

De Maistre Avec de Sade: Zizek Contra De Maistre

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'There is nothing but violence in the world; but we are tainted by modern philosophy which has taught us that all is good, whereas evil has polluted everything and in a very real sense all is evil, since nothing is in its proper place.' Joseph de Maistre, 'Considerations on France', ch. III.

Introductions: to De Maistre, the Executioner, and Zizek

Let us begin:

The gloomy signal is given; an abject servitor of justice knocks on his door to tell him he is wanted; he goes; he arrives in a public square covered by a dense, trembling mob. A poisoner, a parricide, a man who has committed sacrilege is tossed to him: he seizes him, stretches him, ties him to a horizontal cross, lifts his arms; there is a horrible silence; there is no sound but that of bones cracking under the bars, and the shrieks of the victim. He unties him. He puts him on the wheel; the shattered limbs are entangled in the spokes; the head hangs down; the hair stands up, and the mouth gaping open like a furnace from time to time emits only a few bloodstained words to beg for death. The executioner has finished. His heart is beating, but it is with joy: he congratulates himself, he says in his heart 'Nobody quarters as well as I.' He steps down. He holds out his bloodstained hand, the justice throws him from a distance a few pieces of gold, which he catches through a double row of human beings standing back in horror ... (at Berlin, 2005: 19)

The preceding does not come from the opening pages of Foucault's *Discipline and Punish*, Arthur Koestler's novels, or one of Camus' darker novellas. Neither does it hail from the period in which the French still executed prisoners on the wheel. It is a famous passage from the *Soirees in Saint Petersburg*, written after 1817 by Savoyard reactionary and courtier in exile, Joseph de Maistre.

The tradition of conservatism to which Joseph de Maistre belongs, alongside Louis de Bonald, Donoso Cortes, and Carl Schmitt, has until recently been widely neglected by political scholarship. In a country like Australia (where this author is from), this is particularly explicable. Many of the leading statesmen of Australia's right-leaning, but predominantly Protestant parliamentary party have blanched at the label 'conservative'. The *motifs* of the reactionary conservatism of the European counter-enlightenment have never, until recently, found any wider audience 'down under.' Yet political philosophers are paid to consider all the possible models for a good society. Carl Schmitt has recently been resurrected by scholars, despite his lurid anti-semitism and ambitions in Hitler's *Reich*, until the SS kicked him out of the Party (for being a 1933 'May flower') in 1936. Moreover, as scholars in the US and UK have noted, at the same time as the parliamentary political spectrum has shifted right since 1979, so these nations' 'conservative' parties have increasingly embraced forms of authoritarian populism. In this new political formula, liberalism is diluted into the freedom to trade and to invest. Then—with the market elevated into a neoliberal cipher for the general will [read 'silent majority', 'frustrated mainstream' etc.]—minorities dependant on state welfare are ritually demonised by the tabloid press, shock jocks, and politicians. At the same time as society is denounced as 'not existing' ('it's the economy, stupid'), postmodern conservatism promotes an irrationalist [re]embrace of religions—outsourcing welfare to the Churches—and also of civic religion: raising homilies to societies' military guardians in the Falklands, Iraq, Timor, Afghanistan, Iraq, and the now-defunct 'war on terror.' The function of the state meanwhile changes. Nation-building based on counter-cyclical deficit spending and tripartite compromise between the state, labour, and capital is *verboten*. Parliamentary procedure is increasingly curtailed or by-passed, amidst repetitious criticisms of 'political correctness' and 'chattering classes'. Governments instead present themselves as the strange postmodern blend of sound, relatively toothless, economic managers, and Leviathanic protectors of their peoples' 'ways of life' from 'new class elites' within, and terrorists and rogue regimes without.

Given the rapidity with which these changes have occurred, it is a vital task today to understand the heritage and logics of our postmodern conservatism. Our founding contention in this paper is that today's anglophone 'conservatism' has bid farewell to the sceptical modern conservatism of Burke, Kirk, and Oakeshott—for whom conservatism was a primarily *adverbial* thing, describing a way to *do* politics. Instead, it makes its way, more or less self-consciously, towards the more strident and programmatic forms of conservatism associated with the European counter-enlightenment.

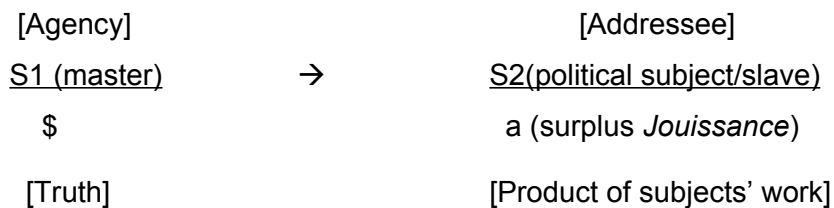
Because of the exacting tools Slavoj Žižek's Lacanian political theory provides us to understand political ideology and subjectivity, it ought to provide us with valuable resources both to test this contention, and to chart the coordinates of the reactionary conservatives' understanding of 'the political.' Yet as far as this author is aware, there has been little Lacanian work on this topic. In *Seminar VII*, Lacan drops a typically rich remark, taken up by Žižek in *Plague of Fantasies*. Left-wing intellectuals are like the medieval fools who speak truth to power, but from a safe, because powerless position of enunciation. By contrast, right-wing intellectuals are 'knaves'. They speak from out of positions of power and they are also always willing, if pushed, to do whatever it takes. (Žižek, 1997: 5) While this remark points us in exactly the right direction [*sic.*], as we shall see presently, it does not by itself an analysis make.

This paper will then be 'filling out' Lacan's remark concerning the political right using the central categories in Slavoj Žižek's Lacanian theory of ideology: the big Other, the obscene underside of ideology, ideological fantasy, and the Real. For purposes of economy, and because of his exemplary status, principal focus will fall on Joseph de Maistre, and de Maistre's extraordinary writings on sovereignty, naming, the 'generative principle' of political constitutions, and the French revolution. As we proceed, we'll see that the absence of a Lacanian analysis of reactionary thought is all-the-more remarkable, given the striking confirmations it presents of many of Žižek's central propositions. For De Maistre was nothing if not a royal knave.

1 The Discourse of de Mai[s]tre?

Joseph de Maistre is usually presented in the history of ideas as an aristocrat of ancient lineage. He is the blue-blooded, if often red-tongued, legitimist who defended the traditional institutions of throne and altar against the enlightenment *philosophes* and the excesses of their political progeny in the French revolution. De Maistre's famous 'Considerations on France' are read as staking out the negative or critical side of a trajectory whose terminus is laid out in his later 'Study on Sovereignty' and 'Essay on the Generative Principle of Political Constitutions.' In these texts, de Maistre's objections to Locke, Condillac and Rousseau are refined. Hereditary monarchy, backed by the Church, is defended as the most natural and thus highest form of human government. In Lacanian terms, and with the pun intended, de Maistre thus seemingly represents a pure, conservative exemplification of the discourse of the master (*du maitre*). This discourse is laid out by Lacan in *Seminar XVII: The Other Side of Psychoanalysis*:

Figure 1: the discourse of the master from Lacan's *Seminar XVII*



As Mladen Dolar has stressed, Lacan's principal interlocutor in analysing this discourse in *Seminar XVII*, and in the seminar as a whole, is Hegel as read by Lacan's 'master' (sic.), Kojeve. (Dolar, 2006) The 'S1' in the top left of the discourse (the position of agency) is the classical master: he who does not work, nor have any desire to know anything about the work or intimate goings-on of his subjects. Rather, as de Maistre comments of the sovereign, if he addresses his subjects at all, it is to say *Fiat!* and utter the commanding signifier that gets 'the engine started.' (De Maistre, 1796: VI) 'Getting people to work is even more tiring than working oneself,' Lacan comments: 'the master never does it. He gives a sign, and everybody jumps.' (Lacan, 2007: 174) The 'S2' (top

right) is the position of the political subjects or slaves addressed by this commanding word of *le maitre*. S2 in this discourse stands for the people who work for the master and who, by working, acquire know-how, *savoir faire* (another register of the 'S2', the chain of signifiers comprising systems of knowledge). (Lacan, 2007: 31-32) Ordinary people are like children, de Maistre emphasises. They never get the government they want. But they should always receive the government they need. In a classical *motif*, the King is like their father: and monarchy, modelled on the family, is the natural form of authority. The product of the work of the political subjects is the 'a' on the bottom right: surplus wealth, and the leisure time of the masters, who have better things to do. (Lacan, 2007: 44) Then what is the barred *subject* (\$) doing beneath the S1 on the left hand side? We will have to return to this. Suffice it to say at this point that it marks the founding impossibility of a sovereign *Jouissance*, which is proscribed by the symbolic law, and ultimately by speaking as such (S1). The little pieces of the Real denoted by 'a' on the bottom right are as much of this lost / impossible *Summum Bonum* that even the classical master can get—whatever the slaves suppose about him.

Several critics have noted the debt the great tradition of 20th century French sociology owes to de Maistre and de Bonald. Lacan in his turn was heavily indebted to this tradition. Lacan was also educated in the same Catholic theological tradition that informs de Maistre's polemics. Perhaps it should not surprise us then how many of de Maistre's formulations provide striking anticipations of Lacan's (and Freud's) teachings, as we will see as we proceed. Humans are creatures who 'do not know what they want,' de Maistre contends: '[man] wants what he does not want; he does not want what he wants; he *wants to want*.' (at Berlin, 2005: 12) Man's conscious intentionality is similarly in no measure the final arbiter of the sense or effects of his actions. This is rather adjudicated in the court of a larger Other [quote]:

In all political or religious works, whatever their aim or importance, it is a general rule that there is never any proportion between cause and effect. The effect is always immense in relation to the cause ... (De Maistre, 1884: ch. III, start)

De Maistre's pessimistic account of what he calls the 'weakness of human powers' is one basis of de Maistre's attack on the *philosophes*. (De Maistre, 1796: I.VI) For de Maistre as for the entire reactionary tradition, human reason proceeds under the sign of human vanity, and our wilful, sinful, fallen ambition to challenge and supplant the creator.

(cf. Koyre, 1946: 56-73) Yet Todorov is right to observe that de Maistre's and de Bonald's wholesale attacks on the sufficiency of human reason do not detract from the often finely logical form of the French reactionaries' own texts. (Todorov, 2002: ch. 1) Neither de Maistre nor de Bonald write the free-ranging, experientially based essays of a Burke or a Montaigne. Their medium is the formal theoretical 'Study', 'Essay', 'Consideration' or treatise, reflecting their heritage in medieval Catholic scholasticism. De Maistre's devastating critique of Rousseau's notion of the 'state of nature', for instance, is argued in the terms of what looks like an orthodox Thomistic-scholastic view of creation: one for which each thing in nature has a *telos* or purpose, so its natural 'work' and excellence is to fulfil this purpose. If it strays too far from this work, it will destroy itself. To look as Rousseau does to man in his primitive beginnings as a guide for political theory, de Maistre argues, is to put the cart before the horse. It is like trying to judge the nature of a man by assessing a child. Politics ought to be about achieving the highest ends of men. These presuppose government and political life in common. To imagine a human being, *a priori*, devoid of his social relations is not to imagine a human being at all. It is certainly not to provide sound bases for good political theory. (De Maistre, 1884: I.II; II.IV)

De Maistre rather directs our eye, repeatedly, to human history—'experimental politics' (De Maistre, 1884: II.II) in our search for sound political teachings. And all human history, de Maistre argues against the modern political philosophers, attests to the iron-clad rule—to which we'll return—that 'nothing great had great beginnings.' (De Maistre, 2002: xxiii) All enduring and higher human institutions have rather been the result of slow evolution, in the hands of His prime-minister in the department of this world, -TIME.' (De Maistre, 2002: xxvii) It is in the passages in Book I of the 'Study on Sovereignty' in particular where such historical evolution is extolled by de Maistre, that He comes closest to conservatism in the English-speaking vein. De Maistre approvingly cites Burke and Montesquieu in these passages. De Maistre contends that nations, like individuals, have their own 'mind', 'soul', or sometimes 'genius'. (De Maistre, 1884: I.IV) These expressions are for him more than metaphorical. Each nation's soul is enigmatic and singular. Accordingly, de Maistre concedes in his 'Study' the broadly Aristotelian point that the best *practicable* regime will differ from place to place, although none can stray too far from monarchy and hope to endure. The other way de Maistre describes this position, one which Carl Schmitt later takes on, is to claim that each nation has its own particular 'constitution' or 'way of life' (De Maistre, 1884: I.IV). This 'constitution' is

not any founding, written document ratified in a public assembly. The ‘constitution’ or ‘national soul’ de Maistre means changes imperceptibly over time in ways that no single man, using human reason, could anticipate or control. Even history’s great legislators, De Maistre sometimes claims, can only ratify with their fiat changes that have already occurred in the nation’s soul. (De Maistre, 1884: I.VII)

For De Maistre, the truth *sine qua non* of political life is that all human morality is grounded in belief and authority, *not* knowledge: or in Lacanese, S1 and *not* S2. De Maistre tells us famously in his ‘Study on Sovereignty’ that each child’s crib should be surrounded by the inherited prejudices of her nation and religion. (1884: I.X)

Sometimes, De Maistre allows that the modern sciences have their own limited place and use (1884: I.XII)—although more often he does not concede this much. Yet De Maistre cannot heap enough disgust on Locke, Condillac, Voltaire and the *philosophes* who presume to bring reason to decide on normative and political questions. At stake in his work is a reactionary radicalisation of a *motif* present also in Luther, Hamann, or Burke, that reason is by its nature analytic. It can only divide, destroy, or as we might say today, ‘deconstruct’. ((eg) De Maistre, 1884: I.VII-X) It cannot put the pieces back together again, and hold them there. For this reason, De Maistre claims to be able to prove the arch-reactionary claim that all political constitutions *have* had *divine* origins—i.e. since human reason and will could not have created them, and there is for him no possible *tertium datur*:

As no nation has been able to give itself the character and position that fit it to a particular government, all have been agreed ... in accepting this truth ... [and] believing that the Divinity had intervened directly in the institution of their particular sovereignties ... (De Maistre, 1884: II. IV)

Government is a true religion; it has its dogmas, its mysteries, its priests—to submit it to individual discussion is to destroy it. (1884: I.XI)

Yet simultaneously, de Maistre claims that the *origins* of any political system must remain off-limits to the ‘universal dissolvent’ of philosophy (1884: I.XII):

It is necessary that the origin of sovereignty should manifest itself from beyond the sphere of human power; so that man, who may appear to have a direct hand in it, may be, nevertheless, only the circumstances. As to legitimacy ... it should seem in its origin to be obscure ... (De Maistre, 2002: xxvii)

In this manner, de Maistre furnishes us with one interpretation of the barred \$ in the bottom left hand corner of *le discours du maitre* in Lacan. The phallus can only operate as *veiled*, Lacan argues in ‘The Signification of the Phallus’, referring to the ancient mysteries with which De Maistre was too well acquainted. (*Ecrits*, 581-582/692-693) Man can only honour or love what he has not made, De Maistre intones. (De Maistre, 1884: I.VII (end)) If he has made it, he knows too well—because he has *seen* its beginnings—that it is finite, *barre*, and that he can tear it down. Again, however politically objectionable this sounds to modern ears, de Maistre is close to the Lacanian account of symbolic authority here. As Žižek has argued concerning the discourse of the master in *For They Know Not What They Do*, given Lacan’s account, all symbolic power is minimally ‘virtual’. It turns on something—the Real of its violent foundations and limits—remaining hidden or in reserve. As the Gospels advise, thou *shouldst* not to put the Lord Thy Father to the test. In Žižek’s precise formulation:

Therein lies the logic of ... phallic power: to aggravate its paradox, it is actual (i.e. effective) only as potential—its full deployment [in law-preserving violence] lays bare its imposture ... on account of a structural necessity, this surplus of trust must remain a pure possibility: we possess power, we are ‘in’ it, only insofar as we do not use it thoroughly, in so far as we keep it in reserve ...’ (Žižek, 2002: 250)

Lacan specifies in *Seminar XVII* that the bottom left hand corner of the schema, where the barred subject is in the discourse of the master, is the site of the usually-hidden truth of the whole. Certainly, everything turns in both Žižek’s critique of political ideology, and de Maistre’s political thought, on how we conceive the usually-hidden, *finite* or divided bases of the master’s authority. So it is to this topic that we have now to turn.

2 *The Real in the Ideology: De Maistre, Naming and Necessity*

The pivot of Žižek’s theory of political ideology is a series of claims Žižek makes on the basis of Lacan’s development of the category of the Real in and after *Seminar VII* (1959-1960). If we are to understand the logics of political ideologies, and the source of their *power* to ‘interpellate’ or name individuals, we need to understand the role of the Real of *Jouissance*. This underlies the symbolic register of power which we have been

focussing on here up to now: which is the basis of Žižek's criticisms of Derrida, Laclau and Mouffe. Žižek's central, related concepts of ideological fantasy, the *disidentification* of subjects with ideologies, and the 'inherent transgressions' which allow subjects the (false) semblance of political independence all turn on his Lacanian account of the relations between the symbolic and the Real. They also underlie Žižek's most incisive cultural analyses, including his justly celebrated critique of the *faux* political cynicism of late capitalist subjects about public authority.ⁱⁱ

Based in Žižek's confessedly 'dogmatic' reliance on Lacan, one great boon of his political interpretations is the *depth* at which they are grounded, in terms of a fundamental ontology of subjectivity and its relations to language. As *The Sublime Object of Ideology* lays out in its central chapter, the basic logics at work in ideological interpellation, for Žižek, are grounded in the 'quilting' operation at play in the production of sense in language. For Lacanian theory, a signifier's sense or 'signified' only becomes clear, retrospectively, at the end of an utterance. At this point, the entire sentence(s) is 'quilting' or 'tied' to the big Other of accepted linguistic meanings. Before such time, the signifiers are 'floating', indeterminate, and open—as we must add—to the telltale interruptions of the unconscious in 'slips.'ⁱⁱⁱ What Žižek stresses, pointing to the top half of Lacan's famous 'bottle opener' diagram developed in *Seminar V*, is the undergirding role of *Jouissance* in the quilting of linguistic sense. (Žižek, 1989: ch. 3) For 'quilting' to be successful, and the effect of sense to be generated, Žižek argues that subjects must suppose that language has touched a 'little piece of the Real.' Let's adapt Žižek's analysis of anti-semitism to make the point. Presently in Australia there is *angst* about Sudanese refugees, ironically precipitated by the murder of a Sudanese youth in Melbourne's outer suburbs. Does this mean all white Australians are racists?

The logic of racism, Žižek notes, is not discernible when we make observations like: 'those Sudanese kids hang around in gangs and don't try to integrate into our way of life,' which may be empirically true; nor even when we say: 'the Sudanese are thugs *because* they hang around in gangs, don't try to learn our language and way of life ...', which may be a partly adequate analysis of the term 'thug.' Racism proper is correlative to the very different claim that: 'those black people hang around in gangs, don't try to learn our language etc. *because they are Sudanese.*' In this third formulation, a new, enigmatic signification has been generated: some postulated, Real 'essence' of 'Sudanese-ness' which would allegedly *cause* the undesirable attributes. We note that it

is with the generation of such 'sublime objects of ideology' as 'Sudene-ness' that Žižek passes directly from Lacanian *linguisterie* into the realm of political ideology. (Žižek, 1993: 149-151) If we are to give an adequate Žižekian/Lacanian assessment of de Maistre's political thought, then, we need to see the role which *Jouissance* plays in it, and the relation between *Jouissance*, language, and the sovereign law.

Now: intriguingly, the link Žižek's Lacanian theory allows him to make between language and politics, and the sovereign fiat (S1) and *naming*, is *not* lost on de Maistre. One difference between the European conservatism that emerged in response to the French Revolution and its British cousin is the characteristic emphasis de Maistre, de Bonald, and figures like Herder in Germany placed on *language*. In the first instance, the reactionaries' interest is in language as the bearer of the national mind, soul, or constitution: the slowly-evolving, subconscious repository of its history and particular 'way of life'. Hence, for instance, de Maistre decries the mixing of tongues in 'The Essay on the Generative Principle of Political Constitutions' as a sure sign of the declining vitality of a people. Yet de Bonald's and de Maistre's interest in language goes deeper than that. Indeed, it lies at the heart of their political interventions. De Maistre aligns the sovereign's act of fiat or decision, which lays down the law, with the power to name things in the world. The fault he finds in the *philosophes'* work is hence ontological, as much as it is political. The moderns' belief that they could found political constitutions from theory or through public democratic assembly is the corollary of the same erroneous pretension in their thinking concerning language:

[Man] has believed that it was himself who invented languages; while again it belongs to him only to see that every human language is learned and never invented, that no imaginable hypothesis within the circle of human power, can explain, with the least appearance of probability, either the formation or the diversity of languages ... (De Maistre, 2002: xlvii)

As Umberto Eco points out in his essay on 'The Linguistics of Joseph de Maistre', De Maistre's linguistic theory is not without its own mysteries. Eco identifies four mutually inconsistent accounts of the naming power of language in the *Soirees of Saint Petersburg* alone, and a similar exercise could be carried out with 'The Essay on the Generative Principle of Political Constitutions'. For De Maistre, new names are at different points engendered through borrowings from other languages; through the 'spontaneous' generation of new metaphors by analogy with other languages; through

the condensation of existing signifiers within a natural language (see anon); *and* because of a mysterious, primordial iconism (similitude between the natural languages and nature) underwritten by the Will of God.

However enigmatic the details, what is clear is the polemical thrust of De Maistre's writings on language. De Maistre's critical targets are the accounts of language, already emergent in the European enlightenment, which pointed towards the arbitrary or conventional nature of linguistic signs: the position of structuralism after de Saussure in the 20th century. De Maistre is also reacting against the attempts of philosophers in the previous two centuries, like Bacon or Wilkins, to create *a priori* philosophical languages (Eco, 1998: 103):

The formation of the most perfected words, the most meaningful, the most philosophical, in the fullest sense of the word, occurs unfailingly in periods of ignorance and simplicity ... in all the writings that appear in our time on this most interesting subject, there is nothing but an invocation of a 'philosophical language' without knowing, indeed without even suspecting, that the most philosophical language is that in which philosophy is *least* mingled. (at Eco, 1998: 107 [my italics])

At the basis of De Maistre's writings on language everywhere, moreover, is the following astonishing claim, which undoubtedly reflects his Masonic background as a young man. In the modern age, says Joseph de Maistre, *human beings have lost the power of naming*. (De Maistre, lvi) Our modern too-rational discourses, in Lacanese, are as so many floating signifiers (S2) without ground in the Real, or power to found anything new (as with the S1s of the master's words). This is the deep force behind the invariant reactionary attacks, to this day, on the vanity of the 'discussing classes' and parliamentary (from *parler*, to talk) government. No public assembly, any more than a *philosophe* like Voltaire with his head 'divided between twenty sciences' (De Maistre 2002: xlili), can generate any new name or body of law that can stand the test of time. De Maistre is in this vein particularly harsh on *writing*, and the idea that we might for instance found a new state in a written body of statutory law, like the American or Australian constitutions.

On one side, the master de Maistrian *motif* about what humans make we can also destroy underlies these repetitive attacks on writing:

It is certain that any authority whatsoever which may have written it will have the right of annulling it; the law will not ... have the character of sacredness and immutability which distinguishes what is truly constitutional ... promises, engagements, oaths, are mere words. It is easy to break this frivolous bond as to form it. Without the doctrine of a Divine Lawgiver, all moral obligation is chimerical ... (De Maistre, 2002: ii)

But there is more in play than this. The Derridean move to make at this point would be to accuse de Maistre, alongside all philosophers since Plato, of giving way to an alleged 'phonocentric' prioritisation of living speech over writing's dead letter. As Eco concludes, the final stake of all de Maistre's prognostications is the myth of a pure origin, which Derrida also targets: 'to establish a double equation between Truth and Origin and between Origin and Language.' (Eco, 1998: 115) God, de Maistre insists, at first only spoke directly to the Hebrews, because he could see the purity of their hearts. The religion of the book came only later, when the Hebrews had become corrupted. Similarly, says de Maistre—dicing directly now with heresy—other ancient peoples had occult wisdom lost to us today:

As far as it is possible to observe the sciences of the primitive peoples despite the enormous distance, we see it always free, independent; it does not so much walk as fly, and in all its bearings there is something aerial and supernatural. It flings its hair to the wind, beneath an Oriental *miter*. The *efod* covers its bosom; it looks only to the sky; and its scornful foot seems only to touch the earth to detach itself from it. Although this primitive science never asked anything of anyone, and relied on no human support, we still have proof that it possessed the most rare kinds of knowledge. (in Eco, 1998: 101)

A Lacanian reading of this de Maistrian *motif* points in a different direction than the deconstructionists'. It would note, first of all, the telltale *agitation* that characterises de Maistre's attacks on writing and modern philosophy more broadly—'ink-stained and out of breath.' (at Eco, 1998: 101) These attacks typically equate the act of writing, directly, with the biological act of insemination. Writing is germination's kind of black double or negation: 'if [a man] possessed the true germs of thought he would not indulge the thought that with a *little black liquid and a pen* he could cause *to germinate* in the world ...' (2002: xix) What is in play in founding speech for de Maistre, by contrast, is

not a person safely 'hearing themselves speaking,' in full conscious mastery of the Truth. For de Maistre this is the illusion of 'GREAT BLOCKHEADS' [in capitals] who indulge the fantasy of naming or law-making by writing, on the basis of democratic assemblies. (De Maistre, 2002: xix) In Lacanian terms, it is rather the Voice as Real object: as Žižek puts it, that enigmatic Voice, like 'the opaque voice of the hypnotist,' wherein 'I hear myself speaking, yet what I hear is never fully myself, but a parasite, a foreign body in my heart.' (Žižek, 1996: 103)

All genuine names, de Maistre argues—against those that are the product of decadent human deliberation—express the Real essence of the thing: 'the name never bears any proportion to the thing, *the thing always dignifies the name.*' (De Maistre, 2002: lvi) The reason is that their origin is divine. The voice that 'germinates' when a people names a thing—and 'it is necessary too that the name 'germinates' ... otherwise the name is false' (De Maistre, 2002: lvi)—is nothing less than the voice of the ultimate Other, God. And no mortal controls this voice. It rather speaks *through* people, as it deigns, and following its own courses:

The religious principle is, in its own essence, creative and conservative ... it acts with greater power than any other principle *upon* the human mind, *it draws from it* prodigious efforts. (De Maistre, 2002: lviii)

Intriguingly, God's creative Voice for de Maistre has, literally, what Lacanians might call a power in the Real: that of *preserving* the thing which it names. If the *Tuilleries* had not been given such an enigmatically 'vulgar' signifier (*tile-kiln*) through the grace of God, De Maistre for instance tells us that 'there was no reason that, the following day, this place should not have been inhabited by pick-pockets and courtesans.' (De Maistre, 2002: liv) By contrast, when the revolutionaries named a temple erected to music *Odeon* 'it is an infallible proof that the art is in decline; and no one ought to be surprised at hearing, in that country, a celebrated critic avow soon after ... that nothing prevents one from writing on the pediment of the temple: *a room to let.*' (2002: lv) The 'more divine' an institution or name is in its basis—for there are *quantities* of the Godhead and reality in de Maistre—'the more durable it will be ...' The prescription is clear, if the metaphysics is bewildering: 'Would you then preserve a thing, *dedicate* every thing.' (2002: lviii (end))

Underlying the 'germinating,' law-making S1 in the discourse of de Maistre, then, we uncover no primordial lack, trauma, or divided subject (\$). The reactionaries' thought does not finally move in the orbit of the discourse of the master, but only in its semblance. In the will and voice of the divine, we are rather in the presence of a full, sustaining phallic *Jouissance*. And here is the rub. De Maistre's God adjudicates over all the unintended effects of our words and actions, like the Lacanian Other. Yet He is not for that reason the symbolic Other, in whose differential play and temporality, *contingency* would always have a place and a role. There can be no *Nachtraglichkeit* (the retrospective conferral of meaning or necessity on previously 'floating' signifiers) in de Maistre's thinking. The reason is that *everything has been determined in advance*. 'In a word, the name of every being expresses what it is, *and in this matter there is nothing arbitrary*,' de Maistre intones. And he cites alleged 'proofs':

For example, to give a name to those who were our ancestor, [the French] formed the word *ancetre*, joining parts of the word *ancien* [old, ancient] with the verb *etre* [to be] ... with the personal pronoun *se*, with the relative adverb of place *hors* [outside], and with the verbal ending *tir*, they formed *sortir* [to go out], that is *se-hors-tir*: 'to put one's own person outside the place where it was.' All this seems wondrous to me.' (in Eco, 1998 105)

As proposed 'proofs' of what de Maistre wants to establish here—that in the history of languages there is only predetermined necessity—such passages are wondrous indeed.^{iv} Our point here however is that De Maistre's Other (God) is an Other who would exist in the Real, potent beyond all lack and contingency. [quote] 'Names have then [sic.] *nothing arbitrary* and originate like all other things more or less immediately in God ...' (De Maistre, 2002: lii) De Maistre's God's is the hand that would inscrutably direct all the play and evolution of natural languages. It is His phallic will that would have 'germinated' all things, although we mortals only see through a glass darkly the meanings of our acts. Because of this, and of our fallen nature, human beings are particularly inclined to see ourselves as free and independent, as if there were chance and contingency in the world. Yet such a thought, de Maistre comments, is as plausible 'as if the trowel should believe itself the architect' (2002: x), just because it plies the mortar. The truth is different. It is that 'man is a free intelligent, and noble being, without doubt; *but he is not less an instrument of god*, according to the happy expression of Plutarch, in a beautiful passage which here introduces itself of its own accord [sic.]'

(2002: xxx) And so it is, that if we are to get to the bottom of de Maistre's politics, we need to turn finally towards the thought of another heretical French aristocrat: de Maistre's contemporary, the Marquis de Sade.

3 ***Reactionary Pere-version: De Maistre With Kant and De Sade ...***

De Maistre's 'Considerations on France' is the classical reactionary response to the French revolution. It presents itself as to be read alongside Edmund Burke's equally famous essay on the same topic. Both Burke and De Maistre are horrified by the violence of the French Revolution: Burke writing even before the Terror. Both authors attack the revolution's bases in the enlightenment *philosophes*. Both impugn the enlighteners' faith in unaided theoretical reason, and its alleged ability to be able to ground good polities. The terrible historical cipher of the real disjuncture between theory and practice, for both, was the gallows, and *Madame Guillotine*. Both authors' 'Considerations', finally, are rhetorically brilliant: fired by the force of that most political of affects, *thymos* or angry indignation.

For de Maistre the Frenchman even more immediately than for Burke, the French revolution was a great trauma. It was 'a bloodstained mire', 'an appalling combination of baseness and cruelty,' 'radically evil', as he variously stresses. Again, 'no element of good relieves the picture it presents':

There was a certain inexplicable delirium, a blind impetuosity, a shameful contempt for all human decency, an immorality of a new kind that jested about its crimes, above all an insolent prostitution of reasoning and of all those words designed to express ideas of justice and virtue ... (De Maistre, 1796: ch. IV)

In the French revolution was exposed for all to see the truth, which de Maistre only ever tries to deny out of politics, that the origins of political societies are generally violent acts of expropriation.¹ People only miss the truth of the divine origin of all names and polities, 'The Essay on the Generative Principle' thus significantly qualifies, 'if [they] shut their eyes *or if they look too closely*.' (De Maistre 2002: xlvii) De Maistre for his part has his eyes wide shut to these usually-hidden mysteries. If there was justice in introducing him

¹ See Part I: and de Maistre's attack on the social contractarians on grounds that nothing great has great beginnings.

above as a royal knave, it is above all because—while attacking the *philosophes* for naively denuding the divine mystery of the origins of political regimes—de Maistre then sets about doing exactly this himself.

Isaiah Berlin notes, in his acerbic essay on de Maistre, that while de Maistre fascinated people of all political stripes (Napoleon tried to arrange a meeting), he always received a frosty reception from Europe's older-style legitimists. In fact only a third generation aristocrat, the young de Maistre was educated a mason, before turning to the One True Church. His writings are dotted with apologies to the Church for his entertaining various frankly gnostic speculations. One of the ancient beliefs whose very universality amongst primitive peoples allegedly attests to its transcendent Truth, de Maistre for instance maintains in his essay 'Enlightenment on Sacrifice', is that human beings have *an irresistible desire for self-immolation*. This is why soldiers, for instance, go so willingly to kill others, and face their own deaths. (cf. Berlin, 2005: 10-11) The third chapter of the 'Considerations of France', similarly, is devoted to considering the very unchristian theme of 'The Violent Destruction of Humanity.' Read after the twentieth century, De Maistre's proximity to the ontology of the later Freud, with its central postulate of a universal death drive, cannot be missed in these texts. To cite a very famous passage from the 'Seventh Dialogue' of the *Soirees*, in which de Maistre leaves orthodox Thomism far behind:

In the whole vast domain of living nature there reigns an open violence, a kind of *prescriptive fury* which arms all the creatures to their common doom. As soon as you leave the inanimate kingdom, you find the *decree of violent death* inscribed on the very frontiers of life. You feel it already in the vegetable kingdom ... how many plants *die*, and how many are *killed*. But from the moment you enter the animal kingdom, *this law* is suddenly in the most dreadful evidence. A power of violence *at once hidden and palpable* ... has in each species appointed a certain number of animals to *devour* the others ... there is no instant of time when one creature is not being devoured by another. Over all these numerous races of animals man is placed, and his destructive hand spares nothing that lives ... and who in all of this will exterminate He who exterminates all the others? *Himself*. It is man who is *charged* with the slaughter of man ... thus is accomplished *the great law of the violent destruction of living creatures* ... (in Berlin, 2005: 5-6)

Human history, de Maistre maintains in this remarkable chapter, is a 'long history of massacres.' 'Through this primary cause [of war] and all the others connected with it, the spilling of blood has never ceased on earth,' de Maistre comments. (De Maistre,

1796: ch. III) However, there is this much good news: ‘... the true fruits of human nature—the arts, sciences, great enterprises, noble ideas, manly virtues—spring above all from the state of war.’ (1796: ch. III)

Seen in the light of this ‘great law of ... violent destruction’, we are soon led to question de Maistre’s horror at the violence of the French revolution, or to query in what *terms* this horror can be signified by him. In fact, de Maistre’s central argument in the ‘Considerations’ is something you won’t find in Burke, or in any other major readers of the French revolution—except, ironically, Hegel. The French Revolution is not the traumatic intrusion of the Real of contingency in the fabric of human affairs, however appalling its various acts. On the contrary, if the revolution took on such a violent life of its own, devouring its own children, it was because *it was willed in advance* by Providence or God:

How indeed have these remarkable events that have baffled all human foresight come about in one day? In truth, there is a temptation to believe that political revolution is only the secondary object of *the great plan which is developing before our eyes with such terrible majesty*. (De Maistre, 1796: ch. II)

The revolution, and all its slaughter, are for de Maistre a kind of collective sacrifice to His Other who does not lack, de Maistre’s God. This God—for whom we have seen even all the smallest of our *names* cannot be changed without Him predetermining it—is punishing France *through the revolution*. He is making the French an example unto others. The sin is impiety. And the revolution is less the crime, than an attempt at reparation. ‘The horrible effusion of blood caused by this great upheaval is a terrible *means*,’ de Maistre reflects, ‘yet it is a means as much as a punishment, and can give rise to some interesting reflections.’ (1796: ch. II (end)) One interesting reflection, which shows how far de Maistre goes down this bizarre path, is his *praise* of the Jacobins, whom we might have taken to be his greatest foes: for ‘fundamentally, it can be seen that, the revolutionary movement having taken root, France and the monarchy could be saved only by Jacobinism.’ (1796: CH. II) De Maistre’s God, in short, like the Nature presented to us by several of de Sade’s most philosophical characters (see anon), *desires violence*. It is not for nothing that De Maistre enthuses at the ‘genius’ of the ancient Greeks, in whose tragedies nature is named as *philomata* [loving, or thirsting for blood].’ (at Eco, 1998: 102) At the very least, de Maistre’s profoundly heretical divinity

has no compunction at all about the pitiless sacrifice of many innocents, if this will show unto others the Truth of his fore-ordained plan:

It might be said that some of the guilty would have been chosen [if this was God's end] and all the rest will have to be pardoned. This is what providence would not wish. Since it is omnipotent, it is ignorant of pardons produced by inability to punish [sic.]. The great purification must be accomplished and eyes must be opened; the French metal, cleaned of its sour and impure dross, must become cleaner and more malleable to a future king. (1796: ch. II)

In Lacanian terms, what then can we finally say about de Maistre's subject position in his astonishing 'Considerations on France'? It sometimes seems that De Maistre himself cannot quite believe it. As we saw, he confesses at one point to the 'temptation' he feels to treat the revolution as this grand sacrificial expiation—as if there might be doubt. Yet faith is only ever sustained by doubt. We mentioned above the unfortunates sacrificed to Providence on the gallows. To theoretically associate: is not de Maistre's position here—given his own status as one of the class of people the revolution expropriated—not deeply comparable to the subject-position of Freud's man on the gallows in his famous short essay 'On Humour'? Readers will know the joke. As the unfortunate man is led to his death, he comments calmly on how lovely the weather is, and what a good start to the week it makes. The humour involved here involves the man's unlikely ability to wholly abstract from the dire position he finds himself in. Despite everything, he affects to see the world in an 'enlarged perspective,' one for which a sunny Monday does in fact make for a good start to the working week. In this way, his own imminent suffering is relativised and belittled. (Freud, 1988: 428; cf. Zupancic, 2000: 153-154)^v In everyday language, people now talk today about Stockhausen syndrome, 'identifying with the aggressor,' or they steal a glib *Jouissance* from misfortune by saying 'I told you so' (incidentally, a fatal attraction for the theoretical Left from *The Dialectic of Enlightenment* to Agamben today). Just so, it is impossible not to remark that the whole of the 'Considerations on France' is marked by its author's unlikely identification with his blood-thirsty Providence. In fact, de Maistre speaks at times with truly remarkable certainty about God's Will. Just as in de Maistre's wondrous theory of names, de Maistre finds the divine will writ large in all of the most unlikely results of the political upheavals of his day (even the exile of French priests by the revolution, for instance, was clearly willed by God. Why? So a new dialogue with foreign Protestant clergymen could

take place, etc.). Human beings may be unsurpassably, indeed deplorably ignorant of the ways of God. Yet, says de Maistre, the singularities of 'this age' have meant that the One has deigned to treat of human affairs in a way discernible at least to his most humble servants.^{vi}

From the Lacanian perspective, which would evaluate *ta politika* with a view to the truth of subjects' desire, it is above all the ethical *falseness* of de Maistre's position that looms large. This falseness would underlie the telltale, symptomatic contradictions which we've seen de Maistre wrestles in his philosophies of language and politics. Yet it presents itself above all when we pose systematically the question of de Maistre's *position of enunciation*: viz. from whence does de Maistre speak, when he proclaims his unheard-of truths and insights? Put brutally, it does not usually belong to subjects on the gallows to reflect joyously that at least their imminent immolation will show the world that the French ought to have been a little more pious for the last fifty years. Ironically, here echoing the great German enlightener Immanuel Kant, de Maistre's terrifying but edifying French revolution can only appear so from *a certain, insulated distance*. It is like the monstrous hurricanes that Kant calls dynamically sublime in the third *Critique*, whose aesthetic appreciation presupposes that our house, and we with it, are not currently being blown apart.

The Žižekian-Lacanian point to be made here, then, is that however heretically cruel de Maistre's blood-thirsty ontology appears, it is ontologically speaking *not cruel enough*. In a manner which recalls the clinic (or *boudoir*) of sadism, when de Maistre dons his prophetic hat in the 'Considerations', he disavows his own position as a divided subject (\$), in order to observe it from a distance in the sufferings of the French beneath the 'invisible hand' of his bloodthirsty Providential deity. The ethical issue, as Žižek argues in 'Kant with (or against) de Sade', is that such a sadistic subject position *does not fully or 'coldly' enough* bracket the 'pathological' dimension of human feelings whose 'beyond' our desire would point us toward. De Maistre hence revealingly confesses in the 'Considerations' that his observations are not as objective or despairing as we might imagine. *Au contraire*, he confesses that [quote]: 'it is sweet [*doux*] to fathom the design of the Godhead in the midst of general cataclysm' (at Hirschmann, 1991: 36): and he also tells us frankly of his 'admiration' for the 'secret force which mocks human intentions'. We hardly need to point out that this 'sweet' pleasure at watching the revolution destroy the lives of thousands is a pure exemplification of what Lacanians call

Jouissance: a painful and even shameful enjoyment in what is usually off-limits to speaking subjects as such.

For Lacan, the fantasmatic structure of sadism looks like this:

Figure 2: the formula of the fantasy in sadism

a <> \$

A

This means: the sadistic agent (a) bombards his/her victims with inconsistent and/or painful demands in order to cruelly divide them (\$) so they manifest their castration, lack, or desire. Far from being a position of sovereign mastery, as Sartre for one supposes, the truth sustaining the agent's position however is his abject dependency upon a cruel Other (A). This is an Other, like de Maistre's stern deity, who is supposed to enjoy the spectacle. The agent, meanwhile, objectifies himself in the name of this Other (hence the 'a' for object in the top left hand), reducing himself to the object-instrument of this malevolent Other's *Jouissance*. As Žižek notes, the Lacanian view of the sadistic position thus strikingly *inverts* the popular understanding of the pervert as the ultimate rebel—s/he who acts out what the rest of us can only dream about. As Lacan comments in 'Kant with Sade' in *Écrits*:

Sade ... stopped at the point where desire and the law became bound up with each other [*se noue*]. / If something in him lets itself remain tied to the law in order to take the opportunity, mentioned by Saint Paul, to become inordinately sinful, who would cast the first stone? But Sade went no further. / It is not simply that the flesh is weak, as it is for each of us; it is that the spirit is not willing not to be deluded. [Sade's] apology for crime merely impels him to an oblique acceptance of the Law. The Supreme Being [as for instance the Nature of Pius VI] is restored in Evil Action [*le Maléfice*]. (Lacan, 2006, 667/790)

It is little wonder then that de Maistre cannot abide Voltaire's dictum that evil cannot correct evil. (De Maistre, 2002: xlii.) 'There is, moreover, good reason for doubting if this

violent destruction is in general as great an evil as is believed,' de Maistre instead reassures those who had reason to doubt: 'it is one of those evils that play a part in an order in which everything is violent and against nature *and which has its compensations.*' (De Maistre, 1796: ch. III) Indeed, some of them are sweet. Faced with the imminent collapse of the Other whose unsullied continuity the Anglophone conservatives celebrate, we hence propose, the elementary move of the reactionary legitimists is to *accept the 'lamentable' need to suspend ordinary morality in order to save the Other.* It is not the reinvigoration of the discourse of the master that is in play; it is the sadists' simulation of the inaugurating act that might re-establish the lost law, played out against the background of a vindictive certainty that one has God on one's side. The *realpolitical* implications of this teaching, when coupled with their defence of the sovereign as absolute by definition, should not escape us. The reactionary position, if our diagnosis of its structuring sadism holds, will always be fatally drawn to prescribe the sacrifice of others. These others, moreover, can be treated with all the indifference with which de Sade's heroes multiply their beautiful, preferably innocent victims in the latter's repetitive *oeuvre*. As de Maistre concedes, showing us the measure of his all-too-human feelings: 'No doubt there are innocent people amongst the unfortunates, *but they are far fewer than are commonly imagined.*' (De Maistre, 1796: ch. II)

Conclusion on the Other: When Conservatism Turns Radical ...

What work then have we done here? The force of our contention is that the reactionary conservatism represented by Joseph de Maistre represents a significant break with the Anglophone conservative tradition dating from Burke. If Burkean conservatism holds to the discourse of the master, the reactionaries are knaves. The two streaks of conservatism share an emphasis on the inscrutable bases of tradition, together with a sense of the importance of culture in social reproduction. They share an emphasis on the insufficiency of theoretical reason to guide practical politics. Both traditions of conservatism were born of their critical reactions to the French revolution, in particular in its debt to the thought of Jean-Jacques Rousseau and the other *philosophes*. Yet the similarities end there, and they conceal more fundamental differences. Using Žižek's Lacanian ideology critique, we've argued here that these differences reach down to the most basic symbolic coordinates of human subjectivity

and political ideologies. De Maistre and company radicalise the conservative critique of modern reason: from non-rationalism into virulent irrationalism. Exiles from their homelands, they do not write, like Burke did, some one hundred years after a constitutional monarchy, and the ascendancy of parliament, had been peaceably installed. Indeed, for them parliamentary government stands condemned of the decadent view that reason alone can create ideals and institutions of lasting value. For de Maistre, put simply, *the symbolic function* is not sufficient, by itself, to ground social order. Without a basis in the Real of an active Divine Other, promises are 'so many words', as we say. The Other, its violent bases denuded by the revolution, must instead be saved from human wickedness and pride.

Yet the Other that is erected by the reactionaries is not the same as the slowly evolving, symbolic order prized by a Burke or an Oakeshott. As 'The Considerations on France' make clear, the Other of the reactionaries is a God in the Real. He is omnipotent, if not omniscient (for he does not see or *care* for the difference between the innocent and the guilty). He alone reserves the power of founding, naming, and preserving. More than this, the darker truth is that *God loves sacrifice*: since His creation is one in which, as de Maistre says, 'an order of things in which everything is violent and against nature.' (De Maistre 1796: ch. III) The proper response of a political conservative to de Maistre might well then be this: *why are you telling us that the foundations of social order are extreme situations of violence, when the foundations of social order are extreme situations are violent?* Burke for instance does not deny that extreme cases present themselves in political life. But he condemns elevating them to the centre of political theory, a move which begins with Machiavelli, arguably the first political modernist, and certainly no 'conservative'. As we have seen, de Maistre plumbs the violent depths of order with a kind of gleeful fascination which makes Machiavelli's *Princip* seem Sainly. Far from a humble, divided subject who, aware of his finitude, would advocate slow and steady political change, de Maistre writes with a kind of fearful certainty. The news he has to report about the French revolution is not good news. But de Maistre reports it bloodily all the same, confident that he is but His, God's, servant, conveying this news to lesser men. In de Maistre's case, we thus can observe the truth in Žižek's observation about the false humility of positions, like de Maistre's, which claim to but humbly convey a higher will. The question to ask here is first of all: *how do you know enough about this transcendent Other to be able to claim to 'humbly' serve him?* In such cases, 'humility' is thus the form of appearance of its opposite: the arrogant claim

to be able to know and decipher the will of a posited absolute Other, which would license the suspension of ordinary symbolic commitments.

The discursive structure of the reactionaries' 'conservatism', in fact, is not 'conservative' at all. It is structurally *sadistic*, rather than a re-instantiation or defence of the position of the classical master. In all politics, especially the most violent, de Maistre thus will repeat, we are but the instruments of the divine will. And this will shalt be done, even if this involves the evil massacre of innocents. As de Maistre concludes his horrified-fascinated hymn to the executioner in the *Soirees*, with which we began:

He sits down to table, and he eats. He goes to bed and he sleeps. And on the next day, when he wakes, he thinks of something totally different from what he did the day before. Is he a man? Yes. God receives him in his temples, and allows him to pray. He is not a criminal. Nevertheless no tongue dare declare that he is virtuous, that he is an honest man, that he is estimable. No moral praise is appropriate to him, for everyone else is assumed to have relations with human beings: he has none. *And yet all greatness, all power, all subordination rest on the executioner.* He is the terror and he is the bond of human association. Remove this mysterious agent from the world, and in an instant order yields to chaos: thrones fall, society disappears. *God, who has created sovereignty, has also made punishment; he has fixed the earth upon these two poles:* 'for Jehovah is master of the twin poles and upon them he maketh turn the world' ... (at Berlin, 2005: 19-20)

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ⁱ A note on referencing the De Maistre texts. Due to their scant availability in English, I am indebted in my research for this essay to translations of De Maistre's work available on the internet for this, courtesy of 'The Joseph De Maistre Homepage' (at www-site <http://www.umanitoba.ca/faculties/arts/history/links/maistre/maistre.html>> accessed August-October 2007, and the translations of Jack Lively at <http://www.maistre.ath.cx8000>. The texts that are cited appear as follows: De Maistre, J. (1796) *Considerations on France* [referenced by chapter], selections, translated by Jack Lively, available at www-site http://maistre.ath.cx:8000/considerations_on_france, accessed August-October 2007; De Maistre, J. (2002) 'Essay on the Generative Principle of Political Constitutions', translated by Ricard Lebrun at www-site http://maistre.ath.cx:8000/considerations_on_france, accessed August-October 2007 [This text is referenced by paragraph number in lower case Latin letters]; De Maistre, J. (1884) *Study on Sovereignty* selections translated by Jack Lively, at www-site <http://maistre.ath.cx:8000/sovereignty>, accessed August-October 2007 [This text is referenced by Book, then Chapter, both in Capital Roman Letters].

ⁱⁱ As Žižek contends in 'I Hear You With My Eyes':

A cynic mocks public law from the position of an obscene underside which, consequently, he leaves intact ... Cynical distance and full reliance on [ideological fantasy about the *Jouissance* of the Other] are thus strictly correlative: the typical subject today is the one who, while displacing cynical distrust of any public ideology, indulges without restraint in paranoiac fantasies about conspiracies, threats and excessive forms of enjoyment of the other ... (Žižek, 1999: 101)

ⁱⁱⁱ Of course, this exigency is what makes reading convoluted sentences in student essays such a chore—one never knows where the student is heading to, and sometimes your expectations that they will arrive at sense are disappointed

^{iv} He seems rather to point here—as Eco comments—to how 'if anything ... new coinages are often born from the wordplay typical of the rhetors of decadence and not from instinctive folk wisdom.' (Eco 105-106)

^v Another, generally less humorous instance of this logic is when people, having undergone some trauma, recur to the discourses of science (or even psychoanalysis) to objectify their own traumatic experiences: 'well, everything is determined, and clearly the way I feel now is the firing of neurones a, b, c ...'; 'I am currently just going through a manic phase'; 'men are just like that,' *etc.*

^{vi} As De Maistre concedes, straightening the matter out: 'Doubtless in *times past* Providence had no need to punish in order to justify its courses; but in this age, it puts itself within our range of understanding and punishes like a human tribunal.' (*loc cit.* [our italics]).