

If resolved, the debate between Jean Paul Marat, revolutionary socialist of the French Revolution, and the Marquis de Sade, would form a blueprint for action for mankind. It would resolve the weighty question's of man's relationship to his fellow man, and the potential of man himself. Strangely enough, Weiss does not seem to point directly at any one clear solution, and the "solution" of the film is to toss this burden, with the tangle of questions and doubts which it uncovers, directly at the viewer.

Marat/ Sade is a study of individuals and movements. Set in France in 1808, it attempts to analyze the variety of interpretations of this famous "revolution", to determine why, as Corday queries, "Change meant one thing to you, I see, and something quite different to me." All of France, both bourgeoisie and working class, clamoured for freedom. And again, freedom meant varying things.

Marat and Sade are indicative of the varying interpretations of freedom and revolution. Sade upholds the position of the individual, he condemns the revolution

because it has become passionless, it has lost its human quality. Through the mass action, he believes, the individual man in the streets has lost his own ability to feel and react. Thus he claims, "I no longer believe in the revolution, I believe only in myself."

His goal, in fact, is not as diametrically opposed to Marat's as one may believe, for both are searching for fulfillment of the individual. But what Marat sees emerging from the quest for individualism are the values of the old societies; individualism means man fighting man, fraternally and with equal arms of course, in happy mutual robbery.

Freedom, as it became interpreted by many of the people involved in the revolution meant the freedom to possess, the freedom to share in the pie that was eighteenth century France. Individualism, in this sense, meant the same thing, the ability to indulge and fulfill one's self, without attempting to redefine the personal desires which were a product of that society. France was undergoing a power shuffle, yet the people of France were remaining intact.

French society in 1789, like capitalist

society today, to perpetuate itself, needs a foundation of men and women who are incapable of taking on responsibility, yet function in accordance with the needs of society. Thus, somehow, their creativity and energy must be channelled into areas through which they will not fundamentally challenge the bases of their society. The myth of individualism, that same individualism which Sade eulogizes, is one concept which has been warped to fit the needs of the ruling class. Individualism has become a competitive thing; the definition of individualism deals with the superficial differences between people; for example promoting commercially eccentric fashions and latest hairstyles. Essentially, this society produces people who will conform to society's values, as determined by the small elite that would manipulate masses of people into psychological submission.

To obscure the real unfreedom that exists (no control over one's life - education, work, personal thoughts) the capitalists and governments point to the large number of consumer goods available, and the "freedom of choice" of these goods. That freedom too, boils down to manipulation, when one considers the pressure on consumers to buy, regardless of the product. This brainwashing not only extends to the competitive market, but also to people's basic notions of freedom, individualism and other people. Another myth the capitalist economy perpetuates is the inherent competitiveness and selfishness of human nature. In reality, it is not "natural" for man to be greedy; the system insists that a "wise" man think only of himself. The corporate economy not only creates illusions of freedom, individualism etc., but it tries to propagandize people into submission but by negating any other alternatives. Hence the myth that de Sade believes - that within the socialist society, individualism is repressed.

by Barb Harris
and Wendy Johnson

De Sade's notion of individualism is one which stems from the economic system of his era. In the same way, our perverted sense of the individual stems from an economic system which puts profits before people, and also isolates people, which is essential to the maintenance of our present system. And as long as that economic system prevails, there will always be selfish competitive people who will try to maintain the system because they see it fulfilling all their socially conditioned desires, e.g., money, possessions, etc.

For those of us who reject this 1984 society and all its values, more positive notions of individualism and freedom seem possible in the future. These ideas, which will grow from an economic system that values people and their potential over any private property, will not be static, but will grow all the time.

The ideal notion of individualism is to me the freedom to fulfill the potential a human has in terms of emotional, intellectual, and technical capacities. So, a person contributes as much as possible to the collective of human beings known as the human race.

To have a fulfilling life which is fulfilling to other people is to learn how to feel. How to think critically. How to love and feel responsible for all other people who are oppressed. When this collective responsibility is developed, the people will trust and love each other with no fears of being rejected or oppressed.

When one realizes that the world around him is all screwed up he has two choices: either he can become quietly schizophrenic, or he must define his own existence in terms of creating a new, free society founded on a deep sense of humanism. De Sade failed to define himself in these terms and thus pursued a course of self annihilation while Marat tried to initiate real change and was killed. But it seems to be of much greater value to die fighting for human beings than to suffer a slow death in life as de Sade did.

We as people each have to make the choice to either ignore society's contradictions or to recognize them and fight to change them.

As Marat says:

Beware when they tell you that
everything is fine
Because if you believe them
They have you under their control
absolutely.



Marat/Sade