

Review by Thomas Sing, Human Scientist, University of Augsburg:

24/7 - The Passion of Life – What does it mean?

The Passion of life, always. Life means Passion, Suffering and Lust at the same time, indivisible, unavoidable, not to deceive, to be put off, but only to the price of loss, of being exiled from life. The history of Passion - the religious impact lies already in the title – as a history of Suffering and Life: it is the human being, that is asked here, and is itself only question of which the salvation lies in his very own respective sin: it shows him his cross, which he has to carry and which he can only escape by failing himself. A film with the power of Sisyphus' stone, that roles towards the façade of a sleepy Hotel in the mountains, in which everything is still right, just as it should be...

A film which not only operates with religious symbolism, but examines it with Nietzsche's hammer, carnevalesque, always a laugh on the lips, which tears the semantics of the order we are used to. The religious pre-text, inscribed to the human being like a branding, appears deconstructed from the beginning, its symbols though, are not so easy to eliminate; in other words, as an enormous provocation: if God is silent, perhaps Satan can give an answer? If the father is absent, if the stringency of genealogy fails - perhaps there is someone else, someone who is in the world, who is inside of me, the fool, whom I repressed and who claims his right to be heard – and whom I have to hear inevitably, if I want to find myself. And perhaps he isn't as evil, as we are told for 2000 years. Perhaps, this seems to me the most important question of the movie, the guilt lies more in a society which drags further habitual values like "good" and "bad", unquestioned, from generation to generation, and forces the human being to chose between them...

Satan, this is made clear in a central point of the film, is the most tragic character in a big Story: his refusal to worship anyone else than God – the human being – expels him from his oneness with God.

In interpreting Lucifer as a chthonic antipode of God (who is still a function of God) the Christian Theology has managed a fantastic chess move:

By splitting God (the All) into a divine (high, good) and a diabolic (lower, evil) aspect, she dissociates also the human being - on one side, there are the systematic societal commandments which give to the human being an order and express and allow everything which holds him into this order (sense, structure, language, law, state, hierarchy, work, ...). On the other side, turned away from light, we find as a ban everything which is a priori opposed to any order, which breaks and has to break

every system: free playing, sense destroying laughter, unlimiting ecstasy and lust, and so on.

History has told from the beginning, that these "Dionysian" aspects can not be removed from the human without removing the human himself. And those directing history, have always counted on and trusted in that, as they always have tried and are still trying, to functionalize the human abysses for their purposes and to channel them into war, torture and state or social violence. The Enlightenment - not ignoring its achievements - has not changed much about this: it has weakened and doubted the primacy of God and the power of his representatives, but by basing its new point of view only on rationalism, it strengthens the individual enormously on one hand (emancipates it by giving him back the power of his own explanation) but also increases the old dilemma: the physicality and the evidence of their expression remains obscene, hors-scène: behind the stage, underneath the carpet...

D.A.F. de Sade begins literary to accelerate vertiginously the movement of Enlightenment, radical like no other, until it runs hot and ends up in mass murder. His attempt to oppose a Pornosophy of human things to the prattling rational-sadism, remains a brief hint and unrecognized until a short time ago. Georges Bataille tries in the middle of the 20th century, to make de Sade readable, by reading him with Nietzsche and without deceiving Hegel, who is "always right, as soon as he opens the mouth" (Derrida). With the *Frankfurt School* the great effort begins, to find everything which the Enlightenment (which, if we believe Adorno, has started with Homer) has taken away from the human, by declaring with his dialectic, that reason is the only agent of human existence.

The post-modern age and the post-structuralism are a first attempt, to circle around the unspeakable (this, which rationality can not say, because its logic of signification fails in front of a whore with opened legs) to recognize its existence and to argue for its right (the right of the Other, that we can not articulate because our language has no space for it). Sadomasochism - the Other ...- Violence that is no violence, and yet nothing but violence. Lust that is no Lust, and yet nothing but Lust. The boundaries of our language are the boundaries of our world... Wittgenstein's sentence is fundamentally true, but what if, between true and false, there was a third? 'True and false simultaneously'? Well, one can raise objection, this is a truism, the truth lies always somewhere in between. This may be, but for the occidental system of thinking, this is not evident: our language, at least our understanding of it, has an

oppositional structure in a rational system. You can not understand what "light" means, without knowing "dark", it would make no sense to differ "man" and "woman" if women didn't exist, etc... And the fact that hermaphrodites exist, is unspeakable for many. Most parents who give birth to a hermaphrodite, have one of the sexual characteristics amputated, to be sure their child has an unambiguous place in the system of sexes. That their decision was often the wrong one, appears if 20 years later, a sex change follows, which perhaps will still not give satisfaction, because one has only changed from one unambiguity to another, and the original indifferent state of alterity is irretrievably lost.

I make this example here, because it shows how an oppositional system of positive and negative is constructed, and how easily it is caused to sway by life, which can not be reduced on such a binary logic. And it shows how inappropriate, insufficient and finally sad our attempts are, to adapt life to our thinking.

The film *24/7* is an attempt to brake those habits and to invert it. An attempt to adapt our thinking to life. A courageous attempt, in times in which there is the tendency to adapt life *and* thinking to an omnipresent economy of usefulness.

It is obvious to a sadomasochist that non-consensual sadism, as violence towards a victim (hypotaxis) and sadomasochism as a playful (yet real) 'violence' with a partner (parataxis) have nothing in common, that the real force of torture and the unreal force of the erotic game are two completely different things. Towards 'normal' people, who do not find any pleasure in the practices of the whipping community, one has to emphasize this from time to time. Actually because it is difficult to empathize with sadomasochists: how can it be nice, if it hurts? How can I feel free, if I submit myself etc... It is not easy to imagine. One has not to be able to imagine it, for himself, but if two strangers assure me that it is like that, and that they are happy with it, as a human of the 21st century I should accept it.

There were some efforts in the last years: the descriptive sociological study *Sadomasochism – scenes and rituals* from Steinmetz, Wetzstein, Reis and Eckert from the year 1993. Remaining and commendable public relations from the community itself. Successful exhibitions for example about Sade in Zurich (2001/2) and about Sacher-Masoch and masochism in Graz (2003). In human sciences, for example the new translation of de Sade from Zweifel and Pfister (1990-2002) and their following research (I owe the word Pornosophy used above to them) even if they are only partially related to practiced sadomasochism. In many places S&M might not

be a taboo any more, at least no reason to be expelled from society, but the picture presented by the media and the public is mostly quite weird and distorted, apart from a few pleasant exceptions, like for example the ARD report *Under German roofs – this should be love?* (1994). The S&M community does by far not enjoy the acceptance, for which the gay community has fought for decades; although I believe that it will not have to go the same way, because sadomasochism somehow has subliminally always been accepted by society (a long time only as a one-sided misunderstanding: around 1900 Krafft-Ebing still describes the sadism of man and the masochism of woman as given by nature).

Regarding cinema, there was no movie until now – except perhaps *Secretary* (2002), but these two movies are difficult to compare – that dealt with the subject of S&M in such a honest and unprejudiced way as *24/7* does. *The passion of Life* is a pleasant, an important, a deeply social film. It might only show one spectrum of the sadomasochist lifestyle, the commercial one of the dominatrix-studio, but in a very logical and illuminating way. And perhaps such a restriction is necessary to make a compressed enough, tenable statement within the bounds of a film. Much in this film is to be pointed out: the authenticity of the characters, the psychological knowledge with which the film approaches them, turns them inside out, without ever offending them, without disavowing them in any way. Although it is very theatrical, it is as far away from sensational journalism as possible. It honours the makers even more, that this is not a film from the community for the community, but a cinema movie that appeals to a great audience.

But I see the enormous achievement of this film in its successful depiction of the transformation of religion into human, erotic communication. An excerpt of Georges Bataille's *Inner experiences* came involuntarily to my mind, when I saw *24/7*:

What the utmost knowledge always lacks, is what only the revelation provided:

An arbitrary answer, which says: "You know now, what you have to know; what you do not know, is what you do not need to know: it is sufficient, that someone else knows it, and you depend on him, you can unify with him."

Without this answer, the human is deprived of the means of being everything, he is a distraught fool, a hopeless question.

The traditional religion gives no sense to the post-modern human being anymore, gives him no reason for his existence, doesn't hold him anymore. Culture gives birth to different ways to solve this dilemma of the solipsistic human (that has always been the dilemma of areligious people), to solve and to reappraise the shield of his

loneliness, his guilt: spirituality and meditation, religion of nature, modern primitivism, sexuality in its wide sense. Sadomasochism, as I understand it, is such a form of catharsis, of cleansing, of meditation, of union with one Other. One ritual of many, between humans that make sure of their being human, are human, only too human and nevertheless or particularly because of this, are being held and supported by the other. Nothing more and nothing less. And that is what *24/7* shows. Also if it is the professional dominatrix that gets paid for her role of the priest. The 'release' of their adepts though, is real and the acting is more than persuading. A release that is not lasting, short-lived, from which loneliness is headed for again, but a release that makes us stay with our self for a moment and rest in our self.

La petite mort, a new beginning...

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