

Resistance according to Foucault

as read through a comparison between *History of Sexuality Vol. I* and subsequent smaller works

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In the essay "Desire and Pleasure," Gilles Deleuze outlines some of the differences between Michel Foucault's theory of power and his own, and notes what he interprets as the tensions within Foucault's account. Among them is a certain ambiguity about the status of resistance; as Deleuze puts it, "there are three notions that Michel takes in a completely new direction, but without having yet developed them: relations of force, truth, pleasures" (Deleuze 188). I too am perplexed by what is almost a coyness on the subject of resistance in Foucault's major works. He seems to insist that this concept is fundamental and vital, but his references to it remain marginal to his discussion of power, where it is never afforded a theoretical excursus or a concrete, historical specificity. After a careful reading, I think that Deleuze is quite accurate in his differentiation of three orientations in Foucault's allusions to resistance, and I borrow them, broadly (as "power," "truth" and "pleasure"), to structure this paper. Because of a particular interest in Foucault's formulation of the radical possibilities of pleasure, I have chosen to focus on *History of Sexuality Vol. I* as a primary text, along with several lesser-known essays and interviews (especially "The Ethics of the Concern of the Self as a Practice of Freedom" [ECSPF] and "The Subject and Power" [SP]). It is my hope that readings of these additional works will resolve some of the inconsistencies and fill in some of the gaps that emerge in *HSI*, leading to a richer understanding of resistance as Foucault conceives of it. In the first section, I survey the position of resistance within Foucault's analytics of power. Then, I go on to explore Foucault's emphasis on resistance via intellectual intervention in the field of

discourse and thought. Finally, I turn to Foucault's interest, in his late work, in the potential of practices of the self. I argue, ultimately, that it is in the figure of the subject that strategic discourses and transformative pleasures can interconnect. The move to center resistance in the subject's relations with herself and others lends a greater coherence to Foucault's often divergent remarks on this topic, and thus offers a more useful tool to his readers.

power

the phenomena of resistance would be like the inverse image of the *dispositifs* [of power], they would have the same characters, diffusion, heterogeneity (Deleuze, 188)

Any study of the status of resistance in Foucault must necessarily begin with a discussion of the nature of its double: power. After he published his popular genealogies (*Discipline and Punish* and *History of Sexuality Vol. I*), Foucault was frequently asked to respond to allegations that he modeled power in a totalizing and pessimistic fashion as (in his words) "a system of domination that controls everything and leaves no room for freedom" (ECSPF 35). Obviously exasperated at this misreading, he clarified his theory of power often in interviews and shorter works.

There is perhaps good reason that Foucault's conception of power is misunderstood, however. In *History of Sexuality Vol. I*, for example, the ways he references power may not explicitly espouse this distorted interpretation, but they also do little to preclude it. Rhetorically, power almost always appears as a sort of mysteriously insubstantial independent agent, almost a proper noun — as in this passage: "Power would no longer be dealing simply with legal subjects over whom the ultimate dominion was death, but with living beings, and the mastery it would be able to exercise over them would have to be applied at the level of life

itself; it was the taking charge of life, more than the threat of death, the gave power its access even to the body" (142-3). Here, we are invited to imagine power as a coherent and all-penetrating force that can, of its own accord, "exercise," "apply," and "take charge," and that is characterized by "dominion," "mastery" and "access." Although Foucault goes on to insist that "It is not that life has been totally integrated into techniques that govern and administer it; it constantly escapes them" (143), this book remains largely silent about instances of this supposedly constant escape, instead focusing almost exclusively on a virtually unilateral process of domination. He speaks in terms of "the multiplication of discourses concerning sex in the field of exercise of power itself: an institutional incitement to speak about it, and to do so more and more; a determination on the part of the agencies of power to hear it spoken about, and to cause it to speak through explicit articulation and endlessly accumulated detail" (18) — that is, although power is clearly not unified or uniform, it seems as if all its "fields of exercise" are aligned with institutions or agencies of coercion and control. Overall, forms of resistance to power (or, more accurately, to domination), either sexual or general, historical or metaphorical, get practically no press in *History of Sexuality Vol. I*.

The fact that the chapter entitled "Method" lays out more explicitly the theoretical structure of power and the interpenetration of power and resistance does not erase the more reductive rhetoric evident in other sections. While I wouldn't claim that there are absolute contradictions within *History of Sexuality Vol. I*, certain tensions do appear between the methodological insistence in this chapter that **power is plural, decentralized, ubiquitous, immanent, strategic, mobile, and unstable**, and the exposition in much of the rest of the book of an ever more all-encompassing and compulsory discursive regulation of sexuality. This could be attributed, in part, to the fact that *Vol. I* is an introduction to a

longer work that was never written as planned. Though Foucault states that "Where there is power, there is resistance... These points of resistance are present everywhere in the power network... by definition, they can only exist in the strategic field of power relations" (95-6), the concrete or historical operation of this resistance remains largely an open question.

To continue the discussion of what power is, for Foucault, and how it is related to resistance, I turn to two of his later works which elaborate (in my formulation) three additional principles that are not fully developed in the "Method" chapter of *History of Sexuality Vol. 1*: a 1984 interview published in English under the unwieldy title "The Ethics of the Concern of the Self as a Practice of Freedom," and an earlier essay called "The Subject and Power." The fact that such texts are not as widely read may contribute to the propagation of *HSI*'s ambivalences, which are counterbalanced by the following clarifications and additions:

1. Power is a relation
2. Freedom is the condition of power
3. Power is distinct from domination

I. In "The Subject and Power," Foucault makes it plain that "there is no such entity as power... Power exists only as exercised by some on others, only when it is put into action" (137). In contrast to how it sometimes inadvertently appears in *History of Sexuality Vol. 1*, then, power has no substance, agency, or ontology independent of instances of its "exercise" by active subjects. He goes on to elaborate on its doubly relational nature: "what defines a relationship of power is that it is a mode of action that does not act directly and immediately on others. Instead, it acts upon their actions" (137). Foucault is perhaps being disingenuous when he claims that "I scarcely use the word *power*, and if I use it on occasion it is simply as shorthand for the expression I generally use: *relations of power*... power is always present: I mean a relationship in which one person tries to control the conduct of the other" (ECSPP 34)

— clearly, he uses the word power very often, to sometimes confusing effect. However, the fundamentally and uniquely interpersonal character of power in his analytics stands. It is this perspective that warrants an optimism which is often overlooked in Foucault's work, inspired by the necessarily unstable plurality of power as a relation:

Power relations are rooted in the whole network of the social. This is not to say , however, that there is a primary and fundamental principle of power which dominates society down to the smallest detail... The forms and the specific situations of the government of some by others in a given society are multiple; they are superimposed, they cross over, limit and in some cases annul, in other reinforce, one another. (141)

So, first of all, because power is nothing more than the haphazard sum of "actions on possible actions," the possibility of productive intervention on an individual level is always immanent in its operation — "faced with a relationship of power, a whole field of responses, reaction, results, and possible inventions may open up" (138). Secondly, when power is defined as relations between subjects, it becomes clear that "there is no relationship of power without the means of escape or possible flight. Every power relationship implies, at least in potentia, a strategy of struggle" (142). This brings me to the next point:

2. Again, in "The Subject and Power," Foucault is more precise about why resistance and power are coextensive. Part of the definition of a "power relationship" is that "'the other' (the one over whom power is exercised) is recognized and maintained to the very end as a subject who acts" (138). Accordingly:

Power is exercised only over free subjects, and only insofar as they are 'free.' By this we mean individual or collective subjects who are faced with a field of possibilities in which several kinds of conduct, several ways of reacting and modes of behavior are available... Consequently, there is not a face-to-face confrontation of power and freedom as mutually exclusive facts (freedom disappearing everywhere power is exercised) but a much more complicated interplay. In this game, freedom may well appear as the condition for the exercise of power (139)

That is, because power is a relation, it exists only where there is a second term that answers it in its own domain, the domain of subjects who choose between possible actions. The moment there is no longer any alternative about how to respond to the call of power, the moment all reciprocity or dialogue is evacuated from a relation, power is in fact no longer in play. This is a rather tautological formulation; and, we might question the value of defining freedom so indiscriminately (is the choice, to use one of Foucault's extreme examples, to submit or commit suicide really a circumstance we want to name as freedom?). Nevertheless, the elegance of this argument is compelling; it becomes more clear, at this point, how power and resistance are mutually dependent:

At the very heart of the power relationship, and constantly provoking it, are the recalcitrance of the will and the intransigence of freedom. Rather than speaking of an essential antagonism, it would be better to speak of an 'agonism'—of a relationship that is at the same time mutual incitement and struggle; less of a face-to-face confrontation that paralyzes both sides than a permanent provocation. (139)

A relation can be called a power relation only when there is within it a freedom that responds. Power and resistance are partners in constituting all subjective relations.

3. In *HSI*, Foucault uses the word "power" to refer to even the most institutional and coercive occasions of regulation and control. This perhaps contributes to the misunderstanding whereby Foucauldian power is read as synonymous with domination. In *ECSPF*, Foucault clarifies this point: "one sometimes encounters what may be called situations or states of domination in which the power relations, instead of being mobile, allowing the various participants to adopt strategies modifying them, remain blocked, frozen" (27). Thus, while power is a characteristic of all relationships between subjects, domination describes only certain configurations of power, those in which the freedom that is natural to power is limited.

Domination is, in a sense, a perversion of power, an obstruction of the perpetual renegotiation that is proper to it. If resistance doesn't indicate progressive movement in relation to power, then, if its ontology is to continuously produce power by its very opposition to it, it is domination that resistance can more appropriately aim to eliminate:

I do not think that a society can exist without power relations, if by that one means the strategies by which individuals try to direct and control the conduct of others. The problem, then, is not to try to dissolve them... but to acquire the rules of law, the management techniques, and also the morality, the *ethos*, the practice of the self, that will allow us to play these games of power with as little domination as possible. (39-40)

I will return to the idea of resistance to domination through the "practice of the self" in the last section.

If we now have a clearer picture than is offered by *History of Sexuality Vol. I* alone of why, in Foucault's analytics, power and resistance are coextensive and interdependent, the question remains of how we, as active subjects, might intervene intentionally in the field of power relations to work towards minimizing domination. I now go on to explore Foucault's two primary answers to this question, in the domain of truth and the domain of pleasure, and the uneasy relationship between them.

truth

if *dispositifs* of power are constitutive of truth, if there is a truth of power, it must have as a counterstrategy a kind of power of truth, against powers (Deleuze, 188)

By way of introduction to "The Subject and Power," Foucault reiterates the centrality of resistance to his intellectual and political project:

I would like to suggest another way to go further toward a new economy of power relations, a way that is more empirical, more directly related to our present situation, and one that implies more relations between theory and practice. It consists in taking the forms of resistance against different forms of power as a starting point... of analyzing power relations through the antagonism of strategies. (128-9)

What is notable about this statement is that, in spite of its emphasis on "relations between theory and practice," it turns immediately to "analysis" as the exclusive mode of engagement. As I will discuss in the first two parts of this section, Foucault is quite explicit about the importance of philosophy and criticism to political struggles, and dedicated to outlining new and radical ways of framing resistance discursively. However, another look at *History of Sexuality Vol. I* can introduce the ways in which, even as Foucault is insistent about the interrelatedness of what I would identify as "theory" and "practice," "truth" and "action," or "discourse" and "pleasure," the precise terms of their relation remain ambiguous.

In the chapter "Objective" of *HSI*, Foucault describes in detail the reductive "juridico-discursive" model of power that he rejects, which consists only of "legislative power on one side, and an obedient subject on the other" (85). Moreover, he argues that this schema is a deception necessary to rendering modern forms of domination "acceptable": "power is tolerable only on condition that it mask a certain part of itself. Its success is proportional to its

ability to hide its own mechanisms" (86). Implied in this structure is the belief that, if only we could "break free" from the bogus "theoretical privilege of law and sovereignty" (90), more effective possibilities of resistance would be available to us. One might be tempted to call this an indictment of "the language of power, the representation it gave of itself" (87) as ideological, if Foucault didn't reject that term absolutely. Foucault restates his belief in the vital importance of an intellectual analysis of power to political struggles at other points as well. In *ECSPF* he claims that, since the Greeks, "the relationship between philosophy and politics is permanent and fundamental" (35); and in a debate with Chomsky, he tells us that "It seems to me that the real political task in a society such as ours is to criticize the workings of institutions, which appear to be both neutral and independent; to criticize and attack them in such a manner that the political violence which has always exercised itself obscurely through them will be unmasked, so that one can fight against them" (HN 130). On one hand, I would invite us to be skeptical of what seems at times to be a naïve, almost Habermasian optimism about the transparent correspondence between accurate information and effective action. On the other hand, however, we must be sensitive to the fact that, when Foucault refers to truth, knowledge, or discourse, it is always insofar as they are integrated with the domain of action, practice, and bodies, and not in opposition to it.

One of his most eloquent statements of the centrality of intellectual engagement to political change comes in a short interview entitled "So is it Important to Think?" (SIIT) which he gave shortly after a left victory in the 1981 elections. In response to "a reproach that was often made: the criticism carried out by intellectuals doesn't lead to anything" (171) Foucault replied:

I don't think criticism can be set against transformation... Thought does exist, both beyond and before systems and edifices of discourse. It is something that is often hidden but always

drives everyday behaviors... Criticism consists in uncovering that thought and trying to change it... To do criticism is to make harder those acts which are now too easy. Understood in these terms, criticism (and radical criticism) is utterly indispensable for any transformation... as soon as people begin to have trouble thinking things the way they have been thought, transformation becomes at the same time very urgent, very difficult, and entirely possible. (172)

Certainly, he does not argue that unmasking the "truth of power" will lead, in any causal or prescriptive sense, to changes in action. Rather, the development of thought (and critical interventions in it by intellectuals like himself) is inextricably intertwined with "everyday behaviors," so that contributions to the former are also immanent to the latter.

This leads us to Foucault's emphasis, in his late work, on what he calls "games of truth." While he concedes, in *ECSPF*, that "one simply cannot say that games of truth are nothing but games of power" (38) — in other words, that one shouldn't simply collapse the discursive production and validation of knowledge into the field of force relations — it is nonetheless through games of truth that subjects constitute the practices of their relationships to themselves and to others. Like power relations, games of truth are never stable or consolidated, and hence are open to transformation: "In a given game of truth, it is always possible to discover something different and to more or less modify this or that rule, and sometimes even the entire game of truth" (39). Thus, in seeking new and radically different ways of thinking about power, the goal is perhaps not to disabuse us of erroneous notions about it (to enlighten us from a state of false consciousness), but rather to make a strategic intervention in a fundamental field of social production. As Foucault puts it: "nothing so far has shown that it is possible to define a strategy outside of this concern [with truth]. It is within the field of the obligation to truth that it is possible to move about in one way or another, sometimes against the effects of domination which may be linked to structures of truth or institutions entrusted with truth" (37). Going beyond his repudiation of the juridical model of

power in *HSI*, it appears here that Foucault is aiming at an analytics of power that is truer not in the sense of being more accurate, but in the sense of being more strategic.

I believe it is in this light that we should read what I identify as Foucault's more specific discursive prescriptions for activism. That is, piggybacking on his distrust of the persistence of the juridical paradigm and its assorted elements (including the universal subject, rights, and justice), Foucault at times made suggestions about what language and concepts should and should not be used to frame political struggles. Here, there remains some tension between a kind of rhetorical embargo (radical change can be provoked only when certain terminologies are abandoned), and a strategic position (we should mobilize such terms with full awareness of their constructedness, limitations, and tactical opportunities). In terms of the former, Foucault claimed, in response to Chomsky, that:

you can't prevent me from believing that these notions of human nature, of justice, of the realization of the essence of human beings, are all notions and concepts which have been formed within our civilization, within our type of knowledge and our form of philosophy, and that as a result form part of our class system; and one can't, however regrettable it may be, put forward these notions to describe or justify a fight which should — and shall in principle — overthrow the very fundamentals of our society. (HN 140)

In this view, it is precisely because these "notions" are interwoven with the status quo of both discourse and relations in practice that they must be purged from radical movements. On the other hand, in this same interview, Foucault also presents a more strategic assessment of the citation of such concepts: "it seems to me that the idea of justice in itself is an idea which in effect has been invented and put to work in different types of societies as an instrument of a certain political and economic power or as a weapon against that power" (138). Here, the "idea of justice" is not inherently stabilizing, and it is equally possible to marshal it as a tool of resistance.

Most compelling are the instances where Foucault finds a way to reconcile these divergent approaches, allowing for a subtle interplay between elements we must reject and elements we must strategically mobilize. In a seminar brief called "Society Must Be Defended," Foucault discusses the "thematic" of war as an alternative to the juridical model. Among its advantages is the fact that

The subject who speaks in this discourse cannot occupy the position of the universal subject. In that general struggle of which he speaks, he is necessarily on one side or the other... And if he also speaks of truth, it is that perspectival and strategic truth that enables him to win the victory. So, in this case, we have a political and historical discourse that lays claim to truth and right, while explicitly excluding itself from juridico-philosophical universality. (296)

The compromise here is that, instead of discarding universal concepts that are valuable weapons, what we abandon is the claim to the authority of a universal speaking position. We speak, instead, for ourselves and our particular investments. Our rights as subjects don't exist prior to us, waiting for us to claim them; rather, they are forged in the process of this claiming. Ultimately, then, Foucault calls not for radical activists to reframe how they speak, but for them to rethink themselves as historically and culturally constituted subjects actively engaged in equally distinctive struggles. This would enable more effective strategies for how to intervene in and exploit discourses that are always permeated with power relations, never before or beyond them.

While this recommendation is of great value, it is one thing to assert that transformations in ways of speaking and thinking are inseparable from practices and bodies, and quite another to coherently model the specifics of this interdependence. Certainly, Foucault's study of sexuality in *History of Sexuality Vol. I* is a notable attempt. In the introduction, he frames the project in these terms: "What is at issue, briefly, is the over-all 'discursive fact,' the

way in which sex is 'put into discourse.' Hence, too, my main concern will be to locate the forms of power, the channels it takes, and the discourses it permeates in order to reach the tenuous and individual modes of behavior" (11). These two sentences are a sort of microcosm of what I see as a methodological tension in the book: on the one hand, power is like an infinitely extensive network threaded through the poles of "discourses" and "behavior," linking them; on the other (notice the first sentence), discourse, and not sexual behaviors or bodies, gets most of the attention. The majority of *HSI* is dedicated to describing "the great process of transforming sex into discourse" (22), to the point where the sex act itself appears as a fantasy, "an ideal point made necessary by the deployment of sexuality and its operation" that disingenuously "enables one to conceive of power solely as law and taboo" (155). And the material functioning of power (not only the conception of it) is at issue: "these discourses on sex did not multiply apart from or against power, but in the very space and as the means of its exercise" (32). What emerges, then, is an analysis of sexuality in which power and discourse partnered up to extend a total hold over sex, which was thereafter "constrained to lead a discursive existence" (33). There is no longer any sex which can be considered prior to or outside of discursive mediation — the realm of bodies and practices seems to have been largely folded into the realm of discourse. Foucault was apparently aware of potential criticisms of this move, and he responds to some of them within the book. Replying to the question of the place of the body, Foucault returns to the theme of intellectual intervention:

the purpose of the present study is in fact to show how deployments of power are directly connected to the body—to bodies, functions, physiological processes, sensations, and pleasures; far from the body having to be effaced, what is needed is to make it visible through an analysis in which the biological and the historical... are bound together in an increasingly complex fashion in accordance with the development of the modern technologies of power (152)

If we could only use "analysis" to "show" and "make visible" the way things really are with bodies and power, we would be better positioned to resist the domination of "sexuality." In this passage (as more generally in the previous parts of this section), Foucault's intervention towards the political project we crudely call "sexual liberation" originates in and is directed at the discursive field.

pleasure

A third direction would be pleasures, the body and its pleasures
(Deleuze, 188)

However, if the fact that sex is "constrained" to discursivity is interpreted as a form of domination, does it not follow that there might be some form of resistance that reduces, circumvents, or rejects the discursive? This is what Foucault seems to suggest in this oft-quoted passage:

It is the aim—through a tactical reversal of the various mechanisms of sexuality—to counter the grips of power with the claims of bodies, pleasures, and knowledges, in their multiplicity and the possibility of resistance. The rallying point for the counterattack against the deployment of sexuality ought not to be sex-desire, but bodies and pleasures. (156)

This statement is tantalizing, but difficult to situate within the larger text. The first problem is that, with sexuality as with power/domination, *History of Sexuality Vol. I* can come across as unduly totalizing, though that was certainly not Foucault's intention. It gives the impression that there is no form of sexual expression, no sexual practice, which does not feed back into the great machinery of *scientia sexualis*. If "We must not think that by saying yes to sex, one says no to power; on the contrary, one tracks along the course laid out by the general deployment of sexuality" (156), does radicalism entail never saying yes to sex? Given that under this regime

there is no prediscursive sex act or sexual body, little space appears to remain where we might locate these pleasures which could supposedly resist "the deployment of sexuality." Moreover, pleasure itself is implicated in power in a "perpetual spiral": "The power which thus took charge of sexuality" (which, remember, is most fundamentally characterized by its discursivity) "...wrapped the sexual body in its embrace. There was undoubtedly an increase in effectiveness and an extension of the domain controlled; but also a sensualization of power and a gain of pleasure... the pleasure discovered fed back to the power that encircled it" (44-5). Even given, again, an acknowledgement that in Foucault's terms, discourse and practices coinhabit the field of power relations, and resistance always lives inside it, I'd argue there's a deep ambiguity here. If no figure of modern sex escapes the discourse of sexuality, even those that name themselves as "liberating," how can we imagine these bodily pleasures that would destabilize rather than reinforce this form of domination? Would they originate within the discursive, or be situated in opposition to it — or somehow do both?

Regardless, Foucault did insist, in *HSI*, on "the importance assumed by sex as a political issue" (145) because of the primacy of "biopower" in the modern West. Under this new regime of power, "[sex] was at the pivot of the two axes along which developed the entire political technology of life" (145): "The disciplines of the body and the regulations of the population" (139). As such, it remains a vital terrain of engagement for radical action. And around the same time as the publication of this book, Foucault reiterated several times his commitment to pleasure as a form of resistance, saying (as quoted by biographer James Miller) that "It is necessary to invent with the body, with its elements, its surfaces, its volumes, its depths, a nondisciplinary eroticism: that of the body plunged into a volatile and diffused state through chance encounters and incalculable pleasures" (278), and that "'one should aim,' in the new feminist and gay social movements, not at a 'liberation' of 'sex-desire,' but rather 'at a

general economy of pleasure not based on sexual norms" (273). To take this idea further requires recourse, again, to later essays and interviews.

The direction these smaller texts will point us in is also suggested, however, in the completion of the *History of Sexuality* project — distant as volumes 2 and 3 may seem from these questions. In the introduction to *History of Sexuality Vol. 2*, Foucault notes that as he continued his work, it became clear that a "theoretical shift" was necessary toward an analysis of the subject, in particular "the relationship of self with self and the forming of oneself as subject" (6). The subject was not entirely ignored in volume 1: Foucault lists the "specification of individuals" through the swarming classification of perversions (42-3) as one of the primary operations of power in the domain of sexuality, and affirms that "it is through sex... that each individual has to pass in order to have access to his own intelligibility" (155). The subject was also part of my discussion of the relationship of power and freedom in the first section. In *ECSPF* Foucault claims that "I have always been interested in this problem [of subjectivity and truth], even if I framed it somewhat differently" (25). But it is clear that there is a new and almost exclusive emphasis on the "practice of the self" in his late work, and a corresponding move away from "theoretical and scientific games" and "coercive practices" (25). He also terms this new terrain "asceticism... an exercise of the self on the self by which one attempts to develop and transform oneself, and to attain to a certain mode of being" (26). Though volumes 2 and 3 of *History of Sexuality* turn rather strangely to Greek and Roman history, we can read obliquely through this move Foucault's characteristic optimism for the contemporary moment, his drive to show, through historical analysis, that things can one day be different because once they were different, that "So many things can be changed, being as fragile as they are, tied more to... complex but transitory historical contingencies than to inevitable anthropological constants" (SIIT 173).

In other writings from the same period, Foucault presents practices of the self more explicitly as the key territory of contemporary political struggles. In "The Subject and Power," he states emphatically that

the political, ethical, social, philosophical problem of our days is not to try to liberate the individual from the state, and from the state's institutions, but to liberate us both from the state and from the type of individualization linked to the state. We have to promote new forms of subjectivity through the refusal of this kind of individuality that has been imposed on us for several centuries (134)

The most valuable struggles today "are not exactly for or against the 'individual'; rather, they are struggles against the 'government of individualization'" (129) through the invention of new forms of self-government. This returns us to the question of where we could locate resistance in the realm of pleasures, bodies, and sex. As Foucault reiterates the issue in *ECSPF*, it is important to "emphasize practices of freedom over processes of liberation... does it make any sense to say, 'Let's liberate our sexuality'? Isn't the problem rather that of defining the practices of freedom by which one could define what is sexual pleasure and erotic, amorous and passionate relationships with others?" (26). Subject-centered "practices" and "relationships with others" are the crucial terms that are introduced here, post *HSI* (practices of freedom are closely aligned, in this text, with practices of the self — the self defined as a free subject). An activist "sexual pleasure" constructed along these lines could meet all the Foucauldian criteria I have discussed thus far: resistance from within the networks of power, through a new type of relation, that restores power's flexibility and mobility; resistance intimately dependent on a new discursive orientation, a new way of thinking about ourselves — but in the activity of the subject this strategic truth is translated into practices that involve the body in new pleasures and relationships. That is, I would argue that it is the subject, as Foucault formulates it, who is the meeting place, the pivot of the poles of truth and action, discourse and pleasure which has

thus far been so elusive. Through practices of the self, we answer the domination of individualization through "sexuality" in a language characterized by the same interdependence of thought and behavior as power itself, but with an idiom that we have creatively remade as our own.

The fact that Foucault framed his own radical sexual activities in these terms supports the premise that this model is indeed the most promising and coherent rendition of the transformative possibilities he implied in *History of Sexuality Vol. 1*. And if it still appears unhelpfully abstract, a look at how he described his more specific exploits can also contribute to imagining how it might be put into practice. Although Foucault claimed that "Every time I have tried to do a piece of theoretical work it has been on the basis of elements of my own experience: always in connection with processes I saw unfolding around me" (SIIT 173), explicit engagement with his own activism or even with contemporary events is notably absent from his books. Since he was adamant about the close connections between theory and action, we can only speculate about why he maintains this disjuncture in his major works. But it doesn't seem illegitimate to turn now to what he did say about his alternative pleasures in a handful of interviews. I'd like to divide his responses into two categories evoking, respectively, work on the self, and relationships with others.

Foucault situated himself not only in opposition to the mainstream, but to some aspects of developing liberation movements as well. Returning to the idea of the importance of new constructions of truth to radicalism, we could extrapolate that he was criticizing a paucity of conceptual transformation even as behaviors and institutions adapted. For example, Miller paraphrases Foucault's uneasiness with "coming out" as "a politicized ritual of public avowal" (255) in the gay rights movement:

The problem with this tactic, from Foucault's point of view, was simple: it assumed that one has a more or less fixed sexual identity that was *worth* avowing in public... "The relationships we have to have with ourselves," as he put it in a 1982 interview with gay activists, "are not ones of identity, rather they must be relationships of differentiation, of creation, of innovation. To be the same is really boring"... Foucault did not want his work "taken as talk about a potentially sequesterable minority" (256)

This statement stresses that we must refuse the calcification of identity into static forms that can be institutionally dominated in favor of subjective practices that make possible a self-fashioning that is continually mobile and inventive. Miller also quotes Foucault on S/M: "I think that S/M is... the real creation of new possibilities of pleasure... it's a kind of creation, a creative enterprise, which has as one of its main features what I call the desexualization of pleasure... The S/M game is very interesting... because it is a strategic relation, but it is always fluid "(263). And on gay bathhouses: "You meet men there who are to you as you are to them: nothing but a body with which combinations and productions are possible... There is an exceptional possibility in this context to desubjectify oneself, to desubjugate oneself... [to] desexualize oneself" (264). These descriptions share a tangible excitement about erotic environments that enable a strategic remobilization of stagnant deposits of power in the self. This inert subjectivity is undone through bodily activities that create unfamiliar pleasures. The idea of "desexualization" in these contexts may seem perplexing. Miller points out that the word "sexe" in French has a much stronger connotation of genitility, specifically: Foucault is in part calling for sexual pleasure that is not exclusively concentrated in the genitals. I think Foucault's choice of this word is even better understood in light of his definition of sex in *HSI*: "sex," in that instance, refers to a construction marshaled by "sexuality" the discourse to support its distinctive forms of domination. To be "desexualized" is perhaps to go beyond "sex-desire" to the more unpredictable realm of "bodies and pleasures" where there is greater freedom to work on the self. Foucault finds, in his own encounters with such alternative sexual practices,

concrete models for spaces which can "desubjectify" us in the sense of restoring flexibility to our process of self construction through new ways of experiencing bodily pleasures.

In a short interview published as "Friendship as a Way of Life" (which is perhaps Foucault's signature statement on being gay), the importance of pleasure and of self-fashioning or desubjectivation is still prevalent. Foucault says that "What we must work on, it seems to me, is not so much to liberate our desires but to make ourselves infinitely more susceptible to pleasure" (137), and that "it's up to us to advance into a homosexual ascesis that would make us work on ourselves and invent—I do not say discover—a manner of being that is still improbable" (137). But his primary emphasis is on resistance through relationships with others rather than through turning inward:

Another thing to distrust is the tendency to relate the question of homosexuality to the problem of 'Who am I?' and 'What is the secret of my desire?' Perhaps it would be better to ask oneself, 'What relations, through homosexuality, can be established, invented, multiplied, and modulated?' The problem is not to discover in oneself the truth of one's sex, but, rather, to use one's sexuality henceforth to arrive at a multiplicity of relationships. (135-6)

These potential relationships explicitly don't have to be sexual, but they do always involve the productive process of individuals giving each other pleasure. Foucault goes on to explain why they are a key terrain of intervention:

One of the concessions one makes to the other is not to present homosexuality as anything but a kind of immediate pleasure... it cancels everything that can be troubling in affection, tenderness, friendship, fidelity, camaraderie, and companionship, things that our rather sanitized society can't allow a place for without fearing the formation of new alliances and the tying together of unforeseen lines of force... To imagine a sexual act that doesn't conform to law or nature is not what disturbs people. But that individuals are beginning to love one another—there's the problem... Institutional codes can't validate these relations with multiple intensities, variable colors, imperceptible movements and changing forms. These relations short-circuit it and introduce love where there's supposed to be only law, rule, or habit (136-7)

I quote this passage at length because, in addition to its beauty, it is one of Foucault's more overt descriptions of how resistance interacts with domination. In this case, alternative relational models make possible the "formation of new alliances and the tying together of unforeseen lines of force" that may destabilize the balance of power. If "Institutional codes can't validate" them, there is the potential for them to "short-circuit," opening up a space of greater freedom where real transformation can take place. What is crucial for me in this formulation is the centrality of collective engagement (in addition to individual work on the self) to resistance. If we are to think of ourselves differently and incorporate this new truth into a bodily practice of pleasure, the process necessarily must involve other people in new forms of kinship and affinity.

In reformulating his analytic of power and resistance through the subject in its relationship with self and others in his later works, Foucault answers the question, raised by *History of Sexuality Vol. 1*, of how discourse and practices might come together in the field of power relations to oppose domination. The activity of the self can be conducted only within the determinations of discourse, but in the body new modes of thought can be translated into new pleasures that reconfigure in positive ways how power is exercised and how we are individualized. It is precisely this sort of transformative potential that Foucault locates in his personal experiences with sexual subcultures. By arguing for this particular coherence in Foucault's account of resistance, I don't intend, first of all, to try to efface all the very productive conflicts and divergences in Foucault's work. Not the least of which is marked by criticism, from some quarters, of his subjective turn — as Deleuze paraphrases it, there is a "danger" here of "reverting to an analogue of the 'constituting subject'" (184-5), after Foucault so emphatically rejected psychological and ideological models of interiority. Nor do I wish to

insist that we wholeheartedly embrace Foucault's optimism in this department — he certainly had a vested interest in championing his chosen pleasures. Nevertheless, he does manage to articulate them compellingly (if briefly) in his philosophical terms to a degree that suggests, at least, that for him they could manifest in practice what he was theorizing intellectually. Finally, it would be antithetical to Foucault's project to attempt to reduce it to a kind of prescription for activism. As he puts it so eloquently:

the idea of a program and proposals is dangerous. As soon as a program is presented, it becomes a law, and there's a prohibition against inventing... The program must be wide open. We have to dig deeply to show how things have been historically contingent, for such and such reason intelligible but not necessary. We must make the intelligible appear against a background of emptiness and deny its necessity. We must think that what exists is far from filling all possible spaces. To make a truly unavoidable challenge of the question: What can be played? (FAWL 139-40)

Even so, if we never attempt to imagine the possibilities for an activist practice that is grounded in theoretical awareness in terms of some concrete principles, we will never know where to begin. It is in hopes that intelligibility can coexist with playfulness that I propose that it is useful to read Foucault's texts for a clearer picture than he perhaps explicitly offered of how he understood the imperative of resistance. His life and works are one rather extraordinary answer to his own question, and comprehending his answer in all its richness may stimulate us to chart our own course through the fields of power and resistance, discourse and action.

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