

**Deakin University**

**Antonia Pont**

**Pathology or intervention? – Deleuze’s masochism and its relation to parody**

Abstract:

In his 1967 work, *Presentation of Sacher-Masoch – Coldness and Cruelty* (2007), Gilles Deleuze famously distinguishes the symptomatologies commonly designated by the names Masochism and Sadism, arguing that despite their shared feature of algolagnia, they are more rigorously approached as two very distinct regimes, having nothing to do with the ‘economy’ of the other. In the work’s preface, Deleuze also notes about Sacher-Masoch himself: ‘His whole oeuvre remains influenced by the problem of minorities, of nationalities and of revolutionary movements’ (2007: 9). Deleuze identifies that, within Masoch’s oeuvre, the masochist is he (normally a ‘he’) who insists on the contract. This insistence is neither to honour any particular contract or contracting *per se*, nor to safeguard himself within it, but to perform, through parodying it to its letter and pushing its operation towards its own limit, the inherent injustice that is its inexorable outcome. This article seeks to explore, using Masochistic ‘humouring’ or mockery of the contract as example, what might constitute a practice of intervention in regimes of power, and in which instances these iterations serve instead only as gestures of complicity with the injustices of the established logics. The article seeks to clarify, at the level of mechanism, a region of parody’s slippery operation, one which would determine the criteria for it to be intervention, as opposed to functioning as compliance and ‘bare repetition’ or ‘repetition of the Same’ (see Deleuze 2004: 27).

Biographical note:

Dr Antonia Pont is Senior Lecturer in Literary Studies and Professional & Creative Writing at Deakin University. She publishes theoretical prose, poetry and short fiction. She is also a yoga practitioner and teacher, with her scholarly research concentrating on theorising practice of any ‘denomination’ in order to clarify the criteria of its operation and efficacy.

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*Il y a là l'humour, qui n'est pas simplement le contraire de l'ironie, mais qui procède par ses propres moyens. L'humour est le triomphe du moi contre le surmoi... [...] L'humour est l'exercice d'un moi triomphant, l'art du détournement ou de la dénégation du surmoi, avec toutes ses conséquences masochistes.* Présentation de Sacher-Masoch (2007: 107)

[There is humour there, which is not simply the opposite of irony, but which proceeds by its own means. Humour is the triumph of the ego over the superego [...] Humour is the exercise of a triumphant ego, the art of diversion or denegation of the superego, with all its masochistic consequences.]<sup>1</sup>

In this article, I seek to do four things:

1. Refresh (or introduce) the argument from Deleuze's 1967 work, *Présentation de Sacher-Masoch*, that: it is imprecise (and missing the point) to speak of a sadomasochism *per se*, and that rather we can only understand the latter in terms of *two separate* 'tableaus of incomparable symptoms and signs' (2007: 16) or two formal typologies that *do not* interact and are not characters in each other's drama.
2. Then, to draw attention in these two series to both masochism and sadism's shared preoccupation with, and contestation of, law, and by intimation with the law as instrument *par excellence* of suffering. Indeed, we can say that if there exist any ways to contest law, the respective tendencies of sadism and masochism, according to Deleuze's reading, represent the two possible vectors or logics of that resistance. The contract, for masochism, is crucial here in his account, as opposed to the institutionalisation that his reading of sadism demands.
3. This folds, then, into an examination of the way that it is humour that marks the masochist's *démarche* (as opposed to the irony of sadism) and we can consider to what degree this division offered by Deleuze might contribute to thinking one aspect of parody's strategy for intervention and, by implication, whether the two typologies have potential for casting light on a thinking of parody in art.
4. Finally, I go on to question to what extent, and under what conditions, we might want to consider masochism (and indeed sadism), after Deleuze's account, as 'practices', given that they both involve a repetition of 'doings', a repetition which can be read through the lens of Deleuze's unpacking in his work *Difference and Repetition* (2004). This, finally, leads us to the question of the 'efficacy of interventions', with parodic humour as example of intervention, and to Deleuze's contribution towards framing such an evaluation.

In his short and pithy volume from 1967, *Présentation de Sacher-Masoch*, subtitled 'Coldness and cruelty', Deleuze's first task is to refute the coupling that has gone by the name 'sadomasochism'. After exhaustively combing the literary works of the Marquis de Sade and Baron von Sacher-Masoch, Deleuze amasses textual evidence to propose, quite provocatively, the existence of a consistent and formal logic at work in each of their aesthetic and material preoccupations. Via the latter, he will, quoting Reynolds, 'resist the conflation that he calls "the sado-masochistic entity"' (2006: 89), affirming instead the profound incompatibility and self-sufficiency of the two

typologies. This preliminary, but virtuosic intervention, will serve as the backdrop against which he will outline an even more interesting proposition that we will get to shortly.

So, despite masochism and sadism seeming to share a seeking of pleasure via an infliction of, or subjection to, pain/humiliation/torment etc. thereby being reduced to their falsely presumed common feature of algolagnia, this lens for Deleuze would seem to fail to grasp what is more interesting in both of their sets of operations, and in the universe(s) that these constitute. Indeed, focusing on the aspect of a certain (and complementary) relation to pain as their *raison d'être*, arguably is the way that their respective political provocations are diffused and reduced to aesthetic oddities.

To illustrate why the emphasis on pain/suffering/punishment is misleading, Deleuze contests the causality assumed to be at work in the masochistic economy. Although the masochist, Deleuze notes, would seem to have to undergo punishment before he experiences pleasure, 'the suffering *is not the cause of the pleasure*, but a *preliminary that is indispensable* to pleasure's arrival' (2007: 78, author's emphasis). In other words, he reminds us, as did Hume before him, that a temporal succession must not be confused with a causal logic. There is pain/punishment first and then pleasure would seem to follow at first glance, however one does not cause the other, rather masochistic torment operates as the strange *condition* for pleasure.

Similarly Deleuze warns against a papering over of 'gaps' [*les blancs*] in readings that defend a collapsing of the two tendencies into a sole typology with two faces. Turning to the role of guilt for the masochist, he writes:

[T]he feeling of guilt has a very important role in masochism, but as a concealing phenomenon, as humorous feeling of a culpability already "turned"; the guilt here is no longer that of the child with regard to the father, but rather of the father himself, and to the father's likeness in the child. There again, there is a "gap" [*blanc*] that is hastily filled in when one seeks to derive masochism from sadism. [...] In wanting to fill in the gaps that separate masochism from sadism, one falls into all sorts of errors, not only theoretical ones, but also practical or therapeutic. (2007: 94-5)

For the purposes of the broader thematic of this issue, we can also note in the above excerpt the explicit mention of 'likeness'. As Deleuze would have it, it is the *likeness of the father in the child* (parody or mimicry) that dances with a guilt that has already turned to humour. If there is an arguable relation between the actual father and the superego of the child-now-adult, then we begin to understand more about the link between humour and the superego explicitly named by Deleuze some pages after (and cited at the start of this essay). The whole book, indeed, works at unpacking the reiterated framing of a dual-typology, and instead tirelessly dismantles arguments (that stretch from Kraft-Ebbing, through Freud) that would defend this coupling and its framing. Dismissing readings that would define masochism (or indeed sadism) in erogenous or sensual terms (pain-pleasure) or in moral or sentimental terms (guilt-punishment), Deleuze – emphasising formal and structural elements – states that masochism:

is firstly formal and dramatic, that is to say, that it achieves a combination of pain and pleasure only by way of a particular formalism, and lives guilt only via a specific history (2007: 95).

The upshot of this is the (perhaps counter-intuitive) fact that the last thing a sadist wants is a masochist, and the last thing a masochist wants is a sadist; or as Deleuze explains, referencing Sade's work *Juliette*, 'A true sadist would never tolerate a masochistic victim' (2007: 36). The economy of sadism requires real suffering that does not provoke pleasure of any kind in its victims, and similarly, the economy of masochism, as depicted in the literary works (and life) of Sacher-Masoch, is utterly subtracted from sadism, and requires a 'good woman' who can be educated to contract with the masochist in the way he seeks. To quote Deleuze on this point once more: 'Sadist and masochist, perhaps each performs in a sufficient and complete drama, with different characters, without anything that could make them communicate, either internally or externally' (2007: 40). Deleuze further clarifies that there may be a kind of faux 'sadism' that is proper to the masochistic universe, but it is not the sadism of the sadist, and does not operate according to its logics in any way (2007: 37-8). So, to conclude this initial point: 'Between sadism and masochism a profound dissymmetry is revealed' (2007: 61).

To do justice to the elegance and relentless rigour of Deleuze's argument in this book is not going to be possible. However, in order to illustrate the breadth of his analysis, the table below may give some indication as to what distinguishes them, and how far-reaching these differences are. That said, such an inventory also demonstrates a certain resonance between them – almost as two parallel series – in relation to the fields, the inflection of which, however, sets them definitively apart. It is this resonance that points the reader towards the more important argument in this work. (see table below).

<b>Masochism</b>	<b>Sadism</b>
<i>Relation to 'coldness'</i>	
as a protective milieu / cocoon / medium	as an ideal of apathy
<i>Environment/Context needed:</i>	
Contractual relations (proliferation of individual laws established in contractual arrangements)	Institutions (minimisation of laws)
Involves education (of the female)	Involves institutionalisation
Hermaphroditism	Androgyny
Order	Disorder / Anarchy
Theatrical / Aesthetic	Demonstrative / Quantitative
<i>Relates to the figure of:</i>	
The Oral Mother (precariously attained through 'pendulum swings' between the uterine mother and the oedipal/sadistic mother)	The Sadistic Father
<i>Characteristic Familial Relation</i>	
Oral Mother / Masochistic Son (father denegated & expelled from symbolic order)	Sadistic Father / Sodomised Daughter (who destroys/negates the mother)
<i>Relation to Temporality / Rhythm</i>	

Based on delay / suspense / waiting sentimentality (or <i>suprasensuality</i> ) that denegrates sensuality	Based on mechanical reiteration / acceleration impersonal, demonstrative sensuality
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<i>Relation to prostitution</i>	
As private contract ('good mother' is prostituted, thereby shown to be capable of assuming the roles of the two 'other mothers')	As universalised institution
Pertains to <i>tableaux</i> / rites / imagination	Pertains to demonstration / reason purified
<i>Relation to the aspects of the Freudian Psychic Apparatus</i>	
... is an ego lacking a superego (which has been projected onto the woman-who-beats as object of derision)	... is a superego that has expelled its ego completely (and projects it onto others)
<i>Relation to Lacan's Three Orders</i>	
Denegrates the father's role in the Symbolic Order – suspends itself in the imaginary – is defeated by the hallucination that returns in the real in the form of the sadistic father	Idea projected with rare violence; it should acquire a maximum of power of aggression, of intervention and systematisation in the real.
<i>Mechanism for Radically Contesting the Law</i>	
<u>Humour</u> (descending into detail into order to ridicule it through derisive enactment 'to the letter')	<u>Irony</u> (ascending to principles, which work to overturn its logic and deny it its power)
<i>Relation to Kant's Revolution regarding the Derivation/Operation of the Law</i>	
Based on the modern discovery that the law <i>nourishes</i> the culpability of he or she who obeys...	Sets forth from the idea: law is not founded on Idea of the Good, but is a formal entity without foundation.
Pertains to Waiting	Pertains to Projection (at speed)

As the left hand column of the table hopefully demonstrates, far from being a private affair of sensual eccentricities, or an unusual and counter-intuitive approach to gaining pleasure, masochism arguably involves an aesthetic register and, more surprisingly, a legal one. We read:

Masoch's culturalism consists of *two* aspects: an aesthetic aspect which is developed via the examples of art and of suspense, a *legal* [juridique] aspect, which is developed via the examples of the contract and of submission (2007: 67, author's emphasis).

That there is no symmetry at one level between sadism and masochism is also clear from this table. A masochist would undermine the sadist's project and vice versa. At another level, their universes would seem, after Deleuze's analysis, to mobilise suffering not in order to evince pleasure but operate rather as the two vectors of a contestation at the level of structure and of law, in response, one could speculate, to the latter's very real *ability* to inflict, and regulate infliction of, suffering.

### **Masochism (and sadism) as performed structural critique of law**

So how does the humoristic resistance – that Deleuze identifies masochism to be enacting – actually function? What are its mechanisms? It is here important to note that (as we see in the table), there are two distinct registers of the masochistic

contestation of law, and they echo one another. The first is a critique within the framework of psychoanalysis, and is specifically in relation to the Oedipus complex and the symbolic order – as the realm of the law (see Evans 1996: 129). The other register (distinct from but also conforming to the psychoanalytic, as another inflection of its logics) pertains to law as it is revealed in worldly contractual relations, whose mechanics, as Deleuze identifies, are crucial to masochism's project and *modus operandi*. Examples are numerous. Most importantly (and refuting the idea that a masochist would want a sadist), the former almost without exception establishes a contract with the woman who has to be educated or groomed to perform her role as female tormenter in this theatre. Furthermore, the masochist also encourages her to contract with third parties, for example, via small notices in the newspaper. So why would this be? Reynolds paraphrases Deleuze's argument by explaining:

masochism highlights the way in which it is the contract, or agreement, between parties and people that generates the law, before focusing in detail on the inevitability of the way in which the subsequent development of the law then ignores or contravenes the very declaration that brought it into being... masochism immanently shows the unjustifiable severity of law in the performative enactment of it (2006: 94),

Suddenly, too, certain aesthetic imperatives of masochism are thrown into relief. The severity that marks the masochistic play arguably is nothing other than a parodic critique of the law's own severity, its own 'contracting' with its subjects that however predictably leads to gross inflations of power and a spiralling imbalance that belies the spirit of equality that the contract might on paper seem to espouse. Put bluntly, the Deleuzian masochist's theatre stages a show, the moral of which is that contracts made with law lead to servitude. And it doesn't *explain* this; it rather *enacts* it. For this reason, masochism, we could say, cannot be a theory, but instead constitutes a formal protest with a specific entourage of aesthetic props that both support its intervention *and* conceal its critique. It is commonly noted that minimal gestures of parody tend to appear and become necessary in epochs of brutal or saturating repression, and this might align with, and cast light on, the obscure nature of the masochist's contestation. I would speculate that, for Deleuze's masochist, the threat of law – whether in the *oikos* or in the *polis* (it matters little) – has been experienced as hyperbolic and hence no direct resistance seems possible or effective. If pleasure under such a regime is structurally precluded, the masochist's genius, after Deleuze, would be the ability to enact or stage this 'turn' of guilt to humour (the defeat of the superego). If the contract is inescapable, then why not inflect that very means of oppression in a manoeuvre that both extracts pleasure exactly where it is prohibited and parodies its very mechanism?

In this vein, Deleuze writes: 'To imagine that a quasi-contract is at the origin of society is to invoke conditions that are necessarily invalidated as soon as the law comes into being' (ctd in Reynolds 2006: 94). The sadist, likewise, levels his critique at the law, but differently. What is interesting about these two symptomatologies, once Deleuze has untangled them, and distilled down to their formal operations, is that they arguably represent two tendencies or means for contesting law – be it moral,

psychoanalytic or in other iterations, means that might be formally instructive for an understanding of how resistance *per se* happens.

Deleuze makes it explicit: where sadism works with the mechanism of *irony*, masochism enacts an operation that mobilises the formal requirements of humour and is therefore arguably instructive for a discussion about parody-as-contestation, and given its aesthetic registers, even about parody in art.

### **Humour as parodic mechanism in masochism**

There is no doubt that the sufferings insisted upon by the masochist, who has contracted with his female tormenter [*femme-bourreau*] can attain the level of intense anguish and real torture. This would be the mistake of a conflated sado-masochism, one that would imply a mere theatricality, actors playing parts, unaffected, a show for a spectator/participant. No, Deleuze makes clear that it is not ‘for show’.

So, if there is something of the comic in masochism, it is not at this affective, lived register. Deleuze derives something at the formal level, however, from the literary and logical universe of Sacher-Masoch that intimates a far more insolent, even cheekier and triumphant tone, than a surface reading would permit. As he dismantles arguments that would frame masochism as an inwardly directed sadism, or the mother as a stand-in for the father-who-beats, Deleuze argues that the masochistic theatre most obviously enacts the denegation of the role of the father in the symbolic order and the idealisation of the oral mother (who is sentimental, kind, but severe and justly punishing). The fetish, a crucial element of masochism, almost absent in sadism, ‘would represent the last moment that one could still believe...’ (2007: 29). Believe *in what*, one might ask? Well, believe that the woman *does not lack* the phallus, and that she, along with the child, aren’t subjugated by the father. Also, most curiously, and against the more conventional view that it is the father who beats the child via the mother (to avoid homosexual implications), the figure being beaten, punished, humiliated etc. in Deleuze’s account would be rather *the image of the father in the male child* (2007: 59-9). Masochism, according to this reading, targets the familial or relational economy of Oedipus to cancel out – banish! – the (sadistic) father. It suspends itself in an imaginary fantasy. The son will be reborn, fatherless, from the oral mother alone, who thereby escapes the Oedipal structures (which stand in as the origin of *law*) and their relation to pleasure. But more importantly, if it is the sadistic father who threatens castration and forbids an incestuous relation with the mother, what better way to resist this order (this law, *and law more broadly*) than by establishing an economy that banishes the father, contracts with the idealised oral mother as insurance against the return of the father, making punishment the condition for the pleasure for which it would otherwise be the price?

Relating it explicitly to an attitude and approach that can be read as parody in the grimmest sense, Deleuze points out ‘all the derision’ at work in masochist submission, as well as ‘the provocation, the critical power’ that operates beneath its ‘apparent docility’ (2007: 77).

If parody, in a certain guise, involves a going-along-with, or close inhabiting of the structures or operations targeted for critique, in order that they appear ridiculous or are dragged from hiding, or that their absurd or extreme logics are raised to the surface for all to see, then the masochist – in appearing to submit to the law of punishment and anguish *to the letter* of his contract, is a parodist whose vehicle, for Deleuze, would be humour. To quote Reynolds:

[M]asochism descends towards consequences to which one submits with all-too-perfect attention to detail, and it tends to involve *demonstration by absurdity* and working to rule (2006: 92, my emphasis).

According to Deleuze, this aligns with the very mechanism of humour – humour as the means by which the ego defeats the superego. Humour descends to consequences; it goes-along-with; it parodies, it derides characters and scenarios that otherwise reveal no chink in their armour. Humour forgoes a pushing-against in favour of something else that enacts resistance differently, a revelatory going-with. Humorous parody would aim at exposing – via a kind of repetition – the mechanisms that permit law’s tormenting excesses by repeating, enacting, structurally inhabiting, and with masochism actually embodying – albeit also ‘theatrically’ but no less intensively for that – the consequences of law’s logic. Equally interesting for our purposes is that, along with the affective or aesthetic ‘pleasures’ engendered by this constellation, there is (more importantly and more surreptitiously) an intellectual pleasure, or the arguably political pleasure, of the humour and its disruption of order enabled by and constituting this operation. Parodic art can be seen to exploit – at a number of levels – the various interventionist pleasures and efficacies that humour-as-mechanism makes available. That humour is the ego’s triumph over the superego, according to Deleuze, is relevant to politicised art, but also for unsettling those debilitating and inhering discourses that we, in more pedestrian ways, ventriloquise and collude with.

If that which says ‘I’ is always multiple, then parody, and more obviously after Deleuze’s account, *masochistic* humour seeks to intervene in exterior *and* interior orders, to ruffle also the feathers of our habitual dramas, disrupt the many voices that inhabit us and which promulgate law. These multiplicities cohabit within a seemingly discrete skin, but partake in various relations and pacts, many of which – without contestation – preclude pleasure and engender considerable, even debilitating, sufferings for singular and collective ‘I’s. Is humorous, surreptitious parody, then, *the* avenue for resistance when explicit, transparent action has been outlawed or is severely punishable, or worse, when any slant inhabiting of a grim order seems to slip out of grasp, evading even the thinkable? Must contestation then, as seems to be the case in Deleuze’s account, conceal its doings via an elaborate and protective *theatre* that puts a (judging, ‘internal’ or ‘external’) spectator off the scent?

Deleuze’s reading of the masochism of Masoch, of the aesthetic worlds *invented* by Masoch, does not emphasise, as is more common, the psychological or psychiatric registers of masochism, preferring psychoanalytic registers in parallel with/as the political. Just as the emphasis in Deleuze’s other work with Félix Guattari, *Kafka: towards a minor literature* (1986), concerns the political force of Kafka’s oeuvre, it avoids (as we read in the ‘Forward’ via Bensmaïa) ‘falling back on what Deleuze and

Guattari call a *hard segment*: the binary machine of social classes, sexes, neurosis, mysticism' (1986: x). It is not, then, a *typical* political intervention, one that would rally existing identities and symptoms for its manoeuvrings, and by necessity then, *also reinforce* what it contests.

Instead, as the *Kafka* book intimates (and articulates via its coining of the term 'minor literatures'), certain artistic interventions operate at 'political', 'ethical' or 'ideological' registers, but so as to put aesthetic operations to work in a (if I permit myself to borrow here from Badiou's vocabulary) *subtractive* mode. This would be a mode that does not allow itself to be read in recognisable terms and nor be aligned with existing categories of compliance *or* resistance – the 'binary machine' noted by Bensmaïa. Such literatures allow something obscured or minor to be heard, something that might even constitute a *non-resistance*, and one that perhaps bears no relation to the contestation/reinforcement cycle. On this note now I turn to my final query for this essay, a necessarily ruminative coda, which presses further into the question of whether masochism specifically (and Sadism by implication) can be considered practices. This invites us to evaluate humour in terms of its pleasure (for some and not others?) adjacently to its efficacy for transformation at a universal register.

### **This disputation of law – questioning masochism as 'practice'**

In order to proceed to a steady assessment of masochism and sadism's validity as 'practices' and means of contestation, ones that might well delineate the logics proper to humour and irony, there is an elephant in the room of Deleuze's reading that must be acknowledged. Although Deleuze does not hide the fact, he does not particularly dwell on the prescribed, and pivotal, roles of the female characters in the sadistic and masochistic scenarios. Deleuze's account leaves it perfectly clear, however, that although masochism would set its critical sights on the sadistic father, in order to stage an oblique theatre that is at once familial and political, a female character is also conscripted – via seduction, coaxing or a manipulation, and often by dint of her own sincere love for him. The *femme-bourreau* does not participate, then, due to personal inclination; she does not pursue any agenda proper to her. Instead she serves the masochist in his project, or to put it provocatively: she *labours* within his *Work*. Likewise and less coyly, the sadist seeks an unwilling victim in his 'demonstrations'. This victim, Deleuze makes clear, is not a masochist, which the sadist would never tolerate. Again, the sadist directs the 'doings' involved in his demonstrations, and needs a female (or numerous) as crucial *elements on which* to operate. The females' roles as character-cum-prop cannot be sidelined. As Deleuze frames these topologies, the females may be said to *participate*, but hardly in any mutually configured, collaborative contestation.

It is for this reason, and on this fulcrum, that this article wishes to query the extent to which sadism and masochism, as Deleuze presents them, could be considered practices, and what definition of practice this would be. It is not unusual to hear sadomasochism deemed to be 'a practice between consenting adults', or similar kinds of phrasing. If we set aside this common conflation of the two typologies, and go

along with Deleuze's reading, then we can ask the question anew as to whether these respective and *distinct* sets of behaviours, and the aesthetics/formalisms that accompany them, align with and support what a practice might be.

If we are speaking casually or in everyday terms – that means to some extent, *imprecisely* – then, sadism and masochism *are* as much practices as many other activities, but this holds only when 'practice' refers to a generalised realm of actions, to any kind of verb occurring with *some* regularity over time. This could include torture of political prisoners, domestic violence, child neglect, harming animals, and a number of other actions done by one party to another, or by parties 'together', and often.

The notion of practice that I would propose for this exploration is instead a delimited and more exacting one. It asserts that practice is:

a bounded set of repeated behaviours that cultivates a *context*, in which a change or transformation – that would be at once universal and singular<sup>2</sup> – can come to pass, coerced by no one.

The practitioner does not *make* the change come, but rather is the caretaker of the scaffolding within which difference can emerge, that is to say, of a peculiar species of repetition: repetition-for-itself. This repetition would neither then be of content, nor of the practitioner affirming or consolidating, through repeating, any particular identity or agenda. Instead, the repetition is purely of an empty form that constitutes space for, and welcomes, the new. Given that this version of practice involves, indeed, a kind of repetition, the danger is in lumping into this designation *any* activity that seems to repeat, that is, those insistent 'doings'(-to), of which masochism, and more notably sadism, would definitely be examples.

For this reader, Deleuze's reading of humour as constituting the triumph of the ego over the superego, is convincing. Given this, what kind of change is this triumph and for whose benefit? To find at any register humour's atmosphere within oppressive conditions, is arguably already a triumph for the person or collective involved, a local triumph, which might pave the way for, or enable, more universal interventions. In Australia, we regularly see examples of this in the persistent humour of the Indigenous community in the public realm and in my experience, in quotidian encounters – on the part of artists, thinkers, parents, activists and so on. What is also particular about Indigenous Australian humour, as I've witnessed it, is that it often manages to evade being cruel. This may be an interesting distinction for our exploration, and something which I'd contend implies skilful mechanisms at work, ones which hesitate before further proliferation of suffering. Not just humour, but careful humour?

Does humour, and other repeated 'doings' (let's not call them practice without looking closely) have different effects when it conscripts (or doesn't) a cast of (female) extras – whether these perform roles as 'victims' in sadism or as 'perpetrators' in masochism? Does humour need to ridicule, conscript, or coerce, and whom or what?

Holding this in mind, to qualify as a practice, for this author, masochism (or sadism) would have to be ‘doings’ that cultivate contexts that ontologically invite change, and this change would not involve a destruction of what was or a reinforcement of what is (which, after Deleuze, might be framed ‘regimes of identity’, see 2004: 164ff) and would, at best, aspire to the universal. Practice *does-not-preclude* the emergence of a different set of relations, a different order, the relations within which perhaps, to borrow from Derrida, would be ‘found for the first time’ (see 1987: 16). The action of not-precluding is crucial here, teetering as it does somewhere unusual, between doing and non-doing. The ‘elephants’ – the sodomised daughter, the destroyed figure of the mother and the conscripted ‘tormenting’ female, who seems to direct the scene but in fact is herself under direction – suggest that the ‘doings’ of masochism and sadism, no matter what their covert and brilliant ambitions, do not unfold without casualties, and the fact and necessity of these casualties undermine any universality to which the two typologies might aspire. Another way to say this is that the activities of sadism and masochism may well effect a shift within the apparatus of the Freudian ego and superego, but that this change is limited to the world of the masochist or sadist himself. This is not to say that humour’s efficacy at this register is not noteworthy. We all know those moments of blithe glee when the superego is warmly condescended to.

Deleuze’s labour, in the ‘Coldness and cruelty’ essay, in generating new parameters within which to ask such questions is indispensable. His alignment of masochism’s manoeuvres with humour as *the* challenge to the superego (law) opens up a space where we can observe the workings of parodic humour and, along with emerging clarifications of practice, pose more nuanced questions about its efficacy. In the case of masochism, the particular ability to extract pleasure from an order that forbade it, and that is at once reproduced and mimicked (if we agree with Deleuze’s analysis) resonates with this concern. By extracting pleasure from the law’s movements, via a theatre of genius, does the masochist exit the order, or does he create a workable more tolerable niche within that order at the cost of the co-opting of others into his endeavours?

Deleuze claims that humour and irony constitute two *approaches to contesting law*. On this point he is possibly right. Irony and humour *do* constitute actions of or approaches to contestation, but contestation is no guarantee of disruption, even if it *might* be its precursor.

Parody here is somehow involved in a loosening of the hold that the terms of the situation have over its subjects. But the causality of this may not be what we first assume. I’d propose that it’s less that parody itself intervenes, and more a case of: *if there has been* a parodic response, we know that the system’s terms have not totally monopolised or totalised the means of expression of its subjects (however, *that they remain in relation to such terms is likely*). At the level of being caught in the thrall of discourse, parody signals that we are less in its thrall, that we can use the limited set of terms provided by the order, to do something not ratified by that order, and not in the ways prescribed by it.

If there is a kind of parody at work in masochism, then into what economy does its intervention, its disruption force a change? If we agree with Deleuze's quite thorough analysis of the aspects of masochism that dispute (psychoanalytic) law, then it is specifically the Law of the Father, the father's position in the law established via the Oedipus complex. We can ask ourselves then, acknowledging both these aspects – the force of humour and a specific realm where masochism makes its contestation – that it may well be possible that for a subject who refuses the legal constraints placed upon him by the Law of the Father, via the use of a humoristic mimicry, and impersonation (*the father is punished...*), then one may well contemplate the possibility that the behaviours that constitute masochism *do* contest *and* disrupt a certain order within the masochist, combining the pure pleasure of parody itself, with a sleight of hand that attains the pleasure that the father forbids. Whether this disruption, however, carries over to have universal impact – for others regardless of sex, for example – remains for me less clear, and for this reason, among others, would have me hesitate to consider it a practice, as I've defined it.

## Conclusion

If Deleuze is right (and we don't have to agree that he is) then sadism and masochism, when rigorously approached as two distinct typologies, offer us a demonstration and a staging, respectively, of the two means available – *structurally* available; this is arguably an ontological matter – for contesting law and moral orders. Untethering them from their pedestrian association with the pathological or the fashionable, Deleuze reframes these tendencies as mechanisms that display two logics for resistance, even hailing Masoch and Sade as great clinicians and anthropologists, since they knew to 'extract new forms, and create new modes of feeling and thinking, a whole new language' (2007: 15ff).

As flagged in this essay, an analysis of Deleuze's sadism and masochism cannot ignore the roles assigned to females in each, and although not the topic of this article, this fact merits a rigorous acknowledgement and examination that could attain to both philosophical and aesthetic perspicacity, without being politically squeamish. One might ask whether the constellations of sadism and masochism, since unfolding by necessity within a phallogocentrism, do not also reinforce, reenact, and extract enjoyment from, its contours, and therefore remain complicit with them. A further difficulty with parodies that seek to unmask and critique certain structural orders is that they can unwittingly sweep up those associated with those orders in ways that are not always productive or just. Put frankly, the right to poke fun is of little use if it makes the world worse. This is a pragmatic, rather than a moral, lens. For this reason, a refining of the ways in which we question what such interventions contribute – a project that informs the efforts of this essay – is a possible way forward. At the same time, Deleuze's distillation of the literary/clinical contributions of Masoch can inform our understandings of what it at stake in other artistic interventions, and of how these tendencies, specifically their relation to repetition, might inform and nuance emerging articulations of practice.

## Endnotes

1. All quotations from *Présentation de Sacher-Masoch* are taken from the 2007 French edition and all translations are by the present author.
2. A pairing that Deleuze, along with others, has emphasised (2004: 203).

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