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<div align="center">Power relations viewed through BDSM.</div>

My primary focus while writing this paper will be on the mapping of BDSM power

relationships, as constituted by agreements, to analyze power relationships as presented by

Foucault. Doing so through mapping Judith Butler's theory of performativity onto Foucault's

description of power. This abstraction will establish BDSM as the prime example of power

relationships, as it possesses qualities of power that are impossible in other power relationships.

Foucault himself was involved in BDSM (bondage, domination and sadomasochism),and I will

incorporate some of his personal experiences and his identity as a gay man into my argument.

There are relations of power in the domination and submission present in all BDSM

relations. The power within BDSM encounters between the dom and sub, also known as

"scenes," are constituted by agreeing on a set of rules, expectations, and a safe word, which

either individual can evoke to end the scene immediately. Judith Butler's performative theory

illustrates how through performance of behaviors associated with an identity we come to apply

that identity and its behaviors to the blank slate at the core of our self. This theory applies to dom

and sub roles because BDSM itself is a kink, meaning that enjoyment of it is explored through

concentrated effort not through inherent enjoyment. Those who identify with one role or the

other, sometimes both, have to learn to identify with that role, and it is common for individuals

to experiment with BDSM and think they are one role, but discover that they enjoy the

contrasting role more. When an individual discovers this about themselves it fundamentally

changes how they identify themselves and to an extent how they live their lives outside of

BDSM. This is achieved through performativity as they adopt behaviors associated with their

BDSM role and incorporate them into their identity.

The communication that takes place prior to the scene is a negotiation of power, the sub

and dom are creating the space in which power can be exchanged. Foucault discusses power as a

combination of knowledge and the ability to act upon that knowledge, and that is exactly what is

taking place here. The discussion of interest and expectations for the scenes is an exchange of

intimate knowledge about the other individual and oneself, which is then formally established by

the agreement thereby allowing each other to act on the knowledge that has just been exchanged;

translating into an exchanging of power. In Foucault's depiction, power exist only in the fluidity

of relationships. BDSM relationships are generally between just two individuals with clear but

fluid boundaries due to the safe word; thus, making it the perfect example to begin a discussion

of power.

The fluidity of power also means it is not something to be possessed. One would think

that in BDSM the dominant has power over the submissive; but power exist only as the exchange

between the two individuals. This exchange is the effect of previous knowledge. In BDSM this

exchange of knowledge is established in depth. Alongside the establishment of an agreement and

a safe word, before beginning the scene so that the exchange of power may take place.

While Foucault's theory of power does not require the necessity of an agreement it is an

important tool in my mapping of BDSM power relationships onto governmentality and

multiplicity. I want to use the nature of the agreement to showcase multiplicity as a network of

power relationships unlike BDSM, which is a relationship usually consisting of two individuals

rather than parties of multiple individuals. I believe this is what Foucault meant in his theory of

multiplicity. The world is complex and systematic, and therefore we can no longer exemplify specific individual power relationships to explain systematic power but must look at things as network of power relationships. In other words, using the mapping of BDSM to provide more insight into Foucault's multiplicity theory, by specifically illustrating the evolution of power relationships.

This illustration is best begun with sovereign power, since the concepts from BDSM relationships apply easiest to sovereign power. In the model of sovereign power royalty can be considered the dominant and the subjects as the submissive. The exchange of power is still present even though we would be inclined to think that the subjects are helplessly ruled or conquered as the exchange happens less explicitly than it does in BDSM. Power is essentially bargained between the king and his subjects, for his right to rule the king generally offers something such as protection for the subjects; and in turn they signify his role as king, in which persists the idea of an agreement. However, the similarities end here, because unlike BDSM, there is no equivalent to a safe word for sovereign power, nor is there a space for re-evaluation of the power once it has been created. Said differently the subjects cannot negotiate, as one can within BDSM, for overall the sovereign power relationship is less fluid than BDSM. For example, if the subjects become dissatisfied with their sovereign ruler, they do not have space to change their circumstances short of a rebellion. This serves a different role than would a safe word, which opens the space for discussion and re-evaluation of the power; rebellion on the other hand comes from a complete frustration with the state of power and resorts to destruction of the power relationship and re-establishment of a new one such as overthrowing the sovereign ruler and the establishment of a new sovereign power. Here emerges another key difference between

BDSM and sovereign power, while rebellion does allow for some re-construction it does not generally allow for an entire re-creation of the power relationship while a safe word does.

This inability to fully reconstruct the overall structure of the power relationship lies in two things: performativity and multiplicity. Performativity causes the class system of sovereign power to become core parts of individual identities. Such: I was born a peasant therefore I am a peasant. This creates a difficulty, if not entirely removing the possibility of completely eradicating the previous power structure, since the identities of the individuals trying to recreate the power relationship are dependent on the power relationship itself. While it is true that roles within BDSM become a part of the individual's identity, it is not to the same degree as roles within power structures such as sovereignty; such as fundamentally changing how the individual lives and perceives their place in the world. Here the agreement presents itself again but only as passive agreement, for when one is born into the socio-economic class within sovereignty one does so only passively by simply not rejecting one's place in the class structure. This is another difference between BDSM roles and sovereign roles, BDSM roles are consciously constructed by the individuals who then use those roles to create the power relationship, whereas sovereign roles are created by the power relationship and then passively agreed to by the individuals. This reversal of the nature of agreement is accounted for by what I propose to call "generational multiplicity," and what Foucault discusses as multiplicity as a network of force relations. Multiplicity first causes difficulty in the complete re-evaluation of the power structure because of the sheer complexity it creates. While I have discussed rebellion as a direct confrontation between the people and the single sovereign ruler, that is an oversimplification for the sake of making a point. While there is a single sovereign ruler, that individual is not responsible for the entirety of power in that structure, for it is a simple network but a network nonetheless.

Therefore removal of that sovereign ruler does not completely eradicate the power structure, it merely removes a part of the network. The rest of the distributed power in its state of perpetual fluidity still exists; the higher socio-economic classes can still act on the power as before with the removal of the sovereign. However, this is multiplicity as Foucault discusses; "generational multiplicity" on the other hand, is a power network within families and across generations.

Further explanation of what I mean by generational multiplicity lies in John Protevi's discussion of Foucault's multiplicity, as it relates to governmentality. Foucault's initial discussion of multiplicity is a grid of intelligibility and power for social relations, said differently force relationships. This is adequate for application to the previous discussion of sovereign power but it does not apply well to governmentality. Since, with governmentality, the network of relations is multiplied even further and there are not direct connections for force to be applied as there is with sovereign power. Protevi's explanation of this shift is that power transforms into actions on the actions of others, rather than direct force. Governmentality creates a network of relations too complex to have relations of direct force as sovereignty can, therefore power turns to indirect actions that affect the potential actions of individuals rather than directly affecting them. This is the kind of multiplicity I'm referring to with generational multiplicity, families create a power structure of actions across generations and impose that onto their children. You will be a farmer, because my father was a farmer and his father before him etc. This is taking an action on the potential actions of these individuals' children, attempting to remove the potential actions that would deviate from the established power structure.

Generational multiplicity is more clearly present in sovereign power, as pressure to remain within the socio-economic class one is born into was enforced by the sovereign. Furthering my point that multiplicity increases the difficulty of leaving the power relationship.

Generational multiplicity represents how deeply the power structure becomes ingrained in the individuals who are subject to it. Since they are imposing that performative identity, and the passive agreement that comes with it, onto their children. Creating a power structure that spans generational identities is significantly more difficult since the space for re-construction of the power structure only exist once the work of previous generations is undone. Generational multiplicity is a concept entirely absent in BDSM, because the nature of BDSM power relationships does not allow for this type of multiplicity. These relationships are solely involved with the individuals actively present in them, no effect is had on descendants of those individuals and the power remains in its true state of fluidity

Power within BDSM, as previously stated, is perpetually fluid and constantly subject to change or eradication given the presence of the safe word. Therefore, with the absence of the equivalent to a safe word, power can solidify within power structures. But because power is fluid this solidification marks the absence of power. Once a power structure, such as sovereign socio-economic hierarchy, becomes established then the change from force relations to relations of actions on actions takes place and power dissipates. Power is force, and with the shift away from force what remains is the merely the concept of power, and that concept influences the actions on actions that perpetuate the past concept of power. This dissipation of power is what I believe Foucault to be discussing when he turns the discussion to power systems. Generational multiplicity is an example of power systems, for by its nature generational multiplicity causes power structures to no longer depend on their individual parts, which is the nature of a structure. Therefore power systems are power structures that have lost their dependency on the individuals who originally constituted them, but remain established due to generational multiplicity. The system itself only has a remembrance of the power created by previous individuals, and

continues to function based on the passive performative agreement of new individuals. This happens in sovereign power and various other forms of governmentality, but is impossible in BDSM, which is the prime foundation of power relationships. Therefore, sovereignty and governmentality are poor representations of power relations. Through multiplicity and generational multiplicity sovereignty and governmentality become less dependent on the individuals who constitute them, and the agreement becomes passive rather than active. With BDSM, the relationship is entirely dependent on the individuals, does not exist without a clear agreement, and does not contain multiplicity. Despite BDSM being dependent on the individuals, the performative identities that are adopted during the scene are temporary as well as subject to change, which incorporates fluidity that is not shared by the identities perpetuated by society.

I now want to shift focus to Michel Foucault himself, and his own BDSM experiences. Not to great detail but merely to address the philosophical relevance of his experience of BDSM and as a gay man. David Halperin discusses a similar point to this in his book *Saint Foucault*, in which he defends Foucault against those who wish to demean his works on the basis of his sexuality and sexual practices, particularly BDSM. However, this is not the only criticism Foucault is subject to regarding this topic. Those who would use Foucault's writings as support for "gay liberation" came to refute him after his statement that he was never concerned with gay liberation, which Halperin also addresses. This second criticism is Halperin's primary concern, as those who would demean Foucault for his sexual practices are ultimately meaningless. With regards to *History of Sexuality vol. 1* Foucault's sexuality became a more illuminated topic, along with some of his opinions, in turn causing the book to be held as iconic of gay liberation. Halperin's defense of Foucault is that of explaining how Foucault's argument is not for gay liberation, but rather for gay survival and resistance. This is because within Foucault's argument

he recognizes the harsh construction of systems of power as I have discussed, and came to the realization that many other gay men, myself and Halperin included have arrived at. That the system in its current state does not allow for gay liberation. For within this system, as Halperin notes, gay liberation is not only barred by gay bashers, police, or prejudice interactions, but by the system of power itself. Homophobia goes deeper than homophobic individuals and clear actions, for it is wound up in the fundamental construct of the power structure, and therefore the structure itself bars gay liberation. Specifically, gay individuals are told something is fundamentally wrong with them and that they should not exist, which goes beyond the general boundaries of homophobic prejudice.

I desire to take this a step further than Halperin does, for from my perspective there is significant philosophical value in Foucault's identity as a gay man and his BDSM experiences. The sheer identity of a gay man is outcast by the power structure, we do not "fit" into the structure. This inherent outcasting based on personal identity removes the struggle that generational multiplicity creates. Since we inherently do not have a place we are not only free from the pressures of generational multiplicity but we are actively outed from the structure in many cases. This creating a unique perspective of the power structure as we are forced to stand outside of it. Thus accounting for Halperin's statement about the realization many gay men have come to is that resistance and survival is the true answer rather than liberation. Therefore, Foucault's BDSM experiences are a byproduct of his identity as a gay man, and that in turn shaped his perspectives of power, especially as he talks about it in *History of Sexuality vol. 1*. Gay resistance and survival versus gay liberation is a fruitless argument, since gay men are not generally subjects of generational multiplicity we do not carry on the system and are not presented with opportunities to, which then removes opportunities to liberate the LGBT within

the system. With gay men not being subjects of generational multiplicity I am referring to the fact that we often times do not have children, and if we do raise children it is more common for those children to be adopted. Therefore, we do not carry on the power system as we are not creating someone to replace the role we had when we die, even if we do have children they are not subject to the same conformist pressures of generational multiplicity because their parents were not and do not see value in instilling the values of the system in their children. However, we are also not subject to generational multiplicity because generally we are viewed as undesirable by our families and are cast aside by them rather than being subject to imprintation of their roles and values onto us. I am unaware of Foucault's experience with his family but even the most positive experiences of gay men still leave us as societal outcast, along with the rest of the LGBT community. My focus remains still on gay men even though what I am describing is often a shared experience of the LGBT community, as that is my perspective as well as Halperin's and Foucault's. But also because BDSM is a community primarily made up of gay men. I do not believe that the BDSM community being primarily made up of gay men, BDSM being the prime foundation of power relations, and Foucault being a gay man who wrote about power and BDSM is all coincidence. And I hope to have shown support for my personal argument as well as the argument I presented for Foucault's and Halperin's perspectives. The analysis of power through BDSM seems to me to be a gay experience, as BDSM much like gay men exist outside that which society often deems appropriate, therefore becoming an essential tool for analyzing the system as both it and those indulging in it exist outside the system.

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