



## Conspiracy Theories as Fiction: Kafka and Sade

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**Abstract:** In this paper, I study conspiracy theories as two novelists handle them: Kafka and Sade. Kafka's depiction of guilt depends on anxiety that refers to nameless accusations. His protagonists may well assume that a conspiracy targets them in a way they can never understand. I explain the logic of the law that embodies such anxiety, in his novels *The Trial* and *The Process*. My second example is the Marquis de Sade who gives many examples of conspiracies on his major novels *Justine* and *Juliette*. I study two of them, first, the group of murderous monks in *Justine* and the Parisian secret society called Sodality in *Juliette*. Both are successful organization and Sade helps us understand why this is so. I discuss some real life examples of conspiracies. Finally, I compare Kafka, Sade, and their viewpoints: Kafka's is that of the victim and Sade's that of the victor.

**Keywords:** secret society, guilt, law, paranoia, crime, punishment

“Guilt for what, she had no idea.  
Guilt is always to be assumed, maybe?  
Once you're an adult”  
Joyce Carol Oates: *Middle Age: A Romance* (2001).

### 1. Kafka: Guilt to Conspiracy Theory

This is how you feel when they come to arrest you:

And those who, like you and me, dear reader, go there to die, must  
get there solely and compulsorily via arrest. Arrest! Need it be said

that it is a breaking point in your life, a bolt of lightning which has scored a direct hit on you? That it is an unassimilable spiritual earthquake not every person can cope with, as a result of which people often slip into insanity? The Universe has as many different centers as there are living beings in it. Each of us is a center of the Universe, and that Universe is shattered when they hiss at you: "You are under arrest" If you are arrested, can anything else remain unshattered by this cataclysm? But the darkened mind is incapable of embracing these displacements in our universe, and both the most sophisticated and the veriest simpleton among us, drawing on all lifes experience, can gasp out only: "Me? What for?" And this is a question which, though repeated millions and millions of times before, has yet to receive an answer (Solzhenitsyn 1988: 3).

The question is, what for. The key mystery comes much later: Who has ordered you to arrest me? No answers will ever come, or if they come, they cannot be true. It will not be the real answer. The plain fact is that some legal authority for some good reasons has arrested you and everything else is irrelevant from now on. When "they" arrest Josef K that faithful morning, he knows he is innocent – he has done nothing – but this point is irrelevant, which is something he never learns.

Franz Kafka provides an elaborate account of law and justice in a seemingly absurd and even surrealistic manner in his novel *The Trial* and selected shorts stories such as "In a Penal Colony" and "Judgement." The *Castle* tells a story of an unexplainable rejection. In addition, the novel *Amerika* contains some fascinating material (see CN and CSS). From these sources, one can collate a grand theory of law even if it is difficult to say what it might be and what it says. Kafka is a novelist of course, not a philosopher of law, although in real life he had a law degree and worked as a civil servant in the prevention of industrial accidents. He had firsthand experience of bureaucracy, which shows in his novels (see for instance Mairowitz and Crumb 1993).

I will adopt a different line of thought: Kafka's approach to law and order is through and through psychological, depicting men who are deeply guilt ridden and ultimately their own executioners. They cannot handle their emerging guilt that is looks as if it resulted from their crimes, but those are crimes without a perpetrator or a victim, crimes without a name, and crimes without witnesses. Yet these crimes are serious, they are real, and they are public to the extent that (almost). All people seem to know about them. Such crimes deserve a punishment and Josef K's arrest follows accordingly. Only one punishment is applicable and that is a violent death by, say, drowning, by knife, or by torture. This is primarily a male problem because guilt and

crime do not affect women that much in Kafka's texts. Kafka's view is impressive, even convincing, but only if one thinks that it all takes place in the guilty person's imagination, in his head so to speak. All of the offices of the lower level law-courts are located in the attics of city apartment houses. All of those houses seem to have law offices in their attics, as if in a person's head, in his mind, in his consciousness. Where the high judges work we do not know because it is a secret, or we do not know because it is unknowable. As Heraclitus says, the human mind is so deep that no one can ever hope to reach to its bottom. The deepest sources of one's guilt feelings are unknown and hidden in the depths of one's subconscious mind.

I agree that many different readings of Kafka about the law exist. His views are deeply allegorical, and the reader must collect hints and statements from here and there without much help from the author himself. However, let me offer what I see as crucial evidence for my psychological perspective. In the Ninth Chapter of *The Trial*, Josef K visits a cathedral in order to show it to an Italian customer of his bank. He works for the bank. The foreigner does not arrive. K is alone in this immense, dark, and mysterious church and is wandering around when he meets a priest. The priest wants to preach to him, which he does, albeit, very briefly. He is obviously part of the mechanism of the law, and he certainly knows K and his status as a suspected criminal. The priest and K discuss as follows:

"I thank you," said K; "but all the others who are concerned in these proceedings are prejudiced against me. They are influencing even the outsiders. My position is becoming more and more difficult."  
"You are misinterpreting the facts of the case," said the priest. "The verdict is not so suddenly arrived at, the proceedings only gradually merge into the verdict."  
"So that's how it is," said K, letting his head sink (CN: 183).

In a highly revealing manner, the priest says that the sentencing is not one individual performative act. On the contrary, it is a gradual process just like the accumulation of personal, subjective guilt is. Guilt typically accumulates and grows. Hence, K's use of the word "they" signifies the first step towards a conspiracy theory. Conspiracy theories play with the word "they" They are out there ready to come and get me and hurt me. They are

just them, and they are otherwise unknown. Such is the simple grammar of a conspiracy theory based on one word, "they." However, K also realizes that all the people he meets belong to the law, and that means that they are all somehow against him. They all know about the case, and they all have an opinion about it. They are part of a deadly conspiracy K can neither control nor figure out. To return to the language of guilt, this is free-floating guilt. These people blame K in a way that is fully incomprehensible to him. However, at the same time he knows that they think he is guilty, and he suffers accordingly. K supports a double conspiracy theory: narrow and broad. The first contains the high judges and officials; the second contains all or most of the people K meets. Perhaps this is typical of guilt feelings.

Guilt starts like a little pang of consciousness pretending that it has an object, motive, and cure. Then it transforms itself into something more obscure and fuzzy gradually becoming unknown and unknowable free flowing anxiety. Finally, it is guilt that is certain of itself and of its cause, and of something that cannot have a name or identity but which demands punishment. The pain grows until one must do something about it. One has to punish oneself. Others do not do it, so it must be the person himself (cf. Taylor 1985: 134-135).

However, according to the correct logic of punishment, the act of punishment must come from outside, otherwise it is not true punishment. Whatever one does, one aims at one's own good, which obviously cannot be a punishment. For the actor, it is impossible to choose anything but what is best for the actor himself. One rank-orders the available alternatives and then chooses the best of them. This is the logical foundation of an action explanation. Therefore, if K punishes himself, which would mean that this act is his best alternative, this is no longer punishment in the proper sense of the term. It is a personal trick designed to alleviate one's pain. Punishment, on the contrary, is something one does not want and cannot want to happen to oneself. When a convicted murderer wants to die and asks for his own execution he creates a logical paradox: he wants a punishment, which is punishment because it undesirable as such, like death. Nevertheless, he wants it. Thus, K's punishment, like all punishment, must come from outside. It always is externalized and alienated. Certain agents do it against the will of the victim, or K, in this case. In a perfectly consistent manner, K accepts this logic of the law as well as the second step that leads him straight into a conspiracy theory.

K thinks that he is a victim of an immense system of law and justice whose lowest level agents are visible and real to him, and that is all. However, these agents are actually nothing but illusory and transient phantoms. They are everywhere, and they multiply in the scariest of manners, but they are nothing. They are idiotic and impotent except when

they remind K of his crime and guilt. The high court and its grand judges are not to be seen anywhere. They exist, which is necessary, but they have no empirical form or content. The priest in the church tells K that K is under a false impression and on the verge of committing a crucial mistake. The priest tells a parable about a man who wanted to enter the law but a guard stops him at the door. He never lets the man enter, and in the end, when the man is already old and dying, he tells him the crucial truth: this is your door and it is open for you only. Yet the man cannot enter. According to the priest, this story explains K's error about the law, and he provides a long interpretation of the parable for the benefit of K. Yet, nothing definitive follows from this conversation. It is just fantastic nonsense and an apt parody of interpretative action.

Perhaps the important point of the priest's parable and the ensuing silly conversation is that it is nonsensical and inconclusive. All we learn is that the law is far away, infallible, infinitely mighty, and fully binding. The guard at the door is part of the law, and that is why he is under no human jurisdiction (CN: 227). The law is outside the human realm. It is, in this sense, both distant and divine, but of course, it is divine in an atheistic sense that is strictly independent of God. I do not deny that a theological reading is possible, but I do not want to follow that path now.

K realizes that a conspiracy threatens him, and that the law is nothing but a vast and mighty conspiracy that is set to destroy him:

"There can be no doubt" – said K ... "there can be no doubt that behind all the actions of this court of justice, that is to say in my case, behind my arrest and today's interrogation, there is a great organization at work. An organization which not only employs corrupt wardens, stupid inspectors, and examining magistrates of whom the best that can be said is that they recognize their own limitations" (CN: 40).

K repeats the same thing once again when he tries to defend the two wardens who first arrested him. They are now in the hands of a sadistic official flogger ready to receive punishment in a closet. Notice that "they" have a name now; they are called high officials: "I really want to see them set free ... for I do not in the least blame them, it is the organization that is to blame, the high officials who are to blame" (CN: 74).

Almost until his last moment, K dreams of salvation and trusts his own innocence. What has he done? He can find no reasons to accept any guilt. Nevertheless, the great conspiracy against him says he is guilty, so what can he do? First, he is angry and frustrated. He tries to write a letter to his judges; he tries to contact them. Then, in the church, he tells the priest that he hopes his women will defend and save him. He says that women have much power.

This is absurd. Finally, when his two executioners come, he does not protest but goes like a lamb to his doom. The killers use a butcher's knife, which, as he realizes, he should have wielded himself. However, he does not do it, and the executioners pierce his heart. His last feeling is that of shame. His undeniable guilt transforms itself into shame when he dies like a stray dog in an old quarry. The conspiracy always gets what it wants. Conspiracies are unstoppable if you think like a conspiracy theorist.

In *The Trial*, conspiratorial elements penetrate the text. In the "Penal Colony," one finds constant references to the old Commandant and his historical times where the roots of punishment still lie: "I still use the guiding plan drawn by the former Commandant," says the officer who supervises executions (CSS: 148). The current Commandant and his women do not understand the real logic of the law. The women, for instance, feel compassion towards the prisoners, which is unacceptable. They ruin everything. K should have known this fact, but he does not. From the point of view of the officer, the new Commandant and his people are conspiratorial. They plot to change the old, still valid rules. The traveler, who is the witness visiting the penal colony, seems to think that the old Commandant is a menace he can blame for all the horrors he sees.

In *Amerika* (CN: Chapter 8), Karl Rossmann wants a job in the Oklahoma Theatre which employs anyone who wants to go and work there. The theatre is an immense, distant, and mysterious entity towards which Carl gravitates as if by natural necessity. The theatre appears to be a benevolent entity. In a sense, it is a converted conspiracy. Who knows? At the same time, it is an irresistible force behind the horizon. In *Amerika*, all the chapters play with and vary the ideas of accusation and guilt. Rossmann is going to find out that life is a continuous trial. In the last chapter, when he wants the Oklahoma Theatre to hire him, he knows that he is in trouble – and guilty – because he has no passport and consequently no identity. For a change, they do not seem to care. Everyone is invited and chosen – to make an ironic Biblical reference. In this case, as I said, "they" seem to be benevolent; nevertheless, they form a nameless, all-powerful secret agency and organization Karl does not know at all. All he can see is their recruiting office.

In front of the recruiting office, angels are blowing their trumpets. Here is the ultimate version of Kafka's conspiracy theories; first an encounter with angels, then the benevolent recruitment officers, and finally a long train trip into the great unknown Oklahoma – all the time knowing that the police may come and get him. No law exists in America. In this sense America is free, the land of the free, although the police officers Karl happens to meet are very threatening and, obviously, immensely powerful. In the end, Karl is running away from the clutches of the police towards the far away

Oklahoma Theatre, his assumed paradise. Can he run away from the authorities? We will never know. *Amerika* was never finished. The novel ends: “and they [the waves] were so near that the breath of coldness rising from them chilled the skin of one’s face” (CN: 439). What a chilling, menacing end this is.

## 2. A Note on the *Castle*

When K comes to a village at the foot of the castle hill, he proudly says, “Let me tell you I am the Land Surveyor whom the Count is expecting” (CN: 444). K is wrong; no one is expecting him, as the invitation seems to rest on an already forgotten mistake and misunderstanding. Nevertheless, he stays in the village anyway and plans to spend the rest of his days there. K can never enter the castle, whatever he does. He is a total nonentity who lives a life of endless frustrations. Does he succumb to conspiracy theory? Not really, but he comes very close indeed. He realizes that the castle and its high officials are powerful, invisible, and malevolent. Nevertheless, they are not intent of destroying him. They simply treat him as if he did not exist. Yet from K’s point of view, there seems to be “an official plot ... by means of which the Superintendent and the teacher were keeping him from reaching the Castle authorities” (CN: 583). This is as close to a conspiracy theory as K ever comes. First, he thinks:

Direct intercourse with the authorities was not particularly difficult then, for well organized as they might be, all they did was to guard the distant and invisible interests of distant and invisible masters, while K fought for something vitally near to him, for himself, and moreover, at least at the very beginning, on his own initiative, for he was the attacker; and besides he fought not only for himself, but clearly for other powers as well, which he did not know, but in which, without infringing the regulations of the authorities, he was permitted to believe (CN: 496).

K has already realized why he should not think so: “Nevertheless, after such fits of easy confidence, he would hasten to tell himself that there lay his danger” (CN: 496). K is in danger and no one can save him. Nobody

accuses him of anything, that is not the problem, but people simply ignore him. Take Klamm, an official who visits the village regularly: K is not supposed to look at him, he must not mention his name, and Klamm's appearance is constantly changing, as if he were some kind of evil demon. Their form never stays constant. Evil has no fixed form.

In detail it fluctuates, and yet perhaps not so much as Klamm's real appearance. For he's reported as having one appearance when he comes into the village and another on leaving it; after having his beer he looks different from what he does before it, when he's awake he is different from when he is asleep, when he is alone he is different from when he is talking to people, and – what is incomprehensible after all that – he is almost another person up in the castle (CN: 608).

Moreover, in a mysterious manner, Klamm forgets the future and its events but, then, he comes from the strange castle on the hill (CN: 520). Thus, K has no hope of ever reaching to him, or even recognizing him, and he has far less hope of ever getting near the castle itself. In this sense, the nebulously malevolent forces of the castle have doomed K who must endlessly wander around the village without hope or purpose. The great conspiracy rejects him because they simply do not care. K can do absolutely nothing about it.

The *Castle*, interestingly enough, contains a separate story of Amalia's crime and punishment (CN, Chapter 15). K learns how the young woman once refused the invitation from Sortini, one of the castle officials. Her crime is actually twofold: first, she interested him and, then, she did not come to him when he (angrily) called. This crime is like the crime of the stupid soldier in the "Penal Colony." Now Amalia deserves her punishment, although all the details of the case remain as hazy as in the case of Josef K in the *Process*. The law treats Amalia and K in the same way. The punishment in this case is the total rejection of the whole family: "Whatever we did, whatever we had, it was all despicable" (CN: 641). The family is doomed. This is social death, as if they were buried alive.

### 3. Kafka: The Logic of the Law

Kafka's ideas of law and punishment have their own weird structure, which somehow resembles the real European systems of law, but also make it all look surreal. Many readers have also thought that Kafka has prophesied the future of modern bureaucracy. His readers seem to understand what is going on. The law, according to Josef K, is something with which we are familiar with some strange and surreal manner, at least in the sense that we feel that



the law turns upside down. The logic of law and punishment looks like this:

Logic:

Crime we can infer from guilt, as if one's guilt were one's crime. Crime does not bring about guilt. K has not done anything. Thus, we cannot infer his guilt from his crime; because the crime is always unknown (see Axioms).

Axioms:

I. Guilt is always beyond suspicion, or to be accused is automatically to be guilty

II. The guilty person does not know the name of his crime; the crime is unknown to the end.

III. Guilt attracts the law in the sense that guilt draws the law towards itself.

IV. The Law is empty; it demands respect and obedience, but that is all it says.

V. The judges are invisible just like the law is secret.

Corollaries:

i. The crime is unnamable and unknown because anything can be called a crime.

ii. One must feel, mistakenly, that one is innocent; that makes one beautiful and sensitive.

iii. It is impossible to defend oneself, but one may try.

iv. The punishment is both necessary and unavoidable

v. No one is ever freed although it may be possible.

vi. The punishment is always just, because it is impossible to challenge it.

vii. The smallest crime deserves the greatest punishment.

viii. Only one punishment exists, death.

ix. No pity or mercy exists; there is no compassion in the law.

x. The punishment, death, is the revelation of the truth, and thus, it liberates the victim.

xi. Punishment implies shame.

xii. Crime is not an action; it is a mode of being.

xiii. The law is a real and incomprehensible mystery.

xiv. No other mysteries exist but the law.

Open Questions:

Who is guilty? Not everyone is guilty. Who will be arrested? Perhaps the conspiracy decides on a random basis? Can anyone can be arrested on legal grounds because no one knows the law?

Explanations:

The law is a great, infinite, nebulous, organized conspiracy that dooms K or anyone else. Certain distant legal possibilities or myths exist of release, innocence, freedom, redemption, and forgiveness. Even small wild girls running around the corridors of an apartment house belong to the law. Many people know K's crime, as they are all fellow conspirators. He can never meet his judges and certainly not the members of the high court who are always undetectable. The higher end of the law is secret and through its door, although it is always open, one cannot enter the law. Of course, the Judges and the High Court exist. It is all a conspiracy, as K comes to think.

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I cannot deal with these items one by one here for obvious reasons. Let me offer an example. Arresting officer Franz says: "See Willem, he admits that he does not know the Law, and yet he claims he is innocent" (CN: 8). Willem agrees that K is not very clever. Now, the logic of the argument is impeccable as follows: a subpoena, according to the law, has been presented. K does not know the law because no one knows the law; K cannot defend himself in any way, so therefore, he is guilty. It does not matter that he has done nothing. Such a fact is irrelevant. This seems to imply that you are guilty until proven innocent, which never happens. This is again typical of Kafka's mirror image logic. Certainly, this fits our psychological interpretation: personal guilt feelings and anxiety follow the same logic. One feels guilty until one can prove himself innocent, which is impossible. The psychology of guilt follows an opposite logic when compared to the law-induced guilt. In this way, Kafka's logic of law follows the familiar logic of psychology.

No proof of such a theory as this exists. Kafka is far too skilled an artist to make it easy for his readers. One can find counterexamples, for instance, in the penal colony the simple soldier's crime is disobedience, although he himself does not know it. In K's case, it seems that no one knows the name of his crime. Perhaps the crime has no name. In the penal colony, the conspiracy is not directly involved with the coming execution. Everything we have is the memory of the old regime who still rules over the proceedings. Josef K, as a conspiracy theorist, believes that the organization called the

law is persecuting him for an unknown, mysterious reason. The soldier in the penal colony, on the contrary, does not know that he is doomed, a fate which K comes to realize with perfect clarity. Different cases exist, but their logic is the same. Karl Rossmann is accused all the time, but he is not a conspiracy theorist – perhaps he will be happy once in Oklahoma, who knows? K the Land Surveyor comes close to being a conspiracy theorist. Amalia and her family accept their fate as it is, without theorizing about its causes.

Kafka's persons are not paranoid. The law really persecutes them. Moreover, for them the law is a great conspiracy they cannot make sense of. Josef K refers to an organization behind the law, although he has no evidence at all. All he can see is a dark abyss or nothing at all. Yet, he refers to a conspiracy in more than one place in the novel. What else could he do? He reifies the threat and gives it some kind of form and structure. The threat does not reside in dusty attics and cramped offices. It extends beyond all limits; it exists out there in its own splendid isolation.

#### **4. Sade: Introduction to Secret Societies**

Let me make clear the structure of my argument from here on. I want to argue that Kafka shows what it means to come to believe in conspiracies, that is, to become a conspiracy theorist. His account of such a mindset is maximally convincing. Next, we need to read Sade. We do it to find evidence for the following hypothesis: Kafka says that one can never know those malevolent agents and agencies that are after us. Sade tries to describe them, as if we knew them. I try to show that such a project is impossible, it does not make sense; hence, it leads to results that are unconvincing. However, they are interesting and worth reading.

Now, secret societies have their laws, rules, and goals and they create conspiracies. Many conspiracy theories refer specifically to secret societies, as we can easily verify, and with good reasons (see Barrett 2007, Steiger, and Steiger 2006, and Wikipedia). I mean by a conspiracy a secret plot by an organized group to achieve a criminal end. This standard definition is too narrow to be interesting. If such a criminal plot is also morally or politically subversive, the case becomes much more interesting. Of course, we must emphasize that conspiracies are often real, and they exist. Actually, they are

common. Conspiracy theories, on the contrary, are shared views that identify some large-scale, important, shocking, or subversive plans by secret groups of influential people even if the evidence for such a conspiracy is twisted, illogical, improbable, clearly imaginary or fictional. Conspiracies are real; conspiracy theories are fictional. Conspiracies exist in real life but conspiracy theories are imaginary. Nevertheless, conspiracy theories are truly common. Think, for instance, of 9/11 and the claim that the CIA did it by means of mini-nukes (Airaksinen 2009). Their variety is endless.

However, I want to make four remarks. First, in this paper I use “conspiracy theory” only in its fictional sense. Second, many people use “conspiracy theory” to refer to some real and existing conspiracies of which they have a theory. Third, conspiracy theories have attracted a number of psychological explanations because such theories are both so common and so illogical. Fourth, conspiracy theorists seem to apply this explanatory model repeatedly until the whole world is full of conspiracies. The theory is obviously compulsively attractive.

In this section of the paper I focus on only one special type of conspiracy theory; those that blame secret societies. This is another fantastically popular topic (see Barrett 2007). Any survey of the relevant literature shows how popular the topic is. A large number of secret societies exists; part of them imaginary and the rest of them real, like the Free Masons. The list of books available on this topic is also impressive as a brief look at [www.Amazon.com](http://www.Amazon.com) proves. No limit to secret societies seems to exist even if they are secret and as such unknown. Many secret societies are surprisingly familiar to us, which is an oxymoron, of course. Hence, only a short step separates such societies from conspiracy theories.

Many secret societies conspire against good people and just societies. Somehow, their secrecy is associated with evil. One might well speculate that it is the secrecy of these societies which allows people to accuse them of some otherwise unexplainable horrors. Perhaps the reasoning goes like this: the cause and explanation of a disaster is unknown; secret societies are unknown, therefore, secret societies are the cause of the disaster. This false logic is irresistible in real life where logical validity is always secondary to rhetorical temptations. To put it another way, a disaster has no explanation. Secret societies are capable of doing anything, so they did it and are therefore responsible. When we see no explanation, we try to find an agent who might have done it. Secret societies may do anything, we just do not know. Secret societies are ready culprits when we start thinking in terms of conspiracy theories. This form of an argument is familiar with the philosophy of religion. We cannot find any evidence that refutes the existence of God, so we say that there is no such evidence we can interpret as evidence in favor of God’s existence. In other words, if you have no negative evidence, this fact itself counts as positive evidence. We have no

evidence that secret societies did not do it; therefore, we say that they possibly did it; and as there are no other possible culprits, we must agree that a secret society did it.

### **5. Sade, Text, and Secret Societies**

From here on, let me make clear the structure of my argument. I argued that Kafka shows us what it means to come to believe in conspiracies, that is, to become a conspiracy theorist. His account of such a mindset is maximally convincing. Next, we need to read Sade. We do it to find evidence for the following hypothesis: Kafka says that one can never know those malevolent agents and agencies that are after us. Sade tries to describe them as if we knew them well. I try to show that such a project is impossible, and that it does not make sense. It leads to unconvincing, artificial, and even silly results. This happens to Sade too. His text may be exciting, but it does not illuminate the problems of conspiracies. Sade tries to describe what cannot be described, which is the secret societies as conspiracies in the sense meant by conspiracy theorists. The logic of the conspiracy theory implies that the evil agency cannot be described or know. If you try, you create more problems than you may solve. It is all fiction that no fiction can make real.

We are discussing a fictional topic here, and that is why we may well stay within the limits of literary fiction. This also allows us to avoid the deeper morasses of folk psychology and the Freudian analyses I have already flirted with. I have selected The Marquis de Sade as the writer who might tell us something interesting about secret societies as they exist in *Justine*, *Juliette*, and the *120 Days of Sodom*. He describes a community of criminal monks in the first book. He describes the Parisian society called the Sodality in the second book, and he describes an isolated community of libertines in the Black Forest in the winter in his third book. The last mentioned community lasts only 120 days, and for that reason, it is not a real secret society even if it is a criminal conspiracy. They kidnap young persons, violate, and kill them. The bad monks gather in their secret monastery. This community has its own, more or less, permanent nature. It also has some official structure and its own sources of funding. They also kidnap women and kill them. That is supposed to be very exciting. The good news is that Justine is able to escape to tell the story of the monk's seraglio.

However, the Sodality is a real, well defined society and, at the same time, a conspiracy which has its bylaws, financing, president, program, and everything that a real society needs. This club is only for some extreme libertines and their low-life criminal associates. Here the social elite meets the criminal underworld in a totally subversive manner: two social classes who should have nothing to do with each other are actually tied together by their common interest.

This sounds like a regime which is at the same time monotonous, potentially boring, certainly not very creative, and certainly shocking – at least if the reader is not an hardened admirer of Sade. A couple of words on Sade's style and aims follow. Sade has only one theme that is libertinage and pleasant evil, or crime, as he is fond of calling it. He repeats that theme endlessly, repeating some special vignettes *ad infinitum*, as his reader soon concludes. Some of his short stories and the book *Justine* are less repetitive, but both *Juliette* and *120 Days* are both long and repetitive. *Juliette* has some one thousand pages. These are no ordinary fictional narratives. They seem to contain some philosophy in the sense that Sade wants to prove a point or two; mainly atheism and the hedonistic justification of human freedom. We are here to enjoy life, and crime is the most enjoyable thing, therefore, we should do it. He seems to promote a certain life-style and tells his reader how to do it. At the same time, he creates a text that tries to punish its reader. This is text as a test, trial, and condemnation. When his reader reads hundreds of pages of stories of eating human excrements, he certainly not only suffers, but he also punishes himself by reading about it. Sade's text is an evil and immoral text for this very reason. However, it is also delightful to realize how he writes a parody of the French tradition of fine food and gourmandism by making his villains eat excrement produced by young people who first get some delicious foods to eat. Of course, anal love denies the procreative function by turning away from the vagina and lusting after the anal orifice, which means disgust, death, and waste. Sade is much more than merely boring. He is the true subversive, creative philosopher of freedom and subversion.

Can we find anything of interest in the story of the Sodality? Are the lecherous monks, who harass Justine so passionately, somehow creative and interesting persons? Perhaps they are. Therefore, it is worthwhile to look into their thinking, their lives, and their activities as secret society based conspirators. The story of the monks is quite delightful in this sense, unlike Sade's Sodality, although it may look like a parody or a critique of something that is not quite easy to see or understand (see Airaksinen 1995, and Barthes 1976).

## 6. Sade: Monastery as a Secret Society

Sade's evil monks describe their own organization as follows:

“You will understand more easily, Madame, if I explain how the society was organized. Prodigious funds had been poured by the Order into this obscene institution, it had been in existence for above a century, and had always been inhabited by the four richest monks, the most powerful in the Order's hierarchy. They of the highest birth and libertinage of sufficient moment to require burial in this obscure retreat, the disclosure of whose secret was well provided against as my further explanations will cause you to see in the sequel; but let us return to the portraits” (*Justine*: 566).

Justine also learns that “a recalcitrant attitude will be of no purpose in this inaccessible retreat” (*Justine*: 567). The monastery has its history (more than one hundred years), its future (forever), its hidden but official status (sanctioned by the monastic Order), its budget (prodigious sums), its members qualifications (rich, powerful, lecherous), and so on. This system works as it should. Also, notice how Sade's twisted logic works in this context. The richest, noblest, and most important men are also the most criminal and lecherous. Sade seems to argue that the most powerful are also the most dangerous, as if their social status would make them psychologically irresponsible hedonistic maniacs. Power translates into mania. Such a secret society is at the same time malevolent, dangerous, and most difficult to reveal and stop. The system may isolate its criminal elements, make them secret that is, but it also protects them. Moreover, the monks receive generous funding from the Order. They are at the same time hidden, protected, and encouraged. Such a policy may seem inconsistent, but it may well be unavoidable if a secret society is going to exist and flourish. Why should it flourish? Because the bad monks want it to flourish, and more of them are born all the time. They must go somewhere, and now Justine has accidentally found the place where they go, a palace, heaven, and haven of criminal pleasures.

The monks kidnap women of all ages, and the point is that they are free and capable of doing absolutely anything to those unlucky people. Justine

describes in detail all kinds of sexual acts or acts that are at least on the fringe areas of sexual pleasure. Nothing else seems to matter to Sade the writer or the fictional monks. Pleasure and freedom exist strictly for each other, and they ruthlessly maximize both. The libertines are free in two different senses. They are free of external control and risk of punishment. Nothing bad can happen to them, and so, they are free or unconstrained. They are also free from guilt and the anxiety that evil deeds are supposed to bring about. They do not suffer at all – in this sense they are again unconstrained and free. Their actions have only one limiting factor, but that is a serious constraint. They can never get full satisfaction. However hard they work, whatever they do, whatever happens to the women, they need to do it again. They are on the wheel of pleasure in the sense that this wheel is free to turn around, but when it turns around, the same acts will return. This makes the monks furious, so they get their revenge by torturing the women. Certainly, it does not help them at all.

When we consider the monastery as a secret society, however fictional it may be, we also see why secret societies are so fearful, even if they are secret and we do not know much about them. Such a society is a menace to its social environment as it serves everything evil, obscene, and destructive. Its members belong to the highest echelons of society; they are supposed to be good, noble, virtuous, just, and in many ways admirable paradigmatic individuals. Yet their true nature is the absolute opposite of this wishful characterization. Their nobility means baseness, and any trust placed on them is the gravest misjudgment one can imagine. In this kind of situation, even if it is hypothetical and imaginary, we can find all the elements of social fear.

We must conclude that secret societies are revolting and dangerous even if we do not know much about their secrets. They are conspiracies, but because they are fiction, we need to talk about conspiracy theories in this context. Notice, however, that the monks and their secret monastery constitute a secret society, but the real conspiracy is committed by the Order, in this case the Benedictine Order, who allows it, organizes all of it, and guarantees its continued existence and functioning. In a typical manner, the conspiracy is large, powerful, and intractable. Its tentacles extend everywhere, and any secret society is just one of its material representations. The monks are conspirators only because the all-mighty Order allows it.

The monk's secret society is the content, and the Sodality is the form of secret societies in the mind of a conspiracy theorist. The monks tell us what they think, what they desire, what they do, how they talk, how they live, and what they eat. The content of the description is rich and detailed, although it is at the same time extremely repetitive and boring. It suffocates its reader



who cannot consume more of the same repetitive horrors. This is what Sade does to his readers. However, now we know what happens within the walls of that nasty monastery. We have a description of the content of freedom, although Sade also calls it unfreedom, that is, being subjected to the destructive laws of nature. No one is free of the laws of nature, although the libertines are socially free – this is a crucial point. Next, the story of the Sodality provides the form that is also the formal cause as it explains some possibilities and potentialities. Even evil life needs its rules, regulations, and laws. Conspiracies are not formless, and that is why they are even more frightful. A formless conspiracy is only a tumult, chaotic, and dark abyss or, in modern terms, a black hole that we cannot see because no light ever comes out of it.

Juliette, the evil woman, comes to Paris. Her friends introduce her to a secret society called Sodality. She enters; they interview her and then accept her as a member. She is recognized for what she is, a she-devil. She looks at the society's rules and regulations that are almost like any other rules of a well-functioning social body. Such rules make the society function in a predictably successful manner in the end. The rules of Sodality may work well, but then they are the rules of a society that serve the ends and goals of a life-style similar to that of the criminal monks in the forest monastery. Here in Paris, the same hedonistic goals exist, but now Sade tells us what the formal rules of such a life are like. What we get here is a predictable and tedious list of norms. First, the description of the purpose of the membership in the Sodality:

Deferring to the common usage, Sodality admits the serviceability of the word *crime*; but makes a plain declaration that in its employment thereof with reference to any kind of act of whatever sort or colour, no condemnatory or pejorative sense is ever intended. Thoroughly convinced that man is not free, and that, bound absolutely by the Laws of Nature, all men are slaves of these fundamental laws, the Sodality, therefore, approves and legitimates everything, and considers as its most zealous and most estimable Members those who, unhesitatingly and unrepentantly, acquit themselves of the greatest number of those vigorous actions which fools in their weakness call crime (*Juliette*: 418).

The Sodality has its detailed rules with 45 items. They state that all the members of the club are equal; women are admitted; atheism is strictly required; a certain minimum income is required; some not so wealthy artists and literary figures are admitted; and criminals are to be protected. A ballot elects the president and his or her term is one month; he or she presides over assemblies that are three per week. There is a permanent committee, a treasurer and two executive secretaries are also prescribed; during the assembly all kinds of pleasures are admitted, but murder can be committed only in special seraglios where prisoners are kept for this purpose, and so on (*Juliette*: 418 ff.).

As I said, this is the formal side of an evil secret society. It presents a real threat to any decent citizen of a normal society. People should be afraid of the Sodality and its members, if they existed. Moreover, even if they did not exist, conspiracy theorists are still afraid of them as if a threat like that was real. The whole idea of a conspiracy theory rests on such a fear. Strange things happen and people get hurt without any clear explanation. Yet, no phenomenon is without its explanation, thus an explanation must exist. You find it if you try hard enough and search everywhere. Secret societies provide the much-needed explanations, and hence, people tend to agree that such evil societies exist, and we needlessly suffer from their activities as their innocent victims.

Sade, in his novel *Philosophy in the Bedroom* (1965: 216), mentions and condemns all the good sodalities, such as the Maternal Society and the Philanthropic Club, when Madame Saint-Ange lectures to her young but willing disciple Eugenie about the unavoidable pleasures of vice and crime. Eugenie says that her mother supports such virtuous sodalities, which the rascals of Sodality firmly condemn. The good and the bad sodalities aim at their opposite ends, the Parisian Sodality being a perfect formulation of a society that must stay as a secret. Otherwise, it will vanish along with its members. Of course, it will survive because it is a figment of the imagination, a conspiratorial dream, and an object of hallucinations at the same time deliriously happy and paranoid.

## **7. The Explanation of Conspiracy Theories**

We may try to explain the endless fascination with conspiracy theories in terms of some logical, social, and psychological considerations, or we may leave the topic as it is, a fact. Let us try some possible explanations anyway. Here is the scheme we need to explain: Something bad happens to us, the normal, good, and innocent people, and we explain why it happens in terms

of some conspiracies by secret societies (in a wide and general sense of “society”). Such societies are the embodiment of evil. We have a good reason to be afraid. We are neither crazy nor paranoid. It is evident that we are in search of an explanation of an explanation.

To believe in conspiracies, in the pejorative sense of “conspiracy theory,” is never crazy, but it may be paranoid. This is the case if, first, the evil things and suffering has not yet happened but is always expected to happen and, second, if the evidence for these future events is (i) twisted, idiosyncratic, and unacceptable, or (ii) the evidence is non-existent even in the mind of the believer. A paranoid person is afraid of something that has not happened and explains it in a way that does not count as an explanation by means of evidence. We need two more conditions: a paranoid person is certain that he is a target of some serious harm. Some unknown forces like secret societies persecute him personally. Finally, we recognize that no amount of persuasion may change his mind. For him, no possible counterevidence may exist. He is doomed.

Full-blown paranoia is a disease of the mind and, as such, not so interesting an explanation. The milder forms of paranoia are more interesting. We can find and understand these by deleting some of the last mentioned conditions in the above definition, for instance the last two. Then we get a more realistic description of the mental conditions that make some people conspiracy theorists.

An authoritarian person believes in and trusts a paternalistic authority who is supposed to protect him against some evil in the world. However, the person feels that he has available and acceptable evidence for the failure of the agent who was supposed to protect him. A perfect example is the case of 9/11. The President of United States and the CIA were supposed to protect the US-citizens against terrorists, as had been promised many times. They had given evidence for being able to do so, and the citizens had believed, or at least had wanted to believe it. Yet, all of it becomes illusory in that fatal day when the Twin Towers collapsed in such a dramatic fashion. What was the explanation? The CIA did it, or at least they knew that it was going to happen. The catastrophe was their responsibility either directly or indirectly. Why did they do it? They wanted to promote their own obscure ends, as also K says. They had something to gain from 9/11 – that is why they did it. What is it? Who are they? Some conspiracy is evident, but no clear answer can emerge, of course. The same story applies to the Japanese attack against Pearl Harbor in 1941. The President knew about the bombing but did nothing to prevent it. He had his own secret reasons. Such conspiracy theories are not personal affairs, but they are large-scale social phenomena.

Think of this marvelous story. In the Second World War when the Japanese were already losing the war, they could not transport all the gold they had robbed from the conquered areas in the Far East to Japan. The US

submarines had cut off the shipping lanes, and the home islands were practically isolated. What should we do with all that gold? The Japanese buried it in the Philippines in secret places. Then they killed the workers and wrote the maps in cipher so that only the elite could read them and get back to the buried treasures. Perhaps the brother of the Emperor Hirohito was in charge of the operation in Tokyo. The gold is “Yamashita’s gold” according to the general who organized it all. The gold may still lie where they originally buried it. The maps are gone, and the Japanese officers are dead. To this day people in the Philippines have been trying to find the gold. Presumably, the former Philippines president and strongman, Ferdinand Marcos, made his fortune with this gold. However, you need to be careful. If you find the gold, the other diggers who want to rob you will kill you. The authors of a book on this theory have written a strange preface to their *Gold Warriors*. They say they have saved all the relevant material in secret places and ordered its release if they are killed. No one can protect their backs by killing the authors because then and only then the incriminating material will be released and published (Seagrave and Seagrave 2003).

This is a very interesting case and type of a conspiracy theory. The Japanese were conspirators against the legitimate interests of the conquered nations. The gold diggers, including the Marcos family, were conspirators against the people of Philippines. Finally, the authors of the book clearly feel that there is a conspiracy against them. In fact, the theory of the gold is a highly controversial one. Many are skeptical about it.

Let us briefly discuss all three cases. First, the case against the Japanese is easy to understand. They were a monstrous enemy of the conquered people; truly cruel and ruthless. They were capable of any evil that one could imagine. Therefore, the Japanese took all that gold and buried it deep. Then they made it all a secret. They had organized all of these activities and the track leads all the way to the imperial court in Tokyo. That is where you need to go if you want to get your gold back. Yet, no information will emerge anyway as the maps are secret or destroyed, and the people are dead or well protected by those who are in power. What is an explanation for this conspiracy theory? The explanation may be something like impotent rage and desire for revenge against the defeated forces of evil who may now be dead but whose legacy lingers.

President Ferdinand Marcos was a tyrant and a dictator who ruled his country for decades with his wife Imelda whose shopping sprees for shoes and bras were legendary. It may feel good to know where his initial wealth came from, therefore, this is the relevant conspiracy theory here. The gold diggers normally end up dead, not Marcos – why is that so? He has his secrets of how he did it. We do not know, but something strange and fearful must have happened. He and his cronies pulled off a trick that should have been impossible. Here the explanation of the relevant conspiracy theory is

in terms of the combination of fear, jealousy, and perfectly simple greed. He did it, and we cannot do it. That is why he did it by means of a conspiracy.

The third aspect of the story of the Philippines' gold, when the authors of the book feel threatened, we may well explain in terms of simple paranoia, as I explained above. The authors think they are now crucially important people, and thus, their newly found enemies want to hunt them down. Who those enemies are no one knows nor can know. Somewhere there is a conspiracy against their innocent lives. This is, indeed, an example of fear nearing paranoia. Of course, it is possible that this fear is well founded, and thus, we would not have a case of paranoia here. However, we still have an example of a conspiracy theory if the enemy is unknown in the sense that we cannot know it whatever we do. This also shows that one's well-founded fear may lead one to conspiracy theories. For example, I am afraid that my shop seems to go bankrupt no matter what I do, so I am afraid of my financial future. This is real fear, no doubt about it. Next, I explain my fate not on the grounds of being a bad businessperson but by referring to the hidden influence and activities of the local Free Masons. My well-grounded fear has made me a conspiracy theorist.

What can we say about the logical explanations of conspiracy theories? Conspiracy theory implies a failure to understand and handle the requirements of an explanation. To do it is not that simple of a demand. Most people cannot do it. The relevant folk-views and ideas are simply inadequate and collapse under the pressure coming from the demands of everyday life and its complexities. For instance, if you do not know the conspirators and their societies then do not use their names in your explanations. If you do not know the facts of the case, do not invent your own. If you do not know the motives of the conspirators, do not invent them, and most of all, do not refer to their malevolent pleasures and stupendous enjoyment. You cannot use what you do not have. Moreover, when you infer from facts back to their causes, you had better be very careful and make only probabilistic or otherwise guarded statements. For instance, you know that Marcos is tremendously wealthy and you want to argue that he found some of the hidden gold and then killed his competitors and possibly even his collaborators. If you say all of this, you must weigh your evidence for it. Marcos was a strongman, and most of them know and use quite unconventional methods to become rich. Some people believe that Egypt's President Hosni Mubarak, when he unwillingly resigned in the winter of 2011, had billions of dollars safely hidden in banks all over the world. Perhaps one should resist the temptation of conspiracy theories here and simply say that this is possible and even expected and stop right there. Conspiracy theories indicate logical problems and inferential failures. Do we need to say more? Perhaps this fact is all we need here.

## 8. Kafka and Sade Again

Kafka's Josef K thinks about his arrest. He talks to people, and he tries to write an appeal to his judges. He realizes that people know of his case and that they know as much or even more than he himself does. He tries to find the judges and the law court, but he cannot. What he finds are always something called low-level agents and officials. The real power wielders stay hidden. He also feels how the rope around his neck tightens all the time, although no concrete evidence of this or of anything else is available. Finally, K concludes and states that a conspiracy against him exists. Somewhere, he suspects, a secret agency is planning his doom he cannot avoid. All he can see is a kind of fake, illusion, and ridiculous theatre. Reality escapes his vision all the time without any reason to think that anything would change too soon. When his executioners finally come, take him away, and kill him – or actually they butcher him – K does not resist. He is only ashamed. He is a sacrificial lamb. Perhaps K is a Christian, as the second to last scene of the book in the Cathedral and with the priest may indicate. Then he is like a silent lamb in the end. The execution appears in three different perspectives, as an execution, butchering, and ritual sacrifice.

Josef K naturally succumbs to conspiracy theories because he is so desperate and understands next to nothing. Kafka offers an additional psychological explanation of the emergence of a conspiracy theory: sheer panic and desperation. When you have no evidence, you have no theory. However, K has some rudimentary evidence. At least they arrested him and told him that his case is in the law-courts, or his is a case in front of the law, but that is all. He panics and infers from all this that there is a malevolent agency who conspires against him even if he had done nothing – as we learn in the opening passage of the text of the *Trial*. He is desperate and bitter.

Sade's Juliette experiences no temptation towards conspiracy theories. She passes the entrance examination of the Sodality splendidly. Now she is one of the conspirators whose motive is mere personal pleasure. What Juliette saw can exist only in one's imagination and in bad fiction. Juliette flogs people, presumably, until her tennis elbow stops her. She cuts living flesh until no flesh exists. She enjoys all the hedonistic pleasure until she is deadly bored. Why would anyone join the Sodality? Sade invents a new breed of people to harass his readers, and in this sense, he is a conspirator too. However, in spite of its apparent fictional realism, Sade's account of the Sodality, as well as the cruel monastic community, is as crazy as any conspiracy theories ever were.

One can say that conspiracy theories may be illogical, but at the same time, one must realize that this entails, as well, that any representations of the insiders of such conspiracies are crazy as well. If the monastery had already existed one hundred years and looks nearly eternal, which is a kind of satirical religious joke, Justine's escape makes them fatally vulnerable and ultimately doomed. This also indicates why a realistic picture of a secret society is an oxymoron: when the story unfolds and the picture emerges, the society in question is no longer a secret.

Sade's answer to criticism could be that the church and their monastic orders are so powerful that nothing may hurt them. However, after Justine's escape their story is no longer secret. In the same way, we can doubt whether the Parisian Sodality could remain secret for so long. The problem with the Sodality is that it is not part of any larger conspiracy as the monks' monastery is. A conspiracy needs some depth if it is going to survive its enemies' and victims' wrath and vengeance. This is the obvious reason why conspiracy theorists think the conspiracies are so deep rooted and powerful. Supported only by its members, the Sodality is alone. However powerful they might be as individuals, that is not going to be enough. The members are unpredictable and untrustworthy rakes anyway. Their society cannot be stable in time. They need social trust but it is hopelessly missing. The Sodality as a secret society is a fatally one-dimensional conspiracy. The monastery, on the contrary, has the full support of the Order, which implies real depth and power.

Any conspiracy has to deflect two types of trouble: its external enemies and internal disturbances. The external enemies are the victims of the

conspiracy, as I said above. The Sodality may be able to handle them. The internal problems are more serious because its members are criminals, libertines, rakes, and lecherous egoists – only those types qualify. What prevents them from attacking each other, if they so fancy? The monks are always under the control of the Order no matter how rich and nasty they themselves might be. The Sodality has no such external power base and support, and therefore, it must perish sooner or later. Any conspiracy theorist understands this much and, therefore, says that the fiends are not only rich and powerful but also well connected. The conspiracy must be wide and deep. It extends to the top of society, all the way to the President of US, as it has been said in the case of 9/11 (Airaksinen 2009). In that unimaginable abyss of power and malevolence, no normal laws of responsibility may apply. The conspiracy is a safe haven that no outsider can even know or describe. Sade says nothing of how the Order works.

Kafka, the great writer as he is, would never explain and depict the secret agency or order which condemns Josef K and leaves him dead as a stone in the old quarry. Sade does what is impossible to do – he always does. He actually describes what such evil societies look like by giving a detailed account of their form and content, their actuality and potentiality, their work and norms, their life and soul. Of course, all this is fictional. In addition, when we notice how imaginary it is, we notice how impossible it all is. We also notice how bad such fiction is. This is the last consolation to the victims of conspiracies as described by Kafka: at least their conspiracy theories can be good and interesting fiction, unlike the stories that assume the point of view of the perpetrators of such conspiracies.

Conspiracy theories are interesting, no doubt about it. It is important that they essentially represent and presuppose the victim's angle of vision. In other words, their crucial feature is that they we articulate them from the point of view of the victim, which still makes them more interesting. To try to describe them from the point of view of the malevolent power wielder is a mistake. Here the reader can identify with the underdog, live through her fears, and experience her destiny. As such, the stories will live and flourish. Thus, the last explanation for the existence of conspiracy theories is that they are interesting, fantastic, and good sympathetic fiction. The best of stories live forever, and this is one true genre of them.

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