the eighth frigs himself upon his face" (7048). And one from *Juliette*: "Sandwiched between the two of them, I sometimes had both their tools wedged in my cunt, or, at other times, I simultaneously entrapped one prick in my anus and the other in my vulva. . . . Noirceuil, reluctant to see a single one of my orifices vacant, stabbed his member into my mouth and there let fly with his final discharge while my cunt and bowels were washed by the two little pederasts' exhalations" (3611).
5. Gustave Courbet's painting *The Origin of the World* is a common reference in critical discourses on Jess Franco's cinema. See, for example, Rauger (5) or Cesari (28–33).

6. The true voyeur likes to peek in secret, without being recognized as a subject who looks. Voyeurs are not particularly eager to watch someone who strips for their benefit, and exhibitionists take pleasure in baring themselves to a person who is not an accomplice: "Between voyeurism and exhibitionism there are all forms of transition; given that the desire of the partner must however be forced, it is understood that the voyeur does not look for an exhibitionist partner and, in the same way, the exhibitionist does not seek a voyeur" (Valas 187).
7. As Roland Barthes writes of the isolated castle in Sade, "Once shut in, the libertines, their assistants, and their subjects form a total society, endowed with an economy, a morality, a language, and a time articulated into schedules, labors, and celebrations" (17).

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III

THE CULT RECEPTION OF FRANCO