

An Open Game: *Subjectivity, Sexuality, and Resistance in Foucault's History of Sexuality, Volume 1* Will Tilleczek

In the introduction to *The Use of Pleasure (UP)*, Foucault offers an explicit formulation of his methods and intention for the *History of Sexuality* extending, retroactively, to the first volume of the series (*HS*). The series was to be “a history of the experience of sexuality, where experience is understood as the correlation between fields of knowledge, types of normativity, and forms of subjectivity in a particular culture.”¹ It is quite clear that the first two dimensions of the experience of sexuality are at stake in *HS*, a work in which, as Deleuze summarizes, Foucault “studied sexuality from the double viewpoint of knowledge and power.”² In *HS* Foucault argues that far from prohibiting sexuality, a specifically modern form of medical and psychiatric power *produced* sexuality by manipulating and examining bodies, codifying the findings as a body of knowledge, and manipulating and normalizing its subjects according to this knowledge. But the role of subjectivity (the third dimension of the experience of sexuality) is far less clear in *HS*, and this ambiguity has caused problems in the interpretation of Foucault’s work. Does *HS* really discuss “the modes according to which individuals are given to recognize themselves as sexual subjects ... bringing between themselves and themselves a certain relationship”?³ If it does, does it not analyze subjectivity as something entirely collapsed into and over-determined by the movements of power and knowledge? Can we really be endowed with subjectivity, a relationship to ourselves, if we as individuals are merely the product of power? And, furthermore, does Foucault not therefore suggest that we can have no agency, and so are unable to resist the very power that invests us with a sexuality? In this paper, I would like to analyze the role of subjectivity in *HS* in an attempt to answer these questions.

¹ Michel Foucault. *The History of Sexuality Volume 2: The Use of Pleasure*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Random House, 1990), 4.

² Gilles Deleuze. *Foucault*, trans. Séan Hand (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1988), 102.

³ Foucault. *History of Sexuality vol. 2*, 5.

To do so, I will first discuss the axes of power and knowledge, and the way in which they produce sexuality as an experience, before moving on to discuss the elaboration of subjectivity in *UP*. However, I will argue neither that *UP*'s conception of subjectivity as a free and volitional self-relationship is already present in *HS*, nor that this subjectivity, as described in *UP*, represents a stark break from *HS* which implies either that the subject is over-determined by power and thus entirely without agency, or that a subjectivity so constructed is nothing other than the power-knowledge from which it is derived. Subjectivity is indeed central to *HS*, but as a self-relationship that must necessarily pass through the middle term of sexuality, produced as it is within a complex deployment of power-knowledge. However, Foucault does not thereby suggest that subjectivity is over-determined, so that it does not allow for self-transformation or active resistance. Even if subjectivity is coerced by and inscribed within the matrix of power and knowledge, this does not foreclose in advance the possibility of resistance to this matrix; rather, resistance is left open as a possibility, and it is indeed the implicit suggestion of *HS* that it can be undertaken in a way that will undermine the deployment of sexuality itself. Sexual subjectivity is a product of power-knowledge, but this is not the end of the story. To be constituted by power is not the same as to be determined by it.⁴

1. Power-Knowledge: The Production of Sexuality

The first two “axes” constitutive of sexuality as an experience are knowledge and power: it must be studied in its relationship to “(1) the formation of sciences that refer to it, (2) the systems of power that regulate its practice.”⁵ If sexuality is to be understood in its relationship to the bodies of knowledge that classify it and the powers that manipulate it, though, we must be careful to clarify the nature of this relationship. It is not the case that “sexuality,” as a pre-existing, trans-historical constant, is merely chosen by a science (such as psychiatry) as an object of study and manipulated according to certain innate rules discovered by that science. Or rather, if this is the representation that power and knowledge give of their relationship with sexuality, we must look to see whether they do not in fact produce and transform sexuality as an experience in the very act of studying and manipulating it. In *HS*, Foucault criticizes the idea that sexuality is simply an essential energy that

⁴ Judith Butler makes a similar argument in *Imitation and Gender Insubordination*, and I am borrowing her wording (“constituted” and “determined”) for this formulation. Butler argues that “gay and lesbian identities are not only structured in part by dominant heterosexual frames, but they are not for that reason determined by them. ... [To] be constituted or structured in part by the very heterosexual norms by which gay people are oppressed is not, I repeat, to be claimed or determined by those structures.” Indeed, her analysis in *Gender Insubordination* can serve as an augment or compliment to Foucault’s *HS* (see note 61).

⁵ Foucault. *History of Sexuality* vol. 2, 4.

has been repressed in recent history. That is, that sexuality has its own natural form that could be the object of a pure knowledge if only it were freed from power; and that, conversely, the only thing keeping us from truly experiencing sexuality is the power of *repression*, a power singlehandedly responsible for any historical shifts in our experience of sexuality – distancing us from it, silencing us in relation to it, hiding it from us (see e.g. *HS* 60). Foucault's thesis, in contrast, is that power is indeed a *productive* force that is inseparable from knowledge, both enabling it and finding in it a locus of support.

Thus we should highlight three crucial components of the relationship between sexuality, power and knowledge, namely (1) that power does not repress, but stimulates; it is a positive energy; (2) that while power and knowledge are not reducible to one another, they operate inseparably; and (3) that this mutually-reinforcing compound of power-knowledge produces sexuality, which is therefore not merely an already existing constant that power and knowledge measure and codify. *Power is productive*. While power may certainly operate by saying “no,” by denying speech and action, this is only one of its functions among others. For Foucault, to think of power primarily as a negative force, as “anti-energy,” would be to deny what makes it so effective and resourceful.⁶ Power is a positive or productive energy; it is the relationship between forces in which possibilities and capabilities are manipulated, transformed, or intensified. Power “work[s] to incite, control, monitor, optimize, and organize the forces under it: a power bent on gathering forces, making them grow, and ordering them, rather than one dedicated to impeding them, making them submit, or destroying them.”⁷ In the case of sexuality, as we will see, power actually intensifies areas of the body, manipulating, investing, and normalizing it in accordance with a knowledge of sexuality (which can of course be an inaccurate or mistaken knowledge). *Power and knowledge operate together*. As this last point implies, power alone does not produce sexuality as an experience. While it may manipulate, intensify, and regulate bodies, in doing so it both relies on and enables the codification of a whole body of knowledge which, in the case of sexuality, is primarily medical. Thus “[if] sexuality was constituted as an area of investigation, this was only because relations of power had established it as a possible target object; and conversely, if power was able to take it as a target, this was because techniques of knowledge ... were capable of investing it.”⁸ The sexuality of individuals is drawn from their body through confessions and examinations; this sexuality is codified and inscribed into a body of medical knowledge; and, re-doubling and intensifying the cycle, this knowledge then

⁶ Michel Foucault. *The History of Sexuality Volume 1: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Random House, 1990), 4.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 136.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 98.

allows further and more effective interventions and manipulations into the sexuality of the individual. Thus while power and knowledge are two distinct techniques in the deployment of sexuality, they are inseparable in this deployment. As Deleuze summarizes, “[b]etween power and knowledge there is a difference in nature and a heterogeneity; but there is also a mutual presupposition and capture.”⁹ Knowledge and power reinforce, enable, and rely on one another in their contact with sexuality. *Knowledge-power produces sexuality*. This is not to say, however, that sexuality pre-exists the interventions of a conglomerate power-knowledge as a free and natural essence. This follows closely from what was said above. Namely, if power is not merely repressive, then its relationship with sexuality is not in the form of a “no-saying” that tries to stifle it. Rather, in their optimization and intensification of the body, “[relations of power] have a directly productive role, wherever they come into play.”¹⁰ Through the cycle of the extraction and interpretation of pleasures, and the normalization and categorization of individuals on the basis of this cycle, sexuality is actually solidified and implanted. Thus this deployment “has ensured, through a network of interconnecting mechanisms, the proliferation of specific pleasures and the multiplication of disparate sexualities.”¹¹ A productive power, intimately connected to systems of knowledge, has produced and deployed, in its contact with the body, the specifically modern phenomenon of sexuality.

An example will help to clarify this methodological discussion. The “perverted individual” is one of the four figures that Foucault isolates as privileged “centers of power-knowledge” in this deployment of sexuality (see e.g. *HS* 105). Medical and confessional procedures of power required a constant and detailed examination of individuals and their bodies: “This form of power demanded constant, attentive, and curious presences for its exercise; ... it proceeded through examination and insistent observation. ... The power which thus took charge of sexuality set about ... intensifying areas, electrifying surfaces, dramatizing troubled moments.”¹² Through this manipulation and measurement of the body, the body was rendered analyzable and inserted into a specifically medical discourse: “[Power] did not aim to suppress it [perversion], but rather to give it an analytical, visible, and permanent reality.”¹³ Conversely, with perversion codified within knowledge, power could draw on this knowledge to fix an individual into the “identity” they were discovered to be: “accompanying [the] encroachment of powers, scattered sexualities rigidified, became stuck to an age, a place, a type of practice. A proliferation of sexualities through the extension of power; an optimization of the power to which each of these local sexualities gave a surface of intervention.”¹⁴ This is the closed cycle of power and knowledge that sur-

⁹ Deleuze. *Foucault*, 73.

¹⁰ Foucault. *History of Sexuality* vol. 1, 94.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 49.

¹² *Ibid.*, 44.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 48.

rounded the sexuality of “the pervert.” And within this circuit of power-knowledge, “the pervert” as a sexuality was thus produced and made to flourish, as “the correlate of exact procedures of power.”¹⁵ Thus it is not the case, according to Foucault, that “perversion,” as a type of sexuality previously allowed to exist in its natural and spontaneous way, was no longer tolerated, and so was circumscribed within a suppressive power system. Rather, the sexuality of the pervert forms the interior and privileged object of a regime of power-knowledge that sought to intensify, enlarge, and solidify the reality of perversion that it itself had incited and discovered within the bodies of individuals: “These polymorphous conducts were actually extracted from people’s bodies ...; or rather, they were solidified in them; they were drawn out and revealed, isolated, intensified, incorporated by multifarious power devices.”¹⁶ Within the self-reinforcing cycle of knowledge and power, sexuality is produced.

2. A Third Axis: Subjectivity

But according to Foucault in *UP*, power and knowledge are not the only constituent aspects of an experience called “sexuality”: “What I planned ... was a history of the experience of sexuality, where experience is understood as the correlation between fields of knowledge, types of normativity, and forms of subjectivity.”¹⁷ This third axis refers to the ways in which individuals recognize themselves in a form of subjectivity that is called “sexual,” “the forms within which individuals are able, are obliged, to recognize themselves as subjects of this sexuality.”¹⁸ Or again, subjectivity refers to “the games of truth in the relationship of self with self and the forming of oneself as a subject.”¹⁹ Thus in distinction to bodies of knowledge, whether medical, religious, or psychiatric, and their relationships to one another; and in distinction from the techniques of power enabling and supported by the latter, together producing the experience called “sexuality,” the third axis – subjectivity – here refers to the relationship one has with oneself in the domain of desire.

This third axis is the explicit focus of *UP*, and so it is much easier to interpret within its framework. This is not incidental, however; there is a good reason – a historical one – as to why subjectivity is easier to detect in ancient Greece, which Deleuze refers to as an “unhooking”: “[The novelty of the Greeks] emerges thanks to a double unhooking ... when the ‘exercises that enable one to govern oneself’ *become detached* both from power as a relation between forces, and from knowledge as a stratified form, or ‘code’ of virtue.”²⁰ If subjectivity, as a process of self-relation through which one cultivates oneself as a moral subject of sexuality, can be seen as

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 47.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 47–8.

¹⁷ Foucault. *History of Sexuality* vol. 2, 4.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 5.

²⁰ Deleuze. *Foucault*, 100.

a clear and explicit phenomenon in ancient Greece, this is because, as a constitutive axis of the experience of sexuality, it enjoyed autonomy from the other two axes.²¹ While the Greeks certainly were concerned with their sexual practices, “there was no institution – whether pastoral or medical – that claimed the right to determine what was permitted or forbidden, normal or abnormal, in this area.”²² That is, actions in the domain of desire were not strictly governed by external institutions of power, but by the subject of those actions himself. Thus if the Greeks concerned themselves with their sexual pleasures, it was in a mode that focused on the power one exercised over oneself, as a free individual, in order to attain self-mastery and a great brilliance in one’s life. They made themselves subjects of desire through “intentional and voluntary actions.”²³ In other words, subjectivity involved the agency of the individual, used in a freely chosen, if strict, self-relationship that sought to manage pleasure in keeping with an aesthetically laudable existence. In a helpful image, Foucault summarizes this by saying that “[the] few great common laws – of the city, religion, nature – remained present, but it was as if they traced a very wide circle in the distance, inside of which practical thought had to define what could rightfully be done.”²⁴ For example, nothing in the law dictated that a husband must be faithful to his wife; the moral value of the husband’s fidelity was to be found in his sexual moderation as a representation of the degree of self-mastery he practiced.²⁵ In sum, one is able to recognize oneself as a subject of sexuality” in ancient Greece by managing pleasures, paying heed to the right way and the right time to use them, through a constant self-battle in the form of moderation and self-control leading, ultimately, to a form of life through which one can leave behind the memory of a free and beautiful existence.²⁶ In all of this, anything like a medical gaze that extorts, measures, and normalizes the body to discover and inscribe a sexuality is replaced by an active and thoughtful relationship to oneself. In ancient Greece, it is this thoughtful self-relationship that constitutes the axis of subjectivity in the domain of sex and pleasure.

3. Subjectivity and Sexuality

Obviously, in *HS*, nothing like this free relationship to oneself, through which one is made an ethical subject in the mastery of desire, is present. As Foucault himself says, “these ‘techniques of the self’ no doubt lost some of their importance and autonomy when they were assimilated into the exercise of priestly power ... and

²¹ Foucault will emphasize that “sexuality” is not a sufficient term to refer to the Greek experiences of the kinds of pleasures, identities, and relationships that would later be collected and modified under this name. The goal of his study is precisely to define the inception of this uniquely modern form of experience called “sexuality.” However, it is beyond the scope of this paper to adequately discuss the aphrodisia, the “ethical substance” of the Greeks, and the historical disjunction between aphrodisia-flesh-sexuality.

²² Foucault. *History of Sexuality vol. 2*, 36.

²³ *Ibid.*, 10.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 62.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 18.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 91-2.

later, into educative, medical, and psychological types of practices.”²⁷ Indeed, one might go further and wonder if, given that subjectivity involves a relationship to oneself, we can even speak of a third axis in *HS*. That is, if the experience of sexuality is produced within a deployment of power and knowledge, how can one “relate to oneself” via sexuality, when the latter is nothing but the effect of a series of coercive technologies? This is the problem that Amy Allen, in a survey of Foucault’s critics, calls his “alleged eradication of the subject,”²⁸ or the “death of the subject.”

Does Foucault really exclude subjectivity entirely from *HS*? Is his own self-interpretation of the project given in the introduction to *UP* that far off the mark? Ultimately, that subjectivity does not take the same form in the deployment of sexuality as it did in the Greek management of pleasures does not mean that this axis is missing from *HS*. Consider the following formulations of the concept of subjectivity given in *UP*. In one helpful passage, Foucault describes this third axis as being concerned with “changes in the way individuals were led to assign meaning and value to their conduct, their duties, their pleasures, their feelings and sensations,”²⁹ Or again, he explains that regarding the third axis in his history he “proposed ... to analyze the practices by which individuals *were led to focus their attention on themselves*, to decipher, recognize, and acknowledge themselves ... bringing between themselves and themselves a certain relationship that allows them to discover, *in desire, the truth of their being*.”³⁰ What these passages suggest is not that subjectivity must necessarily refer to a free and spontaneous agency, calling one’s own conduct into question and organizing it in independence from normative frameworks or codified morality; rather, they emphasize that, with regards to desire, subjectivity is the process by which individuals turn their attention to this domain in order to question their relationship with themselves, to interpret what they are as beings and how this being is to be altered or accepted. And, crucially, they can be *led* to do so.

If we heed this distinction, it becomes clear that the axis of subjectivity is in fact central to *HS*. The experience of sexuality certainly came to effect “changes in the way people assign value to their conduct” and to bring about a new relationship to ourselves in which we sought to discover the truth of ourselves. Through the deployment of sexuality, we came to “demand that sex speak the truth,” and specifically to “demand that it tell us *our* truth.”³¹ From the interplay of knowledge and power that produced sexuality as an object of analysis and intervention, there also emerged a new, specifically sexual subjectivity, as, crucially, the question of sexuality has become *the* question of who we are: “Whenever it is a question of knowing who we are, it is this logic [of desire] that henceforth serves as our master key. ... Theoreticians

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 11.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 114.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 4, my emphasis.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 5, my emphasis.

³¹ Foucault. *History of Sexuality* vol. 2, 69, my emphasis.

and practitioners of the flesh ... made man the offspring of an imperious and intelligible sex.”³² Towards the conclusion of *HS*, moreover, Foucault underscores how sex, as an “ideal point” in the deployment of sexuality which gathered various behaviors, goals, and pleasures, actually effected a radical transformation by regrouping several key questions of who we are under the domain of sexuality. That is, our relation to ourselves would have to pass through sex in order to provide us with the truth of our being: “It is through sex ... that each individual has to pass in order to have access to his own intelligibility ... to the whole of his body ... to his identity.”³³ Thus it is of central importance to Foucault’s analysis that while the emergence of sexuality coincided with a transformation in techniques of power and bodies of knowledge, it also saw a reformulation of the way in which one was to relate to and interpret oneself; indeed, sexuality was to become the privileged domain in which this relationship exists.

We can also note that “becoming a subject of sexuality” actually consists of at least three moments, comprising something at least resembling a “technology of the self.” (1) First of all, subjectivity in this case consists of *recognizing* myself as imbued with a sexuality, as a subject of this sexuality. The bourgeoisie, according to Foucault, equipped themselves with a sexuality in order to distinguish themselves as a ruling class. The bourgeoisie “creat[ed] its own sexuality and form[ed] a specific body based on it,” and therefore actually underwent an “affirmation of self” via their recognition of their distinctly precious, sexualized body.³⁴ More generally, confessional techniques, intertwined with medical and psychiatric examinations, ensured that everyone would see in themselves a sexuality and transform it into discourse.³⁵ (2) After recognizing in themselves a sexuality, moreover, people were also led to *decipher* that sexuality. As in the case of “the homosexual,” for example, the individual was to reinterpret his history as the unfolding of his sexuality, the “insidious and indefinitely active principle [of all his actions],”³⁶ in order to learn as precisely as possible the truth of himself which may otherwise have remained hidden. (3) Finally, one was to intervene in their sexuality, in order to *regulate* it. For example, if the state took the “sexual conduct of the population ... as both an object of analysis and as a target of intervention,” it required not only that it be able to intervene from the outside, but also that “each individual be capable of controlling the use he made of [his sex].”³⁷ One was to internalize the normalizing power of psychiatry and medicine, for example, and to bring this power to bear over one’s own use of sexuality. Or, in the case of the bourgeoisie, we see that the young aristocratic man actually had a moral obligation to control the use he made of his sexuality, as it would be responsible for his “moral fiber” and his line of descendants.³⁸ Thus beyond merely recognizing and

³² *Ibid.*, 78.

³³ *Ibid.*, 156.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 123-4.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 20-1.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 43.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 26.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 121.

interpreting their sexuality, the bourgeoisie also maintained that the sexualized body was “to be cared for, cultivated, and preserved.”³⁹ Clearly, in this threefold process of recognition, decipherment, and regulation, the individual undertakes a relationship to himself, which has sexuality as its focal point. Undoubtedly, this is a form of subjectivity, and is central to an understanding of *HS*. We must be careful not to conflate the free Greek relationship of self-to-self with subjectivity as such; it has other forms.

That being said, it is clear that the form of subjectivity analyzed in *HS* is nearly inseparable from the axes of power and knowledge, forcing the relationship to oneself always to pass through this matrix of constituent forces. We should emphasize, though, that in his description of subjectivity in *UP*, Foucault is careful to note that subjectivity exists when we are *able*, but also when we are *obliged* and *led* to recognize ourselves as subjects (see *UP* 4-5). We must therefore grant that while subjectivity is central to the experience of sexuality, it is nonetheless a subjectivity that is constrained and coerced, always confronting the very power-knowledge that has produced sexuality. As Deleuze argues, what this means is not simply that the third axis disappears, or “falls back on the two axes of power and knowledge,” but rather that it is increasingly interwoven with and re-inscribed into these: “For the relation to oneself will not remain in the withdrawn and reserved zone of the free man, a zone independent of any ‘institutional and social system.’ The relation to oneself will be understood in terms of power-relations and relations of knowledge. It will be reintegrated into these systems.”⁴⁰ This reintegration is clear, for example, if we consider that one is “led” and “obliged” to recognize oneself as a subject through confessional procedures, which induce a relationship to oneself, but which also inscribe this self-relationship into a power-relationship that extracts and manipulates it, and that furthermore sets itself the task of governing it. “[In confession] the speaking subject is also the subject of the statement,”⁴¹ that is, we ourselves speak about ourselves; but, crucially, this ritual “unfolds within a power relationship” in which one confesses to “a partner who is not simply the interlocutor but the authority who requires the confession, prescribes and appreciates it, and intervenes in order to judge, punish [or] forgive,” ultimately leading, though, to “intrinsic modifications *in the person who articulates it*.”⁴² We can see, therefore, a complex form of self-relationship that must pass through a power relation which in fact enjoins it and gives it meaning. Again, we can see a parallel structure in the medical examination, in which one was to speak *about oneself* in regards to sexuality, but was made to do so in relation to

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 123.

⁴⁰ Deleuze. *Foucault*, 103.

⁴¹ Foucault. *History of Sexuality* vol. 1, 61.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 62, my emphasis.

“the discourse of science” which “relied on a many-sided extortion.”⁴³ Sexuality was “present but incomplete” in the speaker, until it was then validated and codified “in the one who assimilated and recorded it,” who would then prescribe the behavioral adjustments that were to follow this medical confession.⁴⁴ The result of this examination, which in fact began with the subject but then reached completion through the avenues of power and knowledge, was a re-implantation of a now-complete identity in the subject who was, to be sure, in a relationship to this sexuality as “the bearer of it and the one responsible for it.”⁴⁵ What we can see here, then, is a science of the subject in which, paradoxically, the subject is forced to participate as the author and originator of a sexuality of which he is unaware, and which will be realized as an obligation and a truth to be recognized, considered, and altered, but only after passing through the very apparatus that induced its extraction.⁴⁶ Subjectivity is present in *HS*, no longer as the free activity of self-mastery, but as an activity tightly woven into the techniques of power and knowledge that have produced sexuality.

We can conclude from this, as Amy Allen argues, that

Foucault’s aim is not to get rid of the concept of subjectivity altogether; instead ... [he examines] how the subject is constituted in a particular way in this particular cultural and historical milieu. ... [Foucault] examine[s] the ways in which discursive practices constitute a historically, socially, and culturally specific, modern mode of subjectivity.⁴⁷

The result of Foucault’s analysis of the relationship of self-to-self in *HS* is not, therefore, “the death of the subject,” but rather an understanding of a specifically modern form of subjectivity in which our relationship to ourselves must pass through sexuality, a domain consisting of varying techniques of knowledge and power that this self-relationship will always encounter. This is not to say that there is no subjectivity: one can equally be “able” or “obliged” to recognize themselves as a subject. Autonomy and spontaneity are not the fundamental elements of the third axis, but rather the fact of a self-relationship is, inscribed as it might be in this case within a matrix of power-knowledge.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 64.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 66-7.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 67.

⁴⁶ This complicated network in which the relation to oneself both is induced by and must pass through the network of power-knowledge is apparent, for example, in the case of the schoolboy: “Doctors counseled the directors and professors ... schoolmasters turned to students, made recommendations to them, and drafted for their benefit books of exhortation, full of moral and medical examples. Around the schoolboy there proliferated a whole literature of precepts, opinions, observations, medical advice.” Clearly, all of this presupposes that the child is able and expected to engage himself in a considered self-interpretation and a self-transformation regarding his sexual behavior. However, this self-relationship is also deeply inscribed in a regime of power-knowledge that incites it, oversees it, and verifies its success.

4. Produced by Power, Doomed to Passivity?: The Subject as a Locus of Resistance

This leads us to the question of agency, passivity, and resistance. For we have maintained that sexual subjectivity is produced by power-knowledge, or, more specifically, that one's relation to oneself in terms of sexuality must always encounter the mechanisms of power and knowledge that have invested this experience. Thus, one might be justified in asking, "Supposing one resents the modern experience of sexuality, with its oppressive and normalizing tendencies, and the whole array of homophobia and hatred to which it has given rise – if one cannot relate to sexuality except through the mechanisms that have produced it, is one doomed to passivity, always-already being a mere effect of what one would seek to change, unable to create any transformations in sexuality without encountering the same limits and being re-inscribed in the same deployment? If sexuality is not a free substrate to which power only says "no," can we be active and free agents in relation to it?" This is a criticism that has been directed at Foucault's work, which Allen summarizes as follows in her survey:

[T]here would seem to be no capacity in the subject for reflection upon or resistance to forces operating outside of it; thus, the subject must be wholly determined by such forces. ... If the subject is *merely or nothing more than* an effect of power/knowledge regimes, then clearly one's agency [and] resistance to oppression ... are out the window.⁴⁸

If the subject is a product of power-knowledge, he is entirely limited and determined in advance by it. Allen correctly suggests, however, that "[t]o say that subjects are the products of forces that are largely out of their control ... is not to say that they have no control over anything whatsoever."⁴⁹ In other words, to be constituted is not the same as to be pre- and over-determined. We have already implied above that this is the case, since while power and knowledge certainly do coerce and invest one's self-relationship, sexuality is nonetheless a domain in which the individual to some extent controls his own conduct. We should emphasize, however, that the presence of power-knowledge in this relationship does not in fact amount to a complete determinism of the subject. Indeed, the capability for resistance, far from being foreclosed in advance, is an implicit theme animating the entirety of *HS*.

That the subject does not completely lack agency or the capacity for resistance will become clear if we revisit the notion of power here briefly. It is crucial that just as power is not a stable and uniform "no-saying," neither is it, as a produc-

⁴⁷ Allen, Amy. "The Anti-Subjective Hypothesis: Michel Foucault and the Death of the Subject." *The Philosophical Forum*. 31.2 (Summer 2000): 122-3.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 116, 120.

tive technology, destined only to solidify and develop in the singular form of an oppressive deployment of sexuality. Power does not only move in one direction, from oppressors who “have it” to the oppressed (in this case the periphery of “sexually deviant” subjects) who do not. Rather, “[w]here there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power. Should it be said that one is always ‘inside’ power, that there is no ‘escaping’ it ...? This would be to misunderstand the strictly relational character of power relationships.”⁵⁰ Power is always power-*relations*. This means that one cannot coerce and manipulate my capacity for action if I do not in fact already have a capacity for action (which can, to be sure, be curbed when coming into contact with this other force). Power is always a relation *between* forces, and as such, it is always necessarily the case that resistance is not exterior to it, but is rather already present in the potential force that serves as the second term in a relation of power. And this means that while the capacity for resistance is a “second term,” it is not “only a reaction or rebound, forming with respect to the basic domination an underside that is in the end always passive.”⁵¹ If power relations are always the interaction of two heterogeneous potencies, that which may initially be dominated always already has the potential of agency and resistance, as the very condition of possibility of this power-relation. Deleuze helpfully summarizes these two moments as a moment of “to affect” and “to be affected”:

To incite, provoke, and produce ... constitute active affects, while to be incited or provoked, to be induced to produce ... constitute reactive affects. The latter are not simply the “repercussion” or “passive side” of the former but are rather the “irreducible encounter” between the two ... At the same time, each force has the power to affect (others) and to be affected (by others again) such that each force implies power relations.⁵²

Confession requires the “being provoked” of the subject invested by this form of power; however, for this encounter to occur, the power relation requires that the one “being affected” in turn has a power “to affect” that has been acted upon. I can only be made to confess if I may not have confessed, and this implies the necessary freedom at play in power relations. In this sense, reversal of power is a *necessarily* possible implication of the imbalance of forces that serves as the foundation for all power relations.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ Foucault. *History of Sexuality* vol. 1, 95.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 96.

⁵² Deleuze. *Foucault*, 71.

This has very real political effects, as all of those surfaces invested with power become sites where a “being affected” can be transformed into a “to affect”; the imbalance of a power relation can be reversed. For example, in his analysis of bio-power, Foucault argues that by thoroughly investing the life of the population, power has taken life as the political object par excellence. Moving away from the spectacle of the death penalty, it manifests itself as power in administering, measuring, and regulating the reproduction of the species. However, as Deleuze suggests, “when power in this way takes life as its aim or object, then resistance to power already puts itself on the side of life, and turns life against power.”⁵³ This is what Foucault means when he says that “life as a political object ... was turned back against the system that was bent on controlling it.”⁵⁴ When life is invested with power and manipulated, it always has the capability of reversing this investment, of shifting the imbalance of the power-relation. Life becomes a site in which the “being affected” of the population can become the “to affect” in which resistance to bio-power struggles in the name of life.

This brings us to sexual subjectivity, because if life, as a surface of contact with power, necessarily allows for a reversal of the power relationship by which it is invested with political value, equally the sexual subject, as the object of a technology of power, has the potential to affect a reversal in this relationship. Moreover, Foucault says this explicitly with his example of homosexuality. The discourse that maintained homosexuality as an “aberrant nature” does not simply “belong” to a power that can use it unhindered in a strategy of oppression: “discourse can be both an instrument and an effect of power, but also a hindrance, a stumbling block, a point of resistance.”⁵⁵ Homosexuality, which was produced as a specific discursive reality and coercively implanted as an identity in the deployment of sexuality, can in fact be re-deployed by those collected under this category. That is, these subjects, invested as they were by a medical “knowledge” of perversion and corresponding normalizing social controls, were able to reverse this discursive regime to “demand that [homosexuality’s] legitimacy or ‘naturalness’ be acknowledged.”⁵⁶ The subject invested by power and knowledge is not denied agency, because knowledge and power are not two axes strictly opposed to subjectivity. They invest subjectivity, but equally the subject has the agency to consider and reverse the power-knowledge with which he is invested in a counter-strategy. The subject is, far from being an entirely passive “effect” of power, the site in which power can be reversed and redeployed.⁵⁷

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 92.

⁵⁴ Foucault. *History of Sexuality* vol. 1, 145.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 101.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ In fact, Deleuze suggests that in the unpublished final volume of *The History of Sexuality* and beyond Foucault would emphasize this point and theorize resistance as precisely the foundational moment of modern subjectivity: “The struggle for modern subjectivity passes through a resistance to the two present forms of subjection ... The struggle for subjectivity presents itself, therefore, as the right to ... metamorphosis.” In a sense, power can only invest a subject who was and will be otherwise.

With this in mind, we can conclude by pointing out that resistance to the deployment of sexuality actually functions as the background and the implicit goal animating *HS*. The entire work is framed by the question of resistance. It begins by evoking – and, of course, criticizing – the political work that is being done in the name of liberating sexuality. Foucault does not want simply to resist, but to do so effectively, and throughout *HS* he calls the efficacy of this current mode of resistance into question by demonstrating its complacency with the deployment of sexuality. We should remember that the points of resistance on which power relations depend “play the role of adversary, target, support, or handle in these power relations” or that, again, resistance “transforms, strengthens, or reverses” power relations.⁵⁸ In other words, one must not be satisfied simply with the fact of resisting, because while resistance can reverse power relations or act as an adversary to existing technologies of power, it can also be reincorporated into the latter as a handle or support. Foucault concludes *HS* by stating that “[t]he rallying point for the counterattack against the deployment of sexuality ought not to be sex-desire.”⁵⁹ Obviously the latter could not dismantle this deployment, but would still be caught thoroughly within it; attempting only to speak more of sex, “to liberate desire,” would be to simply affirm the result of a positive technology of power that one has seen only in its repressive guise. Thus it is crucial to attempt a resistance that will not simply be reincorporated into or serve as a mere inflection of the deployment of sexuality, but rather that will be able to use this deployment as a handle in its resistance – and to do this, one must first understand the handle they are to grab. The function of *HS*, then, is to augment and assist the political work undertaken around sexuality by drawing a more accurate map of the territory to be re-arranged. Foucault explains that “one could not expect this critique [the ‘sexual liberation’ movement] to be *the grid for a history* of that very deployment [of sexuality]. *Nor the basis for a movement to dismantle it.*”⁶² What we have, in *HS*, is not “the funeral of the subject,” but precisely a new grid that can act as a basis from which to dismantle the technology of power-knowledge by which we have been invested as subjects. Granted, Foucault does not offer a positive assessment of what such a resistance would look like, but his task is something other than this: to offer a foundation, a first step, to elucidate the technology of power-knowledge in its positivity, to offer a tactical map. As we have seen, however, he clearly suggests that resistance is possible and desirable. And in this way his analysis

⁵⁸ Foucault. *History of Sexuality* vol. 1, 95, 92.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 157; To analyze Foucault’s offhand and cryptic comment that “bodies and pleasures” should be the “rallying point” for a resistance to the deployment of sexuality would be beyond the scope of this paper. We should be content for now to point out that this again proves that Foucault thinks not only resistance, but effective resistance, can be undertaken against a deployment of power-knowledge that, according to critics, “rids us of any agency.”

⁶⁰ Foucault. *History of Sexuality* vol. 1, 131, my emphasis.

is entirely open to being used and supplemented by others who would attempt to resist the deployment of sexuality from within.⁶³ Foucault therefore certainly does not foreclose the possibility of resistance, and in no way does he “eradicate” the possibility of agency in regards to sexuality. What has animated the entirety of this work is the need to reconsider the history of sexuality in order to enable an effective resistance to its deployment.

Conclusion

Following the threads of subjectivity and resistance in *HS*, we have therefore ended up very far from an interpretation that would see Foucault as either bluntly denying subjectivity or sketching it as a meaningless self-relationship that in all cases will be nothing more than the passive and over-determined underside of the deployment of sexuality. Yes, knowledge and power are constitutive of sexuality as an experience. Yes, as sexual subjects we will always confront these constitutive elements, “as we run up against [power] in our smallest truths,” as Deleuze says.⁶⁴ This is because while we recognize our sexuality, insistently decipher it, and transform our conduct in relation to it, we have been disciplined to do so by a vast and complex technology of power. However, the result of this process does not have to be despair or hopelessness. Those who choose to resist by recognizing and deciphering their sexuality ever more loudly and more vehemently will certainly still be caught within the very deployment that has mobilized and implanted sexuality. But power, as the connection of imbalanced and unstable potential forces of action, always requires the possibility of reversal. And so if subjectivity has been so thoroughly invested with power, a discerning eye could spot the faultiness of the investing power-relations and affect a resistance in this new arena of sexual subjectivity. Far from lamenting the impossibility of resistance, far from mourning the death of agency, *The History of Sexuality Volume 1* offers an intensive and detailed map of a war-zone ripe for transformation. The subject of sexuality may be constructed within a regime of power-knowledge, but he is not for that reason frozen forever in stasis; he necessarily, always-already has the ability to re-invest this subjectivity. In the end, what is at stake in Foucault’s *History of Sexuality* is, as *The Use of Pleasure* puts it, a chance “to get free oneself,” to think and experience differently. Sexuality is still an open game.

⁶⁴ For example, Butler’s *Imitation and Gender Insubordination* could be read as a helpful augment to Foucault’s analysis, as it attempts to demonstrate how subjectivity, despite being structured by normative power, can nonetheless resist this power. Showing that gay identity can be used to call into question the heterosexual claim to originality precisely by performing itself as an imitation of the latter, and therefore demonstrating the “performative” and unstable character of all gender and sexuality identities, Butler offers a positive example of what Foucault suggests: power structures can be dismantled by the very subjects they invest and constitute.

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