

# FOUCAULT, FREUD, FANTASY, AND POWER

Leo Bersani

“I think that what most bothers those who are not gay about gayness is the gay life-style, not sex acts themselves. It is the prospect that gays will create as yet unforeseen kinds of relationships that many people cannot tolerate” (Kritzman 301). The desexualizing of homophobia implicit in this quote from an interview Michel Foucault gave to the American magazine *Salmagundi* was by no means incidental to the mood of a single conversation. In an interview that appeared in 1988 in the French gay publication *Mec*, Foucault announced, “People can tolerate two homosexuals they see leaving together, but if the next day they’re smiling, holding hands, and tenderly embracing one another, then they can’t be forgiven. It is not the departure for pleasure that is intolerable, it is waking up happy” (“Le Gai Savoir” 35; my translation). For someone who has proposed—as I have in “Is the Rectum a Grave?”—that homophobia may be the vicious expression of a more or less hidden fantasy of males participating, principally through anal sex, in what is presumed to be the terrifying phenomenon of female sexuality, Foucault’s argument naturally, or perversely, has a strong appeal. The intolerance of gayness, far from being the displaced expression of the anxieties that nourish misogyny, would be nothing more—by which of course Foucault meant nothing less—than a political anxiety about the subversive, possibly revolutionary social rearrangements that gays may be trying out. Indeed, in this scenario there may be no fantasies—in the psychoanalytic sense—on either side, and if there are, they are insignificant for our understanding of the threat of gayness. Our culture’s sense of security, Foucault goes on to suggest in the *Mec* interview, depends on its being able to interpret. What I may have mistakenly seen as an interpretive terror at homosexual sex is nothing more than a screen—the exciting indulgence of scary fantasies that masks a more profound anxiety about a threat to the way people are expected to relate to one another, which is not too different from saying the way power is positioned and exercised in our society.

There may be nothing to say about those gays holding hands after a night of erotic play. Don’t, Foucault warns us, read *their* tenderness as the exhausted

aftermath of cock-sucking that would “really” be a disguised incorporation of the mother’s breast, or a fucking that would “really” be the heterosexual repossessing of a lost phallic woman, or a being fucked that would “really” be the obsessively controlled reenactment of the mother’s castration by the father in the primal scene. No: those homosexuals gaily embracing as they go to breakfast in the Castro or somewhere off Christopher Street are blankly, superficially, radically, threateningly happy. “There is,” as Foucault says, “no anxiety, there is no fantasy behind happiness,” and with no fantasies to fantasize about, the silenced interpreter becomes the intolerant homophobe. In French, “Il n’y a pas d’angoisse, il n’y a pas de fantasme derrière le bonheur, aussi on ne tolère plus” (“Le Gai Savoir” 35).

Although nearly everything I have ever thought or written about sexuality is at odds with that reading of homophobic intolerance, I have begun to think of it as quite appealing, nearly irresistible. If I add “nearly,” it is partly because, having always longed to be one of those happy gays myself, I can’t help wondering what the pleasures were that led to this enviable absence of any interpretive aftertaste in the men Foucault probably did see, less frequently, I would guess, in Paris than around Castro Street where he lived when, during the glorious pre-AIDS years of the late 1970s, he was a visiting professor at Berkeley. Foucault says almost nothing about those pleasures in the interviews I refer to, although he did speak elsewhere at some length, and with enthusiasm, of gay sadomasochistic sex. In a discussion printed in 1984 in *The Advocate*, Foucault praised S/M practitioners as “inventing new possibilities of pleasure with strange parts of their bodies.” He called S/M “a creative enterprise, which has as one of its main features what I call the desexualization of pleasure.” In a complaint that clearly echoes the call, at the end of the first volume of *The History of Sexuality*, for “a different economy of bodies and pleasures,” Foucault adds, “The idea that bodily pleasure should always come from sexual pleasure, and the idea that sexual pleasure is the root of *all* our possible pleasure—I think *that’s* something quite wrong” (27).

So there is more to erotic pleasure—much more—than sex (by which I take Foucault to mean the conventional association of pleasure with genital stimulation), and perhaps most interestingly, once we desexualize the erotic, we may also be moving to save it from interpretation. It is as if desexualized pleasures were pleasures without fantasy, pleasures uncomplicated by desire, and this displacement of pleasure from the genitals to what Foucault somewhat enigmatically refers to as “strange parts of our body, in very unusual situations” will, I presume, beneficently frustrate all those interpretive efforts based on the idea that pleasure is only sexual. I’ll return to this notion of a desexualized, defantasized body, and in particular to what such an idea implies for thinking about the connection between the way we

take our pleasure and the way we exercise power. For the moment, I want to return to those two happy men, and without at all wishing to explain or interpret their happiness, we might at least conjecture about how they spent the night. Given what Foucault says about S/M, it is not at all improbable that a few moments before Foucault's observer passed them, they checked out of the much-lamented Slot, an S/M bathhouse in San Francisco, now closed, where one of the two—and roles may have been switched during the night—whipped, fist-fucked, verbally abused, and singed the nipples of the other. Far from making such a suggestion in order to question the unreadability of their post-torture tenderness, I want on the contrary to suggest—as I think Foucault meant to suggest—that the intolerable promise of “unforeseen kinds of relationships” that many people see in gay lifestyles cannot be dissociated from an authentically new economy of the body's pleasures, and that such a program may necessarily involve some fairly radical, perhaps even dangerous experimentation with modes of what used to be called making love.

No one was more alert than Foucault to the connections between how we organize our pleasures with one other person and larger forms of social organization. It is the original thesis of *The History of Sexuality* that power in our societies functions primarily not by repressing spontaneous sexual drives but by producing multiple sexualities, and that through the classification, distribution, and moral rating of those sexualities the individuals practicing them can be approved, treated, marginalized, sequestered, disciplined, or normalized. The most effective resistance to this disciplinary productivity should, Foucault suggests, take the form not of struggling against prohibition but rather of a kind of counter-productivity. It is not a question of lifting the barriers to seething repressed drives but rather of consciously, deliberately playing on the surfaces of our bodies with forms or intensities of pleasure not covered, so to speak, by the disciplinary classifications that have until now taught us what sex is.

What strikes me as most interesting about this argument is a connection that Foucault appears to deny in the *Salmagundi* interview when he says that it is not sex acts themselves that are most troubling to non-gays but the gay lifestyle, those “as yet unforeseen kinds of relationships.” There is a neat tactical displacement of emphasis in this sentence: “Don't think,” Foucault is saying to non-gays, “that you're going to get off with a Freudian reduction of your homophobia to personal anxieties; what you're really afraid of is the threat to your privileges in the gay escape from relationships you have created in order to protect that power.” But Foucault everywhere implies that a new lifestyle, new kinds of relationships, are indissociable from new sex acts—or, in his preferred terms, from a new economy of bodily pleasure. In the same interview in which he appears to dissociate sex acts from

lifestyles, he notes that most homosexuals today—like the ancient Greeks—feel that “being the passive partner in a love relationship” is “in some way demeaning,” and he goes on to say that “S/M has actually helped to alleviate this problem somewhat” (Kritzman 300). S/M, he is suggesting—partly due to the frequent reversibility of roles, partly as a result of the demonstration S/M has often been said to provide of the power of bottoms, or presumed slaves—has helped to empower a position traditionally associated with female sexuality.

To empower the disenfranchised partner is, however, not at all the same thing as eliminating plays of power and even struggles for power in erotic negotiations. Foucault obviously thought we would be better off if we could finally shed our compulsion to know and to tell the “truth” of desire, but he never claimed that a new economy of the body, or “as yet unforeseen relationships,” would not continue to be, in perhaps “as yet unforeseen ways,” exercises of power. Indeed, given the notion of power in *The History of Sexuality* as being everywhere, as “produced from one moment to the next, at every point, or rather in every relation from one point to another” (93), it is extremely difficult to imagine how we might even move in the world—never mind how we might make love—without both engaging in some mildly or wildly coercive acts and producing frictions that inevitably block or resist, however minimally, those coercive moves. Indeed, Foucault’s thought is all the more appealing to me in that his Utopian visions never include the pastoral promise—so fashionable in Utopian vision in recent years—of predominantly caring and nurturing human intimacies. There are of course those two hauntingly happy and tender men, but given Foucault’s unambiguous endorsement of S/M, one question we might wish to investigate is the relation, if any, between a happiness unburdened by fantasies ominously lurking just behind it and, say, the consensual brutalization of bodies. Though it would be absurd to argue that sadomasochism is the royal road to an economy of still unprogrammed pleasures, S/M raises, however crudely, important questions about the relation between pleasure and the exercise of power, and invites (in spite of itself) a psychoanalytic study of the defeat, or at least the modulation, of power by the very pleasure inherent in its exercise.

This radical potential in S/M has been obscured by political claims (from which, interestingly, Foucault kept a certain distance). It is frequently maintained that S/M both exposes the mechanisms of power in society and provides a cathartic release from the tensions inherent in social distributions of power. “In the sadomasochistic world,” write two sympathetic sociologists, “many of the conventional niceties, which normally obscure motives and interests, are stripped away” (Weinberg and Kamel 21). Enthusiastic practitioners echo the related themes of catharsis and exposure. For Geoff

Mains, for example, “men fraught with the tensions of social and economic striving seek contrast and relief through a relinquishing of power.” “Leather,” apparently the CEO’s ideal therapy, “can relieve stress” (*Urban Aboriginals* 83). It is a cathartic, therapeutic bringing to the surface of what Robert H. Hopecke calls “the darker side of men’s experience” (74). Far from contesting conventional psychological wisdom about individual unhappiness and social maladjustment, S/M offers the benefits of therapy at no financial cost, and as part of an erotic thrill to boot: in the words of Mark Thompson, “long-held feelings of inferiority or low self-esteem, grief and loss, familial rejection and abandonment, come to surface during S/M ritual” (xvii). Free association is an expensive bore; with the whip, *jouir* becomes identical to *durcharbeiten*.

Politically, the S/Mer says to society: This is the way you really are. Mains approvingly quotes Ian Young: “People [into S/M] have an opportunity to be more aware of the elements of dominance and submission in all relationships” (*Urban Aboriginals* 73). And Thompson claims, “In our audacious explicating of society’s roles and violent tensions, leatherfolk mirror the deadly game that a culture dishonest with itself plays” (xii). This mirroring is invariably presented as a way of contesting what is mirrored. “While the dynamics of S/M may reinforce the categorization of sex and sex roles,” Young writes, “I think it is more likely to break them down” (qtd. Mains, *Urban Aboriginals* 73). As Pat Califia, one of the most intelligent writers on S/M, says, “In an S/M context, the uniforms and roles and dialogue become a parody of authority, a challenge to it, a recognition of its secret sexual nature” (135). Somehow recognition gets identified with a political challenge. To strip away “conventional niceties,” to become “more aware” of inequalities of power in all relationships, to “explicate” violent social tensions, to “recognize” the “secret sexual nature” of authority: does any of this suggest much more than a non-hypocritical acceptance of power as it is already structured?

If there is some subversive potential in the reversibility of roles in S/M, a reversibility that puts into question assumptions about power inhering “naturally” in one sex or one race, S/M sympathizers and/or practitioners have an extremely respectful attitude toward the dominance-submission dichotomy itself. Sometimes it seems that if anything in society is being challenged, it is not the networks of power and authority but the exclusion of gays from those networks. Michael Bronski calls “the explosion of private sexual fantasy into public view . . . a powerful political statement,” but it turns out that the content of that statement is a grab for power: “to consciously present oneself as a (homo)sexual being [and “this is particularly true of the S/M leather scene”] is to grapple with and grab power for oneself” (64). If that’s what you’re after, then there is no reason to question the

categories that define power. Most significantly, at least in gay male S/M, conventional masculinity is worshiped. While the oxymoronic phenomenon of the leather queen is often seen as defying straight ideas of extreme masculinity, it actually expands rather than attacks the notion of machismo. S/M, Hopcke writes, is an “unadulterated reclamation of masculinity” on the part of those who have been excluded from that worthy ideal: gay men. The nobility and beauty of the ideal itself is evident in Hopcke’s luridly glamorous evocation of the (capitalized no less) Masculine, which quite mysteriously, once we’ve claimed it as ours, helps us to deliver a perhaps mortal blow to the culture that invented it: “In S/M and the powerful initiation into archetypal masculinity that it represents, gay men have found a way to reclaim their primal connection to the rawness and power of the Masculine, to give a patriarchal, heterosexist society a stinging slap in the face by calling upon the masculine power of men’s connection to men to break the boxes of immaturity and effeminacy into which we as gay men have been put” (71).<sup>1</sup>

If the alternative to this aping of the dominant culture’s ideal of dominance is not the renunciation of power itself, the question is whether we can imagine relations of power structured differently. The reversibility of roles in S/M does allow everyone to get his or her moment in the exalted position of Masculinity (and if everyone can be a bottom, no one owns the dominant position), but this can be a relatively mild challenge to social hierarchies of power. Everyone gets a chance to put his or her boot in someone else’s face—but why not question the value of putting on boots for that purpose in the first place? Yes, in S/M roles are reversible; yes, in S/M enslavement is consensually agreed to; yes, as Califia puts it, S/M is “power unconnected to privilege” (135). But this doesn’t mean that “privilege” is contested; rather, you get to enjoy its prerogatives even if you’re not one of the privileged. A woman gets to treat a man, or another woman, with the same brutal authority a man has exercised over her; a black man can savor the humiliation of his white trick, thus sharing the pleasure enjoyed by whites in more acceptable social contexts. Furthermore, socially sanctioned positions of power are fortified by the covert and always temporary changes of position offered by an underground culture. Thus the transformation of the brutal, all-powerful corporate executive (by day) into the whimpering, panty-clad servant of a pitiless dominatrix (by night) is nothing more than a comparatively invigorating release of tension. The concession to a secret and potentially enervating need to shed the master’s exhausting responsibilities and to enjoy briefly the irresponsibility of total powerlessness allows for a comfortable return to a position of mastery and oppression the morning after, when all that “other side” has been, at least for a time, whipped out of the executive’s system.

These truths are dressed up, or disguised, by defenders of S/M with a lot of talk about how loving the S/M community is. Unlike nasty patriarchal society, this community only inflicts torture on people who say they want to be tortured. And the victim is always in control: he or she can stop the scene at will, unlike the victims of society's self-righteous wars. This difference is of course important. The practice of S/M depends on a mutual respect wholly unnecessary, and generally absent, from the relations between the powerful and the weak, underprivileged, or enslaved in "normal" society. S/M is nonetheless profoundly conservative in that its imagination of pleasure is almost entirely defined by the dominant culture to which it thinks of itself as giving "a stinging slap in the face." It is true that those who exercise power generally don't admit to the excitement they derive from such exercises. To recognize this excitement may challenge the hypocrisy of authority, but it certainly doesn't challenge authority itself. On the contrary: it reveals the unshakable foundation on which power is built. Its exercise, S/Mers never stop telling us, is thrilling, and it can be just as thrilling for the victim as for the victimizer.

No wonder Foucault, in an interview entitled "Sade Sergeant of Sex," insisted that eros was "absent" from Nazism, or at most only "accidental" to it (5). I suspect he knew that it was very much present, but he had good reason to insist on its absence. He was careful to distinguish the master-slave relation in S/M from oppressive social structures of domination. S/M, he said, is not "a reproduction, within the erotic relationship, of the structure of power. It is an acting out of power structures by a strategic game that is able to give sexual pleasure or bodily pleasure" ("Interview" 30). But what is the game without the power structure that constitutes its strategies? What S/M does not reproduce is the intentionality supporting the structures in society—for example, what Foucault calls "the disgusting petit-bourgeois dream" of a kind of racial correctness underlying the Nazi dream ("Sade" 5). The polarized power structure of master and slave, of dominance and submission, is, however, the same in Nazism and in S/M, and it is that structure—and not the dream of racial "purity" or the purely formal dimension of the game—that gives pleasure. In calling the strategic relations of power within S/M "a convention of pleasure," Foucault appears to be suggesting that pleasure in S/M is the result of the insertion of master-slave relations into the framework of a game, that it is not inherent in those relations themselves (and could therefore be "absent" from Nazism). Dominance and submission become sources of pleasure when they are aestheticized, chosen as the conventions needed by the game in order to make itself concrete. Indeed, the political rescue of S/M depends on this willed secondariness of the power structures it performs. If those structures were themselves seen as the principal source of pleasure, then the racial

ideology motivating their adoption in Nazism would have to be recognized as irrelevant to their *erotic* appeal—just as their aestheticizing in S/M would be unable to account both for their position as the consistently privileged convention and for the excitement that convention generates.

Foucault's theoretical sleight-of-hand fails, in short, to explain why this particular convention serves the pursuit of pleasure so well; it is as if its choice in S/M were also an accident. S/M, far from dissociating itself from a fascistic master-slave relation, actually confirms an identity between that relation and its own practices. It removes masters and slaves from economic and racial superstructures, thus confirming the eroticism of the master-slave configuration. It is of course true that, outside such extreme situations as police- or terrorist-sponsored scenarios of torture, this configuration is in the modern world seldom visible in the archaic form of face-to-face relations of command and violation. Power in civilized societies has become systemic: mediated through economy, law, morality. But this hardly means that S/M is not a repetition of the power informing (giving their very form to) all such mediations. It is a kind of X-ray of the systemic. S/M could be thought of as a laboratory testing of the erotic potential in the most oppressive social structures. It fortifies those structures by suggesting that they have an appeal independent of the political ideologies that exploit the appeal, thus further suggesting the intractability of extreme forms of oppression, their probable resurgence even if the political conditions that nourish them were to be eliminated.

This could be the beginning of an important new political critique, one that would take intractability into account in its rethinking and remodeling of social institutions. But S/M's celebration of master and slave renders it (on the whole, involuntarily) complicit with the perpetuation of regimes that promote the erotic opportunities of domination and enslavement, even though, in a final twist, it should also be noted that S/M's perhaps useful demonstration of the need for such opportunities would be weakened were it to distance itself from the demonstration. By singing the praises of enslavement and torture, S/M self-sacrificially warns us of their profound appeal—self-sacrificially because S/M itself might not survive an antifascistic rethinking of power structures. S/M, in a manner consistent with its most profound dynamic, couples its aggressive social posture with a hard logic aimed at its own immolation.

Thus any concessions on Foucault's part to the possibility that S/M reproduces social structures of power would risk exposing the extent to which S/M supports those structures by confessing to the irresistible pleasures they provide. Whether we have privilege or not, we engage in the deadly or theatrical games of dominance and submission, of bondage and discipline, for the excitement we find in such games. S/M profoundly—and in



spite of itself—argues for the continuity between political structures of oppression and the body's erotic economy. Those practitioners and defenders of S/M who, like Foucault, would reject a politics grounded in brute force implicitly propose, instead of a reexamination of modes of exercising power, a kind of derealization of authoritarian structures. It is as if, recognizing the powerful appeal of those structures, their harmony with the body's most intense pleasures, they were suggesting that we substitute for history a theatricalized imitation of history. If in one sense this theater changes nothing and imagines nothing new, in another sense it changes everything: in S/M we can step out of the roles whenever we like. Since S/M shares the dominant culture's obsession with power, it simply asks that culture to consider exercising power in contexts where roles are not fixed and no one is really or permanently harmed. It proposes, that is, playing with power. The trouble with this is that if bondage, discipline, and pain are such extraordinary sources of pleasure, very few people will be willing to limit the enjoyment of that pleasure to weekend parties. Foucault curiously thought of S/M as an ally in the defantasizing of bodily pleasures, and therefore in contributing to that *art de vivre* he identified with our killing off psychology. But sadomasochism is nothing but psychology. With its costumes, its roles, its rituals, its theatricalized dialogue, S/M is the extravagantly fantasmatic logos of the psyche. The somewhat poignant—and, it seems to me, wholly chimerical—proposal it makes is that we remove fantasy from history. It generously offers us its playrooms—in the charming illusion that, once having left the playroom, we will give up the pleasures that S/M has helped us to recognize as irresistible.

Perhaps S/M's most valuable lesson can best be approached through what most people undoubtedly consider as its most repellent aspect: the inflicting of pain. Not too surprisingly, S/M texts are frequently evasive on the subject of pain. PR considerations probably lead the initiates to downplay the more shocking sides of their erotic fun. (The case for S/M would, ideally, be persuasive to those who limit their bedtime frolics to vanilla sex—hardly an easy task in a society in which a limited sexual imagination can pass as a certificate of irreproachable morals.) Here is Juicy Lucy's list of what S/M is and is not, in a volume of essays edited by *Samois*, a lesbian-feminist S/M group:

S/M is not: abusive, rape, beatings, violence, cruelty, power-over, force, coercion, non-consensual, unimportant, a choice made lightly, growth blocking, boring.

Now a list of things S/M is: passionate, erotic, growthful, consensual, sometimes fearful, exorcism, reclamation, joyful, intense, boundary-breaking, trust building, loving, unbelievably great sex, often

hilariously funny, creative, spiritual, integrating, a development of inner power as strength.

If S/M has any specificity at all, it certainly includes, however consensual all this may be, “beatings, violence, cruelty, power-over, force,” whereas from Juicy Lucy’s enumerations of what S/M is you’d never know that, as she writes a few pages later, her toys include whips, leather wrist and ankle restraints, handcuffs, and “some chain” (31, 35).<sup>2</sup> In other texts the emphasis on communal male jolliness is such that you may think a Rotary Club promotional piece had been mistakenly inserted in a volume on leatherfolk. Little did I suspect, in making this comparison, that it had already been made, seriously, by a dyed-in-the-wool S/Mer: “Why,” John Preston writes,

should we be surprised by the emergence of gay leather clubs when for all practical purposes they’re composed of the same men in racial, class, and economic terms as Rotary and Lions in the straight world? If you’ve ever been to a meeting of a leather organization and seen its nationalistic bent, patriotic fervor, and reliance on ritual with the singing of common songs, and the pomp and circumstance of its hierarchy, you can see that the need being fulfilled is strikingly similar to what’s going on at any other men’s civic benevolent society. (219)

When the subject of pain is directly addressed, it is generally either in biochemical terms or through mystical descriptions of the “cosmic ecstasy” induced by torture. The biochemical discourse operates, interestingly, as an indirect critique of the very categories of sadism and masochism, categories that assume a transgression of the pleasure-pain opposition they might seem to support. Mains writes about the metamorphosis of pain into pleasure as a result of “the release of opioids in the brain, the spinal chord, and possibly into the bloodstream,” a process that seems to generate, “like a sudden fix of heroin, . . . an ecstatic response and the ability to sustain, if not demand, increasingly larger volleys of painful experience” (*Urban Aborigines* 59). From this perspective the presumed identity of pleasure and pain in masochism, and therefore perhaps masochism itself, become meaningless. The pain so-called masochists enjoy is actually pleasure. They have simply found ways to transform stimuli generally associated with the production of pain into stimuli that set off intense processes identified as pleasurable. Far from enjoying pain, “masochists” have developed techniques to bypass pain; the chemicals released through S/M, Mains writes, “not only suppress pain but also generate feelings of euphoria” (“Molecular Anatomy” 41). Thus the psychological category of masochism is superfluous. The masochist, like

everyone else, *pursues only pleasure*. If there is anything that needs to be accounted for in masochism, it is not a supposed identity of pain and pleasure, but rather a passion for pleasure so intense that extreme pain is momentarily tolerated (rather than loved for its own sake) as necessary to bring the masochist to that biochemical threshold where painful stimuli begin to produce pleasurable internal substances. Masochism would, then, be an extreme hedonistic discipline. If masochists need to be accounted for psychologically, it would not be for their “unnatural” pursuit of pain, but rather for their potentially dysfunctional rejection of pain. Dysfunctional in that pain may be a signal that tells us to flee a stimulus threatening to the body’s, or the ego’s, integrity—to their coherence as securely delimited, individuating entities. Pain is the organism’s protection against self-dissolution.

There is perhaps no way to give a satisfactory definition of pain independent of its protective function. The pleasure-pain dualism corresponds to a fundamental rhythm on the part of individual organisms toward and away from the world. A substantive (rather than functional) definition of pain always founders on the subjective variations in what is perceived and reported as painful or pleasurable. The subordination of pain to power in certain S/M discussions may correspond to an awareness of the futility, even the danger, of speaking of pain as an end in itself. Not only does that presumed end disappear both in its subjective variability and in the biochemical account of the blocking of pain; the exclusive focusing on pain can also obscure our understanding of the self-shattering that may be the secret teleology of S/M’s universalizing of pleasure.

In this self-shattering, the ego renounces its power over the world. Thus, while images of Fakir Musafar hanging from the branches of a tree by hooks through his nipples (a photograph of this is reproduced in *Leatherfolk*) may encourage us to think of S/M as a kind of absolutizing of pain exactly identical to its suppression, it is perhaps not entirely disingenuous of Juicy Lucy, who describes her whip in some detail, to insist that “pain is simply the inevitable result of unacknowledged power roles” (33). Through pain S/M dramatizes—melodramatizes—the potential ecstasy in both a hyperbolic sense of self and the self’s renunciation of its claims on the world. The very aping in S/M of the dominant culture’s reduction of power to polarized relations of dominance and submission can have the unexpected—and politically salutary—consequence of enacting the appeal of a renunciation of power. The most radical function of S/M is not primarily in its exposing the hypocritically denied centrality of erotically stimulating power plays in “normal” society; it lies rather in its truly shocking revelation that for the sake of that stimulation human beings may be willing to give up even a minimal control over their environment.

I am, of course, suggesting the primacy of masochism in sadomasochism. If there were such a thing as a sadism unaffected by masochistic impulses, it would reveal nothing more newsworthy than the pleasure of control and domination. The appeal of powerlessness would be entirely on the side of the masochist, for whom the sadist would be little more than an opportunity to surrender to that appeal. Such surrenders obviously serve those who wield power in society: they certify the often voluntary nature of submission, the secret collaboration of the oppressed with the oppressors. But S/M also argues for the permeability of the boundaries separating the two. The reversibility of roles in S/M does more than disrupt (if only momentarily) the assignment of fixed positions of power and powerlessness (as well as the assumptions underlying such assignments about the “natural” link between dominance and particular racial or gendered identities). From that reversibility we may also conclude that perhaps inherent in the very exercise of power is the temptation of its renunciation—as if the excitement of a hyperbolic self-assertion, or an unthwarted mastery over the world and, more precisely, brutalization of the other, were inseparable from an impulse of self-dissolution.

It might be objected that there is very little evidence of any such surrender of power in the real world of dominance and submission whose structure S/M prides itself on exposing. The viability of that polarized structure depends on the successful resistance, on the part of the dominant, to the *jouissance* of self-loss, a resistance that in turn depends on a certain desexualizing of the sadistic position. This is not to propose, with Foucault, that Eros was absent from Nazism, although the efficiency of such social murder-machines as Nazism may require a denial of Eros’s presence. The complacency with which the powerful visibly enjoy their privileges suggests the relative success of that denial. And yet, given the apparent self-destructiveness of civilization, it could be argued—as Freud obliquely but powerfully does in *Civilization and Its Discontents*—that, on the scene of history, the promise of suicidal *jouissance* is what sustains the most aggressive self-affirmations and self-promotions. S/M strips away the defenses against the joy of self-dissolution; in more general historical contexts, the countervailing instinct of self-preservation drives that joy underground, buries it, so to speak, in proud displays of mastery. But as we have seen over and over again, with dispiriting frequency, the oppressed, having freed themselves from their oppressors, hasten to imitate them, as if it were in the position of dominance that the drive toward destruction—and ultimately toward self-destruction—could be most effectively pursued.<sup>3</sup> S/M makes explicit the erotic satisfactions sustaining social structures of dominance and submission. Societies defined by those structures both disguise and reroute such satisfactions, but their superficially self-preservative subterfuges hardly liberate them from the aegis of the death drive. S/M lifts a social repression

in laying bare the reality behind the subterfuges, but in its open embrace of the structures themselves and its undisguised appetite for the ecstasy they promise, it is fully complicit with a culture of death.

If, as many readers undoubtedly feel, Freud has been waiting in the wings since the beginning of this discussion, it is now time to bring him to center stage. This move, it could be said, is predictable enough on my part; but is it really possible for anyone seriously interested in Foucault on fantasy, sexuality, and power not to engage him in a confrontation with psychoanalysis? Can anyone believe that such peremptory formulas as “L’Art de vivre c’est de tuer la psychologie” make any sense except as an aggressive riposte to an interlocutor Foucault seldom acknowledges or addresses directly? Foucault was so acutely aware of psychoanalysis as yet another episode in a history of disciplinary discursive networks that he never considered that psychoanalysis might have begun to provide answers to questions he himself found urgent.

The first major theoretical attempt to desexualize pleasure was not *The History of Sexuality* but, about seventy years earlier, Freud’s *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*. It is that work that—forcefully if evasively—first raised the possibility of dissolving the very notion of sex in a reorganization of bodily pleasures. The *Three Essays* already—to use verbs Foucault associates with S/M—denaturalizes, falsifies, even devirilizes the sexual. The passages in Freud’s work that lead to his conclusion that “the quality of erotogenicity” should be ascribed “to all parts of the body and to all the internal organs” (184) could be taken as a gloss on Foucault’s description of S/M practitioners as “inventing new possibilities of pleasure with strange parts of their body,” and more generally on his call for a different economy of pleasures. The difference, of course, is that Freud continues to use the word “sexual” for a degenitalizing of erotic intensities. Indeed, the originality of his thought has less to do with the pansexualism for which his contemporaries reproached him than with his appropriation of the notion of sexuality for certain phenomena that he was the first to describe and that, in some ways, have very little to do with what had been understood until Freud as specifically sexual.

Freud, as it were, coerced the sexual into describing what I would call a certain rhythm of mastery and surrender in human consciousness. I think he was most profoundly interested in studying how human beings both move to master the spaces in which they live (to take account of and to appropriate objects and other human subjects) and to renounce the project of mastery *for the sake of pleasure*. To survive in any environment requires a degree of invasive intent with respect to that environment; the exercise of power is a prerequisite for life itself. To note this was not original to Freud; the

particular psychoanalytic inflection in a philosophy of power was the claim that the project of mastery might generate a pleasure—a thrill—incompatible with all invasive appropriations. As I have meant to suggest in my remarks on S/M, political philosophies of power in particular must take this rhythm into account. The psychoanalytic thematizing of the pursuit and renunciation of mastery as sadism and masochism gives a kind of ideal visibility to this double movement, which, however, sadomasochism performs reductively and melodramatically. Masochistic *jouissance* is hardly a political corrective to the sadistic use of power, although the self-shattering I believe to be inherent in that *jouissance*, while it is the result of surrender to the master, also makes the subject unfindable as an object of discipline. Psychoanalysis challenges us to imagine *a nonsuicidal disappearance of the subject*—or, in other terms, to dissociate masochism from the death drive. In still other terms, can a masochistic surrender operate as an effective (even a powerful) resistance to coercive designs?

Interestingly enough, Foucault has a version of this double rhythm. It is decidedly non-psychoanalytic: as power moves toward and against its objects, it inevitably produces frictions that thwart its movements. For both Freud and Foucault, although in very different ways, the exercise of power produces a resistance to power from within the exercise itself. Freud's version, it seems to me, gives the better account of the subjectivities that enact both the exercise and the resistance. The aggressive aim engenders a self-reflexive aggressiveness (masochism would be the *effect* of sadism). The subject seeks to repeat an excitement to which the object to be appropriated has become irrelevant and which may consist, most consequentially, in the dissolution of the appropriating ego. Appropriation has been transformed into communication, a non-dialogic communication in which the subject is so obscenely "rubbed" by the object it anticipates mastering that the very boundaries separating subject from object, boundaries necessary for possession, have been erased.

The origin of the excitement inherent in this erasure may, as I speculated in *The Freudian Body*, be in the biologically dysfunctional process of maturation in human beings. Overwhelmed by stimuli in excess of the ego structures capable of resisting or binding them, the infant may survive that imbalance only by finding it exciting. The masochistic thrill of being invaded by a world we have not yet learned to master might therefore be an inherited disposition resulting from an evolutionary conquest. This, in any case, is what Freud appears to be moving toward as a definition of the sexual: an aptitude for the defeat of power by pleasure, the human subject's potential for a *jouissance* in which the subject is momentarily undone.

*Jouissance* as I have been using it refers to that "erotogenicity" that, in the *Three Essays*, Freud ascribes not only to the body's entire surface and all

the internal organs but also to any activities and mental states or affective processes (he mentions intellectual strain, wrestling, railway travel) that produce a certain degree of intensity in the organism and in so doing momentarily disturb psychic organization. Following Jean Laplanche, who speaks of the sexual as an effect of *ébranlement*, I call *jouissance* self-shattering in that it disrupts the ego's coherence and dissolves its boundaries. (The *jouissance* that transforms sadism into masochism would also be an effect of such sublimated appropriations of the real as art and philosophy.) Psychoanalysis has justifiably been thought of as an enemy of anti-identitarian politics, but it also proposes a concept of the sexual that might be a powerful weapon in the struggle against the disciplinarian constraints of identity. (Furthermore, self-shattering may be intrinsic to the homo-ness in homosexuality. The narcissistic excitement in homo-ness gives rise to an anti-identitarian identity.)

We might, then, think of sexuality not only as the strategic production described by Foucault but also as an appropriate term to describe the non-strategic effects of the body's exercises in power. What are the advantages in doing this? Remember that much of the appeal of S/M for Foucault is that, as he puts it in "Le Gai Savoir," "with the help of a certain number of instruments, of signs and symbols or of drugs," it eroticizes the whole body, thereby "desexualizing" pleasure. This sounds very much like the nonsexual sadism evoked by Freud in "Instincts and Their Vicissitudes," a sadism unencumbered in its projects of mastery by sexual excitement. It's true that Foucault speaks of these projects as erotic, and the distinction between the erotic and the sexual seems to be that the former is devirilized pleasure, or extraordinarily polymorphous pleasure finally detached from "that virile form of compulsory pleasure that is *jouissance*, *jouissance* understood in the ejaculatory sense, in the masculine meaning of the word" ("Le Gai Savoir" 34; my translation). But in rescuing us from penile tyranny, these practices also bracket what may be—and here I can speak only of male sexuality—a man's most intense experience of his body's vulnerability. Foucault wrote so brilliantly of the body as an object of the exercise of power that we may fail to note how little he spoke of the body as an agent of power. What is to control or modulate nonsexual sadism, which in a sense would be the realization of the quite natural and quite terrifying human dream of an *undisturbed mastery* of the space in which our bodies move? The body liberated from what Foucault scornfully called the machismo of proud male ejaculation is also the male body liberated from what may be its first experience, at once sobering and thrilling, of the limits of power.

I refer to the experience of masturbation, a practice that Foucault saw at the very origin of the science of sexuality. What he called the war against onanism during the past two centuries was crucial in constituting the human

subject as a subject of sexual desire, a constitution that would be gloriously, or ingloriously, crowned by psychoanalysis. Freud is also interested in masturbation, but in a significantly different way. As part of his demonstration of how each of the principal erogenous zones of childhood “leans on” a nonsexual human function, Freud notes that the agent of masturbation is the subject’s principal tool for manipulating the environment: the hand. And implicit in this connection, I believe, is the suggestion that, to use another, coarser sense of the word, the tool the little boy plays with gives him an experience of seriously qualified mastery: in masturbation the hand produces an excitement indissociable from a certain form of surrender—from, ultimately, a loss of control. In masturbation, the boy’s body, more specifically the penis, disciplines the hand that would rule it. If it is time to sing the praise of the penis once again, it is not only because a constitutive reason for a gay man’s willingness to identify his desires as homosexual is love of the cock (an acknowledgment profoundly “incorrect”), but also because it was perhaps in early play with that much shamed organ that we might have learned about the *rhythms* of power, that we might have been, or should have been, initiated into the biologically intrinsic connection between male sexuality and surrender or passivity—a connection that men have been remarkably successful in persuading women to consider as nonexistent.

Who are you when you masturbate? It is conceivable that the body of another person would be able to excite mine without hooking up to my fantasy network (and that would indeed exemplify the irrelevance of predetermined positionings of desire to the production of pleasure), but I find unimaginable a successful session of what the disciplinarians know as self-abuse without fantasy. We have, though, become extremely sensitive to the danger of looking too closely at our fantasies. What positions, what activities, what identifications excite us? What imagined object best helps the masturbatory process along? What do we prefer the other to be doing—to us, for us, alone, with someone else? Such questions would of course not only be congenial to the confessor’s forays into the penitent’s soul; in more sophisticated form, they nourish the psychoanalytic curiosity about the identificatory moves of desire. The danger is clear. It is but a step from identifications to identity, and the very tracing of the former’s mobility may conceal an urge to find the common denominator that would, for example, definitively distinguish homosexual from heterosexual desire. It is, after all, Freud—with his confusing picture of inversion’s genealogy in the first few pages of the *Three Essays* (and especially in footnotes added in 1910, 1915, and 1920)—who can be thought of as the first pluralizer of homosexuality. This would not necessarily make Freud more palatable to queer thinkers suspicious of all psychoanalytic investigations; his dismissal of the reductive



view of male homosexuality as a woman's soul imprisoned in a man's body could, after all, be seen less as a rejection of essentializing than as a recognition of that particular definition's inability to cover an impressive range of subessences. Multiple typologies do not adequately justify the typologizing enterprise itself, an enterprise whose ultimate aim, it is feared, is to fix identities through stable definitions.

But how free do we become by freeing ourselves from typologies, genealogies, and schemes of desire, and are such schemes necessarily essentializing? Historically, there is probably no reason to find the answers to these questions self-evident. If, for example, we follow Foucault's and David Halperin's studies of ancient Greece, we see that sexuality was for the Greeks just as expressive of "the agent's individual essence" as it may be for us. Ancient sexual typologies, Halperin writes, "generally derived their criteria for categorizing people not from sex but from gender: they tended to construe sexual desire as normative or deviant according to whether it impelled social actors to conform to or to violate their conventionally assigned gender roles." This meant, specifically, not only that phallic penetration of another person's body expressed sexual "activity" and "virility" while being penetrated was a sign of "passivity" and "femininity" but, even more significantly, that "the relation between the 'active' and the 'passive' sexual partner is thought of as the same kind of relation as that obtaining between social superior and social inferior. 'active' and 'passive' sexual roles are therefore necessarily isomorphic with superordinate and subordinate social status" (32, 25, 30).

The nature of the agent's desire was, according to this analysis, more significant than the object of that desire in determining his identity, but the link between sexuality and identity was just as firmly established as it is for us. Indeed, the emphasis on what a man did instead of whom he chose made for an extraordinarily brutal reduction of the person to his or her sexual behavior. The male citizen fucked; and to penetrate someone else was the sexual manifestation of something I see no reason not to call the citizen-essence. There is no escape from this judgment—no appeal, say, to the contradictions and ambivalences of desire in order to "prove" (since such proof was necessary) that you were more virile than your passive behavior suggested. The Greek model is not only, as Halperin acknowledges, puritanical about virility; it is a striking example of the misogyny inherent in homophobia, even though it was not opposed to homosexuality *per se*. In a sense, the Greeks were so open about their revulsion from what they understood as female sexuality, and so untroubled in their thinking about the relation between power and phallic penetration, that they didn't need to pretend, as nineteenth-century sexologists did, that men who went to bed with other men were all secretly women. No: only half of them were women,

and that judgment was irrevocable and had enormous social implications since, as Halperin emphasizes, to be fucked was a sign of social inferiority (the fate of women and slaves); the adult male citizen who allowed himself to be penetrated was *politically disgraced*.

The persistence of this judgment throughout the centuries and in various cultures has been documented by others. Foucault notes its continuing force even in contemporary gay life when, in the remark I quoted earlier, he suggests that S/M may help to break down a prevalent view, among gay men, of “passive” sex as “somehow demeaning.” In short, it is not at all certain that the essentializing of a homosexual identity puts into effect a more rigid identity system than the one already in place—a system that didn’t even have to be curious about the most minute moves of the subject’s desires in order to classify him ethically and to position him politically.

Even the crudest identity-mongering leaves us freer than that. To be a woman’s soul imprisoned in a man’s body is to be sure an imprisoning definition, but at least it leaves open the possibility to wonder, as Freud did, about the various desiring positions a woman might take. She might awaken in the male body the wish to be phallically penetrated, but she might also lead him to love himself actively through a boy (as, according to Freud, Leonardo sought to relive his mother’s love for him as a child by becoming attached to younger men); or she might even awaken in him a complex scenario of orality in which his homosexuality would, strangely enough, be best satisfied with a lesbian. The mobility of desire defeats the project of fixing identity by way of a science of desires. The gender system itself provides a basis for moving beyond the constraints and divisions instituted by that system. Historically, the invention of the homosexual as a type may have helped to break down the sexism in the earlier classifications according to acts, a classification that distributed power along the lines of a binary distinction indifferent and invulnerable to a problematic of identity. The *attempt* to essentialize homosexuality initiated an inquiry into the nature of the desires that impel us, for example, to seek to penetrate or be penetrated by another person, an inquiry that must ultimately destroy any unquestioned correlation between the acting out of those desires and attributions of moral and political superiority and inferiority.

I have always been fascinated—and at times terrified—by the ruthlessly exclusionary nature of sexual desire. Much of the interest of Proust for me lies in the self-lacerating candor with which he never tires of exposing that same fascination and terror in himself. This exposure involves a double humiliation: it is at once a confession of rebuffed desire and a narrative of the impressively base ruses by which the rebuffed lover seeks to exercise power over those indifferent to his desires. In today’s climate of moral self-

congratulation, which pits our own caring and nurturing queer selves against a vicious heterosexist community, nothing could be more unwelcome than the Proustian suggestion that the struggle for power unleashed by sexual desire may not be entirely the consequence of inequitable and correctable social arrangements but is a nasty aspect of the inescapable resistance the world opposes to our equally inescapable invasive projects. Given that nastiness, and the terror, on both sides, that accompanies it, we might begin tracing a theory of love, based not on our assertions of how different, and how much better, we are than those who would do away with us (because we are neither that different nor, alas, that much better), but one that would instead be grounded in the very contradictions, impossibilities, and antagonisms brought to light by any serious genealogy of desire.

I want to suggest one of the ways in which sentiments and conduct we might wish to associate with love can emerge as a resistance, in the Foucauldian sense, to the violence and avidity for power inherent in all intimate negotiations between human beings. I will do this by looking briefly at one of the most morbid genealogies of homosexual desire in psychoanalytic literature: Freud's account of the origin of castration anxiety in the case of the Wolf Man. On the basis of a dream that Freud's adult patient recalls having had at the age of four, Freud reconstructs a real scene (he will in fact spend much of the case history debating with himself over the real or fantasmatic nature of this scene) that took place when the boy was only one and a half years old. He had awakened from an afternoon nap in his parents' bedroom to see them engaged in *coitus a tergo*; both his father's penis and his mother's genitals were clearly visible to him. The reactivation of this scene by the four-year-old's dream leads to a repression of the boy's longing for sexual satisfaction from his father, for it shows or reminds him, Freud argues, that the necessary condition of any such satisfaction—so the child presumably concluded from his interpretation of his penisless mother being penetrated by his father—was castration.

But the strangest part of this interpretation of an admittedly doubtful (unremembered and constructed) scene is how little it corresponds both to Freud's own construction and to his account of the version given by his patient. First of all, the Wolf Man tells his analyst that "the expression of enjoyment which he saw on his mother's face did not fit in with [the assumption that he was witnessing an act of violence]; he was delighted to recognize that the experience was one of gratification." More important, nothing in the evidence presented suggests that the four-year-old resurrects his relation to his father in the primal scene as one of terror. In fact, both the four-year-old and the presumably traumatized tiny observer of a parental coitus display remarkably tender paternal feelings toward Freud's

dreaded castrating father. When soon after the traumatic dream the little Wolf Man develops a compulsive interest in religion, he resents the God who let his son die “in order to be able to cling to *his* father”; “the God whom religion forced upon him was not a true substitute for the father whom he had loved and whom he did not want to have stolen from him.” This resistance to a cruel God is by no means only a self-protective effort to save himself from Jesus’s fate. In seeking to distinguish his own father from that cruel and punishing Father of Christianity, the boy was trying, Freud writes, “to defend his father against the God”—as if he generously wished to save his father from being contaminated by an evil character, from becoming someone who not only might punish him, but whom he could no longer love. The child’s affection was strengthened when, during the period of his religious conflicts, he visited his sick father in a sanatorium and “felt very sorry for him.” Freud notes not that this “attitude of compassion” diminished the original terror of castration but that it “derived from a particular detail of the primal scene”—that is, compassion for the father was from the very beginning part of that scene as Freud and the Wolf Man remembered or constructed it together (“Infantile Neurosis” 45, 66, 86, 67).

What was that detail? The Wolf Man tells Freud that while watching his parents make love “he had observed [his father’s] penis disappear, that he had felt compassion for his father on that account, and had rejoiced at the reappearance of what he thought had been lost.” Not only that; in the midst of all this, our true Christian passes a stool—an event Freud interprets as giving the infant “an excuse for screaming” and drawing attention to himself, but given what Freud says both here and elsewhere about feces as gifts, we might also think of this as the little boy’s attempt to compensate his father for his loss. The primal scene originates not only the threat of power but also its transference, its reciprocity. The view of the father as the agent of castration seems all the more mysterious when we remember—and Freud explicitly reminds us of this—that “the threats or hints of castration which had come [the little Wolf Man’s] way had emanated from women” (88). But no amount of evidence will deter Freud from giving dad the dubious privilege of exercising his castrating prerogative. If the child failed to read his father in that way, then this case history must be simply erased and replaced by phylogenetic truth: “In spite of everything,” Freud asserts in one of the most remarkable passages in his work, “it was his father from whom in the end he came to fear castration. In this respect heredity triumphed over accidental experience; in man’s prehistory it was unquestionably the father who practiced castration as a punishment and who later softened it down into circumcision” (86). For Freud, that decidedly non-gay daddy, nothing would block the theoretical confirmation and vindication of murderous relations among men—an imperative undoubtedly based on the still-deeper need to

keep the sexes distinct and, in the service of that need, to warn that castration is the precondition of femininity.

But Freud's insistence on castration as the (fantasized) consequence of sexual satisfaction from the father is, as we have seen, resisted by his own account of the fantasies connected with that satisfaction. The case of the Wolf Man is a fascinating model of frictional confrontations: the real or constructed primal scene explaining *or* correcting the terror generated by the dream; the presumed fear of castration leading to a repression of desire for the father; the father's vulnerability as the *child's* resistance to his fantasized violence (or, alternatively, the father's violence as the child's defense against what frightens him in the former's vulnerability); Freud's interpretative violence against the evidence he himself records of the secondary role of castration in the infant's (remembered or constructed) reading of a (remembered or constructed) scene of parental sex. The study is also dominated by powerful thrusts: the repeated penetrations of the father's penis, the interpretative aggressions of Freud's insistent, curiously unsupported theory of castration. But just as those potentially damaging penile thrusts meet what might be called the resistance of the child's solicitude, so Freud's resolute presentation of the father as castrator is effectively turned back by all the "memories" of the child's concern for the father's *loss* of power. In the Wolf Man case, a terrifying scenario of the relation between father and son as one in which the two are permanently separated, and polarized, by a threat of violence that necessitates the repression of love is partially rewritten as an account of a gentler exchange between the two, one in which the son's power is improvised as a response to the vulnerability inherent in the very position and exercise of power.

For us, perhaps better readers of the Wolf Man's story than Freud himself (who does however find in this case the "furthest and most intimate expression of homosexuality" [101]), that story unintentionally provides us with one (not the only) genealogy of gay love. Let's imagine a man being fucked as generously offering the spectacle of his own penis as a gift or even a temporary replacement for what is momentarily being "lost" inside him—an offering *not* made in order to calm his partner's fears of castration but rather as the gratuitous and therefore even lovelier supplemental protectiveness that all human beings need when they take the risk of merging with another, of risking their very boundaries for the sake of such self-dissolving extensions. If there is no fantasy to read or interpret behind the happy faces of those two gays we began by observing, perhaps there *were*, supporting their lovemaking, the shadowy figures of the loving child and the daddy he coaxed out of his terrorizing and terrorized castrating identity, figures who may have helped *them*, Foucault's couple, to spend a night of penile oblation.

## NOTES

1. According to Parveen Adams, only the lesbian sadomasochist avoids this tribute to the paternal phallus and the oedipal law. Lesbian S/M "appears not to be compulsive, can just as easily be genital or not, and is an affair of women." It is a practice of "mobility," "consent," and "satisfaction" (263–64).
2. Others have noted this dismissal of torture in sympathetic discussions of S/M. Mandy Merck writes that while "a few cruelties may be alluded to" in these discussions, "the subjectivity which enacts them is never examined" (256), and Tania Modleski points out that the emphasis on consensuality in S/M "has meant a neglect of some of the most important, indeed the defining, features of S/M—the infliction of pain and humiliation by one individual on another—features requiring explanation even if they *are* desired by all parties" (154).
3. The Deleuzian separation of masochism from sadism (in Deleuze's analysis of heterosexual masochism the mother beats the law of the father out of the male child, thus mocking the rule of the law) politically sentimentalizes masochism as a resistance to power, thereby bypassing the excitement of submitting to power (whether exercised by a man or a woman). By eliminating the sadistic subject from the masochistic scenario, Deleuze's analysis (in *Masochism: An Interpretation of Coldness and Cruelty*) blinds us to sadistic power's most profound appeal (and so to its ineradicability): the promise it contains of masochistic surrender. In Modleski's version of lesbian S/M, which is close to the Deleuzian model, the woman in the position of power "serves an almost archetypal function, initiating the woman into symbolic order, but transferring and transforming a patriarchal system of gender inequities into a realm of difference presided over by woman." Modleski acknowledges that the "complex dynamic" enacted by lesbian S/M simultaneously contests and preserves "existing gender arrangements" (156–57). A question to consider: does the absence of a man in an S/M relation change the function of power worship as radically as Modleski and, for different reasons, Parveen Adams maintain? Since the *kick* of S/M depends on the exercise and on the relinquishing of power, the gender of the participants seems to me irrelevant to S/M's reinforcement of prevailing structures of domination and oppression. Lesbian S/M may contest the most frequent gender arrangements within those structures, but the rule of the Law (whether it is presided over by a man or a woman) can hardly be "derided" (as Deleuze argues) or contested as long as that rule continues to be experienced as thrilling (that is, as long S/M is practiced and other, less oppressive ways of exploiting the eroticism inherent in power have not been explored).

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