

FOUCAULT LIVE

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SEMIOTEXT(E)

- 6 Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983). See also *On the Line*, trans. John Johnston (New York: Semiotext(e) Foreign Agents Series, 1983). [Ed.]
- 7 Michel Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," *Semiotext(e)* (Vol III, No. 1, 1978). [Ed.]
- 8 For a later clarification [1994], see Gilles Deleuze, "Desire and Pleasure," *More & Less*, No. 2, 1996 (Pasadena: Art Center). [Ed.]
- 9 Jean Baudrillard, *Forget Foucault* (New York: Semiotext(e) Foreign Agents Series, 1987). [Ed.]

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HISTORY AND HOMOSEXUALITY

Q: K.J. Dover's book *Greek Homosexuality*¹ presents a new elucidation of homosexuality in ancient Greece.

MF: It seems to me that the most important thing about this book is that Dover shows that our division of sexual behavior between homo- and heterosexuality is absolutely not relevant for the Greeks and the Romans. That means two things: on the one hand that they lacked the notion or *concept* of this division, and on the other that they didn't have the experience. A person who went to bed with another of the same sex did not experience himself as a homosexual. This seems to me fundamental.

When a man made love with a boy, the moral issue revolved around the question: was this man active or passive, and did he make love with a beardless boy—the appearance of a beard defined a cut-off point? The combination of these two types of dichotomy institutes a very complex profile defining morality and immorality. Thus it makes no sense to say that homosexuality was tolerated by the Greeks. Dover brings out the complexity of this very coded relationship between men and boys. It had to do with flight and protection for the boys, and pursuit and courtship for the men. Thus there existed a whole civilization of pederasty, of man-boy love, which necessitated, as always happens with this type of coding, the valorization or devalorization of certain kinds of behavior.

That is what I would take from Dover's book. It dispenses with a lot of things in historical analysis regarding the famous sexual taboos, the very notion of the taboo. You have to take things differently, that is to say, write the history of a family of experiences, of different ways of life, a history of the diverse kinds of relationships between people of the same sex, according to age, etc. In other words, the condemnation of Sodom shouldn't serve as the historical model.

I would add something that is not found in Dover's book, an idea that came to me last year. There is a whole theoretical discourse on the love of boys in Greece, from Plato to Plutarch, Lucian, etc. And what me struck in this series of theoretical texts is this: it is very difficult for a Greek or a Roman to accept the idea that a boy brought up, by virtue of his condition, as a free man born of a noble family to exercise familial and social responsibilities and assume power

over others—as Roman senator, man of politics, Greek orator—to accept the idea that this boy has been *passive* in his relationship with a man. It's something unthinkable within their moral values, one that can't be assimilated to the status of a taboo either. That a man pursues a boy goes without saying, and that this boy be a slave, in Rome particularly, is only natural. As the saying goes: "to be fucked is a necessity for a slave, a shame for a free man, and a favor returned for an emancipated slave." In contrast, then, it's immoral for a free young man to be fucked. It's in this context that one can understand the law forbidding prostitutes to exercise any political function. One calls a prostitute not a streetwalker but someone who has been supported successfully and publicly by different people. That he has been passive, an object of pleasure, makes it inadmissible that he exercise any authority. That's what the theoretical texts always put up against. For them it's a matter of edifying a discourse, which consists in proving that the only true love must exclude sexual relations with a boy and stick to affective pedagogical relations, of a quasi-paternal nature. This is, in fact, a way of making acceptable the practice of love between free men and free boys, while denying and transposing what actually happens in reality. Therefore one should not interpret the existence of this discourse as the sign of a tolerance toward homosexuality, in practice as in thought, but rather as the sign of an *obstruction*. One speaks of it because there's a problem, for one must retain the following principle: it's not because one speaks about something in society that it is admissible. If one accounts for a discourse, one should not investigate the reality of which this discourse would be the reflection, but the reality of the problem that forces people to speak about it. What makes it mandatory to speak of these man-boy relations—whereas one speaks much less about marriage relations with women—is very much the fact that these relations were difficult to accept morally.

Q: It was difficult to accept morally and yet the whole of Greek society was founded on these pederastic relations, let's say pedagogical in the widest sense. Isn't there an ambiguity there?

MF: Actually, I have simplified things a bit. What is necessary to take into account in the analysis of these phenomena is the existence of a monosexual society, since there was a very clear separation between men and women. Certainly there were relations between women that were very close, but which are not well known because there is practically no theoretical, reflective text written by women about love and ancient sexuality. I set apart the texts of several pythagorians and neo-pythagorians written between the first and eighth centuries B.C. and poetry. In contrast, we have all sorts of evidence that refers to a monosexual masculine society.

Q: How would you explain the fact that these monosexual relations finally disappeared with Rome, well before Christianity?

MF: In fact, it seems to me that one can only observe the disappearance on a massive scale of monosexual societies in 18th century Europe. In Rome, one finds a society where the woman in a distinguished family had a very important role at the familial, social and political level. But it's not so much the increased importance of the wife's role that provoked the dislocation of monosexual societies; it was rather the establishment of new political structures that prevented friendship from continuing to have the political and social functions that it had had up to that point; if you like, the development of institutions of political life made relations of friendship no longer possible, as they had been in an aristocratic society. But this is only an hypothesis...

Q: What you are saying leads me to raise a question about the origin of homosexuality, and here I must separate male from female homosexuality. The problem is this: in Greece, masculine homosexuality can only exist in a highly hierarchical society, with women occupying the lowest level. It seems to me that in taking up again the Greek ideal, masculine gay society of the 20th century thus legitimates a misogyny that rejects women.

MF: Actually I do think that this Greek myth plays a role, but it only plays the role that one wants it to play: it's not because one refers to it that one assumes a certain behavior, but because one assumes a certain behavior that one will refer to it while remodelling it. I find very striking the fact that, in America, homosexual society is a monosexual society with ways of life, organizations at the professional level, a certain number of pleasures that are not of the sexual order. Thus that you have homosexuals who live in a group or community, in a relation of constant exchange, reveals completely the return of monosexuality. Women also have lived in monosexual groups, but clearly in many cases they were forced to; it was a response, often novel and creative, to a status that was imposed upon them. I am thinking specifically of a very interesting book by an American, *Surpassing the Love of Men*. The author, Lillian Faderman,² studies women's friendships from the 18th century to the first half of the 19th on the following basis: "I will never raise the question whether or not these women had sexual relations. I will simply consider on the one hand the network of these friendships or the very history of a friendship, see how it unfolds, how the couple lives it, what kinds of behavior it entails, and how the women were linked to one another; and on the other hand, what is the lived experience, the type of affect, of attachment linked to that."

Thus a whole culture of feminine monosexuality appears, of a life among women that is fascinating.

Q: However, what you were saying in *Gai Pied* and what you are saying now seem problematic to me in this respect: to study the feminine monosexual groupings without posing the question of their sexuality would seem to continue the attitude that confines women to the domain of feeling, with its eternal stereotypes: their freedom of contact, their free emotions, their friendships, etc.

MF: Perhaps I will appear too lax to you, but I think that the phenomena that one would like to study are so complex and pre-coded by grids of analysis already in place that one must accept certain methods, incomplete to be sure, but generative of new reflections and which allow new phenomena to appear. Such methods allow one to go beyond the completely hackneyed terms current in the 1970s: taboos, the law, repression. These terms were very effective politically and useful in terms of knowledge, but one can attempt to renew the instruments of analysis. From this point of view, the freedom of trajectory appears to me to be much greater in America than in France. Which does not mean that one must regard it as sacred.

Q: Perhaps you could speak about John Boswell's book, *Christianity, Social Tolerance and Homosexuality*.³

MF: It's an interesting book because it reconsiders things already known and brings new things to light. Things already known that it develops: that what is called Christian or indeed Judeo-Christian sexual morality is a myth. It suffices to consult the documents: this famous morality that localizes sexual relations in marriage, that condemns adultery and all non-procreative and non-matrimonial behavior, was well established before Christianity. You find all these formulations in the texts of the Stoics and Pythagorians and these formulations are already so "Christian" that the Christians take them up as they are. What is rather surprising is that this philosophical morality comes in a certain sense retrospectively, after a real movement in society to valorize matrimony and marriage and affective relations between spouses... Marriage contracts dating from the Hellenistic period have been found in Egypt in which women demanded the husband's sexual fidelity, which he promised. These contracts did not emanate from the noble families but from an urban and somewhat popular milieu.

Since the documents are rare, one can hypothesize that the Stoic texts on this new matrimonial morality distilled in cultivated circles what was already taking place in the popular milieu. That shakes up completely the whole familiar landscape of a Greco-Roman world of marvelous sexual license destroyed by Christianity in a single blow.

Beginning from this perspective, Boswell was very struck to see to what point Christianity remained in conformity with what existed before it, particularly on the question of homosexuality. Until the 4th century Christianity takes up the same type of morality; it simply tightens up the bolts. There, however, beginning precisely in the 4th century, new problems will be raised with the development of monasticism. The demand for virginity then emerges. First, in the ascetic Christian texts there is an insistence on the problem of abstinence of not eating too much, of not thinking too much about eating; slowly a haunting by libidinal images, images of concupiscence, develops. One then finds a certain type of experience, of a relationship to desires and to sex which is rather new. As for homosexuality, even if you find for example in the work of Basile de Cesare

a condemnation of friendship between boys as such, that doesn't carry against the whole of society. It seems to me certain that the great condemnation of homosexuality properly speaking dates from the Middle Ages, between the 8th and 12th centuries. Boswell states clearly that it is the 12th century, but already it appears in a certain number of penitential texts in the 8th and 9th centuries. In any case, it is necessary to break up the image of a Judeo-Christian morality and account for the fact that these elements were put into place at different epochs around certain practices and institutions passing from certain milieus to others.

Q: To return to Boswell, what seems surprising to me is that he speaks about a gay subculture in the 12th century which had for one of its members the monk A. de Rievaulx.

MF: Actually, there was already in antiquity a pederastic culture that appears to diminish with the shrinking of the man-boy relation in the Roman Empire. One of Plutarch's dialogues accounts for this transformation; all the modern values are put on the side of the woman who is older than the boy; it's their relation that is valorized. When two boy lovers show up, they are slightly ridiculed. They are clearly the story's rejects, and moreover they disappear from the end of the dialogue. Thus the pederastic culture was shrinking. But incidentally, one must not forget that Christian monasticism presented itself as the continuation of philosophy; one was dealing therefore with a monosexual society. As the highly elevated ascetic demands of the first monasticism rapidly relaxed and if one admits that beginning in the Middle Ages the monasteries alone were the tritularies of culture, one has all the elements that would explain why one can speak of a gay subculture. Add the elements of spiritual guidance, thus of friendship and an intense affective relation between old and young monks, considered as a possibility for salvation, and they had there a form of the Platonic type predetermined in antiquity. If one admits that until the 12th century it was very much Platonism that constituted the cultural base for this monastic and ecclesiastic elite, I think the phenomenon is explained.

Q: I understood that Boswell was postulating the existence of a conscious homosexuality.

MF: Boswell begins with a long chapter in which he justifies his trajectory, why he takes the gays and gay culture as the guiding thread of his history. At the same time he is absolutely convinced that homosexuality is not a transhistoric constant. His idea is the following: if men have sexual relations among themselves, whether between an adult and a young man in the city or in the monastery, it is not only because of the tolerance of others vis-à-vis a certain form of sexual act; it implies necessarily a culture, that is to say, modes of expression, valorizations, etc., and thus the recognition by the subjects themselves of the specific nature of these relations. One can admit this idea as long as it doesn't imply a constant sexual or anthropomorphic category, but a cultural

phenomenon that changes in time while maintaining itself in its general formulation: a relation between individuals of the same sex that entails a mode of life in which the consciousness of being singular among others is present. Beyond a certain point it's also an aspect of monosexuality. One could imagine an equivalent hypothesis, a feminine subculture in which the fact of being a woman would assume that one has the possibility of a relationship with other women which is given neither to men nor even to other women. It seems to me that around Sappho and the myth of Sappho there was this form of a subculture.

Q: Actually some recent feminist research goes in this direction, concerning in particular the women troubadors, whose texts are addressed to other women. But interpretation is difficult since one doesn't know if they were only the mouthpieces for certain noblemen like the male Troubadors. But certain texts exist in any case that speak like Christine de Pisan of the "feminine sex" and that prove that there was a certain awareness of an autonomous feminine culture, imperiled moreover by the society of men. Should one speak here of a feminine gay culture? Applied to women the term "gay" as doesn't seem to me to be very operative.

MF: Actually the term has a much stricter meaning in France than in America. In any case, it seems to me that in postulating at least a masculine gay culture, Boswell does not contradict himself in relation to the thesis that would have it that homosexuality is not an anthropomorphic constant which is sometimes repressed and sometimes accepted.

Q: In *The History of Sexuality* you analyze the discursification of sex, as it proliferates in the modern epoch, yet in this discourse on sex it appears that homosexuality is absent, at least until around 1850.

MF: I would like to understand how certain sexual behaviors become problems at a given moment, give rise to analyses, constitute objects of knowledge. One tries to decipher these behaviors, understand them and classify them. The interesting thing is not so much a social history of sexual behaviors, a historical psychology of attitudes in regard to sexuality, but a history of the problematisation of these behaviors. There are two golden ages in the problematisation of "homosexuality" or "monosexuality," that is to say, relations between men and men, and men and boys. The first is the one of the Greek, Hellenistic period that ends roughly during the Roman Empire. Its last great witnesses are Plutarch's dialogue, Maxime de Tyr's dissertations, and Lucian's dialogue. My hypothesis is that—although it is a current practice—they spoke a great deal about it because it created a problem.

In European societies the problematisation has been much more institutional than verbal: a set of measures, prosecutions, condemnations have been taken in regard to those whom one didn't yet call homosexuals but, from the 17th century on, sodomites. It's a very complicated history and I would say that it has three stages.

Since the Middle Ages a law against sodomy carrying the death penalty has been in existence, but it was seldom applied. One ought to study the economy of this problem, the existence of the law, the framework in which it was applied, and the reasons for which it was only applied in some cases. The second aspect is the practice of the police in regard to homosexuality, very clear in France in the mid-17th century, an epoch when cities actually exist, where a certain type of police surveillance is in place and where, for example, one observes the arrest, relatively massive, of homosexuals—in the Jardin du Luxembourg, Saint-Germain-des-Près, or the Palais Royal. One observes dozens of arrests; names are taken down, people are arrested for several days or are simply released. Some remain "in the hole" without a trial. A whole system of traps and threats is set up, with cops and police spies, a little world is put into place very early, in the 17th and 18th centuries. The files at the Arsenal library speak clearly: workers, priests, soldiers as well members of the lower nobility are arrested. This is all inscribed within the framework of a surveillance and organization of a world of prostitutes—kept women, dancers, actresses—fully developing in the 18th century. But it seems to me that the surveillance of homosexuality began a little earlier.

Finally, the third stage: it's obviously the noisy entry of homosexuality into the field of medical reflection in the mid-19th century. It had happened more distinctly during the 17th and in the beginning of the 19th centuries. This is a social phenomenon of great scale, more complicated than a simple invention of doctors.

Q: Do you think, for example, that the classifications and medical work of Hirschfeld, at the beginning of the 20th century, isolated homosexuals?

MF: These categories were used, it is true, to pathologize homosexuality, but they were equally categories of defense, in the name of which one could claim rights. The problem is still very current: between the affirmation "I am homosexual" and the refusal to say it, lies a very ambiguous dialectic. It's a necessary affirmation since it is the affirmation of a right, but at the same time it's a cage and a trap. One day the question "Are you homosexual?" will be as natural as the question "Are you a bachelor?" But after all, why would one subscribe to this obligation to choose? One can never stabilize oneself in a position; one must define the use that one makes of it according to the moment.

Q: In an interview in the journal *Gai Pied* you say that one must "be set on becoming homosexual," and at the conclusion you speak of varied and polymorphic relations. Isn't that a contradiction?

MF: Saying "one must be set on being gay" puts oneself in a dimension where the sexual choices that one makes are present and have their effects over the whole of our life. I also meant that these sexual choices must at the same time be creative of ways of life. To be gay means that these choices spread across a whole life; it's also a certain way of refusing existing life styles; making

sexual choice the operator of a change of existence. Not to be gay is to say: "How am I going to be able to limit the effects of my sexual choice in such a way that my life doesn't change in any way?" I would say that one must use sexuality to discover or invent new relations. To be gay is to be in a state of becoming. To respond to your question, I would add that it is not necessary to be homosexual but it is necessary to be set on being gay.

Q: Is that why you affirm that homosexuality is not a form of desire but something desirable?

MF: Yes, and I believe that it's the central point. To question ourselves on our relation to homosexuality is more than simply having the desire for a sexual relation with someone of the same sex, even if it is important; it's desiring a world where these relations are possible.

Translated by John Johnston

1 Kenneth James Dover, *Greek Homosexuality*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978).

2 Lillian Faderman, *Surpassing the Love of Men*. (New York: William Morrow, 1980)

3 John Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980)

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AN ETHICS OF PLEASURE

Q: One of the many things that a reader can unexpectedly learn from your work is to appreciate silence. You write about the freedom it makes possible, its multiple causes and meanings. For instance, you say in your last book that there is not one but many silences. Would it be correct to infer that there is a strongly autobiographical element in this?

MF: I think that any child who has been educated in a Catholic milieu just before or during the Second World War had the experience that there were many different ways of speaking as well as many forms of silence. There were some kinds of silence which implied very sharp hostility and others which meant deep friendship, emotional admiration, even love. I remember very well that when I met the filmmaker Daniel Schmidt who visited me, I don't know for what purpose, we discovered after a few minutes that we really had nothing to say to each other. So we stayed together from about three o'clock in the afternoon to midnight. We drank, we smoked hash, we had dinner. And I don't think we spoke more than twenty minutes during those ten hours. From that moment a rather long friendship started. It was for me the first time that a friendship originated in strictly silent behaviour.

Maybe another feature of this appreciation of silence is related to the obligation of speaking. I lived as a child in a petit bourgeois, provincial milieu in France and the obligation of speaking, of making conversation with visitors, was for me something both very strange and very boring. I often wondered why people had to speak. Silence may be a much more interesting way of having a relationship with people.

Q: There is in North American Indian culture a much greater appreciation of silence than in English-speaking societies and I suppose in French-speaking societies as well.

MF: Yes, you see, I think silence is one of those things that has unfortunately been dropped from our culture. We don't have a culture of silence; we don't have a culture of suicide either. The Japanese do, I think. Young Romans