

Michel Foucault

ethics

essential works

M. Foucault

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FRIENDSHIP AS A WAY OF LIFE*

Q. You're in your fifties. You're a reader of *Le Gai Pied*, which has been in existence now for two years. Is the kind of discourse you find there something positive for you?

M.F. That the magazine exists is the positive and important thing. In answer to your question, I could say that I don't have to read it to voice the question of my age. What I could ask of your magazine is that I do not, in reading it, have to pose the question of my age. Now, reading it...

Q. Perhaps the problem is the age group of those who contribute to it and read it; the majority are between twenty-five and thirty-five.

M.F. Of course. The more it is written by young people the more it concerns young people. But the problem is not to make room for one age group alongside another but to find out what can be done in relation to the quasi identification between homosexuality and the love among young people.

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. And, no doubt, that's the real reason why

*R. de Ceccaty, J. Dapet, and J. Le Bitoux conducted this interview with Foucault for the French magazine *Gai Pied*. It appeared in April 1981. The text that appears here, translated by John Johnston, has been amended.

homosexuality is not a form of desire but something desirable. Therefore, we have to work at becoming homosexuals and not be obstinate in recognizing that we are. The development toward which the problem of homosexuality tends is the one of friendship.

Q. Did you think so at twenty, or have you discovered it over the years?

M.F. As far back as I remember, to want guys [*garçons*] was to want relations with guys. That has always been important for me. Not necessarily in the form of a couple but as a matter of existence: how is it possible for men to be together? To live together, to share their time, their meals, their room, their leisure, their grief, their knowledge, their confidences? What is it to be "naked" among men, outside of institutional relations, family, profession, and obligatory camaraderie? It's a desire, an uneasiness, a desire-in-uneasiness that exists among a lot of people.

Q. Can you say that desire and pleasure, and the relationships one can have, are dependent on one's age?

M.F. Yes, very profoundly. Between a man and a younger woman, the marriage institution makes it easier: she accepts it and makes it work. But two men of noticeably different ages—what code would allow them to communicate? They face each other without terms or convenient words, with nothing to assure them about the meaning of the movement that carries them toward each other. They have to invent, from A to Z, a relationship that is still formless, which is friendship: that is to say, the sum of everything through which they can give each other pleasure.

One of the concessions one makes to others is not to present homosexuality as anything but a kind of immediate pleasure, of two young men meeting in the street, seducing each other with a look, grabbing each other's asses and getting each other off in a quarter of an hour. There you have a kind of neat image of homosexuality without any possibility of generating unease, and for two reasons: it responds to a reassuring canon of beauty, and 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. I think that's what makes homosexuality "disturbing": the homosexual mode of life, much more than the sexual act itself. 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. The institution is caught in a contradiction; affective intensities traverse it which at one and the same time keep it going and shake it up. Look at the army, where love between men is ceaselessly provoked [*appelé*] and shamed. 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.

Q. You were saying a little while ago: "Rather than crying about faded pleasures, I'm interested in what we ourselves can do." Could you explain that more precisely?

M.F. Asceticism as the renunciation of pleasure has bad connotations. But asceticism is something else: it's the work that one performs on oneself in order to transform oneself or make the self appear which, happily, one never attains. Can that be our problem today? We've rid ourselves of asceticism. Yet it's up to us to advance into a homosexual asceticism that would make us work on ourselves and invent—I do not say discover—a manner of being that is still improbable.

Q. That means that a young homosexual must be very cautious in regard to homosexual imagery; he must work at something else?

M.F. 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 [*plaisirs*]. We must escape and help others to escape the two readymade formulas of the pure sexual encounter and the lovers' fusion of identities.

Q. Can one see the first fruits of strong constructive relationships in the United States, in any case in the cities where the problem of sexual misery seems under control?

M.F. To me, it appears certain that in the United States, even if the basis of sexual misery still exists, the interest in friendship has become very important; one doesn't enter a relationship simply in order to be able to consummate it sexually, which happens very easily. But toward friendship, people are very polarized. How can a relational system be reached through sexual practices? Is it possible to create a homosexual mode of life?

This notion of mode of life seems important to me. Will it require the introduction of a diversification different from the ones due to social class, differences in profession and culture, a diversification that would

also be a form of relationship and would be a "way of life"? A way of life can be shared among individuals of different age, status, and social activity. It can yield intense relations not resembling those that are institutionalized. It seems to me that a way of life can yield a culture and an ethics. To be "gay," I think, is not to identify with the psychological traits and the visible masks of the homosexual but to try to define and develop a way of life.

Q. Isn't it a myth to say: Here we are enjoying the first fruits of a socialization between different classes, ages, and countries?

M.F. Yes, like the great myth of saying: There will no longer be any difference between homo- and heterosexuality. Moreover, I think that it's one of the reasons that homosexuality presents a problem today. Many sexual liberation movements project this idea of "liberating yourself from the hideous constraints that weigh upon you." Yet the affirmation that to be a homosexual is for a man to love another man—this search for a way of life runs counter to the ideology of the sexual liberation movements of the sixties. It's in this sense that the mustached "clones" are significant. It's a way of responding: "Have nothing to fear; the more one is liberated, the less one will love women, the less one will founder in this polysexuality where there are no longer any differences between the two." It's not at all the idea of a great community fusion.

Homosexuality is a historic occasion to reopen affective and relational virtualities, not so much through the intrinsic qualities of the homosexual but because the "slantwise" position of the latter, as it were, the diagonal lines he can lay out in the social fabric allow these virtualities to come to light.

Q. Women might object: What do men together have to win compared to the relations between a man and a woman or between two women?

M.F. There is a book that just appeared in the U.S. on the friendships between women.¹ The affection and passion between women is well documented. In the preface, the author states that she began with the idea of unearthing homosexual relationships—but perceived that not only were these relationships not always present but that it was uninteresting whether relationships could be called "homosexual" or not. And by letting the relationship manifest itself as it appeared in words and gestures, other very essential things also appeared: dense, bright, marvelous loves and affections or very dark and sad loves. The

book shows the extent to which woman's body has played a great role, and the importance of physical contact between women: women do each other's hair, help each other with make up, dress each other. Women have had access to the bodies of other women: they put their arms around each other, kiss each other. Man's body has been forbidden to other men in a much more drastic way. If it's true that life between women was tolerated, it's only in certain periods and since the nineteenth century that life between men not only was tolerated but rigorously necessary: very simply, during war.

And equally in prison camps. You had soldiers and young officers who spent months and even years together. During World War I, men lived together completely, one on top of another, and for them it was nothing at all, insofar as death was present and finally the devotion to one another and the services rendered were sanctioned by the play of life and death. And apart from several remarks on camaraderie, the brotherhood of spirit, and some very partial observations, what do we know about these emotional uproars and storms of feeling that took place in those times? One can wonder how, in these absurd and grotesque wars and infernal massacres, the men managed to hold on in spite of everything. Through some emotional fabric, no doubt. I don't mean that it was because they were each other's lovers that they continued to fight; but honor, courage, not losing face, sacrifice, leaving the trench with the captain—all that implied a very intense emotional tie. It's not to say: "Ah, there you have homosexuality!" I detest that kind of reasoning. But no doubt you have there one of the conditions, not the only one, that has permitted this infernal life where for weeks guys floundered in the mud and shit, among corpses, starving for food, and were drunk the morning of the assault.

I would like to say, finally, that something well considered and voluntary like a magazine ought to make possible a homosexual culture, that is to say, the instruments for polymorphic, varied, and individually modulated relationships. But the idea of a program of proposals is dangerous. As soon as a program is presented, it becomes a law, and there's a prohibition against inventing. There ought to be an inventiveness special to a situation like ours and to these feelings, this need that Americans call "coming out," that is, showing oneself. 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 back-

ground 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?

NOTE

- ¹ Lillian Faderman, *Surpassing the Love of Men* (New York: Morrow, 1980).

SEXUAL CHOICE, SEXUAL ACT*

J.O'H. Let me begin by asking you to respond to John Boswell's recent book on the history of homosexuality from the beginning of the Christian era through the Middle Ages.¹ As an historian yourself, do you find his methodology valid? To what extent do you think the conclusions he draws contribute to a better understanding of what homosexuality is today?

M.F. This is certainly a very important study whose originality is already evident from the way in which it poses the question. Methodologically speaking, the rejection by Boswell of the categorical opposition between homosexual and heterosexual, which plays such a significant role in the way our culture conceives of homosexuality, represents an advance not only in scholarship but in cultural criticism as well. His introduction of the concept of "gay" (in the way he defines it) provides us both with a useful instrument of research and, at the same time, a better comprehension of how people actually conceive of themselves and their sexual behavior. On the level of investigative results, this methodology has led to the discovery that what has been called the "repression" of homosexuality does not date back to Christianity properly speaking but developed within the Christian era at a much later date. In this type of analysis it is important to be aware of the way in which people conceived of their own sexuality. Sexual behavior is not, as is too often assumed, a superimposition of, on the one hand, desires

*This interview was conducted in French and translated by James O'Higgins; it first appeared in the "Homosexuality: Sacrilege, Vision, Politics" special issue of *Salmagundi* 58-59 (Fall 1982-Winter 1983), pp. 10-24.

that derive from natural instincts, and, on the other hand, of permissive or restrictive laws that tell us what we should or shouldn't do. Sexual behavior is more than that. It is also the consciousness one has of what one is doing, what one makes of the experience, and the value one attaches to it. It is in this sense that I think the concept "gay" contributes to a positive (rather than a purely negative) appreciation of the type of consciousness in which affection, love, desire, sexual rapport with people have a positive significance.

J.O'H. I understand that your own recent work has led you to a study of sexuality as it was experienced in ancient Greece.

M.F. Yes, and precisely Boswell's book has provided me with a guide for what to look for in the meaning people attached to their sexual behavior.

J.O'H. Does this focus on cultural context and people's discourse about their sexual behavior reflect a methodological decision to bypass the distinction between innate predisposition to homosexual behavior and social conditioning? Or do you have any conviction one way or the other on this issue?

M.F. On this question I have absolutely nothing to say. "No comment."

J.O'H. Does this mean you think the question is unanswerable; or bogus, or does it simply not interest you?

M.F. No, none of these. I just don't believe in talking about things that go beyond my expertise. It's not my problem, and I don't like talking about things that are not really the object of my work. On this question I have only an opinion; since it is only an opinion, it is without interest.

J.O'H. But opinions can be interesting, don't you agree?

M.F. Sure, I could offer my opinion, but this would only make sense if everybody and anybody's opinions were also being consulted. I don't want to make use of a position of authority while I'm being interviewed to traffic in opinions.

J.O'H. Fair enough. We'll shift direction then. Do you think it is legitimate to speak of a class consciousness in connection with homosexuals? Ought homosexuals to be encouraged to think of themselves as a class in the way that unskilled laborers or black people are encouraged to in some countries? How do you envision the political goals of homosexuals as a group?

M.F. In answer to the first question, I would say that the homosexual consciousness certainly goes beyond one's individual experience and

includes an awareness of being a member of a particular social group. This is an undeniable fact that dates back to ancient times. Of course, this aspect of their collective consciousness changes over time and varies from place to place. It has, for instance, on different occasions taken the form of membership in a kind of secret society, membership in a cursed race, membership in a segment of humanity at once privileged and persecuted—all kinds of different modes of collective consciousness, just as, incidentally, the consciousness of unskilled laborers has undergone numerous transformations. It is true that more recently certain homosexuals have, following the political model, developed or tried to create a certain class consciousness. My impression is that this hasn't really been a success, whatever the political consequences it may have had, because homosexuals do not constitute a social class. This is not to say that one can't imagine a society in which homosexuals would constitute a social class. But in our present economic and social mode of organization, I don't see this coming to pass.

As for the political goals of the homosexual movement, two points can be made. First, there is the question of freedom of sexual choice which must be faced. I say "freedom of sexual choice" and not "freedom of sexual acts" because there are sexual acts like rape which should not be permitted whether they involve a man and a woman or two men. I don't think we should have as our objective some sort of absolute freedom or total liberty of sexual action. However, where freedom of sexual choice is concerned, one has to be absolutely intransigent. This includes the liberty of expression of that choice. By this I mean the liberty to manifest that choice or not to manifest it. Now, there has been considerable progress in this area on the level of legislation, certainly progress in the direction of tolerance, but there is still a lot of work to be done.

Second, a homosexual movement could adopt the objective of posing the question of the place in a given society which sexual choice, sexual behavior, and the effects of sexual relations between people could have with regard to the individual. These questions are fundamentally obscure. Look, for example, at the confusion and equivocation that surround pornography, or the lack of elucidation which characterizes the question of the legal status that might be attached to the liaison between two people of the same sex. I don't mean that the legalization of marriage among homosexuals should be an objective; rather, that we are dealing here with a whole series of questions concerning

the insertion and recognition—within a legal and social framework—of diverse relations among individuals which must be addressed.

J.O'H. I take it, then, your point is that the homosexual movement should not only give itself the goal of enlarging legal permissiveness but should also be asking broader and deeper questions about the strategic roles played by sexual preferences and how they are perceived. Is it your point that the homosexual movement should not stop at liberalizing laws relating to personal sexual choice but should also be provoking society at large to rethink its own presuppositions regarding sexuality? In other words, it isn't that homosexuals are deviants who should be allowed to practice in peace but, rather, that the whole conceptual scheme that categorizes homosexuals as deviants must be dismantled. This throws an interesting light on the question of homosexual educators. In the debate that arose in California, regarding the right of homosexuals to teach primary and secondary school, for example, those who argued against permitting homosexuals to teach were concerned not only with the likelihood of homosexuals constituting a threat to innocence, in that they may be prone to seducing their students, but also that they might preach the gospel of homosexuality.

M.F. The whole question, you see, has been wrongly formulated. Under no circumstances should the sexual choice of an individual determine the profession he is allowed, or forbidden, to practice. Sexual practices simply fall outside the pertinent factors related to the suitability for a given profession. "Yes," you might say, "but what if the profession is used by homosexuals to encourage others to become homosexual?"

Well, let me ask you this: Do you believe that teachers who for years, for decades, for centuries, explained to children that homosexuality is intolerable; do you believe that the textbooks that purged literature and falsified history in order to exclude various types of sexual behavior, have not caused ravages at least as serious as a homosexual teacher who speaks about homosexuality and who can do no more harm than explain a given reality, a lived experience?

The fact that a teacher is a homosexual can only have electrifying and intense effects on the students to the extent that the rest of society refuses to admit the existence of homosexuality. A homosexual teacher should not present any more of a problem than a bald teacher, a male teacher in an all-female school, a female teacher in an all-male school, or an Arab teacher in a school in the 16th district in Paris.

As for the problem of a homosexual teacher who actively tries to seduce his students, all I can say is that in all pedagogical situations the possibility of this problem is present; one finds instances of this kind of behavior much more rampant among heterosexual teachers—for no other reason than that there are a lot more heterosexual teachers.

J.O'H. There is a growing tendency in American intellectual circles, particularly among radical feminists, to distinguish between male and female homosexuality. The basis of this distinction is twofold. If the term *homosexuality* is taken to denote not merely a tendency toward affectional relations with members of the same sex but an inclination to find members of the same sex erotically attractive and gratifying, then it is worth insisting on the very different physical things that happen in the one encounter and the other. The second basis for the distinction is that lesbians seem in the main to want from other women what one finds in stable heterosexual relationships: support, affection, long-term commitment, and so on. If this is not the case with male homosexuals, then the difference may be said to be striking, if not fundamental. Do you think the distinction here a useful and viable one? Are there discernible reasons for the differences noted so insistently by many prominent radical feminists?

M.F. [Laughs] All I can do is explode with laughter.

J.O'H. Is the question funny in a way I don't see, or stupid, or both?

M.F. Well, it is certainly not stupid, but I find it very amusing, perhaps for reasons I couldn't give even if I wanted to. What I will say is that the distinction offered doesn't seem to be convincing, in terms of what I observe in the behavior of lesbian women. Beyond this, one would have to speak about the different pressures experienced by men and women who are coming out or are trying to make a life for themselves as homosexuals. I don't think that radical feminists in other countries are likely to see these questions quite in the way you ascribe to such women in American intellectual circles.

J.O'H. Freud argued in "Psychogenesis of a Case of Hysteria in a Woman" that all homosexuals are liars.² We don't have to take this assertion seriously to ask whether there is not in homosexuality a tendency to dissimulation that might have led Freud to make his statement. If we substitute for the word "lie" such words as *metaphor* or *indirection*, may we not be coming closer to the heart of the homosexual style? Or is there any point in speaking of a homosexual style or sensibility? Richard Sennett, for one, has argued that there is no more

a homosexual style than there is a heterosexual style. Is this your view as well?

M.F. Yes, I don't think it makes much sense to talk about a homosexual style. Even on the level of nature, the term *homosexuality* doesn't have much meaning. I'm reading right now, as a matter of fact, an interesting book that came out recently in the U.S. called *Proust and the Art of Love*.³ The author shows us how difficult it is to give meaning to the proposition "Proust was a homosexual." It seems to me that it is finally an inadequate category—inadequate, that is, in that we can't really classify behavior, on the one hand, and the term can't restore a type of experience, on the other. One could perhaps say there is a "gay style," or at least that there is an ongoing attempt to recreate a certain style of existence, a form of existence or art of living, which might be called "gay."

In answer to the question about dissimulation, it is true that, for instance, during the nineteenth century it was, to a certain degree, necessary to hide one's homosexuality. But to call homosexuals liars is equivalent to calling the resisters under a military occupation liars. It's like calling Jews "moneylenders," when it was the only profession they were allowed to practice.

J.O'H. Nevertheless, it does seem evident, at least on a sociological level, that there are certain characteristics one can discern in the gay style, certain generalizations which (your laughter a moment ago notwithstanding) recall such stereotypifications as promiscuity, anonymity between sexual partners, purely physical relationships, and so on.

M.F. Yes, but it's not quite so simple. In a society like ours, where homosexuality is repressed, and severely so, men enjoy a far greater degree of liberty than women. Men are permitted to make love much more often and under less restrictive conditions. Houses of prostitution exist to satisfy their sexual needs. Ironically, this has resulted in a certain permissiveness with regard to sexual practices between men. Sexual desire is considered more intense for men and therefore in greater need of release; so, along with brothels, one saw the emergence of baths where men could meet and have sex with each other. The Roman baths were exactly this, a place for heterosexuals to engage in sexual acts. It wasn't until the sixteenth century, I believe, that these baths were closed as places of unacceptable sexual debauchery. Thus, even homosexuality benefited from a certain tolerance toward sexual practices, as long as it was limited to a simple physical encounter. And

not only did homosexuality benefit from this situation but, by a curious twist—often typical of such strategies—it actually reversed the standards in such a way that homosexuals came to enjoy even more freedom in their physical relations than heterosexuals. The effect has been that homosexuals now have the luxury of knowing that in a certain number of countries—Holland, Denmark, the United States, and even as provincial a country as France—the opportunities for sexual encounters are enormous. There has been, you might say, a great increase in consumption on this level. But this is not necessarily a natural condition of homosexuality, a biological given.

J.O'H. The American sociologist Philip Rieff, in an essay on Oscar Wilde entitled "The Impossible Culture," sees Wilde as a forerunner of modern culture.⁴ The essay begins with an extensive quotation from the transcript of the trial of Oscar Wilde, and goes on to raise questions about the viability of a culture in which there are no prohibitions, and therefore no sense of vital transgression. Consider, if you will, the following:

"A culture survives the assault of sheer possibility against it only so far as the members of a culture learn, through their membership, how to narrow the range of choices otherwise open."

"As culture sinks into the psyche and becomes character, what Wilde prized above all else is constrained: individuality. A culture in crisis favors the growth of individuality; deep down things no longer weigh so heavily to slow the surface play of experience. Hypothetically, if a culture could grow to full crisis, then everything would be expressed and nothing would be true."

"Sociologically, a truth is whatever militates against the human capacity to express everything. Repression is truth."

Is Rieff's response to Wilde and to the idea of culture Wilde embodied at all plausible?

M.F. I'm not sure I understand Professor Rieff's remarks. What does he mean, for instance, by "Repression is truth?"

J.O'H. Actually, I think this idea is similar to claims you make in your own books about truth being the product of a system of exclusions, a network, or *episteme* [*épistémè*], which defines what can and cannot be said.

M.F. Well, the important question here, it seems to me, is not whether a culture without restraints is possible or even desirable but whether the system of constraints in which a society functions leaves individu-

als the liberty to transform the system. Obviously, constraints of any kind are going to be intolerable to certain segments of society. The necrophiliac finds it intolerable that graves are not accessible to him. But a system of constraint becomes truly intolerable when the individuals who are affected by it don't have the means of modifying it. This can happen when such a system becomes intangible as a result of its being considered a moral or religious imperative, or a necessary consequence of medical science. If Rieff means that the restrictions should be clear and well defined, I agree.

J.O'H. Actually, Rieff would argue that a true culture is one in which the essential truths have been sunk so deep in everyone that there would be no need to articulate them. Clearly, in a society of law, one would need to make explicit a great variety of things that were not to be done, but the main credal assumptions would for the most part remain inaccessible to simple articulation. Part of the thrust of Rieff's work is directed against the idea that it is desirable to do away with credal assumptions in the name of a perfect liberty, and also the idea that restrictions are by definition what all must aim to clear away.

M.F. There is no question that a society without restrictions is inconceivable, but I can only repeat myself in saying that these restrictions have to be within the reach of those affected by them so that they at least have the possibility of altering them. As to credal assumptions, I don't think that Rieff and I would agree on their value or on their meaning or on the devices by which they are taught.

J.O'H. You're no doubt right about that. In any case, we can move now from the legal and sociological spheres to the realm of letters. I would like to ask you to comment on the difference between the erotic as it appears in heterosexual literature and the manner in which sex emerges in homosexual literature. Sexual discourse, as it appears in the great heterosexual novels of our culture—I realize that the designation "heterosexual novels" is itself dubious—is characterized by a certain modesty and discretion that seems to add to the charm of the works. When heterosexual writers treat sex too explicitly, it seems to lose some of the mysteriously evocative quality, some of the potency we find in novels like *Anna Karenina*. The point is made with great cogency in a number of essays by George Steiner, as a matter of fact. In contrast to the practice of the major heterosexual novelists, we have the example of various homosexual writers. I'm thinking for example of Cocteau's *The White Paper*, where he succeeds in retaining the poetic enchant-

ment, which heterosexual writers achieve through veiled allusion, while depicting sexual acts in the most graphic terms.⁵ Do you think such a difference does exist between these two types of literature, and if so, how would you account for it?

M.F. That's a very interesting question. As I mentioned earlier, over the past few years I have been reading a lot of Latin and Greek texts that describe sexual practices both between men and between men and women; and I've been struck by the extreme prudishness of these texts (with certain exceptions, of course). Take an author like Lucian. Here we have an ancient writer who talks about homosexuality but in an almost bashful way. At the end of one of his dialogues, for instance, he evokes a scene where a man approaches a boy, puts his hand on the boy's knee, slides his hand under his tunic and caresses the boy's chest; then the hand moves down to the boy's stomach and suddenly the text stops there. Now, I would attribute this prudishness, which generally characterizes homosexual literature in ancient times, to the greater freedom then enjoyed by men in their homosexual practices.

J.O'H. I see. So the more free and open sexual practice is, the more one can afford to be reticent or oblique in talking about it. This would explain why homosexual literature is more explicit in our culture than heterosexual literature. But I'm still wondering how one could use this explanation to account for the fact that the former manages to achieve the same effect in the imagination of the reader as the latter achieves with the exact opposite tools.

M.F. Let me try to answer your question another way. The experience of heterosexuality, at least since the Middle Ages, has always consisted of two axes; on the one hand, the axis of courtship in which the man seduces the woman; and, on the other hand, the axis of sexual act itself. Now, the great heterosexual literature of the West has had to do essentially with the axis of amorous courtship, that is, above all, with that which precedes the sexual act. All the work of intellectual and cultural refinement, all the aesthetic elaboration of the West, were aimed at courtship. This is the reason for the relative poverty of literary, cultural, and aesthetic appreciation of the sexual act as such.

In contrast, the modern homosexual experience has no relation at all to courtship. This was not the case in ancient Greece, however. For the Greeks, courtship between men was more important than between men and women. (Think of Socrates and Alcibiades.) But in Christian culture of the West, homosexuality was banished and therefore had to

concentrate all its energy on the act of sex itself. Homosexuals were not allowed to elaborate a system of courtship because the cultural expression necessary for such an elaboration was denied them. The wink on the street, the split-second decision to get it on, the speed with which homosexual relations are consummated: all these are products of an interdiction. So when a homosexual culture and literature began to develop it was natural for it to focus on the most ardent and heated aspect of homosexual relations.

J.O'H. I'm reminded of Cassanova's famous expression that "the best moment in life is when one is climbing the stairs." One can hardly imagine a homosexual today making such a remark.

M.F. Exactly. Rather, he would say something like: "the best moment of love is when the lover leaves in the taxi."

J.O'H. I can't help thinking that this describes more or less precisely Swann's relations with Odette in the first volume of Proust's great novel.

M.F. Well, yes, that is true. But though we are speaking there of a relationship between a man and a woman, we should have to take into account in describing it the nature of the imagination that conceived it.

J.O'H. And we would also then have to take into account the pathological nature of the relationship as Proust himself conceives it.

M.F. The question of pathology I would as well omit in this context. I prefer simply to return to the observation with which I began this part of our exchange, namely, that for a homosexual, the best moment of love is likely to be when the lover leaves in the taxi. It is when the act is over and the guy [*garçon*] is gone that one begins to dream about the warmth of his body, the quality of his smile, the tone of his voice. It is the recollection rather than the anticipation of the act that assumes a primary importance in homosexual relations. This is why the great homosexual writers of our culture (Cocteau, Genet, Burroughs) can write so elegantly about the sexual act itself, because the homosexual imagination is for the most part concerned with reminiscing about the act rather than anticipating it. And, as I said earlier, this is all due to very concrete and practical considerations and says nothing about the intrinsic nature of homosexuality.

J.O'H. Do you think this has any bearing on the so-called proliferation of perversions one sees today? I am speaking of phenomena like the S&M scene, golden showers, scatological amusements, and the like.

We know these practices have existed for some time but they seem much more openly practiced these days.

M.F. I would say they are much more widely practiced also.

J.O'H. Do you think this general phenomenon and the fact that homosexuality is "coming out of the closet," making public its form of expression, have anything to do with each other?

M.F. I would advance the following hypothesis: In a civilization that for centuries considered the essence of the relation between two people to reside in the knowledge of whether one of the two parties was going to surrender to the other, all the interest and curiosity, the cunning and manipulation of people was aimed at getting the other to give in, to go to bed with them. Now, when sexual encounters become extremely easy and numerous, as is the case with homosexuality nowadays, complications are introduced only after the fact. In this type of casual encounter, it is only after making love that one becomes curious about the other person. Once the sexual act has been consummated, you find yourself asking your partner, "By the way, what was your name?"

What you have, then, is a situation where all the energy and imagination, which in the heterosexual relationship were channeled into courtship, now become devoted to intensifying the act of sex itself. A whole new art of sexual practice develops which tries to explore all the internal possibilities of sexual conduct. You find emerging in places like San Francisco and New York what might be called laboratories of sexual experimentation. You might look upon this as the counterpart of the medieval courts where strict rules of proprietary courtship were defined.

It is because the sexual act has become so easy and available to homosexuals that it runs the risk of quickly becoming boring, so that every effort has to be made to innovate and create variations that will enhance the pleasure of the act.

J.O'H. Yes, but why have these innovations taken the specific form they have? Why the fascination with excretory functions, for instance?

M.F. I find the S&M phenomenon in general to be more surprising than that. That is to say, sexual relations are elaborated and developed by and through mythical relations. S&M is not a relationship between he (or she) who suffers and he (or she) who inflicts suffering, but between the master and the one on whom he exercises his mastery. What interests the practitioners of S&M is that the relationship is at the same time regulated and open. It resembles a chess game in the sense that one can win and the other lose. The master can lose in the S&M game

if he finds he is unable to respond to the needs and trials of his victim. Conversely, the servant can lose if he fails to meet or can't stand meeting the challenge thrown at him by the master. This mixture of rules and openness has the effect of intensifying sexual relations by introducing a perpetual novelty, a perpetual tension and a perpetual uncertainty, which the simple consummation of the act lacks. The idea is also to make use of every part of the body as a sexual instrument.

Actually this is related to the famous phrase *animal triste post coitum*. Since in homosexuality coitus is given immediately, the problem becomes "what can be done to guard against the onset of sadness?"

J.O'H. Would you venture an explanation for the fact that bisexuality among women today seems to be much more readily accepted by men than bisexuality among men?

M.F. This probably has to do with the role women play in the imagination of heterosexual men. Women have always been seen by them as their exclusive property. To preserve this image, a man had to prevent his woman from having too much contact with other men, so women were restricted to social contact with other women and more tolerance was exercised with regard to the physical rapport between women. By the same token, heterosexual men felt that if they practiced homosexuality with other men this would destroy what they think is their image in the eyes of their women. They think of themselves as existing in the minds of women as master. They think that the idea of their submitting to another man, of being under another man in the act of love, would destroy their image in the eyes of women. Men think that women can only experience pleasure in recognizing men as masters. Even the Greeks had a problem with being the passive partner in a love relationship. For a Greek nobleman to make love to a passive male slave was natural, since the slave was by nature an inferior; but when two Greek men of the same social class made love it was a real problem because neither felt he should humble himself before the other.

Today homosexuals still have this problem. Most homosexuals feel that the passive role is in some way demeaning. S&M has actually helped alleviate this problem somewhat.

J.O'H. Is it your impression that the cultural forms growing up in the gay community are directed very largely to young people in that community?

M.F. I think that is largely the case, though I'm not sure there is much to make of it. Certainly, as a fifty-year-old man, when I read

certain publications produced by and for gays, I find that I am not being taken into account at all, that I somehow don't belong. This is not something on the basis of which I would criticize such publications, which after all do what their writers and readers are interested in. But I can't help observing that there is a tendency among articulate gays to think of the major issues and questions of lifestyle as involving people in their twenties typically.

J.O'H. I don't see why this might not constitute the basis of a criticism—not only of particular publications but of gay life generally.

M.F. I didn't say that one *might* not find grounds for criticism, only that I don't choose to or think it useful.

J.O'H. Why not consider in this context the worship of the youthful male body as the very center of the standard homosexual fantasy, and go on to speak of the denial of ordinary life processes entailed in this, particularly aging and the decline of desire?

M.F. Look, these are not new ideas you're raising, and you know that. As to the worship of youthful bodies, I'm not convinced that it is peculiar at all to gays or in any way to be regarded as a pathology. And if that is the intention of your question, then I reject it. But I would also remind you that gays are not only involved in life processes, necessarily, but very much aware of them in most cases. Gay publications may not devote as much space as I would like to questions of gay friendship and to the meaning of relationship when there are no established codes or guidelines. But more and more gay people are having to face these questions for themselves. And, you know, I think that what most bothers those who are not gay about gayness is the gay lifestyle, not sex acts themselves.

J.O'H. Are you referring to such things as gays fondling or caressing one another in public, or their wearing flashy clothing, or adopting clone outfits?

M.F. These things are bound to disturb some people. But I was talking about the common fear that gays will develop relationships that are intense and satisfying even though they do not at all conform to the ideas of relationship held by others. It is the prospect that gays will create as yet unforeseen kinds of relationships that many people cannot tolerate.

J.O'H. You are referring to relationships that don't involve possessiveness or fidelity—to name only two of the common factors that might be denied?

→
youth
10s

M.F. If the relationships to be created are as yet unforeseeable, then we can't really say this feature or that feature will be denied. But you can see how, in the military for example, love between men can develop and assert itself in circumstances where only dead habits and rules were supposed to prevail. And it is possible that changes in established routines will occur on a much broader scale as gays learn to express their feelings for one another in more various ways and develop new lifestyles not resembling those which have been institutionalized.

J.O'H. Do you see it as your role to address the gay community especially on matters of general importance such as you have been raising?

M.F. I am, of course, regularly involved in exchanges with other members of the gay community. We talk, we try to find ways of opening ourselves to one another. But I am wary of imposing my own views, or of setting down a plan, or program. I don't want to discourage invention, don't want gay people to stop feeling that it is up to them to adjust their own relationships by discovering what is appropriate in their situations.

J.O'H. You don't think there is some special advice, or a special perspective, that a historian or archaeologist of culture like yourself can offer?

M.F. It is always useful to understand the historical contingency of things, to see how and why things got to be as they are. But I am not the only person equipped to show these things, and I want to avoid suggesting that certain developments were necessary or unavoidable. Gays have to work out some of these matters themselves. Of course, there are useful things I can contribute, but again, I want to avoid imposing my own scheme or plan.

J.O'H. Do you think that, in general, intellectuals are more tolerant toward, or receptive to, different modes of sexual behavior than other people? If so, is this due to a better understanding of human sexuality? If not, how do you think that you and other intellectuals can improve this situation? In what way can the rational discourse on sex best be reoriented?

M.F. I think that where tolerance is concerned we allow ourselves a lot of illusions. Take incest, for example. Incest was a popular practice, and I mean by this, widely practiced among the populace, for a very long time. It was toward the end of the nineteenth century that various social pressures were directed against it. And it is clear that the great interdiction of incest is an invention of the intellectuals.

J.O'H. Are you referring to figures like Freud and Lévi-Strauss, or to the class of intellectuals as a whole?

M.F. No, I'm not aiming at anyone in particular. I'm simply pointing out that if you look for studies by sociologists or anthropologists of the nineteenth century on incest you won't find any. Sure, there were some scattered medical reports and the like, but the practice of incest didn't really seem to pose a problem at the time.

It is perhaps true that in intellectual circles these things are talked about more openly, but that is not necessarily a sign of greater tolerance. Sometimes it means the reverse. I remember ten or fifteen years ago, when I used to socialize within the bourgeois milieu, that it was rare indeed for an evening to go by without some discussion of homosexuality and pederasty—usually even before dessert. But these same people who spoke so openly about these matters were not likely to tolerate their sons being pederasts.

As for prescribing the direction rational discourse on sex should take, I prefer not to legislate such matters. For one thing, the expression "intellectual discourse on sex" is too vague. There are very stupid things said by sociologists, sexologists, psychiatrists, doctors, and moralists, and there are very intelligent things said by members of those same professions. I don't think it's a question of intellectual discourse on sex but a question of asinine discourse and intelligent discourse.

J.O'H. And I take it that you have lately found a number of works that are moving in the right direction?

M.F. More, certainly, than I had any reason to expect I would some years ago. But the situation on the whole is still less than encouraging.

NOTES

¹ John Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance and Homosexuality: Gay People in Western Europe from the Christian Era to the Fourteenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980). According to Boswell the urban culture of Roman society did not distinguish homosexuals from others. The literature of the early Christian Church also did not oppose gay behavior. But hostility to the sexuality of gay people became more evident at the time of the dissolution of the Roman state and its urban centers. The eleventh century brought a renaissance of urban life and with it the reappearance of a more visible gay culture, which was only to be threatened a century later by theological and legal prejudices. The intolerance of the late Middle Ages continued to have an effect on European culture for centuries to come. To understand the nature of gay relationships, Boswell insists that they must be studied within temporal boundaries according to the customs of their day.

² See *Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1955), vol. 2.

- 5 J. C. Rivers, *Proust and the Art of Love: The Aesthetics of Sexuality in the Life, Times, and Art of Marcel Proust* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980).
- 4 Philip Rieff, "The Impossible Culture," *Salmagundi* 58-59 (Fall 1982-Winter 1983), 406-26.
- 5 Jean Cocteau, *Le Livre Blanc* (Paris: Quatre-Chemins, 1928) [*The White Paper*, pref. and ill. by Jean Cocteau (New York: Macaulay, 1958)].

THE SOCIAL TRIUMPH OF THE SEXUAL WILL*

G.B. Today we no longer speak of sexual liberation in vague terms; we speak of women's rights, homosexual rights, gay rights, but we don't know exactly what is meant by "rights" and "gay." In countries where homosexuality as such is outlawed, everything is simpler since everything is yet to be done, but in northern European countries where homosexuality is no longer officially prohibited, the future of gay rights is posed in different terms.

M.F. I think we should consider the battle for gay rights as an episode that cannot be the final stage. For two reasons: first because a right, in its real effects, is much more linked to attitudes and patterns of behavior than to legal formulations. There can be discrimination against homosexuals even if such discriminations are prohibited by law. It is therefore necessary to struggle to establish homosexual lifestyles, existential choices [*des choix d'existence*] in which sexual relations with people of the same sex will be important. It's not enough as part of a more general way of life, or in addition to it, to be permitted to make love with someone of the same sex. The fact of making love with someone of the same sex can very naturally involve a whole series of choices, a whole series of other values and choices for which there are not yet real possibilities. It's not only a matter of integrating this strange little practice of making love with someone of the same sex into preexisting cultures; it's a matter of constructing [*créer*] cultural forms.

*This interview was conducted in French and translated by Brendan Lemon. Given on October 20, 1981, it was published in *Christopher Street* 6:4 (May 1982), pp. 36-41. The text that appears here has been slightly amended.

G.B. But there are always things in the course of daily life which obstruct the creation of these ways of living.

M.F. Yes, but that's where there's something new to be done. That in the name of respect for individual rights someone is allowed to do as he wants, great! But if what we want to do is to create a new way of life [*mode de vie*], then the question of individual rights is not pertinent. In effect, we live in a legal, social, and institutional world where the only relations possible are extremely few, extremely simplified, and extremely poor. There is, of course, the relation of marriage, and the relations of family, but how many other relations should exist, should be able to find their codes not in institutions but in possible supports, which is not at all the case!

G.B. The essential question is that of supports, because the relations exist—or at least they try to exist. The problem comes because certain things are decided not by law-making bodies but by executive order. In Holland, certain legal changes have lessened the power of families and have permitted the individual to feel stronger in the relations he wishes to form. For example, inheritance laws [*droits*] between people of the same sex not tied by blood are the same as those of a married heterosexual couple.

M.F. That's an interesting example, but it represents only a first step, because if you ask people to reproduce the marriage bond for their personal relationship to be recognized, the progress made is slight. We live in a relational world that institutions have considerably impoverished. Society and the institutions which frame it have limited the possibility of relationships because a rich relational world would be very complex to manage. We should fight against the impoverishment of the relational fabric. We should secure recognition for relations of provisional coexistence, adoption....

G.B. Of children.

M.F. Or—why not?—of one adult by another. Why shouldn't I adopt a friend who's ten years younger than I am? And even if he's ten years older? Rather than arguing that rights are fundamental and natural to the individual, we should try to imagine and create a new relational right that permits all possible types of relations to exist and not be prevented, blocked, or annulled by impoverished relational institutions.

G.B. More concretely, shouldn't the legal, financial, and social advantages enjoyed by a married heterosexual couple be extended to all types of relationships? That's an important practical question, isn't it?

M.F. Certainly, but once again I think that's hard work, though very, very interesting. Right now I'm fascinated by the Hellenistic and Roman world before Christianity. Take, for example, relations of friendship. They played an important part, but there was a supple institutional framework for them—even if it was sometimes constraining—with a system of obligations, tasks, reciprocal duties, a hierarchy between friends, and so on. I don't think we should reproduce that model. But you can see how a system of supple and relatively codified relations could exist for a long time and support a certain number of important and stable relations, which we now have great difficulty defining. When you read an account of two friends from the period, you always wonder what it really is. Did they make love together? Did they have common interests? No doubt, it's neither of those things, or both.

G.B. In Western societies, the only notion upon which legislation is based is that of the citizen, or of the individual. How do we reconcile the desire to validate relations which have no legal sanction with a law-making body which confirms that all citizens have equal rights? There are still questions with no answers—that of the single person, for example.

M.F. Of course. The single person must be recognized as having relations with others quite different from those of a married couple, for example. We often say that the single person suffers from solitude because he is suspected of being an unsuccessful or rejected husband.

G.B. Or someone with "questionable morals." →

M.F. Yes, someone who couldn't get married. When in reality the life of solitude is often the result of the poverty of possible relationships in our society, where institutions make insufficient and necessarily rare all relations that one could have with someone else and could be intense, rich—even if they were provisional—even and especially if they took place outside the framework of marriage.

G.B. All that makes us foresee that the gay movement has a future which goes beyond gays themselves. In Holland, it is surprising to see at what point gay rights interest more than homosexuals, because people want to direct their own lives and their relationships.

M.F. Yes, I think that there is an interesting part to play, one that fascinates me: the question of gay culture—which not only includes novels written by pederasts about pederasty, I mean culture in the large sense, a culture that invents ways of relating, types of existence, types of values, types of exchanges between individuals which are really

new and are neither the same as, nor superimposed on, existing cultural forms. If that's possible, then gay culture will be not only a choice of homosexuals for homosexuals—it would create relations that are, at certain points, transferable to heterosexuals. We have to reverse things a bit. Rather than saying what we said at one time, "Let's try to re-introduce homosexuality into the general norm of social relations," let's say the reverse—"No! Let's escape as much as possible from the type of relations that society proposes for us and try to create in the empty space where we are new relational possibilities." By proposing a new relational *right*, we will see that nonhomosexual people can enrich their lives by changing their own schema of relations.

G.B. The word *gay* itself is a catalyst that has the power to negate what the word "homosexuality" stood for.

M.F. That's important because by getting away from the categorization homosexuality-heterosexuality, I think that gays have taken an important, interesting step: they define their problems differently by trying to create a culture that makes sense only in relation to a sexual experience and a type of relation that is their own. By taking the pleasure of sexual relations away from the area of sexual norms and its categories, and in so doing making the pleasure the crystallizing point of a new culture—I think that's an interesting approach.

G.B. That's what interests people, actually.

M.F. Today the important questions are no longer linked to the problem of repression, which doesn't mean that there aren't still many repressed people, and above all doesn't mean that we should overlook that and not struggle so that people stop being oppressed; of course I don't mean that. But the innovative direction we're moving in is no longer the struggle against repression.

G.B. The development of what used to be called a "ghetto," which now consists of bars, cafés, and baths, has perhaps been a phenomenon as radical and innovative as the struggle against discriminatory legislation. Of course, some people would say that the former would exist without the latter, and they're probably right.

M.F. Yes, but I don't think we should have an attitude toward the last ten or fifteen years which consists of stamping out the past as if it were a long error that we're finally leaving behind. A lot of change has come about in behavior, and this took courage, but we should no longer have only one model of behavior and one set of problems.

G.B. The fact that bars have—for many—stopped being private clubs

indicates what transformations are taking place in the way homosexuality is lived. The dramatic part of the phenomenon—making it exist—has become a relic.

M.F. Absolutely, but from another point of view, I think that's due to the fact that we've reduced the guilt involved in making a very clear separation between the life of men and the life of women, the "monosexual" relation. With the universal condemnation of homosexuality, there was also a lessening of the monosexual relation—it was permitted only in places like prisons and army barracks. It's curious to note that homosexuals were also uneasy about monosexuality.

G.B. How so?

M.F. For a while, people were saying that when everyone started having homosexual relations, we could all finally have good relations with women.

G.B. Which was of course a fantasy.

M.F. That idea seemed to imply a difficulty in admitting that a monosexual relation was possible, and could be perfectly satisfying and compatible with relating to women—if we wanted that. That condemnation of monosexuality is disappearing, and we see women also affirming their right and desire for monosexuality. We shouldn't be afraid of that, even if it reminds us of college dorms, seminaries, army barracks, or prisons. We should acknowledge that "monosexuality" can be something rich.

G.B. In the sixties, the integration of the sexes was seen as the only civilized arrangement, and this created, in effect, a lot of hostility about "monosexual" groups like schools or private clubs.

M.F. We were right to condemn institutional monosexuality that was constricting, but the promise that we would love women as soon as we were no longer condemned for being gay was utopian. And a utopia in the dangerous sense, not because it promised good relations with women but because it was at the expense of monosexual relations. In the often-negative response some French people have toward certain types of American behavior, there is still that disapproval of monosexuality. So occasionally we hear: "What? How can you approve of those macho models? You're always with men, you have mustaches and leather jackets, you wear boots, what kind of masculine image is that?" Maybe in ten years we'll laugh about it all. But I think in the schema of a man affirming himself as a man, there is a movement toward redefining the monosexual relation. It consists of saying, "Yes, we spend

our time with men, we have mustaches, and we kiss each other," without one of the partners having to play the nelly [*éphèbe*] or the effeminate, fragile boy.

G.B. Thus, the criticism of the machismo of the new gay man is an attempt to make us feel guilty and is full of the same clichés that have plagued homosexuality up to now?

M.F. We have to admit this is all something very new and practically unknown in Western societies. The Greeks never admitted love between two *adult men*. We can certainly find allusions to the idea of love between young men, when they were soldiers, but not for any others.

G.B. This would be something absolutely new?

M.F. It's one thing to be permitted sexual relations, but the very recognition by the individuals themselves of this type of relation, in the sense that they give them necessary and sufficient importance—that they acknowledge them and make them real—in order to invent other ways of life, yes, that's new.

G.B. Why has the idea of a relational right, stemming from "gay rights," come about first in Anglo-Saxon countries?

M.F. That's linked to many things, certainly to the laws regarding sexuality in Latin countries. We see for the first time a negative aspect of the Greek heritage, the fact that the love of one man for another is only valid in the form of classic pederasty. We should also take into consideration another phenomenon: in countries that are largely Protestant, associative rights were much more developed for obvious religious reasons. I would add, however, that relational rights are not exactly associative rights—the latter are an advance of the late nineteenth century. The relational right is the right to gain recognition in an institutional sense for the relations of one individual to another individual, which is not necessarily connected to the emergence of a group. It's very different. It's a question of imagining how the relation of two individuals can be validated by society and benefit from the same advantages as the relations—perfectly honorable—which are the only ones recognized: marriage and the family.

SEX, POWER, AND
THE POLITICS OF IDENTITY*

Q. You suggest in your work that sexual liberation is not so much the uncovering of secret truths about one's self or one's desire as it is a part of the process of defining and constructing desire. What are the practical implications of this distinction? →

M.F. What I meant was that I think what the gay movement needs now is much more the art of life than a science or scientific knowledge (or pseudoscientific knowledge) of what sexuality is. Sexuality is a part of our behavior. It's a part of our world freedom. Sexuality is something that we ourselves create—it is our own creation, and much more than the discovery of a secret side of our desire. We have to understand that with our desires, through our desires, go new forms of relationships, new forms of love, new forms of creation. Sex is not a fatality: it's a possibility for creative life. →

Q. That's basically what you're getting at when you suggest that we should try to become gay—not just to reassert ourselves as gay.

M.F. Yes, that's it. We don't have to discover that we are homosexuals.

Q. Or what the meaning of that is?

M.F. Exactly. Rather, we have to create a gay life. *To become.*

Q. And this is something without limits?

M.F. Yes, sure, I think when you look at the different ways people have experienced their own sexual freedoms—the way they have created their works of art—you would have to say that sexuality, as we now know it, has become one of the most creative sources of our society and

*This interview was conducted by B. Gallagher and A. Wilson in Toronto in June 1982. It appeared in *The Advocate* 400 (7 August 1984), pp. 26–30 and 58.

our being. My view is that we should understand it in the reverse way: the world regards sexuality as the secret of the creative cultural life; it is, rather, a process of our having to create a new cultural life underneath the ground of our sexual choices.

Q. Practically speaking, one of the effects of trying to uncover that secret has meant that the gay movement has remained at the level of demanding civil or human rights around sexuality. That is, sexual liberation has remained at the level of demanding sexual tolerance.

M.F. Yes, but this aspect must be supported. It is important, first, to have the possibility—and the right—to choose your own sexuality. Human rights regarding sexuality are important and are still not respected in many places. We shouldn't consider that such problems are solved now. It's quite true that there was a real liberation process in the early seventies. This process was very good, both in terms of the situation and in terms of opinions, but the situation has not definitely stabilized. Still, I think we have to go a step further. I think that one of the factors of this stabilization will be the creation of new forms of life, relationships, friendships in society, art, culture, and so on through our sexual, ethical, and political choices. Not only do we have to defend ourselves, not only affirm ourselves, as an identity but as a creative force.

Q. A lot of that sounds like what, for instance, the women's movement has done, trying to establish their own language and their own culture.

M.F. Well, I'm not sure that we have to create our *own* culture. We have to *create* culture. We have to realize cultural creations. But, in doing so, we come up against the problem of identity. I don't know what we would do to form these creations, and I don't know what forms these creations would take. For instance, I am not at all sure that the best form of literary creations by gay people is gay novels.

Q. In fact, we would not even want to say that. That would be based on an essentialism that we need to avoid.

M.F. True. What do we mean for instance, by "gay painting"? Yet, I am sure that from the point of departure of our ethical choices, we can create something that will have a certain relationship to gayness. But it must not be a translation of gayness in the field of music or painting or what have you, for I do not think this can happen.

Q. How do you view the enormous proliferation in the last ten or fifteen years of male homosexual practices: the sensualization, if you

like, of neglected parts of the body and the articulation of new pleasures? I am thinking, obviously, of the salient aspects of what we call the ghetto—porn movies, clubs for S&M or fistfucking, and so forth. Is this merely an extension into another sphere of the general proliferation of sexual discourses since the nineteenth century, or do you see other kinds of developments that are peculiar to this present historical context?

M.F. Well, I think what we want to speak about is precisely the *innovations* those practices imply. For instance, look at the S&M subculture, as our good friend Gayle Rubin would insist. I don't think that this movement of sexual practices has anything to do with the disclosure or the uncovering of S&M tendencies deep within our unconscious, and so on. I think that S&M is much more than that; it's the real creation of new possibilities of pleasure, which people had no idea about previously. The idea that S&M is related to a deep violence, that S&M practice is a way of liberating this violence, this aggression, is stupid. We know very well what all those people are doing is not aggressive; they are inventing new possibilities of pleasure with strange parts of their body—through the eroticization of the body. I think 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 idea that bodily pleasure should always come from sexual pleasure as the root of *all* our possible pleasure—I think *that's* something quite wrong. These practices are insisting that we can produce pleasure with very odd things, very strange parts of our bodies, in very unusual situations, and so on.

Q. So the conflation of pleasure and sex is being broken down.

M.F. That's it precisely. The possibility of using our bodies as a possible source of very numerous pleasures is something that is very important. For instance, if you look at the traditional construction of pleasure, you see that bodily pleasure, or pleasures of the flesh, are always drinking, eating, and fucking. And that seems to be the limit of the understanding of our body, our pleasures. What frustrates me, for instance, is the fact that the problem of drugs is always envisaged only as a problem of freedom and prohibition. I think that drugs must become a part of our culture.

Q. As a pleasure?

M.F. As a pleasure. We have to study drugs. We have to experience drugs. We have to do *good* drugs that can produce very intense pleasure. I think this puritanism about drugs, which implies that you can either

be for drugs or against drugs, is mistaken. Drugs have now become a part of our culture. Just as there is bad music and good music, there are bad drugs and good drugs. So we can't say we are "against" drugs any more than we can say we're "against" music. →

Q. The point is to experiment with pleasure and its possibilities.

M.F. Yes. Pleasure also must be a part of our culture. It is very interesting to note, for instance, that for centuries people generally, as well as doctors, psychiatrists, and even liberation movements, have always spoken about desire, and never about pleasure. "We have to liberate our desire," they say. *No!* We have to create new pleasure. And then maybe desire will follow.

Q. Is it significant that there are, to a large degree, identities forming around new sexual practices, like S&M? These identities help in exploring such practices and defending the right to engage in them. But are they also limiting in regards to the possibilities of individuals?

M.F. Well, if identity is only a game, if it is only a procedure to have relations, social and sexual—pleasure relationships that create new friendships, it is useful. But if identity becomes the problem of sexual existence, and if people think that they have to "uncover" their "own identity," and that their own identity has to become the law, the principle, the code of their existence; if the perennial question they ask is "Does this thing conform to my identity?" then, I think, they will turn back to a kind of ethics very close to the old heterosexual virility. If we are asked to relate to the question of identity, it must be an identity to our unique selves. But the relationships we have to have with ourselves are not ones of identity, rather, they must be relationships of differentiation, of creation, of innovation. To be the same is really boring. We must not exclude identity if people find their pleasure through this identity, but we must not think of this identity as an ethical universal rule.

Q. But up to this point, sexual identity has been politically very useful.

M.F. Yes, it has been very useful, but it limits us, and I think we have—and can have—a right to be free. →

Q. We want some of our sexual practices to be ones of resistance in a political and social sense. Yet how is this possible, given that control can be exercised by the stimulation of pleasure? Can we be sure that these new pleasures won't be exploited in the way advertising uses the stimulation of pleasure as a means of social control?

M.F. We can never be sure. In fact, we can always be sure *it will happen*, and that everything that has been created or acquired, any ground

that has been gained will, at a certain moment be used in such a way. That's the way we live, that's the way we struggle, that's the way of human history. And I don't think that is an objection to all those movements or all those situations. But you are quite right in underlining that we always have to be quite careful and to be aware of the fact that we must move on to something else, that we have other needs as well. The S&M ghetto in San Francisco is a good example of a community that has experimented with, and formed an identity around, pleasure. This ghettoization, this identification, this procedure of exclusion and so on—all of these have, as well, produced their countereffects. I dare not use the word *dialectics*—but this comes rather close to it.

Q. You write that power is not just a negative force but a productive one; that power is always there; that where there is power, there is resistance; and that resistance is never in a position of externality vis-à-vis power. If this is so, then how do we come to any other conclusion than that we are always trapped inside that relationship—that we can't somehow break out of it.

M.F. Well, I don't think the word *trapped* is a correct one. It is a struggle, but what I mean by *power relations* is the fact that we are in a strategic situation toward each other. For instance, being homosexuals, we are in a struggle with the government, and the government is in a struggle with us. When we deal with the government, the struggle, of course, is not symmetrical, the power situation is not the same; but we are in this struggle, and the continuation of this situation can influence the behavior or nonbehavior of the other. So we are not trapped. We are always in this kind of situation. It means that we always have possibilities, there are always possibilities of changing the situation. We cannot jump *outside* the situation, and there is no point where you are free from all power relations. But you can always change it. So what I've said does not mean that we are always trapped, but that we are always free—well, anyway, that there is always the possibility of changing.

Q. So resistance comes from within that dynamic?

M.F. Yes. You see, if there was no resistance, there would be no power relations. Because it would simply be a matter of obedience. You have to use power relations to refer to the situation where you're not doing what you want. So resistance comes first, and resistance remains superior to the forces of the process; power relations are obliged to change with the resistance. So I think that *resistance* is the main word, *the key word*, in this dynamic.

Q. Politically speaking, probably the most important part of looking at power is that, according to previous conceptions, "to resist" was simply to say no. Resistance was conceptualized only in terms of negation. Within your understanding, however, to resist is not simply a negation but a creative process; to create and recreate, to change the situation, actually to be an active member of that process.

M.F. Yes, that is the way I would put it. To say no is the minimum form of resistance. But, of course, at times that is very important. You have to say no as a decisive form of resistance.

Q. This raises the question of in what way, and to what degree, can a dominated subject (or subjectivity) actually create its own discourse. In traditional power analysis, the omnipresent feature of analysis is the dominant discourse, and only as a subsidiary are there reactions to, or within, that discourse. However, if what we mean by resistance in power relations is more than negation, then aren't some practices like, say, lesbian S&M, actually ways for dominated subjects to formulate their own languages?

M.F. Well, you see, I think that resistance is a part of this strategic relationship of which power consists. Resistance really always relies upon the situation against which it struggles. For instance, in the gay movement the medical definition of homosexuality was a very important tool against the oppression of homosexuality in the last part of the nineteenth century and in the early twentieth century. This medicalization, which was a means of oppression, has always been a means of resistance as well—since people could say, "If we are sick, then why do you condemn us, why do you despise us?" and so on. Of course, this discourse now sounds rather naïve to us, but at the time it was very important.

I should say, also, that I think that in the lesbian movement, the fact that women have been, for centuries and centuries, isolated in society, frustrated, despised in many ways, and so on, has given them the real possibility of constituting a society, of creating a kind of social relation between themselves, outside the social world that was dominated by males. Lillian Faderman's book *Surpassing the Love of Men* is very interesting in this regard. It raises the question: What kind of emotional experience, what kind of relationships, were possible in a world where women in society had no social, no legal, and no political power? And she argues that women used that isolation and lack of power.

Q. If resistance is a process of breaking out of discursive practices,

it would seem that the case that has a prima facie claim to be truly oppositional might be something like lesbian S&M. To what degree can such practices and identities be seen as challenging the dominant discourse?

M.F. What I think is interesting now, in relation to lesbian S&M, is that they can get rid of certain stereotypes of femininity which have been used in the lesbian movement—a strategy that the movement has erected from the past. This strategy has been based on their oppression. But now, maybe, these tools, these weapons are obsolete. We can see that lesbian S&M tried to get rid of all those old stereotypes of femininity, of antimale attitude and so on.

Q. What do you think we can learn about power and, for that matter, about pleasure from the practice of S&M—that is, the explicit eroticization of power?

M.F. One can say that S&M is the eroticization of power, the eroticization of strategic relations. What strikes me with regard to S&M is how it differs from social power. What characterizes power is the fact that it is a strategic relation which has been stabilized through institutions. So the mobility in power relations is limited, and there are strongholds that are very, very difficult to suppress because they have been institutionalized and are now very pervasive in courts, codes, and so on. All this means that the strategic relations of people are made rigid.

On this point, the S&M game is very interesting because it is a strategic relation, but it is always fluid. Of course, there are roles, but everybody knows very well that those roles can be reversed. Sometimes the scene begins with the master and slave, and at the end the slave has become the master. Or, even when the roles are stabilized, you know very well that it is always a game. Either the rules are transgressed, or there is an agreement, either explicit or tacit, that makes them aware of certain boundaries. This strategic game as a source of bodily pleasure is very interesting. But I wouldn't say that it is a reproduction, inside the erotic relationship, of the structures of power. It is an acting-out of power structures by a strategic game that is able to give sexual pleasure or bodily pleasure.

Q. How does this strategic relation in sex differ for that in power relations?

M.F. The practice of S&M is the creation of pleasure, and there is an identity with that creation. And that's why S&M is really a subcul-

ture. It's a process of invention. S&M is *the use* of a strategic relationship as a source of pleasure (physical pleasure). It is not the first time that people have used strategic relations as a source of pleasure. For instance, in the Middle Ages there was the institution of "courtly love," the troubadour, the institutions of the love relationships between the lady and the lover, and so on. That, too, was a strategic game. You even find this between boys and girls when they are dancing on Saturday night. They are acting out strategic relations. What is interesting is that, in this heterosexual life, those strategic relations come before sex. It's a strategic relation in order to obtain sex. And in S&M those strategic relations are inside sex, as a convention of pleasure within a particular situation.

In the one case, the strategic relations are purely social relations, and it is your social being that is involved; while, in the other case, it is your body that is involved. And it is this transfer of strategic relations from the court(ship) to sex that is very interesting.

Q. You mentioned in an interview in *Gai Pied* a year or two ago that what upsets people most about gay relations is not so much sexual acts per se but the potential for affectional relationships carried on outside the normative patterns. These friendships and networks are unforeseen. Do you think what frightens people is the unknown potential of gay relations, or would you suggest that these relations are seen as posing a direct threat to social institutions?

M.F. One thing that interests me now is the problem of friendship. For centuries after antiquity, friendship was a very important kind of social relation: a social relation within which people had a certain freedom, certain kind of choice (limited of course), as well as very intense emotional relations. There were also economic and social implications to these relationships—they were obliged to help their friends, and so on. I think that in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, we see these kinds of friendships disappearing, at least in the male society. And friendship begins to become something other than that. You can find, from the sixteenth century on, texts that explicitly criticize friendship as something dangerous.

The army, bureaucracy, administration, universities, schools, and so on—in the modern senses of these words—cannot function with such intense friendships. I think there can be seen a very strong attempt in all these institutions to diminish or minimize the affectional relations. I think this is particularly important in schools. When they started

grade schools with hundreds of young boys, one of the problems was how to prevent them not only from having sex, of course, but also from developing friendships. For instance, you could study the strategy of Jesuit institutions about this theme of friendship, since the Jesuits knew very well that it was impossible for them to suppress this. Rather, they tried to use the role of sex, of love, of friendship, and at the same time to limit it. I think now, after studying the history of sex, we should try to understand the history of friendship, or friendships. That history is very, very important.

And one of my hypotheses, which I am sure would be borne out if we did this, is that homosexuality became a problem—that is, sex between men became a problem—in the eighteenth century. We see the rise of it as a problem with the police, within the justice system, and so on. I think the reason it appears as a problem, as a social issue, at this time is that friendship had disappeared. As long as friendship was something important, was socially accepted, nobody realized men had sex together. You couldn't say that men *didn't* have sex together—it just didn't matter. It had no social implication, it was culturally accepted. Whether they fucked together or kissed had no importance. Absolutely no importance. Once friendship disappeared as a culturally accepted relation, the issue arose: "What is going on between men?" And that's when the problem appears. And if men fuck together, or have sex together, that now appears as a problem. Well, I'm sure I'm right, that the disappearance of friendship as a social relation and the declaration of homosexuality as a social/political/medical problem are the same process.

Q. If the important thing now is to explore anew the possibilities of friendships, we should note that, to a large degree, all the social institutions are designed for heterosexual friendships and structures, and the denial of homosexual ones. Isn't the real task to set up new social relations, new value structures, familial structures, and so on? One of the things gay people don't have is easy access to all the structures and institutions that go along with monogamy and the nuclear family. What kinds of institutions do we need to begin to establish, in order not just to defend ourselves but also to create new social forms that are really going to be alternative?

M.F. Institutions. I have no precise idea. I think, of course, that to use the model of family life, or the institutions of the family, for this purpose and this kind of friendship would be quite contradictory. But

it is quite true that since some of the relationships in society are protected forms of family life, an effect of this is that the variations which are not protected are, at the same time, often much richer, more interesting and creative than the others. But, of course, they are much more fragile and vulnerable. The question of what kinds of institutions we need to create is an important and crucial issue, but one that I cannot give an answer to. I think that we have to try to build a solution.

Q. To what degree do we want, or need, the project of gay liberation today to be one that refuses to chart a course and instead insists on opening up new venues? In other words, does your approach to sexual politics deny the need for a program and insist on experimentation with new kind of relations?

M.F. I think that one of the great experiences we've had since the last war is that all those social and political programs have been a great failure. We have come to realize that things never happen as we expect from a political program, and that a political program has always, or nearly always, led to abuse or political domination from a bloc—be it from technicians or bureaucrats or other people. But one of the developments of the sixties and seventies which I think has been a good thing is that certain institutional models have been experimented with without a program. Without a program does not mean blindness—to be blind to thought. For instance, in France there has been a lot of criticism recently about the fact that there are no programs in the various political movements about sex, about prisons, about ecology, and so on. But in my opinion, being without a program can be very useful and very original and creative, if it does not mean without proper reflection about what is going on, or without very careful attention to what's possible.

Since the nineteenth century, great political institutions and great political parties have confiscated the process of political creation; that is, they have tried to give to political creation the form of a political program in order to take over power. I think what happened in the sixties and early seventies is something to be preserved. One of the things that I think should be preserved, however, is the fact that there has been political innovation, political creation, and political experimentation outside the great political parties, and outside the normal or ordinary program. It's a fact that people's everyday lives have changed from the early sixties to now, and certainly within my own life. And surely that is not due to political parties but is the result of many movements.

These social movements have really changed our whole lives, our mentality, our attitudes, and the attitudes and mentality of other people—people who do not belong to these movements. And that is something very important and positive. I repeat, it is not the normal and old traditional political organizations that have led to this examination.