NEW HISTORICIST READING OF MARAT/SADE

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ABSTRACT

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As a play that both spoke to its time and can potentially gain new significance as a reflection of contemporary American society, *The Persecution and Assassination of Jean-Paul Marat as Performed by the Inmates of the Asylum of Charenton under the Direction of the Marquis de Sade* is the subject of this study. Renowned for its striking imagery, evocative and provocative themes, and popularized through Peter Brook’s innovative production techniques, Peter Weiss’s monumental play attained particular relevance in light of America’s political climate during the mid- to late 1960s. Using New Historicism as a theoretical lens, this study explores the play’s representation in and critical reception to its premiere in London of 1964 and New York of 1965, respectively.
For D.V.W.: I never would have made it without your unconditional love and support.

And for Doug “D.J.” Jenkins: Thanks for always believing that I had the brains and the talent to do this.
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INTRODUCTION

As a play that spoke to its time and can potentially gain new significance as a reflection of contemporary American society, The Persecution and Assassination of Jean-Paul Marat as Performed by the Inmates of the Asylum of Charenton under the Direction of the Marquis de Sade is my chosen focus. Renown for its striking imagery, evocative and provocative themes, innovative acting and production techniques, and popularized by Peter Brook’s 1964 Royal Shakespeare Company production in London, Peter Weiss’s monumental play attained particular relevance in light of America’s political climate during the mid- to late 1960s. My primary interest is exploring the dramatic work’s representation and critical reception within different historical moments and venues.

My attraction to the play has intensified due to the passionate and sometimes controversial reactions to it. Playwright Peter Weiss has discussed the impact of the Holocaust and its aftermath on his writing and personal life, and Marat/Sade embodies a varied range of emotions and concepts related to this and other global events: treatment of the mentally ill, power structures, revolution, and prison violence, to name a few. As I came to discover, Marat/Sade continually displays its ability to evoke powerful responses from readers and, more importantly, audience members.

First, I believe it is necessary to address the events leading to Peter Weiss’s writing of Marat/Sade. I will provide some general background information on Weiss, noting events that related specifically to the play. It should be noted that, although he was a
citizen of Sweden, residing in Stockholm since 1939, Weiss writes in German and "very probably cares much more about German problems" (Wager 190). Born into a half-Christian, half-Jewish family, Weiss’s mother and father emigrated to London and then Czechoslovakia when Hitler came to power.

Weiss has freely expressed his sympathy with oppressed minorities and has spoken of a sense of alienation escalating from the awareness of being an immigrant or outsider. Further, his concern was for the "human situation of oppressed people.... In our world, there are people who are aggressors and there are others who flee or try to. You are always on either one side or the other, and sometimes you cannot help which side you are on" (Qtd. in Wager 190). Weiss recalls feeling paranoid while growing up in such a threatening political environment, and has spoken about his experience passing through Berlin during the infamous Kristallnacht. Further, "although the playwright insists that he has no particular interest in any particular oppressed group...there can be little doubt that his experiences have affected his thinking and writing" (Wager 191). Visiting the Nazi concentration camps, Weiss observed human beings losing their identities, thrown into a state of inhumanity where they were treated like objects.

Inspired by artists and writers such as Dali, Max Ernst, Herman Hesse, Henry Miller and Kafka, Weiss also quite seriously followed Marxist theory and has often expressed his belief that the capitalist nations are decaying societies. Despite taking some liberties and criticizing Communist doctrine, this playwright nonetheless insists
that “the future lies with the 'revolutionary' or 'socialist' lands of the Communist world” (Wager 192).

**Statement of Research Questions**

My thesis focuses on the British and American debuts, respectively, of Brook’s version of *Marat/Sade*, underlining the significant differences in reception depending on venue. The London premiere of Peter Brook’s production of *Marat/Sade* was hailed for its innovative acting and directing techniques. By contrast, at its premiere in New York in December of 1965, audience reception was markedly different.

Although the production itself made no explicit references to specific, current political conditions, the play sometimes sparked responses to America’s involvement in Vietnam. This consideration leads me to the following questions: How and why did this shift in reception occur, and could similar reactions occur in a contemporary theatre setting? How does the play address themes such as revolution, modern medical and scientific practices, and modern-day warfare? Do these themes resonate with Americans in light of our history? Finally, and most importantly, does the sociopolitical relevance of *Marat/Sade* continue to the present day?

**Methodology**

As this will be a New Historicist reading of *Marat/Sade*, I will be writing under the assumptions of this theory. My contention is that art and society are connected, and that this text cannot be evaluated outside of its cultural context. From this standpoint, several factors surrounding the play itself must be taken into
account: societal concerns of both Peter Weiss and Peter Brook, historical references and characters in the play, the cultural and historical moments of the play’s premiere in mid-1960s London and New York, and lastly, how living in the United States in the year 2006 (three years into the Iraq War), has informed my subjective reading and interpretation of the play.

The first chapter of this study will explore Peter Weiss’s background on a deeper level, delving into the historical context and personal circumstances from which the play Marat/Sade emerged. Of particular significance will be references to World War II, the Vietnam War, or other sociopolitical conflicts that shaped Weiss’s writing. For instance, his background as a visual artist and the lack of self-identity (having been born into a half-Christian, half-Jewish family) will be taken in account.

The next chapter explores the Peter Brook production of Marat/Sade. Here I will offer a brief introduction to Brook’s aesthetic and his importance in the theatre world, and emphasize his dissatisfaction with the original Berlin production specifically and the state of British theatre in the 1960s generally. I will expand on the rehearsal and directing techniques he employed in order to reframe the play in light of his own concerns, which essentially began with his Royal Shakespeare Company workshop The Theatre of Cruelty in January of 1964.

Chapter Three discusses reviews of the London and New York premieres of the Brook production, highlighting the differences in critical reception within each individual venue, and using direct
textual evidence to provide a possible explanation for how and why this shift occurred. I will also discuss ways in which New Historicism, as a theoretical lens, could be applied to a present-day production of *Marat/Sade*. I believe that the differences between the London and New York productions’ reviews, and the implications of New Historicist criticism, can provide insight into sustaining the play’s impact for a contemporary, post-9/11 audience.

**Literature Review**

I will refer to *The Playwrights Speak*, edited by Walter Wager, to dig deeper into Weiss’s background and the global circumstances surrounding the writing of *Marat/Sade*. Through Wager’s interview with Weiss, I will gain insight into the playwright’s primary concerns, his thinking and writing process, and historical and cultural influences on his work.

Since it is one thing to read about a production and quite another to actually see one, I studied Peter Brook’s seminal production of *Marat/Sade*, now available on DVD. First released on film in 1967, this production was the defining paradigm of how to stage the play. Despite its shortcomings, the film is in keeping with the script’s apparent concern for verisimilitude, as its production coincides with America’s involvement in Vietnam. While audiences and critics of this time brought their own thoughts or feelings about the war – transferring them onto the play’s actions and messages – Peter Brook’s version does not explicitly espouse this connection. However, as the most popular and influential version of the play – and the model upon which subsequent productions seem to be based – analysis of
the film is a useful tool in terms of seeing at least part of how the live audiences possibly reacted to the play. Moreover, I will supplement studying the film with references from the original production’s sound recording.

A deeper understanding of Brook’s revolutionary approach to the play and critical responses to his production abound in Albert Hunt and Geoffrey Reeves’ Peter Brook. Here I will cite Brook’s rejection of the original Berlin production to highlight his re-envisioning of the play in an attempt to more adequately reflect contemporary social dynamics. Of particular interest is his extreme physical and psychological rehearsal process. “Brook’s decision to have an acting area into which all of the inmates could move at will directly affected his approach to the play. His rehearsals did not begin with the text but as a workshop on madness” (Hunt 85).

The Empty Space and The Open Door, both written by Peter Brook, discuss his directing process and his goals for staging productions in particular ways. In these texts I will draw out sections in which he deals with staging and rehearsing Marat/Sade, looking specifically for references to critics’ or audiences’ responses to his production.

Reviews of the London and New York premieres of Marat/Sade will expand upon specific production characteristics and audience reactions. In these reviews I will highlight any specific references to current events, whether concerning American politics in particular or general global issues.

The New Historicism, edited by H. Aram Veeser, “Modernism and the politics of culture” by Sara Blair, and “Texts in history: the
determinations of readings and their texts," and Outside Literature both by Tony Bennett provide the theoretical framework for this study. In The New Historicism, essays by theorists including Stephen Greenblatt and Brook Thomas will be employed to read Marat/Sade by way of New Historicism.

Bennett mentions the perceived limitations of theories, that instead of seeing them as absolutes for any particular field, we should ask ourselves, "What do they enable one to do? What possibilities do they open up that were not there beforehand? What new fields and types of action do they generate" (Bennett, "Text in history" 64)? I think that these are important questions to ask; otherwise we run the risk of pigeon-holing Marxist literary theory into one knowledge system. Bennett also comments on possible ways in which Marxists should respond to such criticisms:

It’s singularly odd to expect that Marxists should feel placed on the defensive by the ‘discovery’ that there neither are nor can be any transcendental guarantees, any absolute certainties or any essential truths. (Bennett, "Texts in History" 65)

As Bennett underlines, using Laclau as an example of a theorist who calls for disregarding "prior ontological privilege" in favor of discursive intervention, in recent years Marxists have endeavored to escape such formalistic tendencies.

While Tony Bennett’s essays underline Marxist literary criticism’s significant influence on New Historicists, Stephen Greenblatt deals more directly with New Historicism’s application in
the arts and literature. Arguing that we should avoid perceiving art as distinct from its sociopolitical background, and vice versa, Greenblatt is in favor of the idea that art simultaneously reflects and alters the society from which it emerges. His ideas in particular can perhaps lead to answering one of my research questions: How and why did the shift in audience reception from London to New York occur? I expand my discussion of Greenblatt’s essay and how it relates to a New Historicism reading of Marat/Sade in Chapter 3.

**Criticisms of New Historicism**

In “History as Usual? Feminism and the ‘New Historicism,’” Judith Lowder Newton begins by outlining the assumptions surrounding New Historicism that are “intensely familiar.” Specifically, she cites the notion that New Historicism presupposes human subjectivity as “constructed by cultural codes which position and limit all of us in various and divided ways” (Newton 152). Throughout a significant portion of her essay, Newton – coming from a feminist perspective – attempts to challenge the assumptions surrounding New Historicism. Her frame of mind often sheds fresh light on these assumptions and asks us to question New Historicism’s emergence from the new left, cultural materialism, postmodernism, and other considerations. Of particular significance to me is Newton’s awareness of New Historicism “as a response to the perception that American educational institutions and culture are rapidly forgetting history” (Newton 153).

Newton makes it clear from the beginning that this is connected to her not just in her scholarly work, but also personally: “Some parts of these ‘histories,’ of course, do tell the story of my own
trajectory into the assumptions and strategies attributed to ‘new historicism’” (Newton 153). Just as New Historicism cannot—and should not—separate itself from feminist issues, Newton cannot or should not separate herself from the work that interests her.

Newton also sets up a critique of the New Historicism’s claim to newness. Much like her fellow critic Brook Thomas, she attempts to debunk the assumption that New Historicism is doing anything new. In Thomas’ essay, he makes a strong claim that history is by its very definition “new,” since it constantly must rewrite itself based on previously unknown facts or changing political biases; therefore, the term “New Historicism” is essentially redundant. Newton makes a similar claim in her comparison of New Historicism to feminist theory and the women’s movement, leading to the assertion that feminists have been dealing with the same issues as New Historicians before the term “New Historicism” even came into being.

Further, Newton points out how feminists integrated women’s stories into the already existing history, and also alludes to their concern with social change. This certainly makes sense in terms of reading feminist theory alongside New Historicism. “What emerged in the ‘New Women’s History,’ then, and in feminist literary/historical work with which it intersects, are emphases and practices which overlap with those currently attributed to ‘New Historicism’” (Newton 155). But having made this statement, she addresses the fact that there are still marked differences between the ways in which the two theories deal with the construction of history and what constitutes an historical period.
Newton also raises compelling issues with different texts concerning both feminist theory and New Historicism, including works by Gallagher, Armstrong and Poovey:

In one basic way at least each of these books breaks with the ideological division of the world into ‘public’ and ‘private,’ man and woman, class and gender and so works within a central insight of feminist theory, that public and private are not separate but intersecting. (Newton 156)

Through this statement, Newton comes to the next logical conclusion, that the “centrality or marginality of gender as an organizing category in ‘history’ informs what counts as ‘history’ in the first place” (Newton 157).

In the conclusion of her essay, Newton also poses some possible solutions to the construction of history. She not only problematizes Gallagher, Armstrong and Poovey’s texts and New Historicism in general, she also offers strategies for overcoming the disparities in reconstructing the past: “We might follow Poovey’s example and the example of several feminist historians by juxtaposing the discourse of men and women on the same social topics or in the same organizations and movements” (Newton 164).

She later applies similar strategies to New Historicism:

In its emphasis upon the different ways that gendered subjects enter into ideology, moreover, materialist feminist work suggests an important direction for “new historian” practice no matter what its politics. For if we wish to be serious about our assertion that
representation “makes things happen” we will need to explore the way that discursive meanings circulate throughout a culture (Newton 165).

Since the whole idea of New Historicism seems to be a production of history that allows for a fuller, more complete version of social change and human agency, as she states, this contention makes sense.

Finally, in Tony Bennett’s essay, “Texts in history: the determinations of readings and their texts,” he addresses the different ways in which Marxist criticism can be interpreted and utilized, and in general, what theory’s function should be. Bennett takes issue with deconstruction and other forms of criticism that fail to acknowledge Marxism’s shifted perspective since the nineteenth century, arguing that rather than existing as a static, essentialist theory, it has potential to address a diverse range of issues.

**Limitations**

This will not be a purely biographical exploration; the only personal history that will be referenced pertains to the events surrounding Peter Weiss’s writing of *Marat/Sade*. Also, I will not discuss Weiss’s writing process or historical recontextualization in great detail. However, I will explicate his method of combining opposing historical figures – Jean-Paul Marat and the Marquis de Sade – and their cultural significance in Revolutionary and Napoleonic France. Specifically, I will discuss how they became iconographic figures in their own time periods and, especially in Sade’s case, well after their deaths. I should also stress that Sade’s intentionally subversive, pornographic and sometimes morbid writing style does not
particularly interest me. However, this aspect of his published work is in some ways unavoidable, considering one of the repeated choruses in *Marat/Sade*: “There is no liberation / without general copulation,” and that the character Duperret cannot keep his groping hands off of the inmate playing Charlotte Corday.

The majority of my limitations in regard to Peter Weiss are language-oriented; the bulk of biographical texts concerning the playwright are in the original German. Thus, as a non-German speaker, I have limited access to many texts dealing specifically with his life. Also, the reviews cited will not serve to place aesthetic value on the productions in question. Rather, what interests me is how the productions were executed, and if critics’ reactions suggest links to contemporary issues. In addition, although Weiss is often placed within the Avant-garde theatre movement, I will not expand upon the theory that views *Marat/Sade* as an extension of that movement.

In this study, New Historicism – and, similarly, how Weiss’ Marxist political perspective informed his playwriting career - is a more useful theoretical framework. In the most literal sense, however, this will not be a “full” New Historicist reading, as specific political events of 1964 London and 1965 New York City are beyond the scope of my research. In order to limit the numerous and sometimes conflicting information surrounding the early years of the Vietnam War, I will examine topical references from the critical reviews and other commentators on Brook’s staging. In addition, I will cite other theatrical productions, films, and literature to draw
out similarities between Marat/Sade and other cultural products that emerged from this period.

In terms of Peter Brook, since his name has been renown in the theatre world for decades, there are scores of biographies about him, and he is certainly open to discuss his own work. In my research I looked specifically for references to Marat/Sade, or similar rehearsal and staging techniques he employed in earlier productions (such as the Theatre of Cruelty workshop and performance, which immediately preceded Marat/Sade).

**Justification**

While I certainly believe that the Marat/Sade has artistic and historical merit, for me, this play also holds personal significance. As a young American struggling with conflicting and fervent emotions surrounding the past five years – and the remaining three – under the George W. Bush Administration, Marat/Sade floored me with its relevance when I first read it. After the 2004 Presidential Election, however, hopelessness and frustration prevailed. In autumn of that year, I witnessed or participated in theatrical productions including Arthur Miller’s All My Sons, William Shakespeare’s Comedy of Errors, and Bertolt Brecht’s Good Woman of Setzuan; each production contained varying degrees of sociopolitical commentary, and every anti-war statement, including those in the Marat/Sade, seemed hollow and futile to me. Something needed to refuel my passion for the play.

November 26, 2004. At noon I had just woken up to find my house in chaos from the night before. Sitting down at the kitchen table, I flipped through the November 18th issue of The Guardian when I stumbled
upon something I had not noticed before: a political cartoon depicting a lumbering, steroid-jacked, headless American, wearing a shirt bearing the American flag with a Christian cross in place of the stars and the caption “The Bush Electorate” written beneath.

As the body plodded along, it spouted off several phrases, all building to a sobering punch line: “He gave us the Patriot Act, he’s going to finish dismantling the country, he’s going to privatize social security, he lost me my job, he sent me to war, he lost the debates 3-0, he’ll feed us all to the drug companies...but I don’t care – He’s my leader!” This headless American sauntered toward the brink of a cliff, where a tiny, cowboy attired George W. Bush motioned, stepping over the edge and calling back, “Follow me!” Two little figures in the background commented on this scene. One asked, “Some of the people some of the time?” to which the other answered, “All of these people all of the time.”

I was struck by the cartoon’s morbid and ironic humor. It made me realize that if ever I traveled abroad again, or if I was ever introduced to non-Americans, their first impression of me could be this stupid, headless Behemoth. The phrase, “All of these people all of the time” particularly impacted me; if the cartoonist was implicating the religious population alone – as indicated by the altered flag on the lummox’s shirt – then why should I care?

But what if this bumbling, blind mass was, indeed, all of us, all of the time? “These people” needed not just include Bush supporters and voters, but also the Americans who might have voted for John Kerry had they actually gone to the polls, or the 35-40 percent of the
population who simply could not be bothered to vote on November 4, 2004. The more I stared at the cartoon, the more I realized that I could not absolve myself. Could I have done more to educate people on the importance of voting? Could I have made time to volunteer on Election Day to remind people to hit the polls? Did I do any of these things? No. My best effort was registering to vote in the swing state of Ohio.

If the rest of the world hated us, if people all across the globe saw us – and me – as this brainless lemming, then I could not argue, because I was as responsible as the Democrat who stayed home on Election Day, or opted to vote for Bush in order to “stay the course.” I was as accountable as the Republican who sincerely believed that George W. Bush would do this country good, and as guilty as the politicians who lied, swindled and stole to keep him in office. No one was exempt from this collective choice; the people spoke and, like it or hate it, we now had to deal with it. However, just because we have no option other than surviving with half the voting population’s decision, that does not mean we cannot comment on it – that art should or can be stifled.

As a theatre scholar, I find Peter Weiss’s absence from recent theatrical studies and productions dissatisfying and unfortunate, and maintain that his work – especially the Marat/Sade – demand fresh attention. I believe that this play has the potential to inspire American audiences deeply, especially in light of our continued involvement in 2006 Iraq – currently touted as “the new Vietnam” – the
atrocities committed at Abu Ghraib, Bagram and Guantanamo, and 
Election 2004’s outcome.

However, in order for Marat/Sade to make a substantial impression 
upon American audiences, it must connect with them on a more immediate 
level, compelling them to actively engage their social and political 
environment. Through this study I aspire to emerge with a better 
understanding of Peter Brook’s staging techniques and Peter Weiss’s 
employment of topical political events to create a play that not only 
resonates on a contemporary level, but also has consistently 
perpetuated its significance since its debut.
CHAPTER I: PETER WEISS

An examination of Peter Weiss’ biography helps to clarify his reasons for writing Marat/Sade. One of the most critical events from his childhood was World War II and its aftermath. Although Weiss was a citizen of Sweden, where he lived in Stockholm since 1939, he wrote in German and probably cared much more about German problems (Wager 190). In any case, one can imagine the anxiety, confusion, and fear that a young child might feel in the midst of a rising oppressive power.

Even at a young age, his distrust and questioning of authority—leading perhaps to his attraction to Marxism—were rooted deeply in his experience through the early stages of WWII. Adding to his anxiety and distrust was the fact that his mother was Christian and his father was Jewish. Weiss has stated explicitly:

> My experiences as a child — we left Germany in 1934, but there were already Storm Troopers — made a very strong impression [...]. I was always very frightened as a child, always afraid of power and soldiers and force. [I am] interested in the human situation of oppressed people [...]. In our world, there are people who are aggressors and there are others who flee or try to. You are always on either one side or the other, and sometimes you cannot help which side you are on. (Qtd. in Wager 190)

It is probably impossible to know for certain whether or not Weiss identified with the actual victims of concentration camps, or how much stock he placed into his half-Jewish heritage. However, we
do know about the psychological traumas Holocaust survivors suffered simply due to the fact that they survived, and others suffered and died horribly. “Even though Peter Weiss experienced such guilt feelings as a survivor and discussed them in the novel Fluchtpunkt, his selection of Auschwitz as ‘his place’ in the 1964 essay is a voluntary and deliberate act…” (Schlunk 27).

Weiss himself adds weight to this argument through recounting his childhood spent in various stages of emigration:

“The terrible thing is feeling guilty for not being punished as all the others have been punished. I remember when I went from Germany in the beginning, I didn’t go with the feeling that I’m a hero, I can fight against Fascism now. I went with great disappointment [...].” (Qtd. in Alvarez 1)

In addition, and despite his parents’ strongest efforts, Weiss had extensive exposure to the atrocities occurring at the time, including the Kristallnacht, “when synagogues were being burned down in Berlin and Jewish shops were being ransacked and atrocities were being committed” (Qtd. in Wager 191). In Act I, Part 12 of the play, the character Sade even uses the phrase “final solution” when describing how human beings have always sought to destroy the weak and powerless, a significant allusion to the Nazi’s Final Solution during World War II.

Despite his insistence that he has no vested interest in any specific oppressed group, it is easy to speculate that Weiss’
experiences have affected his thinking and writing. For instance, in Part 11 of Act I of *Marat/Sade*, the character Marat states:

>The people used to suffer everything / now they take their revenge [...] and you don’t remember that you drove the people to it / Now you protest / but it’s too late / to start crying over spilt blood / What is the blood of these aristocrats / compared with the blood the people shed for you / Many of them had their throats slit by your gangs / Many of them died more slowly in your workshops. (21)

This passage alludes to the corruption and bloodshed surrounding Weiss’ upbringing, his developing Marxist perspective and his sympathy towards oppressed groups.

It is therefore fair to state that when embarking on writing *Marat/Sade*, Weiss had ample first-hand memories and evidence on which the story could build. Perhaps the idea of writing a play that took place in an asylum and largely concerned the inmates of said institution was an attractive idea to Weiss simply because it was material with which he was familiar. In an interview recorded in the collection *The Playwrights Speak*, he expanded on his thoughts and feelings concerning the Nazi concentration camps: "'...Human beings lost their identity and just were thrown into a state of inhumanity and the accused there treated them as...objects. There were no human beings for them, either’” (Wager 205).

Weiss’ apparent case of “survivor’s guilt” is misleading in a way; it suggests that he felt strongly about this negative situation and took no action. On the contrary, he was adamant about artists and
writers, including him, responding to the war and to the treatment of concentration camp victims. “‘...For me this consciousness of the world around is so great, and there are so many things, so many problems which involve you so you have no other choice — you have to take them up’” (Qtd. in Wager 207). Weiss even reiterated his own feelings through the character Marat in Act I, Part 12 of the play:

Against Nature’s silence I use action / In the vast indifference I invent a meaning / I don’t watch unmoved I intervene / and say that this and this are wrong / and I work to alter them and improve them. (26-27)

**Preparation**

Weiss’ artistic background would also have a significant influence on his later playwriting career. First of all, it is not difficult for a young painter to make the leap from art into theatre, as Weiss would have become accustomed to thinking in visual terms. He explains,

I was a surrealistic painter, and my first films were all experimental surrealist films [...]. Later on I went over to documentary movies, which contained the seed of the work I am now doing in theatre. During the Fifties, I worked almost entirely with films. From the beginning, everything I have done has been extremely visual [...] and this is essential to the staging of my plays [...]. Sade interested me because his work is so visual — he could have written Marat/Sade himself. (Qtd. in Wager 193)
Weiss’ interest in the visual aspects of this writing sparked his continued study of Jean-Paul Marat and the Marquis de Sade, thereby building the backbone of his play: “I spent a very long time in doing research work for the Marat/Sade to build up the play in the historic sense, to really have the reality behind the story. I studied the works of Sade and I read the works of Marat...’” (Qtd. in Wager 197).

Unfortunately, most of Weiss’ visual art, especially his early ones from the World War II years, are simply gone; his parents destroyed them. Our initial reaction may be to question such a cruel act, but under the circumstances it may have saved his life.

As traumatic as Weiss’ private pain must have been about learning that his mother had destroyed all early paintings of his nightmarish visions (thus robbing him of his only strength), she may have understood quite well that this was not the time to transport across Nazi borders paintings which most certainly would have fallen under the category of “decadent art” (Schlunk 17).

Another aspect of Weiss’ life that should be taken into consideration when examining Marat/Sade was his lack of identity formation during his early years, due to his half-Christian, half-Jewish parentage and displacement from his home country. “The central experience of Peter Weiss to be found at the core of all of his works is his homelessness...” (Schlunk 14).

As a child, Weiss’ family was constantly relocating, supposedly to avoid Nazi territory, and this perpetual dislocation made a lasting impression: “Weiss emigrated to England, later to Prague, where he
studied painting at the Academy of Art. Before the Germans occupied Czechoslovakia, Weiss escaped to Switzerland and from there to Sweden. ...Only in the 1950s did he start writing in German again” (Schlunk 14).

As mentioned in the introduction, Weiss freely expressed his sympathy with oppressed minorities and has spoken of a sense of alienation that comes from the awareness of being an immigrant or stranger (Wager 190). His empathy for oppressed groups certainly explains the energy and detail given to each inmate’s character description. Moreover, what could be more alien and strange than to find oneself stuck in an insane asylum, completely cut off from the outside world, residing in an apparently timeless realm in which Jean-Paul Marat and the Marquis de Sade can coexist and debate as though the actor playing Marat were the real man?

The environment in Marat/Sade is nothing if not confusing and warped; the outside world seldom penetrates the protective (or is it oppressive?) walls. This description is not far removed from Weiss’ own search for identity. Many historians point out that despite his constant moving, young Weiss’ parents attempted to keep their children largely isolated, and for many years, ignorant of world events. Jurgen Schlunk explains:

This obliviousness to the outside world was [...] a direct result of an intense sensitivity to the stifling oppressiveness of his family life, which lacked closeness and warmth [...]. To be sure, the parents’ intentions seem permanently at variance with those of the son, but part of
In other words, poorly concealed fear dictated the parents' behavior; as their son eventually learned the truth about the state of the world anyway, their attempts to keep him ignorant failed.

I have detailed the influences on Weiss' choice of content, but stylistic influences are also apparent in his work. The extent to which each shapes Marat/Sade is still largely up for debate, but one cannot deny the presence of both Brecht and Artaud in this play. Weiss has stated that not only did Brecht's plays impress him, but also "his theories about dramatics and even, of course, the theories by Artaud, whom I admired very much" (Qtd. in Wager 197).

Other modern playwrights to leave an impression on Weiss include Strindberg, Beckett, and Ionesco, as he explains further: "'Everything which is in modern dramatics influences and one is related to it in a way'" (Qtd. in Wager 197). In particular, Brecht's impression on Peter Weiss may help to explain why he also chose material that challenged his audience to view a situation differently, and to take action when necessary.

**Homage (to Marat)**

Just as an understanding of Peter Weiss' historical and social surroundings - a bloody world war, various sources of intimidation and
oppression, and lack of a solid identity – deepen the Marat/Sade’s significance, recognizing the magnitude of the play’s two central, historical characters, Jean-Paul Marat and the Marquis de Sade, adds another layer of meaning. Due to Weiss’ clear socialist/Marxist leanings, it is not difficult to understand his fascination with the revolutionary Jean-Paul Marat. For my purposes, it is useful to examine Marat’s iconographic status gained, not surprisingly, after his assassination.

Within Marat’s assassination one can see a parallel between the historical person and the character – that is, the inmate in Weiss’ play. The actor playing Marat in Sade’s play at Charenton Asylum is afflicted with paranoia; the real-life man also exhibited elements of that description. Since he expected to be slain eventually, the assassination “fulfilled his most oft-repeated prophecy...” (Conner 258). Indeed, it is interesting to speculate if Marat’s assassin, Charlotte Corday, actually did him a huge favor by bumping him off: it got him out of facing the bloody realities of pre-Terror Revolutionary France and immensely boosted his popularity, essentially making a national hero of him.

[Marat’s] martyrdom was the occasion for a massive outpouring of public grief throughout France, especially among the population of Paris [...]. A quasi-religious cult of Marat arose with eulogies likening Marat to Jesus. Busts, portraits, and medallions bearing the likeness of the People’s Friend were everywhere. [...] Except for
Robespierre no other political leader now commanded as much respect among the sansculottes. (Conner 258-260)

Naturally, Marat never would have gained such a cult following had he been popular with the people at the time of his death, at which point “Marat had all but vanished from the political scene.... The assassin’s dagger revived his influence and raised it to unprecedented heights” (Conner 258).

And of course, no martyrdom would be complete without one’s friends emerging in droves to reap the benefits:

Most significant of all was the success of Robespierre and the central Montagnard leadership to turn the revered memory of their fallen comrade [into] a potent weapon in the Jacobin triumph over the Gironde, who thereafter could convincingly be portrayed as destabilizers or fomenters of civil war for their role in the assassination of a great patriot. (Conner 260)

In the end, however, Marat’s assassination only underlined the deadly conspiracies rampant in revolutionary France; part of the hypocrisy inherent amongst perhaps the bloodiest of revolutionaries, Robespierre, is mentioned in Act II, Part 27 of Marat/Sade:

Robespierre / who turns white when the word force is used / doesn’t he sit at high-class tables / making cultural conversation / by candlelight. (78)

Additionally, Marat proved himself a noteworthy historical figure, if for nothing else than as a strategist and tactician: “His
phenomenal success in provoking the authorities while evading arrest – for several years – was not accidental” (Conner 262).

**Stifled Unrest: The Marquis de Sade**

Much of the Marquis de Sade’s recent popularity can be attributed, in my opinion, to Geoffrey Rush’s powerful and unusually seductive performance in the 2000 film *Quills*. However, the author’s titillating novels – including *Justine*, *The 120 Days of Sodom*, and *Philosophy in the Boudoir* – were well-known since their initial publication, and his notoriety did not end with his literary contributions. After his imprisonment at Charenton Asylum, where he remained from 1803 until his death in 1814, “he wrote and directed many of its entertainments, and it became fashionable in Paris to visit the asylum, as much as to observe the louche behavior of the lunatics as to watch the performance” (Trewin 144).

In spite of his relative failure as a playwright, Sade’s attachment to the theatre was, then, profound and enduring. [...] The dramatic is [...] the ideal medium for the representation of the sexual, and while the sexed body could not be openly represented on the 18th-century stage, there was still the virtual stage of Sade’s prose works, all of which [...] exhibit a fundamental theatricality.

(Phillips 61)

Partly for this reason, combining Jean-Paul Marat and the Marquis de Sade on a single stage and in the same play would not have been such a gigantic leap for Peter Weiss to make. Further, Weiss would have had little trouble finding evidence to support his use of Sade as
a dramatic character in and of himself; the man was already - in his writing, directing, and in his daily life - extraordinarily theatrical:

Sade’s tendencies towards self-dramatization are never too far below the surface, and the theatre of revolution certainly provided him with ample opportunities to role-play. Indeed, days before the Bastille was stormed, Sade is said to have harangued the street crowds from his cell, urging them to rise up and revolt – perhaps the most theatrical of all episodes in his very theatrical life.

(Phillips 44)

Adding depth to Weiss’ creation of this dramatic character is the fact that, to varying degrees, Sade was involved with French Revolutionary concerns, and even composed a eulogy for Marat. In it, Sade wrote:

“Scevolus, Brutus, your only merit was to arm yourselves for one moment to end the existence of two despots; your patriotism shone for one hour at most. But you, Marat, by what more difficult road did you lead the life of a free man; how many thorns lay in your path as you pursued your goal; it was among tyrants that you spoke to us of liberty; you adored this goddess whilst we were still ignorant of her sacred name; Machiavelli’s daggers hovered above your head from all quarters but your august brow remained unruffled. Scevolus and Brutus each threatened a single tyrant; but your far greater spirit desired the death of
all those that overburdened the earth, and slaves accused you of liking blood! Great man, it was theirs that you wished to spill; you were prodigal with their blood, only in order to spare that of the people. With so many enemies, how could you not succumb? While you singled out traitors, you were to be struck down by treachery.” (Qtd. in Phillips 50)

Although this eulogy appears to support Jacobin fanaticism, it is difficult to determine the seriousness of Sade’s intentions. It could be just as easily interpreted as, characteristic of much of Sade’s first-person writing, a subtle sarcastic parody of Marat’s extremism. We could even hold Sade’s own political leanings against the same question: “…Was his apparent espousal of democracy born of sincerely held convictions, or was it a cynical manoeuvre designed to establish his credentials as a bona fide republican? Critics are divided on this question” (Phillips 51). Ultimately, it is practically impossible, and in some ways inconsequential, to determine Sade’s true intentions. What is important here is the fact that Weiss found Sade as fascinating of a historical and theatrical character as, apparently, his original readers did.

If there is a reason for the immense interest in Sade, it may be connected to the fact that he had no clear political agenda, and trying to force a specific label on him is problematic.

There is also the violence of Sade’s fictional world, which tempts some readers to draw dubious analogies with modern political scenarios. […] There is a danger that such
adaptations invite audiences to dehistoricize Sade’s text, forcing it into an entirely inappropriate context of modern political thinking. Those who have attempted to enlist Sade in the ideological vanguard of ‘good’ (Marxist) or ‘evil’ (fascist) political movements of later times are guilty of anachronism and misreading. (Phillips 47)

Leaning towards a Marxist bias, Peter Weiss may have come close to falling into this trap when writing *Marat/Sade*; he has made it clear in interviews that the character Marat, representing the side of social (read: Socialist) change, is supposed to emerge “victorious” from the debates with Sade in the play. Presumably, then, Socialism beats out Sade, who is content to remain an individualist and non-involved libertine, which is in keeping, for the most part, with Sade’s own writing:

> Far from embracing a particular political credo, the Sadean text consistently exposes politics as corrupt and empty rhetoric, a means of manipulating the masses. Sade has no optimism about social progress. Indeed, he has no systematic faith in the need for society at all. […]

Despite his obvious fascination with the historical process, human history seemed to Sade to be utterly nonsensical and any concept of progress wholly unsupported by the evidence. (Phillips 47-48)

Clearly, Weiss picked up on this very important distinction in *Marat/Sade*; in Act II, Part 28 of the play, the character Sade reiterates some of what Phillips has discussed above:
Give up Marat / You said yourself / nothing can be achieved by scribbling / Long ago I abandoned my masterpiece / a roll of paper thirty yards long / which I filled completely with minute handwriting / in my dungeon years ago / It vanished when the Bastille fell / it vanished as everything written / everything thought and planned / will disappear. (82).

Although Peter Weiss chose to omit this information in the play, a major reason for Sade’s iconographic status within his circle of Parisian peers was the fact that at times, despite the cynicism towards the government expressive in much of his fictional work, he did involve himself in the French Revolution “with an enthusiasm astonishing for one with no belief in human progress” (Phillips 48). In his fictional writings, he was particularly critical of Robespierre and the often inhumane tactics employed during the Terror; this was also the period in which Sade was imprisoned at Picpus for “political moderation and alleged royalist sympathies,” and began writing Philosophy in the Boudoir (Phillips 52).

From his cell in this former sanatorium, he had a clear view of the guillotine which had been moved to this new location from the Place de la Concorde because of complaints about the smell of blood. The executed were buried in their thousands in the grounds of the sanatorium. Sade watched this bloody slaughter day after day, and declared in correspondence that it affected him greatly. Against the backdrop of these horrific events in Sade’s own
life, the cruelties of his fictions take on a highly ironic character. (Phillips 52-53)

Ultimately, then, one finds Sade’s political nature – like so much else in his life – indeterminable, “which in an odd way, is more subversive than any fixed political position would be. The ambiguity of both the content of Sade’s declarations on politics, as well as the ambiguity of their tone (serious or ironic?), undermines any aim of desirability, of a polarized set of views” (Phillips 59).

Weiss includes many of these biographical experiences in *Marat/Sade*; Sade proclaims in Part 20:

> When I lay in the Bastille / My ideas were already formed / I sweated them out under the blows of my own ship / Out of hatred for myself / And the limitations of my mind / In prison I created in my mind / Monstrous representatives of a dying class / who could only exercise their power / in spectacularly staged orgies / I recorded the mechanics of their atrocities in the minutest detail / and brought out everything wicked and brutal / that lay inside me. (47)

In the same section of the play, Sade continues arguing with Marat, professing his dissatisfaction with both the Revolution and its proponents:

> And then in the next few months / as the tumbrels ran regular to the scaffolds / and the blade dropped and was winched up and dropped again / all the meaning drained out of this revenge / It had become mechanical / It was inhuman
it was dull / and curiously technocratic / And now Marat /
now I see where / this revolution is leading. (49)

As mentioned briefly in the beginning of this chapter, part of Weiss’ attraction to Sade was from a visual art standpoint rather than any possible, albeit vague, political one. However, another plausible explanation for his interest is that for an emerging theatre artist, Sade’s experience as an actor and director held some interest for the playwright. Sade wrote plays after the Revolution, during the 1790s, and in the asylum at Charenton, where he staged his own and other works.

Throughout his adult life, Sade devoted himself energetically to the putting on of plays, frequently assuming leading roles himself in his productions. The appeal of a physical medium well suited to Sade’s sensual and extrovert personality may offer some explanation of his fascination with theatre. (Phillips 60)

Sade’s theatricality extended even into his novels, such as The 120 Days of Sodom, with its melodramatic setting and the manner of its construction:

The story-tellers effectively dramatize the very process of narration, illustrating the power of language to excite and taking the physicality of theatre to its logical extreme in transforming the body itself into principal actor. This theatricality informs the spaces of the novel. In addition to the melodramatic nature of the castle setting and location, the narration of stories and the communal
orgiastic activities that these stories are intended to promote take place in a main hall, designed in the semi-circular shape of an amphitheatre. [...] Debauchery here is above all a shared dramatic experience, in which it is as important to be seen as to see. Acting out their own desire, the four protagonists are also audience to that of others. (Phillips 67-69)

*Philosophy in the Boudoir* is another novel with an explicitly dramatic form, which should not suggest that these works were necessarily intended for live performance, but rather, “its dialogic structure does at least indicate that it was intended to be read as theatre, to be performed in the mind’s eye” (Phillips 72, emphasis original). The following speech from Part 30 of *Marat/Sade* alludes to this idea and explicitly draws attention to Sade’s sensuality and penchant for the dramatic:

Marat / as I sat there in the Bastille / for thirteen long years / I learned / that this is a world of bodies / each body pulsing with a terrible power / each body alone and racked with its own unrest / In that loneliness / marooned in a stone sea / I heard lips whispering continually / and felt all the time / in the palms of my hands and in my skin / touching and stroking / Shut behind thirteen bolted doors / my feet fettered / I dreamed only / of the orifices of the body / put there / so one may hook and twine oneself in them. (92)
Peter Weiss may have been attracted to these icons of French history for political and/or visual reasons, but it was the possibilities to which these characters could be represented onstage that made the actual play so appealing for British director Peter Brook, whose production exploded onto the London stage in August of 1964, and in New York in December of 1965.
CHAPTER II: PETER BROOK IS INTRODUCED

Before delving into Peter Brook’s rehearsal process and staging of Marat/Sade, I will explicate the importance of this now renowned and revered figure in the theatre world. Although he emerged as a director during the conservative post-World War II years, Brook would not make a lasting impact on the theatre world until the mid-1960s. As an interpreter of Shakespeare, a director of opera and Broadway musicals, and an examiner of international cultures and myths, he would go on to inspire younger generations of theatre artists and scholars:

Brook joined Artaud and Grotowski in that triumviral pantheon which shaped, in absentia, the style and thinking of much of the experimental theatre of the early ’seventies – having himself sounded the resonances of Artaud in the Theatre of Cruelty season of 1964, and introduced Grotowski to British theatre during rehearsals for US in 1966.

(Selbourne x)

Not only was he responsible for re-envisioning a diverse range of texts from a directorial standpoint, he often designed his own shows and composed the music in order to achieve “the Wagnerian ideal of ‘total theatre’” (Moffitt xii).

During the late 1950s and early 1960s, Peter Brook expressed his dissatisfaction with the state of theatre. He felt that, as a whole, the theatre as it existed in England in the 1950s and 1960s was not only unsuccessful at inspiring or instructing, but also poor entertainment. “Audiences crave for something in the theatre that
they can term ‘better’ than life and for this reason are open to confuse culture...with something they do not know, but sense obscurely could exist...” (Brook 11). Further, Brook lamented that theatre was “On a catastrophically low level [...]. Why are there no plays that reflect the excitement, the movement, the change, the conflict, the tragedy, the misery, the hope and the emancipation of the highly dramatic moment of world’s history in which we live? Why are we given the choice between colour and poetry in the classics, or drab prose in contemporary drama? Why has no one followed on Brecht’s track? [...] I think that to find the causes one must not look for individual villains or a race of villains: I think the villain is deeply buried in the system: it lies in laws that operate at almost all levels.” (Qtd. in Hunt 67)

Evidently, Brook was looking for new and stimulating material with which he could work. After the premature abandonment of his concept for Jean Genet’s The Screens, theatre scholar Martin Esslin relates: “‘a German agent sent me the script of The Marat/Sade. I read the play and rang up Brook and told him this was the play he had been looking for’” (Qtd. in Hunt 83).

Brook also found the inherent conservatism of major British theatrical works somewhat dated, and wished to reintroduce liveliness and energy that would not only underscore significant issues in the classics, but also to explore works that could possibly reach younger audiences and new playwrights:
The theatre had lacked ambition since its Elizabethan years at a time of new discovery and new hope: London, a city of feverish life, its mad blood stirring, its dramatists, each with a host of furious fancies [...] wanting to know and possess their world and to understand themselves in relation to it. Now, in Weiss, Brook had encountered an author who restrained neither his ambition nor the exuberance of his demands. Obviously, they must join forces. (Trewin 145)

Peter Brook’s first introduction to Marat/Sade onstage was during its premiere in Berlin in the Schiller Theatre on April 29, 1964, under the direction of Konrad Swinarski, an experience that, initially, he found lacking. This production focused on the philosophical debates between Marat and Sade: “Marat believes that society can be changed by violent revolution; Sade believes that change can only come about if individuals use their unrestricted imaginations to unlock the ‘cells of the inner self’” (Hunt 85).

In fact, when discussing with Peter Weiss the possibility of bringing the play to the London stage under his own direction, it became clear that Brook intended to do exactly the opposite of the Berlin production. “Brook told Weiss that the two opposing tendencies, Artaudian (demanding the spectator’s complete and intense involvement) and Brechtian (insisting on the spectator’s alienation) must come together in performance” (Trewin 145).

Sally Jacobs, scenic designer for Brook’s Marat/Sade, further explained Brook’s initial concept for the design of his production:
Peter [...] said he could see in [The Berlin Marat/Sade] what he wanted to do, although it wasn’t there in that production at all, which was very static. He said that when the curtain went up there was this stunning image of the people of Charenton sitting in tiers of seats around a small acting area the size of a postage stamp. The image was stunning but you were stuck with it, there was nowhere to go. He wanted to do exactly the opposite: he wanted to be able to use the whole stage and to have the inmates of Charenton always present but on the perimeter, so that they could come and go and form into great set pieces. He wanted to make a completely free space in which any of this would erupt but could at the same time have the tremendous focus, when it was necessary, for the duologues. (Qtd. in Hunt 85)

**I am the Revolution: Theatre of Cruelty**

Antonin Artaud was the theorist who coined the term “Theatre of Cruelty,” explaining later that his use of the word “cruelty” was not directly in reference to sadism or bloodshed. Rather, he wanted “to return to the etymological origins of language, which always evoked a concrete notion through abstract concepts.... Essentially, cruelty means strictness, diligence and implacable resolution, irreversible and absolute determination” (Qtd. in Hunt 68). Whereas Peter Weiss concentrated on Brechtian techniques when he wrote *Marat/Sade*, Brook was thinking of Artaud during the conceptual stages of directing the play.
However, this should not suggest that Brook shut out Brechtian conventions from his process entirely; in fact, Brechtian techniques were greatly influential over the conceptual stages of Marat/Sade. Recognizing his importance in The Empty Space, Brook writes:

*The Marat/Sade* could not have existed before Brecht: it is conceived by Peter Weiss on many alienating levels [...]. All these criss-crossing planes thicken the reference at each moment and compel an activity from each member of the public [...]. [For example] in the Royal Shakespeare Theatre version [...] a stage manageress walked on to the stage, blew a whistle, and the madness immediately ended [...] now it is all over [...] of course, it’s just a play. So we begin to applaud. But unexpectedly the actors applaud us back, ironically. We react to this by a momentary hostility against them as individuals, and we stop clapping. I quote this as a typical alienation series, of which each incident forces us to readjust our position. (74-75)

Brook had been inspired by Artaud since reading *The Theatre and its Double* in 1959, at that time describing him as “this visionary, undoubtedly mad...” (Qtd. in Hunt 68). It was perhaps because of these characteristics that Brook declared Artaud more sensible than anyone else about theatre in our time (Hunt 68). This sentimentality is in keeping with 1960s popular art, particularly cinema but also earlier theatrical productions. The idea that madness was actually a more admirable or desirable state than “normal” or “sane” society was
reiterated in films such as *King of Hearts* (1966), theatrical productions such as Friedrich Durrenmatt’s *Die Physiker* (1962), novels such as *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest* (1962), and in one of the inmate’s lines in in Act I, Part 15 of *Marat/Sade*: “A mad animal / Man’s a mad animal” (32).

Stanley Kaufmann, one of a set of favorable critics for the New York premiere of the play, commented in an interview about the film version that Brook came close to perpetuating this idea in his production:

> There’s a danger in this, in using the mad people that way. I don’t think it’s in the play, but it is in Brook’s production. It is what I call the “Cuckoo’s Nest” fallacy. Which is the implication that the mad people are really the sane ones. I think that’s a cheap, sentimental bit of nonsense [...]. What saves it: first of all, the mad people are acting [...]. Here, in *Marat/Sade*, they are mad people who are acting sane people in a play-within-a-play. And the words they are given to speak – supposedly written by De Sade – have this twin-strata of one person’s utterance conveyed through the mouths and distortions of insane people. So that takes a little of the edge off the facile idea that the real lunatics are the people out in the street. The idea is dangerous: ideologically, intellectually. (Qtd. in Helfer 213)

At the same time, however, Brook understood that Artaud had legitimate and severe psychiatric problems, which is interesting
considering that Brook adopted Artaud’s theory for the staging of *Marat/Sade* and that Artaud himself once appeared onstage as Jean-Paul Marat. Later in his career, Brook also stated that he “never trusted Artaud’s idea on theatre one inch [...] If you try to take literally anything that he wrote, and you try to put it in practice, you’ll find that he was not a practitioner” (Qtd. in Moffitt 30). What Brook did find compelling and useful in Artaud was his insistence on a visceral, non-textual language of theatre: “Artaud, to me [...] was interesting, merely as the image of a challenge” (Qtd. in Moffitt 32). In the end, then, he aimed for the *Marat/Sade* to be a combination of Artaudian and Brechtian perspectives:

Herald [...] speaking in octosyllabics, was announcer and satirical commentator; there were signs and placards, and an expository singing chorus of four grotesques. On the other side, the production offered a frightening variety of Artaudian shocks, everything from hallucinations, paroxysms, executions, and whippings, to cries and moans, an infinity of sound variations, and a startling use of make-up. (Trewin 146)

Brook’s assistant during the casting of *Marat/Sade* – which became, essentially, an experiment to test Artaudian techniques and a manner in which to select possible actors for this different approach to the play – was Charles Marowitz. Marowitz had worked previously with Brook on the Royal Shakespeare Company production of *King Lear* and supposedly hand-selected the actors who would participate in the “research project” following auditions, dubbed “Theatre of Cruelty.”
This workshop was to be a marked break from traditional audition practices, and eventually rehearsal procedures, seen on the British stage. Hence, the Royal Shakespeare Company represents his first experimental group “before groups of this sort existed anywhere else in the world. It was group work, exercises, work on sound […]. That research work led eventually to Marat/Sade…” (Qtd. in Croyden 157).

Charles Marowitz recalls that in this highly experimental practice, it was necessary to develop completely new audition techniques. It may also be worthwhile to remember that although many of these techniques may seem commonplace in contemporary theatre auditions, these exercises were new and highly unusual for the typical British actor of the mid-1960s:

The actor was, first of all, asked to reel off “his two-minute set-piece in his own way, without suggestions or interference.” But then he was confronted by the Artaudian bombshell: he was given a new character and a new situation and asked to play these “still retaining the text of his original speech.” (Hunt 69)

After this initial stage, the actor received a piece of nonsense-text, and finally, “there were ‘discontinuous improvisation’ exercises […]. These collective hour-long auditions were, apparently, exhaustive enough to enable Marowitz confidently to select a group of actors with the qualities needed to create, in Artaud’s words, ‘a world ephemeral but true, a world in contact with reality’” (Qtd. in Hunt 69).
Despite Marowitz’s best efforts, Brook found more problems than solutions with the results of the auditions. This was partly because he realized, along with Artaud, that “the displacement of the supremacy of the word in drama inevitably led to the displacement of other elements which were generally accepted as the stuff of theatre” (Hunt 71). Marowitz’s collective, improvisational audition pieces often involved actors interacting through nonsensical words, or, individually, using sound and movement to react to reading a letter or receiving a phone-call producing some highly emotional reaction of the actor’s choosing.

The problems in these exercises were clear to Brook, who was looking for a theatrical form that did not rely on anecdote or emotional recall, but that could communicate directly to an audience through sound, gesture, and the visual relationship between actors and objects. In short, his intention was exactly the opposite of what Marowitz had asked the actors to do.

In an article that he wrote for Encore in 1960, Brook states: “If I had a drama school, the work would begin very far from character, situation, thought or behavior. We would not try to conjure up past anecdotes of our lives [...]. We would search deeper [...]. Then we would begin to study how to sit, how to stand, how to raise one arm” (Qtd. in Hunt 72). However, the exercises described by Marowitz began precisely from character, situation, thought and behavior.

Artaud had at least been ridiculous on a grand scale. In his Spurt of Blood (1927) human limbs fell on the stage and the wrist of God was bitten by a whore. [...] What would
the man who wanted theatre to swoop down like a plague have made of exercises that place us firmly in the world of apartments, before-dinner, drinks, clinging girlfriends looking for marriage [...]? (Hunt 72)

At the end of the audition process, Marowitz had selected twelve actors to hand over to Brook, who ended up speaking to only one of them: Glenda Jackson. Jackson would go on to play Charlotte Corday in the Royal Shakespeare Company production. Despite its shortcomings, the Marowitz-orchestrated audition had one major achievement: it taught the actors to utilize their entire bodies, apparently something with which they had no prior training.

Just as the audition process needed to change in order to come close to the desired results, Brook needed to approach the rehearsal process in a different manner, introducing techniques that went beyond and even preceded script analysis. “His rehearsals did not begin with the text but as a workshop on madness” (Hunt 85).

“My first approach was to have the actor do anything he could think of, in a wild way. The next step was by conversation and through improvisation to get each person to remember [...] one, two, three very close, intimate cases of madness, and as he began to talk about them he began to illustrate them. And so [...] he was then, as an actor, beginning to live them with his body; and in talking about four or five different cases, and then showing it, and then perhaps playing it out, he began to find that one of them corresponded more to himself than another. And in
this way he began to discover something of his own possible madness.” (Qtd. in Hunt 85-86)

In addition, Brook visited asylums in England and France in order to broaden his actors’ experience with his first-hand observations. Supplying the cast with books by de Sade, Artaud, and Ezra Pound, articles on madness, and paintings by Breughel, Goya and Hogarth, the director equipped his players with the hard research and inspirational images necessary to successfully portray deranged inmates.

This process, however carefully planned and executed, carried challenges and potential pitfalls of its own. In The Empty Space, Brook details the problems that his actors faced during rehearsal:

In the Marat/Sade, as kinetic images of insanity rose up and possessed the actors and as he yielded to them in improvisation, the others observed and criticized. So a true form was gradually detached from the standardized clichés that are part of an actor’s equipment for mad scenes. Then [...] he had to come up against a new problem. He may have used an image from observation, from life, but the play is about madness as it was in 1808 – before drugs, before treatment, when a different social attitude to the insane made them behave differently, and so on. For this, the actor had no outside model – he looked at faces in Goya not as models to imitate but as prods to encourage his confidence in following the stronger and more worrying of his inner impulses. (Brook 124)
Stanley Kaufmann points out similarities between the staging of the theatrical production and the film, quoting from Brook’s *The Shifting Point* and illustrating how focus was created for both versions of the play:

[Brook recalled] “When I directed the play, *Marat/Sade*, for the stage, I had not attempted to impose my own point of view on the work. On the contrary, I tried to make it as many-sided as I could. As a result, the spectators were continually free to choose, in each scene, and at every moment, the points which interested them most.”

Parenthetically, I think that’s baloney. No director in the theatre wants the audience to be free to look anywhere it chooses. In film, the camera decides where we look, but, in the theatre, no director wants you to be free either. (Qtd. in Helfer 210)

Kaufmann’s point is well taken, not only for the simple fact that lack of focus is indicative of lazy directing, but also because it is impossible to separate one’s own point of view, especially when interpreting another’s text for the stage. Brook was most certainly influenced by a variety of factors — including his early directing career in conservative Britain, the theories of Brecht and Artaud, and even his own viewing of the original Berlin production — leading to his subjective interpretation and vision of the play.

Adding to the strength of the production was not only the imaginative directing and acting, but also Brook’s staging and the musical score composed by Richard Peaslee. Sally Jacobs, responsible
for the scenery in *Marat/Sade*, carried Brook’s vision of the text into the design process: “What [Brook’s] method of working dictated was that there has to be a strong design decision taken early on [...] but it has to be the kind of design which allows for growth.” (Qtd. in Hunt 87)

Brook also hoped to exploit the set’s functional quality, having his actors experiment with different set pieces to see what they could do with them. He had each crawl inside the baths to see if he or she would fit, and how much of their bodies could be seen from the audience. The actors performed similar activities to visualize every possibility that the scenery offered. Marowitz characterized the set as one of the boldest seen during his lifetime:

> The vast bathhouse [...] had a bleached-out look; the walls dwarfed the human figures; here and there were pieces of pipe and water jets; the red and blue of France were the only colours. The center of the raked stage comprised a complete circle of triangular duckboards, hinged on the outer edge so that they could be lifted to enable the inmates to get down into the baths underneath. (Hunt 87)

As for Peaslee’s contribution to the project, he began working with Brook for the “Theatre of Cruelty” workshop, without ever having heard of either Brook or Artaud. However, he enjoyed *The Spurt of Blood* because “it only took five or ten minutes” (Qtd. in Helfer 218). Peaslee found that because of Brook’s experimental and often spontaneous acting exercises, the music that would eventually end up in *Marat/Sade* would have to remain relatively consistent:
“Otherwise, some actors, and especially dancers, would really be thrown if things change from one night to the next. A little story: In the Marat/Sade, we had a drummer who was a bit psychotic, and the on-stage atmosphere of the insane asylum didn’t help him any. When we were doing the show in New York, one night in the middle of the show – I forgot who was speaking – he took his wig off and threw it down on the stage and yelled: ‘Three cheers for Dixie!’ He’d periodically do things like that. We couldn’t predict what was going to happen. I wanted to get rid of him, but Peter said: ‘Oh, that’s great!’ He wasn’t interested in predictable slick performances all the time.” (Qtd. in Helfer 219)

Despite Peaslee’s tongue-in-cheek remarks, his working relationship with Brook was largely open and affable, citing his appreciation for Brook’s approach to theatre: “I didn’t know what ‘my’ approach would have been, but I liked this top-to-bottom versatility [...]. I also like very much anything political, like the Marat/Sade” (Qtd. in Helfer 220). He also comments on the fact that Brook was open to learn from anyone and anything, regardless of whether or not it was his original idea:

“I learned a lot just by listening to him. One day when I was with him on Marat/Sade [...] he said: ‘Listen to this!’ And he took out a funnel and dragged it along a grating in the floor. It sounded like a rachet [sic] on the guillotine! So we used it! And some chains. At first, I
was kind of angry, because I hadn’t thought of it. But there was never any jealousy with him. If it was a good idea, no matter who’d thought of it, he’d use it. Anything that would make for a better production.” (Qtd. in Helfer 223)

As mentioned above, Peaslee attempted to stay as consistent as possible in his score, and with lyrics composed by Peter Weiss and translated by Adrian Mitchell, by the time the Royal Shakespeare Company was in rehearsal a good portion of the music was already written.

“But things would happen in rehearsal. For instance, at one point there was no song for Charlotte Corday. So Brook said: ‘It would be nice to have a little waltz here.’ Adrian wrote a lyric, which he said was based on The Blue Danube. Well, I wanted to have something ready for rehearsal next morning. So I did something just for blocking purposes in the scene. And I wrote a really banal little tune. Well, those things tend to stay in a show! Whereas the things you really like get thrown out.” (Qtd. in Helfer 220)

The orchestra itself contained few instruments that would be considered out of the ordinary, as the script called for five players: “trumpet, drums, guitar. That’s what Peter Weiss asked for. We didn’t use any taped music or hidden sources. Peter Brook likes live music; you hear what you see” (Qtd. in Helfer 220).
The Royal Shakespeare Company’s hours of intense preparation apparently paid off. Brook’s initial response to the Berlin production of Marat/Sade, the Theatre of Cruelty Workshop, the research and improvisation developed during the rehearsal process, and the collaborators’ work not only surprised and invigorated the company, but also would make a striking entrance once onstage in front of a live audience.
CHAPTER III: MARAT/SADE’S FIRST VISIT

Unsurprisingly, the play became an immediate phenomenon in London following its premiere on August 20, 1964. Although some had reservations about the play, critics were largely enthusiastic. This type of theatre was nearly unheard of on the London stage at this time, and the typical Royal Shakespeare Company patron had never seen anything quite like it. On August 23rd, the Sunday Telegraph’s Alan Brien offered a highly detailed description of the setting for his readers:

A towering windowless silo walled with tiny bricks and booby-trapped with sunken pits. Among the inmates with their padded clothes and sunken faces, the devil-worshipping priests and burned-out whores, the lecherous ex-aristos and the lethargic ex-rebels, the childish voluptuaries and the aged virgins, move the black-eyed nuns and the muscle-bound warders (Qtd. in Trewin 147).

Bernard Levin of The Daily Mail wrote: “It is without doubt one of the half-dozen most amazing achievements in mise-en-scene that the English theatre has seen in my lifetime” (Qtd. in Hunt 89). The Times described it as “the most ambitious example of the theatre of cruelty yet to appear”; and B.A. Young of the Financial Times commented on Brook’s “fantastic richness of kinky invention” (Qtd. in Hunt 89). Bamber Gasciogne of the Observer went into further detail about the scenery and costumes:

The lunatics in their shapeless white tunics and strait-jackets make a bustle and swirl somewhere between Breughel
and Daumier. Probably the most stunning scene of all is a
guillotine sequence, complete with metallic raspings,
buckets of paint (red and blue), and other techniques which
seemed self-conscious and false in the Theatre of Cruelty
isolation at Lamda (Qtd. in Trewin 147).

Clearly, what most critics remembered about the London production
was the play’s visual impact, and its refusal to leave the audience
relieved or placated in any manner; if Brook could make audiences
leave the theatre with their senses and intelligence disturbed, then
he felt his production had succeeded.

Other London critics offered mixed reviews. Some were
dissatisfied with the pace and the disproportionate time between the
two acts (Act I ran for eighty-five minutes, while Act II lasted only
thirty minutes). “Other critics found the debates too long. John
Gross complained that Revill’s (Marat) and Magee’s (Sade) speeches
were ‘swamped by the general turbulence’” (Qtd. in Helfer 134). Frank
Kermode of The Times “remembered the debates as moments when, ‘the
brilliantly sustained succession of theatrical coups lapsed with awful
doctrine deliberation into the boring conversation of the
principals and tedium became almost a novel theatrical event’” (Qtd.
in Helfer 134). In the same review, however, he also commented that
the impact of the production’s visceral aspects were enormous.

Finally, Stephen Vinaver, in Encore, wrote of Brook transforming
the play into “a theatrical image of violence. The naked forces at
play among the inmates performing seem suddenly the focal point of the
play and its justification. The great thing is that the company
doesn’t seem to ‘play’ insanity: in this production after the first few minutes, insanity takes hold and becomes the norm” (Qtd. in Hunt 89).

**Song and Mime of Marat/Sade’s Arrival in New York**

The production had no less of a shocking and invigorating effect at the American premiere on December 27, 1965. Albert Hunt and Geoffrey Reeves vividly recounted the first impression made by the actors’ appearance at curtain:

> The mad inmates made a striking entrance [...] they represented, in their off-white straitjackets, a terrifyingly convincing bedlam, partly through make-up [...] and partly through the most carefully sustained delineation of insanity on the part of all the actors: one talked to herself with her hands held aloft, another stared fiercely at the audience, another suffered involuntary spasms, another continually slavered from mouth to chin, another played with an imaginary child. It looked like a chamber of horrors. (Hunt 88)

This review seems in keeping with what audiences at the time desired. *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest* had graced the stage at the Royal Theatre and Court Theatre in 1963, and Friedrich Durrenmatt’s *Romulus der Grosse* premiered in New York on January 11, 1962, paving the way for the type of experience that *Marat/Sade* provided two years later.¹ Productions such as these, often debuting off- or off-off Broadway,

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¹ Interestingly, the critical reviews for *Romulus der Grosse* often remarked how the issues addressed in this play were even more topical than in 1949, the year of its debut in Zurich.
also opened the door for less expensive ticket prices and hence, younger New York natives. It would make sense, then, for this crowd to respond enthusiastically to the active and sometimes confrontational performances that the Royal Shakespeare Company presented.

Stanley Kauffmann of the *New York Times* commented that *Marat/Sade* even had the potential to further push traditional boundaries ascribed to the Broadway stage: “The drama moves out of even unconventional expectation – to thrust, discover, astound” (Kauffmann 61). Although this reviewer concentrated mainly on Weiss’ contribution in the text itself (and criticized it for its ambiguous message), other critics pointed to Brook’s direction and staging as the key to its success in the United States: “[Brook’s] brilliant conception is largely responsible for the sensation created by the piece (its first, didactic, presentation by a German company was much more placidly received)” (Drutman 61).

Other critics were less impressed with the production, focusing on its ambiguous ending and the fact that the assault of grotesque, often unflattering images tended to override the message buried within the text. Walter Kerr of the *New York Herald Tribune* reacted sarcastically, “out of apparent chaos ‘some seeds may have entered into you’. [...] A seed that has now entered into me is the seed of rebellion against the substitution of theatrical production for dramatic structure” (214).

John McClain of the *Journal American* offered an even more biting spin on Brook’s direction:
Never in the history of the local theatre have so many rancid, deplorable and malformed souls been assembled on a single stage [...]. If this isn’t unattractive enough, there are moments when tasteless lyrics are accompanied by blatant action. (McClain 214)

In this case, then, Brook’s intentions were fulfilled, since he himself had stated from the beginning that he had no time for traditional “prettified or melodramatic” stage madness (Trewin 145). In fact, Brook would later claim that he found nothing romantic about the notion of insanity:

“The idea that this is a form of genius, and it liberates great areas of inner freedom, is just not true. On the other hand, mentally sick people can have momentary and quite extraordinary insights, but basically they live through endlessly tragic experiences.” (Qtd. in Moffitt 31)

In his review, John McClain also added, ironically:

It beats me that either the author, Peter Weiss, or Mr. Merrick should believe that a great many people living in a world unsettled by the threat of war and strikes and social unrest are interested in spending an evening observing a group of drooling, twitching and utterly pathetic lunatics performing a play-within-a-play which hashes up the dreary ingredients of the French Revolution. (McClain 214)

These reactions, however strong or insightful and whether positive or negative, were consistent in both the London and New York premieres. It is more significant for my purposes to explicate the
differences between the critical reviews and hence, draw out possible
audience reactions. For instance, some New York critics pointed not
only to the audience’s emotional response to the actors’
characterizations, but also to the audience’s direct participation in
the play. Wilfred Sheed of *Commonweal* remarked:

The audience gradually becomes implicated in this
confusion. The night I was there people began to applaud
their favourite ideas, only to waver when they realized
that the avowed lunatics on the stage were clapping even
louder [...]. The uncertainty reached a screaming
crescendo at the end when the lunatics [...] solemnly
applauded the audience: de Sade and Weiss have obliterated
all distinctions – the monkeys are outside the bars, the
visitors inside. (Qtd. in Hunt 91)

The *New York World-Telegram*’s Norman Nadel also picked up on audience
response to the production: “[The audience was] stunned and silent
right to the final mad moments, then [the performance stirred] it to
grand applause” (Nadel 215).

Another factor related to the different receptions was casting:
Ian Richardson replaced Clive Revill as Jean-Paul Marat, thereby
adding more weight to this crucial character. “He presented the
arguments with much more conviction and redressed some of the
imbalance that had been evident in the first production” (Hunt 90).

The biggest difference, however, had less to do with the amount
of audience involvement or casting than with larger sociopolitical
questions. Few, if any, London critics discussed the political
implications raised during the production. However, in New York of January 1966, something unexpected happened:

Brook once said that in theatre there was always a time when a combination of circumstances made a production right. This combination of circumstances arose with The Marat/Sade when it went to New York. [...] What made the audience particularly responsive was the growing unease about the Vietnam War. The audiences applied references about Napoleon and the wars after the French Revolution to the Vietnam War. The play, Brook said, struck a nerve in a way it never had in London (Hunt 90).

A veteran of pre-war American political theatre, Harold Clurman, commented:

"After Roux has shouted 'Once and for all the idea of glorious victories won by the glorious army must be wiped out. Neither side is glorious' - with the admonition 'This is outright pacifism. At this very moment our soldiers are laying down their lives for the freedom of the world and of our world,' the audience applauds (and how delighted many of us are that it does) in recognition of the attack upon a contemporary parallel. [...] Marat/Sade converts all our political and intellectual concern into display" (Qtd. in Hunt 91).

Further into his review, Normal Nadel also explicated this factor:
[The Marat/Sade] adds a new and harrowing dimension to reality [...]. I say reality, fully expecting a debates from those who will see it as the very antithesis of life – a caricature, a masquerade, a grotesque. Yet it is the precise reality that most of us turn away from, or pretend to ignore, because it is more painfully real than we can stand for unlimited time, if for any time at all. (215)

Nadel also took the Marquis de Sade’s line, “The only reality is in the imagination,” literally, suggesting that the very fact of the asylum setting, the inmate actors, and the period of 1808 France reflects a more modern reality: “We in the audience smile bitterly at the myth of that enlightenment in the fact of history to this moment” (215). He also defends the apparent putrescence of the production as essential to its effectiveness on spectators and in underscoring its meaning:

If "Marat/Sade" [...] would be nothing but violence, madness and human excess, no matter how brilliantly executed, it would be merely a horror show. Actually, it is far more – a searching, burning and merciless disemboweling of nature – or, more precisely, of nature’s monumental indifference in the presence of human wrongs and human sufferings. (215)

Other critics pointed out that, in addition to advancing a trend of long-titled plays, "it was one of the most talked-about international works of theatre in the mid-1960s. Expressing the
sentiments about freedom of young people in much of the world...the people are sort of not quite free” (Kurlansky 69).

Brook has stated explicitly, and probably because of the marked difference in audience response, that the Marat/Sade was more exciting and rewarding to play in the United States than in London, where typically the reception was based upon the effectiveness of its theatricality. By contrast, “The American audience reacted to Marat/Sade much more directly, they accepted and believed the propositions that man is greedy and murderous, a potential lunatic. They were caught and held by the material of the drama...” (Brook 26).

Finally, Alfred Hunt recalls:

Twenty-five years on, with the Gulf War replacing the Vietnam War as the current American Nightmare, I find the reaction of the American critics to the New York production enthralling. Virtually all of them discuss [...] the ferment of ideas raised by the play [...]. The Marat/Sade, in conclusion, showed us a society in which the violence was “incapable of being contained.” It offered no solutions, but it confronted us “with an inescapable sense of the violence inside ourselves, and the links between this and a murderous society.” (Qtd. in Hunt 92)

Conversations Concerning Life and Death

At this point I would like to turn my attention to how New Historicism sheds light onto the Marat/Sade phenomenon. I find the appropriateness of both New Historicism and cultural materialism, its British equivalent, twofold. This study has, after all, focused on
the premiere of _Marat/Sade_ in both Broadway and in London.
Additionally, the openly Marxist and political ideologies of cultural
materialism – especially apparent in the writings of Raymond Williams
– is significant when one recalls Weiss’ affinity for Marxism and his
Brechtian theory that art should actuate social change. Similarly,
cultural materialism exists under the assumption that literature can
serve as a means of social change (mainly, debunking the social and
political myths created by the bourgeoisie). New Historicism is not
necessarily Socialist in its scope, but nevertheless asks readers to
recognize that they cannot escape their cultural surroundings when
interpreting an art object.

More importantly, Stephen Greenblatt’s arguments regarding the
position of art within society and politics are useful in
comprehending New Historicism’s relation to the play. The basic
assumption here is that art is both a product and a producer in
society: in other words, we should not conceive of art as a distinct
realm from its sociopolitical background, and vice versa; art
simultaneously reflects and alters the society from which it emerges.
Similarly, critics’ personal biases inform their interpretations of
art.

Considerations such as those that Tony Bennett proposes in “Texts
in History” add insight to the ways in which Marxist theory builds
upon Peter Weiss’s own penchant towards socialism, and most
importantly reminds us that “neither text nor context are conceivable
as entities separable from one another” (Bennett 72). Essentially,
Bennett’s argument is that Marxist theory
Cannot be adequately developed if predicated on the assumption [...] that the relations between literary texts, other ideological phenomena and broader social and political processes can be determined, specified for all time, by referring such texts to the conditions of production obtaining at the moment of their origin.

(Bennett 69)

This should not suggest that we entirely disregard this aspect — origins of production are certainly significant in terms of placing literary works in context — but he does ask Marxist theory to take into consideration the relations between the texts’ origins and other social, political, and literary developments.

Placing certain literary texts within Bennett’s argument seems useful in terms of recalling that historical and cultural moments are not frozen in time. Yes, it is important to view art and literature within their historical contexts, but once the moment of production has been completed, it is gone and other factors begin to leave impressions upon the work. The Marat/Sade, for example, may have been a historically and politically significant play in its earliest conceptual stage circa 1964, but was not the play equally, and simultaneously differently, relevant for London audiences under Peter Brook’s direction? Moreover, the play garnered deeper, and markedly different, social and political significance for the play’s New York audiences, seated as they were amidst an uncertain political atmosphere. As an art object in general, according to New Historicism, the Brook staging of Marat/Sade is a social product that
reflected and responded to the American historical moment of the mid-1960s.

Returning to “Towards a Poetics of Culture” for a moment, I would like to cite an interesting parallel in *Marat/Sade* to a segment of Greenblatt’s argument in which he discusses the cult surrounding President Ronald Reagan and his apparent inability to remove his Hollywood persona from his political one. In Chapter I, I discussed the iconographic status Jean-Paul Marat and the Marquis de Sade; with Greenblatt’s argument in mind, it is possible that these two figures’ cultural statuses added to the success of *Marat/Sade*, as the historical characters were already products before the theatrical characters were.

Of course, at the time that he wrote the essay, Stephen Greenblatt could not have possibly predicted that yet another product – equally immersed in the popular/celebrity world, although in a very different fashion – would emerge from the Reagan era: George H.W. and W. Bush. Indeed, the “fantasmatics” have not died with Reagan at all: he is still quite a lucrative product and his legacy lives on, constituting an entire franchise that has persisted for over a decade, just as the Marquis de Sade’s legacy (perhaps more so than Jean-Paul Marat) has persisted.

Another fascinating aspect of this essay is Greenblatt’s discussion of the Yosemite National Park. The idea of having to follow stricter rules when entering the “wilderness” is completely antithetical to the great majority of modernist writers and thinkers. For modernists the wilderness was pure and preferable because of its
very nature — untamed, untouched by men, free, even chaotic; think of Peter Brook’s rehearsal process and his aim to free his actors of preconceived habits, and Weiss’ own wild and untamed inmates as his dramatis personae. Today, however, we must abide by enforcements, “an intensification that serves as the condition of an escape from the asphalt” (Greenblatt 9).

Are Americans perhaps willing to accept these terms because of some perceived need for the feeling and illusion of security? If this is the case, then there is also a compelling, albeit subdued, argument that since art and society cannot satisfyingly function without each other, then Americans will not accept works of art that they consider dangerous. As the theatrical stage is already unsafe territory by the nature of its live-ness, the implication is that audiences will reject plays that impede upon their real or imagined security. If our reaction is producing theatre that is tame, censored and restrained, then we prove Greenblatt’s argument: we cannot stand outside of that capitalist system and simultaneously reflect and contribute to a paranoid sociopolitical atmosphere. Why, then, was the play so satisfying for Brook and the cast of Marat/Sade in New York City? What contributed to the Broadway critics’ visceral responses, both positive and negative, to political and ideological questions raised in the play?

The answer may lie in the fact that the Marat/Sade inherently underscored sensitive sociopolitical issues for Americans in 1965. The word “revolution” is repeated throughout almost all of the play, not only because the inmates’ characters “live” in terrifying and
corrupt times, but because the inmates themselves literally live in Coulmier’s corrupt institution. At the same time that it responded to the inmates’ living situation, the play easily could have added another level of meaning for New Yorkers, during a stressed and unstable time, as the United States was already involved with conflicts in Vietnam. The various New York reviews especially add weight to this point: almost all of the critics cited instances in which they felt outraged or uncomfortable, but several of them viewed the play in a positive light.

At the time of the play’s premiere in New York, when political considerations caused mixed and often negative reactions to radical views or speech, the Marquis de Sade’s imprisonment for his subversive writings takes on greater significance, as the Herald points up in the introduction:

The former Marquis Monsieur de Sade / whose books were banned his essays barred / while he’s been persecuted and reviled / thrown into jail and for some years exiled. (8)

Given the conflict in Vietnam, many of the lines in Marat/Sade had the potential to add further meanings to New Yorkers, as in Marat’s speech to Simonne in Part 8 of Act I:

And what’s a bath full of blood / compared to the bloodbaths still to come / Once we thought a few hundred corpses would be enough / then we saw thousands were still too few / and today we can’t even count all the dead / Are there any of our enemies left anywhere? (15)
In Act I, Part 10, the character Charlotte Corday also comments on the violence and bloody state of Paris:

The sun can hardly pierce the haze / not a haze made out of rain and fog / but steaming thick and hot / like the mist in a slaughterhouse / Why are they howling / What are they dragging through the streets [...] Why do the children scream / What are those heaps they fight over / those heaps with eyes and mouths / What kind of town is this / hacked buttocks lying in the street. (20)

The following lines from Part 12 of Act I are mainly a retort to the ideas set forth by Marat. However, its allusion to greed, power lust, and more advanced means of oppression was possibly more poignant for Americans than for Britons:

Haven’t we always beaten down those weaker than ourselves / Haven’t we torn at their throats with continuous villainy and lust / Haven’t we experimented in our laboratories / before applying the final solution. (24)

Further, Sade’s reflection on the cold, calculated methods of modern warfare, stated later in this same speech, would have resonated deeply with Americans in 1965:

We condemn to death without emotion / and there’s no singular personal death to be had / only an anonymous cheapened death / which we could dole out to entire nations / on a mathematical basis / until the time comes / for all life / to be extinguished. (26)
In Act I, Part 18, Sade also addresses the idea of patriotism and how it relates to the political system of France; unsurprisingly, this system did not seem much different to the American one existing in the United States in 1965:

My patriotism’s bigger than yours / They’re all ready to die for the honour of France / Radical or moderate / they’re all after the taste of blood / The luke-warm liberals and the angry radicals / all believe in the greatness of France / Marat / can’t you see this patriotism is lunacy. (40)

In response to this statement, Coulmier interrupts with, “[calling over them with raised forefinger] Take care.”

Part 19 of Act I contains perhaps the most culturally relevant argument for an American audience. The following discourse between Coulmier and Jacques Roux relates to the idea of patriotism, and further addresses the paranoia, uncertainty and fear of a wartime government and military:

Roux: We demand that everyone should do all they can / to put an end to war / This damned war / which is run for the benefit of profiteers / and leads only to more wars / We demand that the people who started the war should pay the cost of it / Once and for all / the idea of glorious victories / won by the glorious army / must be wiped out / Neither side is glorious / On either side they’re just frightened men messing their pants / and they all want the
same thing / Not to lie under the earth / but to talk upon it / without crutches

Coulmier: This is outright pacifism / At this very moment our soldiers are laying down their lives / for the freedom of the world and for our freedom [turning violently to Sade] This scene was cut. (44-45)

In what was quite probably a familiar scene to any New York audience member aware of the penalties for dissent during this period, the stage directions call for Roux to be “overpowered by the two Nurses and dragged off,” and then “strapped to a bench.” In the Brook production, the actor playing Roux is also beaten by the Nurses in order to quiet him. To understand the relevance of this particular scene, one need simply to recall the response that active Civil Rights Movement leaders and supporters met during marches and non-violent protests.

Further, Coulmier’s speech during the Epilogue, Part 33 of Act II, is blatant in its hypocrisy. Given the historical context of the New York premiere, it would be difficult not to respond to his ironic ending:

Let’s close the history book and then / return to eighteen-eight the present day / of which though not unclouded we may say / it promises that mankind soon will cease / to fear the storms of war the squalls of peace / For today we live in far different times / We have no oppressors no violent crimes / and although we’re at war anyone can see / it can only end in victory. (99)
To expand on the uncertain and sometimes violent atmosphere of mid-1960s United States, I would like to address one of Judith Lowder Newton’s points in “History as Usual? Feminism and the ‘New Historicism.’” Although she merely hints at the concept of the “power of moral surveillance,” this aspect could be significant in explaining the Brook production’s reception. For the most part, New Historicism is analyzed in either historical or sociopolitical terms, but rarely with moral considerations in mind. Different conceptions of moral action are implied in the various characters’ dialogue in Marat/Sade, as early as the Herald’s introduction at the beginning of the play:

...The former priest Jacques Roux / Ally of Marat’s revolution but / unfortunately the censor’s cut / most of his rabble-rousing theme / Our moral guardians found it too extreme. (7)

At this point, the character Roux begins to say “Liberty,” but Coulmier cuts him off threateningly. Coulmier, in many respects, represents the hypocrisy inherent in this overall corrupt French society, to which the audience of 1965 easily might have responded:

...It’s been proved over and over again / that the poor need the spiritual comfort of the priests / There’s no question of anyone being oppressed / Quite on the contrary everything’s done to relieve suffering. (29)

This statement, of course, stands in direct contrast to the staging of Brook’s production. The bathhouse’s enormous, bleached-out walls, exposed pipes and “instruments for mental and physical hygiene,” as Coulmier states in Part 2, are far from relieving or comforting. In
part 27 of Act II, Coulmier even threatens censorship when Sade’s play critiques Coulmier and the mental institution too severely: “If you use any more of these slanderous passages / we agreed to cut / I will stop your play” (78).

Moreover, wartime generally seems to raise ethical questions. For instance, World War II prompted historians and scientists to question the necessity of using the atomic bomb in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and the validity of fire-bombing cities such as Dresden. The Vietnam War raised questions about attacks on civilian homes and towns, and the Iraq War has brought up issues about ethical treatment of prisoners of war. For this reason, I believe that the Marquis de Sade’s speech during the section “Monsieur de Sade is Whipped” could have been relevant for an audience on the brink of full-scale war:

In a criminal society / I dug the criminal out of myself / so I could understand him and so understand / the times we live in / My imaginary giants committed desecrations and tortures [...] But then I saw / when I sat in the courtroom myself / not as I had been before the accused / but as a judge / I couldn’t bring myself / to deliver the prisoners to the hangman / I did all I could to release them or let them escape / I saw I wasn’t capable of murder / although murder / was the final proof of my existence / and now / the very thought of it / horrifies me / In September when I saw / the official sacking of the Carmelite Convent / I had to bend over in the courtyard / and vomit / as I saw my own prophecies coming true [...] And then in the next few
months / as the tumbrels ran regularly to the scaffolds / and the blade dropped and was winched up / and dropped again / all the meaning drained out of this revenge. (48-49)

In this passage, despite Sade’s insistence on isolating himself from any specific political ideology, his character makes a strong moral judgment on Marat and the other Revolutionaries, rejecting the mass murder and conception of revenge that they prescribe.

Finally, I would like to address Stephen Greenblatt’s conclusion in “Towards a Poetics of Culture”: “We need to develop terms to describe the ways in which material...is transferred from one discursive sphere to another and becomes aesthetic property” (Greenblatt 11). One could argue that this is exactly what Peter Weiss and, later, Peter Brook did with the Marat/Sade, especially considering the many layers of alterations and overlapping histories involved between the play’s writing and its Royal Shakespeare Company debut in London 1964. In this case, the play serves as a prime example of interpretative art and aesthetics, of “making certain things one’s own.” Marat/Sade could be considered just as much Brook’s play as Weiss’, and similarly, just as much an American production as a British one.

**Continuation of the Conversation: Contemporary Relevance**

In order for this New Historicist reading to be complete, I am obligated to admit my subjective reading of Marat/Sade. It probably goes without saying at this point that this researcher, writing in the winter and spring of 2006, is not impressed with the current handling
of United States foreign policy. Especially due to the United States’ decision to declare war on Iraq three years ago, certain aspects of Marat/Sade spoke to me on a deep level. Mainly, I was impressed with its treatment of revolution, mass executions and war, the abuse of inmates and prisoners, and how succinctly the play seemed to reflect contemporary world events in general.

I first read the play sometime in April of 2004, a time in which I felt disconnected from world events. Still, nothing could have prepared me for what I saw plastered on every news website later that month: a dark-skinned, hooded figure wearing a black robe stood on what appeared to be a box or crate, wires dangling from his fingertips and from between his legs. At first I was not sure whether this was a cruel hoax or some sort of bizarre anti-war propaganda, but as I read the article accompanying the photograph, I understood that this was no joke. It was only one of a series of the Abu Ghraib prison-abuse photographs.

By 2006, the issue of foreign prisoner treatment seemed to have all but disappeared, but the images and emotions that they stirred stayed with me, and they were one of many recent events on my mind as I poured over the pages of Peter Weiss’ play. The Iraq War, 9/11, the sobering news coming from Abu Ghraib, Guantanamo and Bagram, the USA PATRIOT Act, modern methods of treating mental illness, the upcoming election, the 2000 election – all were thrown into sharp focus when reading Marat/Sade.

Reflecting back on it, many of the lines and passages that might have seemed relevant or sensitive for an American audience during the
mid-1960s had a similar effect on me in 2004. The only difference might be that instead of mass-media coverage of tortures and destruction yet to come, the United States was already a year into the War on Terror, the release of the abuse photos were hot off the press, I had immediate access to any and nearly all of my information, and there was no sign of the war stopping any time soon.

Moreover, my initial reactions to the play do not seem markedly different from those detailed after the New York premiere in 1965, besides how the production looked in my mind (this was, of course, before I even knew of Peter Brook’s production and how influential this vision and staging of the play would have on more recent productions). In Part 24 of Act I, the Four Singers touched a personal chord with their remark on the ruling class and the mass executions occurring during post-revolutionary France: "What has gone wrong with / the men who are ruling / I’d like to know who / they think they are fooling / They told us that torture was over and gone / but everyone knows the same torture goes on" (58).

However, the citation from the play that produced the most intense emotional response was, unsurprisingly, one of the Marquis de Sade’s, in Act I, Part 12. Having seen the film Quills and knowing some background information about Sade prior to reading the play, I knew this figure’s abhorrence for being pigeon-holed into one particular political group. Nevertheless, he was also a libertine, and occasionally, somewhat flippantly, commented on human nature’s innate pension for violence and deviance. To me, it was no surprise that Weiss had put into this character’s mouth an idea that any human
being — whether living in Revolutionary France, Vietnam War-era United States, or 2006 United States — could comprehend: the human experience has been, at least on a global scale, that the poor stay poor, the rich stay rich, and year after year we trade off in killing each other on grand scales. The only difference is that the methods today are more technologically advanced, thorough, and expeditious.

Curious about how many Iraqis had been killed during the invasion and occupation, I took the liberty of checking the grimly-named website “Iraqi Body Count Project”: as of March 2006, supposedly a minimum of 33,489 civilians were reported killed by military intervention in Iraq. They estimate the maximum number at 37,589. Since the beginning of 2003, 2,306 United States soldiers have died in Iraq, and 16,653 have been wounded, according to the website Iraq Coalition Casualty Count (http://icasualties.org/oif/).

We condemn to death without emotion / and there’s no singular personal death to be had / only an anonymous cheapened death / which we could dole out to entire nations / on a mathematical basis / until the time comes / for all life / to be extinguished. (26)

It is almost easier to ask myself how I could not recall the numbers dead in Iraq, on all sides, after reading this passage.

Let me now move on to the rhetoric of patriotism. I could probably fill another eighty pages documenting the word’s usage in the media and from the Bush Administration from 2000 to 2006. After 9/11,
I noticed something strange happening in North Adams, Massachusetts\textsuperscript{2} – incidentally, a bastion of conservatism for the most part. American flags were absolutely everywhere. There was neither house nor car, neither office nor pickup truck bed that was not flying an American flag immediately after the attacks.

Anyone who did not display their patriotism, whether in front of their houses, in pin form on shirt lapels, or in their dormitory room window, was criticized. Anyone who spoke out against the Iraq War under these stressed and trying times, anyone who even whispered the words, "I don’t think war will solve any of this," was the opposite of a patriot: a dissenter, or synonymously, a traitor, or synonymously, a terrorist.\textsuperscript{3}

As mentioned in the previous chapter, Sade addresses patriotism in Act I, Part 18. When I first read this, I was dumbfounded; I honestly could not believe that something a German playwright wrote forty years ago could be nearly identical to post-9/11 political

\textsuperscript{2} The location of my undergraduate alma mater, Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts, and a culmination of three volatile factors: the conservatism of primarily white, working-class North Adams natives, the socially and racially mixed college student population, and the perceived high-culture elites who work for or patronize Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art (MASS MoCA). North Adams natives openly despise the latter two groups, so as a college student and employee of MASS MoCA, after 9/11 I often stifled my true opinions about conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq.

\textsuperscript{3} "Every nation in every region now has a decision to make. Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists." – George W. Bush, Sept. 20, 2001

"Administration officials have lashed out at Democrats who have accused the administration of manipulating intelligence to justify the war in Iraq. Bush has suggested that critics are hurting the war effort, telling U.S. troops in Alaska on Monday that critics ‘are sending mixed signals to our troops and the enemy. And that’s irresponsible.’" – Glenn Kessler, Washington Post, Nov. 16, 2005
rhetoric: “My patriotism’s bigger than yours / Radical or moderate /
they’re all after the taste of blood / Can’t you see this patriotism
is lunacy” (40). In other words, the type of patriotism that Marat
calls for is lunacy. I see little, if any, difference between the
type of patriotism Marat wants and what has come to fall under the
definition of “patriotism” in the United States of 2006.4

Additionally, under the category of patriotism falls the issue of
what to do with all of our troops overseas. The main question seems
to be, “Is it even possible to support the troops without also
supporting the war?” In the play, Coulmier suggests that it is not,
as evidenced in his debate with Jacques Roux:

Roux: On either side they’re just frightened men messing
their pants / and they all want the same thing / Not to lie
under the earth / but to talk upon it / without crutches

Coulmier: This is outright pacifism / At this very moment
our soldiers are laying down their lives / for the freedom
of the world and for our freedom [turning violently to
Sade] This scene was cut. (45)

The idea of favoring patriotism over pacifism is still a
sensitive issue in 2006, just as it was in 1965. Conservatives argue

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4 “Our nation is somewhat sad, but we’re angry. There’s a certain level of
blood lust, but we won’t let it drive our reaction. We’re steady, clear-eyed
and patient, but pretty soon we’ll have to start displaying scalps.” – George
W. Bush, Nov. 11, 2005

“Some observers look at the job ahead and adopt a self-defeating pessimism.
It is not justified. With every random bombing, with every funeral of a
child, it becomes more clear that the extremists are not patriots or
resistance fighters – they’re murderers at war with the Iraqi people
themselves.” – George W. Bush, Nov. 11, 2005
that those who criticize the president and the war might as well personally murder their own sons and daughters. Liberals retort by claiming that there is a way to support the troops while simultaneously opposing the war: by demanding that the troops be brought back to American soil. Because of this passionately-debated issue, it is unsurprising that this argument between Coulmier and Roux was one of the touchiest segments of the play and caused the biggest and most emotionally-charged reaction in the mid-1960s. Further, since the issue has yet to be resolved, I believe that the reaction today would be similar.

I would even argue that this reaction is welcome, since Peter Weiss’ aim from the beginning was for his audience to connect with and take action on the atrocities surrounding them. As a Marxist and admirer of Brecht, Weiss set up the play in order to produce the biggest reactions and raise the most challenging questions possible. We see the differences in perspective through the various critical reviews from 1964 London and 1965 New York. Further, because the passages cited throughout this study are so close to home for post-9/11 Americans, I suspect that the play would produce immediate reactions from both liberal and conservative audience members.
CHAPTER IV: CONCLUSION

Throughout this study I have highlighted the ways in which Marat/Sade, particularly the 1965 Royal Shakespeare Company production, embodies themes that resonated with American audiences. A majority of the critical reviews from London hailed Peter Brook’s vision as a necessary departure from typical English productions up to that time, but none interpreted the play as a reflection of the political climate in Britain of 1964. By contrast, New York critics suggested that the ideas put forth in the play stirred strong emotional responses, and some attributed those responses directly to political concerns. The difference in critical reception largely relates to the casting change for the character Marat and America’s involvement in Vietnam. Further, from examining the critical reviews and reading lines from the play alongside contemporary sociopolitical issues, we can clearly see that Marat/Sade continues its relevancy.

The ways in which Peter Brook and his cast interpreted the play underlined the stress and uncertainty of 1965 America, causing a more satisfying and exciting reaction for the cast and director, in addition to a deeper connection to the play’s themes for the New York audience. Moreover, due to the fact that the United States of 2006 faces somewhat similar historic and political situations as it did in the Vietnam era, the play’s relevance can persist for contemporary audiences.

In terms of suggesting areas for further research, admittedly I am not completely qualified to do this. Having virtually no access to German sources, areas in which I would recommend further development
may be available within German theatre studies. However, as an American theatre scholar, I can make some suggestions based on the English sources that I consulted.

In regard to Peter Weiss, possibly the most enlightening information has come through interviews. Granted, it is usually prudent to take any artists’ own words with a grain of salt, but we at least get a glimpse of their overall aesthetic and their intentions for the particular work in question. The scholarly research devoted to Peter Weiss usually concentrates on his placement within the Avant-garde tradition, but perhaps more American scholars can discuss his politics, especially his place within Marxism.

As far as Peter Brook is concerned, he is fortunately willing and pleased to discuss his own work, as his numerous interviews and autobiographical texts show. Therefore, it is difficult to say where further developments can be made; almost anything and everything that one could think to write about him has been said already. Perhaps then we could look further into the design elements of his individual productions, with more emphasis on the contributions of artists such as Sally Jacobs, Richard Peaslee and his other collaborators. It would also be interesting to explore more input from his actors and their experiences with the Marat/Sade and other Brook productions.

Since I did not talk at length about ticket prices or detailed demographics, future studies could explicate the specific makeup of Broadway audiences during the mid-1960s. Research of this kind could shed light on the age-range of audience members, how ticket prices affected each age group, and the types of shows that were popular
within those groups. Similar research could be conducted for British audiences of the same period: for instance, one could compare ticket prices and demographics for the Royal Shakespeare Company to other London theatres.

One more area of study could be the original Berlin production of Marat/Sade and the specific staging techniques employed at the Schiller Theatre. Again, this is possibly an area that already has been researched in German theatre scholarship, but the details of this information are difficult to find in English. In a historical study of the original production, with critical reviews to support it, we could perhaps get a sense of audience reaction or response. Additionally, this is an area that can be expanded in the realm of New Historicism: critical reactions to the Berlin production or more recent regional theatre and universities productions. Specifically, how were those productions relevant within other historical and socio-political moments, if at all?

More than anything else, however, I believe that this play needs to be produced more often. It comes and goes from the American stage, usually in smaller regional theatres or universities, but I believe that it could have a stronger impact as some sort of revival. It is not enough to simply talk about a play, especially one of this nature. Marat/Sade was meant for performance, and I contend that it needs to be envisioned with fresh eyes. Even if it fails to elicit the social change that Weiss had in mind from the beginning, or to cause the audience to take action on current world events, Marat/Sade has the potential to at least voice differing opinions about war in general,
and call our anxieties and assumptions about the Iraq War specifically into question.

In closing, I would like to briefly address the issue of staging *Marat/Sade*. As the Abu Ghraib prison photographs were the freshest concerns on my mind when first reading the play, I wondered what it might look like if the Charenton inmates were placed in a more contemporary setting. Perhaps the inmates could file into the auditorium receiving those little cups full of pills from the Sisters. What would the reaction be if, when Jacques Roux loses control and is directed to be dragged off by a male Nurse, they threw a black hood over his head — much like the black hoods over the Iraqi prisoners’ heads in those photographs — and doused him in cold water under the showers of the bathhouse?

Having spent a year and a half studying and practically living with this play, I think that these would be strong, exciting staging choices from a directorial standpoint, and it would certainly ensure that the audience caught the message. However, I no longer believe that the play needs that sort of explicit handling; from the reactions I have researched in both the London and New York premieres, the relevance is there in the very words of the play. All it needs is a company to perform it, a space in which to stage it, and a director to add emphasis and focus where necessary.

To reflect on my experience upon first reading the play and studying others’ reactions to *Marat/Sade*, I feel that the social issues and moral considerations it addresses have not disappeared by any means. I doubt that they will ever fully go away. In the
entirety of American history, have we ever not been at war? In this country, have we ever been truly isolated from other nations’ affairs?

Ultimately, my hope is that future readers of this play will find its existence relevant: that the desire to stage it remains as strong as it was for Peter Brook in the mid-1960s, and the emotional connection remains as deep as it was for this post-9/11 American. If we are indeed the “New Roman Empire,” then the play will continue to reflect our situation within the global community for years or even decades to come. When and if the empire falls, our reactions may come from a different perspective, but the overall strength of Marat/Sade will continue.
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