a foucauldian and deleuzian reading of

AUTOPOIETIC BISEXUAL LIVES

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*T*HIS PAPER WILL LOCATE THE CONVERGENCE of Foucault's and Deleuze's critico-political itinerary on the ethics of autopoiesis. Using primary research from a sociological study on bisexual lives, it will demonstrate the consonances of their respective theoretical insights about the potential of erotic "pleasure" and "desire" as forces of resistance. It takes as its point of departure Tuhkanen's (2005-6) observation that "the way in which the queerness of Foucault's ethics harmonizes with Deleuze's work remains largely unconsidered", a task that could be pursued by via Foucault's research on the art of living/care of self. Firstly, we clarify the objectives of Foucault's research in the later volumes of the history of sexuality project to show how it invites us to experiment with technologies of the self to defuse normative regimes by cultivating the work of desubjectification—*autopoiesis*, the *re-writing of the self, becoming-other*. The paper interprets empirical data of bisexual experiences with this Foucauldian framework to elucidate the ethico-political significance of affective-relational experimentations in gender-crossings and sub-cultural practices of BDSM (bondage and discipline, dominance and submission, and sadomasochism) that hinge on the consensual exchange of power for erotic stimulation or pleasure. The analysis of these non-normative relations of intimacy and exchanges of pleasure will "read Foucault as a foreign body, pregnant with Deleuzianism, that already inhabits the centre of queer thinking" (Tuhkanen 2005-6). Our aim is twofold: to set the groundwork for further conversations between Foucauldian and Deleuzian thinking, and to highlight a lacuna in queer scholarship on bisexuality.

Background and Methodology

*T*he bisexual narratives featured in this essay, and the Deleuzian concepts through which these are analysed, are drawn from Watson's (2012) doctoral dissertation, a qualitative sociological study that explored the nexus of bisexuality and sex/gender diversity (see also Watson 2014). It principally argued that the master categories of sex, gender and sexuality are continually dismantled and revised through the lived realities that occupy *in-between* spaces of corporeality—heterosexual/homosexual, man/woman, male/female, and masculine/feminine. In these borderland spaces, self-ascriptions of bisexuality are moving towards articulations of fluidity and inventive labelling (Owen 2011; Pallotta-Chiarolli 2010; Rust 2009; Watson 2014). Rather than simply recruiting self-identified "bisexuals", Watson therefore sought persons whose intimate partner histories included relational connections with *more than one gender*. Consonant with the Deleuzian logic informing this study, individuals were not "named" as "bisexual". For naming confers homogeneity onto those being named, thus provoking the question: who is doing the naming and whose interests are at stake? Deleuze and Guattari refer to the *extensive* usage of proper names/common nouns that elides multiplicity with "dismal unity"; the "devious despotic" signification that ensures "unification of an aggregate they subsume" (1987, 27). To this end, Watson's project also solicited beyond the conventional male/female gender divide. The final sample included men and women as well as sex/gender diverse individuals for whom the two-sexed model has in some way been disrupted by: adopting hormone therapy and/or surgery in order to present as their preferred gender (transgender); rejecting or blurring the gender binary (genderqueer); or biological anomaly (intersex). A purposive method, which utilised snowball sampling (Neuman 2006), resulted in a sample of 47 individuals (aged between 19 and 67) comprising 15 men and 15 women (who have never questioned their designated birth sex/gender), and 17 sex/gender-diverse persons.

Data was collected via individual in-depth interviews (face-to-face or phone) that explored sex/gender/(bi)sexuality in terms of: self-expression; relationality; partner configurations; family; sociality; and public discourses. Interview transcripts were coded and analysed using NVivo (qualitative software) to identify emergent themes. The study underscored the ontological messiness of sexual realities that are complicated by embodied articulations of sex/gender diversity. Hence, participants utilised a cornucopia of descriptors to convey their sexuality including, bisexual, queer, bi-queer, gay-bi, polymorphous, polysexual, pansexual and bi-sensual, or rejected labels. It is from the vantage point of this muddied terrain that our dialogue between Foucault and Deleuze is located. Space constraints limit us to select narratives from Watson's (2012) dissertation most pertinent to our Deleuzian-Foucauldian analyses. However, these stories typify the sample's complexity and the central tenet of Watson's thesis

that bisexuality is an epistemological viewfinder through which sex/gender/sexual bodies are rendered visible as multiplicities of ethical becoming-selves. Subsequent planned and forthcoming publications will offer a more comprehensive interrogation of Watson's data. For a summary of participant profiles see Watson (2012, 2014).

Foucault's fourfold ethics, an art of living, and the care of self

The first volume of *The History of Sexuality* (1990)—a central text informing critiques of heteronormativity—has entreated significantly greater attention than the latter two volumes, *The Use of Pleasure* (1990b) and *The Care of the Self* (1988c). The second volume, recasts the project as 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" (Foucault 1990a, 4; emphasis added). The concept of "experience" anchors the three analytical axes around which the Foucauldian corpus pivots: truth, power, ethics (or knowledge, governmentality, subjectivity). "Experience" thus figures as a prismatic lens for refracting both the interrogation of "an objective, anonymous, and general structure connecting fields of knowledge, types of normativity, and forms of subjectivity", and the ethical cultivation of "a subjective self-relation of recognition" (Oksala 2004, 111). While analyses may focus on a particular domain of experience—truth, power, ethics— these are inter-involved with no ordering conceptual or chronological hierarchy and "can only be understood one in relation to the others and cannot be understood one without the others" (Foucault 1998, 243).

An "axial" reading of the *History of Sexuality* enables an investigation of the subversive potential of bisexual intimacies that remains mindful of the hetero-normative power that suffuses "sexuality". As such, we perform our analysis from the standpoint of ethics, adopting Foucault's understanding of experience or "limit-experience" as both structuring historical conditions and transformative force (O'Leary 2008, 7). "Experience", however, would not appear in Foucault's subsequent works until around 1978, where he reconceptualised limit-experience as a movement of (un) becoming that serves to "tear the subject away from itself" (Foucault 2000, 241). This later understanding of limit-experience turns on the dual meaning of the French word *expérience*, which can also mean "experiment". Limit-experience, in other words, bespeaks a movement of desubjectification or becoming-other. With a more nuanced conceptualisation of (limit-)experience, Foucault characterised his work thus in the later phase of his intellectual life:

> The experience through which we grasp the intelligibility of certain mechanisms [deviance, punishment, etc.] and the way in which we are enabled to detach ourselves from them by perceiving them differently will be, at best, one and

the same thing. That is really the heart of what I do (Foucault 2000, 244).

Accordingly, we analyse the stories of Watson's (2012) respondents through this optic, exploring how the potential for limit-experience may be actualised by adjustments in role performance and bodily habits, and by the affective intensification of erotic *pleasure*. This analysis draws on two dominant leitmotifs that emerged in participants' narratives—their subverting and/or transgressing of the gender binary, and erotic performance enacted through BDSM—activities by which they confront coded relations of power, and in the same movement, detach themselves from mechanisms of normativity by performing, embodying, and thus perceiving them, *queerly*.

By treating erotic pleasure as "material" for experimentations that negotiate both "hetero" *and* "homo" norms circumscribing their intimate relations, respondents cultivate a form of ethical self-fashioning. While a parallel may be drawn between participants' ethical "use of pleasure" with the sexual ethics of Greco-Roman male elites (Foucault 1990b), we underscore Foucault's point that one cannot expect to "find the solution of a problem in the solution of another problem raised at another moment by other people"(1984, 343). What interests Foucault about the Greco-Romans is not the specific content of their sexual ethics but the orienting praxis-ideal of an art of living. The purpose of tracing the genealogies of problematisations (of deviancy, madness, etc.) descending through different eras is "to point out the proximity and the difference, and, through their interplay, to show how the same advice given by ancient morality can function differently in a contemporary style of morality" (Foucault 1988a, 247). Our argument, therefore, is that Foucault's research on Greco-Roman sexual ethics extends an invitation to us to rearticulate the praxis-ideal of an art of living in a contemporary context—which Watson's (2012) respondents arguably perform.

Here, O'Leary's (2002) reading of Foucauldian ethics is instructive for our analysis of bisexual intimacies and the reciprocity between the Foucauldian and Deleuzian itineraries. Building on Foucault's fourfold analysis of ethical substance, mode of subjection, ethical work, and *telos*—the "what", "why", "how", and "goal" of ethics—O'Leary makes the following proposals for a contemporary art of living. Firstly, because Foucault critically regards the subject as a "fictitious unity" and "sex" an "ideal point" consolidated by the discourses of sexuality, the ethical substance is the transcendental subject that must be refused (Foucault 1990a, 154-155). Secondly, if the self is not a given, the mode of subjection is the decision to embrace the open-endedness of existence with an attitude that treats life as an art of ongoing crafting. Thirdly, Foucault's critico-political project aims "to prise open the relations of truth-power-subjectivity which make us the kind of individual that we are" (O'Leary 2002, 153), hence, the ethical work involves practices of desubjectification, which may be cultivated with technologies of the self. These are knowledge-practices that:

permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and ways of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality Foucault (1993, 203).

Fourthly, if the task of critique is not to remove constraint or domination but to continuously open up possibilities for new socio-political decisions and arrangements, the *telos* is freedom, conceived not as an historical constant or ideal state but as *constituted by relations,* as the capacity to refused to be pinned down to a certain identity: the freedom to always become otherwise than before, or in Deleuzian terms, to *become-other*.

In searching for a way to detach ourselves from the confessional mode of subjection by which modern individuals are enjoined to decipher their "innermost truth" as particular subjects (of sexuality or otherwise), Foucault (2005) re-evaluated the relationship between the Ancient Greek maxims of: the renowned and widely-accepted injunction of *gnōthi seauton* (know thyself), and the forgotten precept of *epimeleia heautou* (the care of self). For the Greco-Romans, "know thyself" was twinned with, and functioned as a specific application of, the imperative to "care for the self" comprising three dimensions: "an attitude towards the self, others, and the world"; a form of attention turned towards "oneself"; and "actions by which one takes responsibility for oneself and by which one changes, purifies, transforms, and transfigures oneself" (Foucault 2005, 10-11). However, through a gradual process involving the rise of theology—which culminated in the "Cartesian moment"—the care of self came to be displaced by know thyself. Foucault's re-evaluation of the *epimeleia heautou* thus refocuses attention on the affective, relational, and performative processes of embodiment—or what Foucault (2005: 16) describes as the movement of *askēsis* and *erōs*—by which a person's relation of self to self and others, the relation between subjectivity and truth, may be transfigured.

Autopoiesis and Ethical Corpora

The care of self and the art of living, hence, articulate a praxis-ideal of *autopoiesis*. Although Foucault did not use the term as such, an ethics of autopoiesis can be drawn from the influence of Nietzsche in his writings. For Nietzsche adopts a certain "aesthetic attitude" that treats life, habits, and experiences as material to be worked on, formed and shaped as an "I" who is both a self-description and a self-creation (Nehamas 1985). This autopoietic work pivots on the recognition that the process of crafting is on-going and open-ended. As an aesthetic mode of subjection, one refuses the transcendental self and modes of normativity via practices of desubjectification: becoming-other. Importantly for our argument, Foucault underscores the productive

and agentic but subjectless dimensions of self as we create ourselves as "a work of art" (1984, 350-351). It is on this conceptual ground that Foucault's itinerary resonates most strongly with Deleuze and Guattari, for whom the creative process of self-production is fundamental to their canon. Indeed this process is likened to that of an artist's palette from whence new forms emerge. Here, "multiple exchanges" between self and social figurations permit "diverse possibilities" that offer the aesthetic potential to reconfigure anew one's corporeality (Guattari 1995, 7).

Autopoiesis is key to Deleuze and Guattari concept of *becomings* (Buchanan 1997) and, hence, provides a central plateau of thought from which to explore bisexuality in ways that bring to light the complex interplays with sex/gender (Watson 2012). Becomings comprise a diverse array of singularities that coalesce in fluid assemblages—social spaces of production that destabilise the unilinear and binary logic of traditional canons of thinking. According to Watson (2012), recalibrating bisexual theory through becomings rejects a hierarchical and authoritative system of organisation, and hence, delivers a "war-machine" against conceptual fossilisation. A war-machine, which is everywhere mobilised in the Deleuzian enterprise, is not military, but occupies cartographies of connections and extensions (Deleuze 1995, 33)—attacking the foundationalist assumptions that bear down and attempt to organise social process and production into tidy transcendent categories. Transcendent universals (abstract concepts), organise matter into social bodies that attempt to cohere the subject, to corral and constrain desire. Delineated by external representations (objects), transcendences variously consolidate as *molar* entities, *strata*, *organisms*, and *majorities* in Deleuzian idiom (for example, race, class, sex, religion). The war-machine is a space of nomadic thought, which dismantles binary regimes that overcode and police us as "wholes" (Deleuze and Parnet 2006, 106).

It is here that Deleuzian philosophy reveals its radical potential for reframing how (bi) sexuality is understood. Of salience, Watson (2012) theorises that an epistemological space is made available to consider bisexuality beyond conventional constructions grounded upon genitality of partner. This offers an analytical position that more ably accommodates consideration of those who are sex/gender-diverse. The Deleuzian project seemingly installs a post-gender vision—a polysexual, multi-sexual reprisal that de-essentialises the body, sexuality and sexed identities (Braidotti 2002). The analytical problematic of the two-sexed system is replaced by "a thousand tiny sexes" that emerge in ever-changing configurations of assemblages, hence, "there are as many sexes as there are terms in symbiosis" (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 213, 242). Deleuze and Guattari consider that the social categorisation of man/woman, as well as psychoanalytic narratives of psychical bisexual organisation (masculine/feminine), ignores how:

Sexuality brings into play too great a diversity of conjugated becomings; these are like *n* sexes … Sexuality is the production of a thousand sexes, which are so many uncontrollable becomings. *Sexuality proceeds by the way of the becoming-woman of the man and the becoming-animal of the human* … (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 278-9; emphasis in original).

The conceptual scaffolding of autopoiesis accordingly offers a simpatico of thinking between Deleuze and Foucault that productively re-imagines how bisexuality is enacted, embodied and expressed. Watson's (2012), respondents' stories expose how bisexuality occupies indeterminate spaces of in-between that "play with different regimes of signs, and even nonsign states" (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 21). Analytical focus, therefore, examines not what a label *means*—which for Deleuze (1995) is despotic, tyrannical and diagnostic, and for Foucault (1997) is identity-bound by ethical rules—but how it is *produced* and what ways of living are rendered possible. In doing so, ruptures and schisms are made apparent that allow polyvocalities of sexuality to surface, which the unified sex/gendered/sexual subject and its reliance on binary logic suppresses from view. Watson's respondents thus conveyed their sexualities as a *process of becoming* that negotiates dominant binary discourses and culturally-scripted categories, while carving out spaces of heterogeneity and movement (Deleuze and Guattari 1987). Consonant with Foucault's notion of desubjectification, Watson (2012) argues that participants' lived realities "asignify" and "asubjectify" (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 9) the taken-for-granted idiom of LGBT by variously dismantling and reassembling dominant identity categories in fluid and inventive ways. The radical notion of asignifying bisexuality is not to evacuate comprehensibility but urges us to rethink the sexual body in terms of *content* and *expression* rather than structural *form* (Deleuze 1995, 21; Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 43).

Autopoietic Adventures

Selected narratives from Watson's (2012) study illuminate the autopoietic landscape that we have mapped out thus far in our dialogue between Foucault and Deleuze. We begin with Cherie (late 30s), whose gender-crossing story is *par exemplar* of the autopoietic venture—what s/he "becomes" is literally an aesthetic project of the erotically-desiring self. Self-describing as a queer trannie, Cherie lives and presents for the most part as a male/man. However, weekend clubbing and swinger's parties provide the forum to metamorphose into a "woman". This *en femme* transformation entails a full makeover regimen including: gothic dress style; wig; cosmetics; "tucking" the penis, and adopting "feminine" affectations (walking with small steps one foot in front of the other and sitting with crossed legs).

The process of "becoming-Cherie" is, from one perspective, filtered through a molar version of femininity that aligns to a normative performance and expression of the "female" body. Yet, Cherie actualises a queerly-embodied configuration—something that is both familiar and unfamiliar—what Freud (1919) termed the uncanny. It is the dissonance of the uncanny that perplexes and suggests an alien or extraneous form, challenging onlookers to peer within their own subjectivities. When in public with her (female) partner, Cherie commented that "people sort of tend to look at you and you can just see that they're just processing—something does not compute". Cherie does not become molar woman but rearranges its constituent parts into something-other—a composite body, which, moreover, enables exploration beyond the limits of conventional sexuality. Cherie explained the sexual vicissitudes and boundary-blurring of this queer embodiment that offers new sexual possibilities:

> I'm quite happy to sleep with women as a man, with men as Cherie, with other trannies as a man or Cherie, and so on. But I think it's one of those things where the language falls down a little bit. Realistically, if you are a guy dressing up as a girl and you're getting picked up by a guy who wants to believe you are a girl what does that make you? I mean technically bisexual is an adequate term but I don't think it quite captures the full diversity of possibilities.

Ewan's (early 50s) genderqueer story similarly revealed autopoietic subjectivities rather than any attempt to authentically replicate "being" woman. Although currently married, it is a borderline narrative that does not attach to dominant polarities of sex/gender and sexuality but nomadically weaves in between. Ewan's story underscores this interstitial movement wherein notions of indeterminacy and incongruence become manifest. It is a nebulous sense of self, which Ewan repeatedly describes as "weird" and "freakish". "My peripatetic life continues peripatetically," he later reflected.

It is this distinctive nomadism of mind, corpora and biography—recalling the Nietzschean influence on the reciprocity between Deleuzian and Foucauldian sensibilities—which disallows Ewan from solidifying into a range of molar identities that his body has variously assumed: husband, father, pilot, gay lover, cross-dresser, trans woman. Ewan recounted his life-story as a non-linear series of becomings comprising: four marriages; parenthood; intermittent oestrogen hormone therapy; cross-dressing in women's clothes; feeling maternal (rather than paternal); cohabiting in a "lesbian relationship" with a bisexual woman (Ewan "transformed" to Justine during this period); and cruising public toilets for "gay" sex. At the time of his interview, Ewan was in a state of flux—unsure of how to satisfy profound yearnings for femininity and sexual contact with men within a marital relationship:

In my case I'm not really sure if I'm transgender or not. I seem to float between. To look at me, I'm a physical male, but I don't live like a male. I dress up and do the whole thing […] I am on hormones at the moment. I lived as a female for eight months, as Justine, but I didn't feel comfortable in my skin. I felt like a freak. So I gave up being Justine and I've compromised at the moment, on hormones, and trying to stay soft […] Throughout my life I've had periodic extreme attractions to men. When I took hormones most recently my libido disappeared. But when I stopped taking them, my libido came back, but it came back gay, stronger than before and it's still that way. Maybe this feminine thing is just another aspect of sexuality: I'm not sure whether that's transgendered or gay. It's such a fluid idea. […] I've got a wonderful relationship with my [current] spouse—it seems incongruous calling her my wife. I said to her, "did you ever think you'd be married to a weirdo?"

Qualifying his "weirdo" status as "not pejorative", Ewan invokes the enabling potency of anomaly and ambiguity that has steered him towards a new hybrid-becoming. After much contemplation and counseling, he later decided against pursuing complete gender transition (surgical reassignment and living full-time as a woman). Ewan reflected that part of his struggle was the social imperative to "be" one gender or the other, and to settle on one sexual orientation. That he did not "fit" the putative dominant expectations of "being" male, female, gay or straight presented a seemingly intractable dilemma. He eventually realised that the locus of his undecidability is that which permits a flexibility of gender and sexuality, and now describes himself as genderqueer-bisexual. Ewan's autopoietic venture has thus constructed a border-zone habitus in which he moves between "male mode" and *en femme*, between his wife and male lovers, as occasions allow. Pondering his emergent subjectivity, Ewan mused: "So, if I'm not a woman but really a man, then what kind of man am I? In a word: complicated".

Ewan's decision not to undergo surgical reassignment (the recognition that undecidability is the condition of possibility for gender performativity and relationality with others) and Cherie's compositing of the bisexual "trannie" body (the recognition that movement across, rather than the pinpointing of, positions within the gender field is what invites possibilities)—what they enact is a refusal to accept or settle on any determinate answer to the question "Who am I?" Rather, their decisions recast the question of the self as "What am I?", or apropos of Spinozan understandings, "Of what is this body capable?" Echoing Foucault, this question is pursued not with a hermeneutic of the self but the care of self. Utilising various technologies of the self to become-other than man/woman/male/female/gay/lesbian/straight, ways of relating the self to self and others are negotiated as a continual transformative and reflexive process. As these genderqueer subjects cultivate a contemporary art of living, what actualises the ethical and political potential of the praxis-ideal of autopoiesis is

the relationality that coheres between the self and its encounter with others, the relationality ushered by the willingness to accept unpredictability and be hospitable to what is strange and novel. The ethico-political force of autopoiesis, we argue, is to be harnessed from the body's indeterminate capacity to affect and be affected. This is elucidated by the stories of those who experiment with BDSM play, an analysis of which is crucial to the dialogical exchange between Deleuze and Foucault, as it foregrounds the key point of disagreement between them: their respective analytics of "desire" and "pleasure".

Becoming-other with BDSM

The affective potency of desire and pleasure that is enacted in BDSM expands thinking about sexual relations beyond normative boundaries of "coupling". In other words, the relations respondents entered into are more profoundly contoured by terms other than the reigning signifiers (man/woman, husband/wife) that attempt to rule and bind multiplicities of subjectivity into an obedient unified subject. Deleuze's radical rewriting of the relational body is strikingly evidenced in participants' narratives, which explode gender signifiers, sending shards of stereotypes shooting off into all directions, before settling into new combinations and permutations of self. It is on this precipitous terrain that BDSM incites feverish debate, particularly from feminist critiques that position these practices as replaying patriarchal structures of gendered power.

Feminist arguments that attempt to co-opt BDSM within a paradigm of male dominance/female oppression are challenged by those advocating an ethics of sex positivism and sex radicalism. Pat Califia (2000), for example, provides a comprehensive overview of lesbian-feminist arguments that colour this fraught terrain, elucidating how the dogma of hard-line feminism in fact marginalises vast micro-realities of lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered people who derive consensual pleasure from pornography and BDSM. Here, relations are predicated by care and consideration not exploitation. Morgan (early 50s), a passionate genderqueer feminist who has attended but not participated in a women's only BDSM group, highlighted this zone of contention:

> Especially in female communities [BDSM is] seen as perversion of power. We've got ourselves out from under the yolk of coercive power—why would you willingly put yourself back in there again?

The key factor identified by interviewees that differentiates BDSM from other forms of oppressive power systems is its contractual status. It is the "exchange of power", which several participants commented upon, that is compelling—a power dynamic

that is consented to, and negotiated between, willing parties. Matthew, (mid-20s, trans man), who experienced his early sexual years before transition as a politically-active feminist lesbian, rebutted notions of BDSM as a repetition of patriarchal power structures and coercion:

> The patriarchy thing assumes that a masculine person is going to be dominant in BDSM. I love the idea that, whilst I'm physically stronger, in a BDSM space I'll give over to my female partner and she'll have all the power and push me to my physical/psychological limits.

The attraction held by abdicating power also surfaced in other trans women's interviews, which made observations that, anecdotally, BDSM finds favour in trans communities. Lisa (early 40s, trans woman) conjectured that "maybe it's because we've had to drive ourselves so hard in our journeys to become transsexual, we like to relinquish some control". But as Matthew further commented, the dominant/submissive, top/bottom interaction is not about unequal power, as is the common misperception. Rather, it is about equity; for either party can say no. The submissive partner holds as much power through bestowing permission:

> In the real world, the oppressed person/party has no ability to control what happens to them—they never consented to being disempowered. Consent is the key difference [...] There's a little bit of danger in giving up control, and it requires a whole lot of trust (Matthew).

Foucault, who participated in the S&M scene of San Francisco, echoed these sentiments that S&M is not a hierarchical relationship of master (empowered) and slave (disempowered). Rather it is "regulated and open" much like a chess game in which either partner can fail to meet the needs and challenges of the other; it is ultimately a "mixture of rules and openness" that introduces "perpetual novelty" (Foucault 1988b, 299).

While Foucault did not elaborate on this theme in any systematic or sustained manner, we wish to chart a way forward by folding Foucault's brief remarks onto Deleuze's thinking on the matter and then pleating it back onto Foucauldian ideas about the transgressive potential of the body's capacity for pleasure. As illuminated by respondents' comments, libidinal pleasure, in the context of BDSM, entwines a peril that is counter-weighted against the complete trust procured within contractual and consensual agreement. Watson (2012, 234) points out that the power dynamics of such dangerous phantasm are illuminated in Deleuze's (1991) critical essay on masochism, *Coldness and Cruelty*, in which he maintains that a contract of mutual interdependence must first exist. Power inscribed by the dominant social template of the majoritarian gender order is accordingly re-signified by the parties generating an erotic agreement. Thus, power is transferred from the juridical location of institutional (transcendent) authority onto the contract (Deleuze 1991, 77). The very act of masochistic submission is "de-sexualized" (de-gendered) via privileging the sign of the contract as a mode of resistance (Deleuze 1991, 12; 1995, 142).

Importantly, then, the contractual element emerged in participant discourse as a *productive* ethical practice arising between two sexual *bodies*—it is an *affect* that rewrites the patriarchal gender script of male-dominant/female-subdominant, rather than demanding adherence to a universal law. Notions of consensus, contract, agreement, negotiation, trust and care were all key determinants for participants inclined towards BDSM. An ethos of the care of self or autopoiesis—what Watson (2012, 235) terms a "generative ethics of corporeality and relationality"—thus emerges from flows of desire between nuptial alliances that "exchange actions and passions" (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 257). As Gilson (2011:71) argues, nuptials are generative processes that privilege *production* rather than *reproduction*. Such production detaches bodily subjection from both the privileged ground of "molar human" and moral prescriptions that are bound to the procreative imperative of sexual relationships. Watson (2012) argues that this allows an enlarged understanding of bisexually-desiring bodies that looks to the molecular operation of non-human elements. Molecularity, as Neimanis (2007, 289) argues, connects "radically different" entities that:

> constantly extend and disrupt the discrete bounds of our stratified bodies in all sorts of ways: we enter visceral becomings in mouth-becoming-apple or lung-becoming-smog.... Our molecularity is what allows stratified bodily assemblages to enter into new and surprising relationships, and to be transformed and reconfigured by these nuptials.

This molecular view is crucial to understanding a Deleuzian-informed ethics based on "processual creativity", which, rather than objectifying or reifying subjects, generates "new fields of reference" (Guattari 1996, 198). Consequently, human bodies become more than our biology, incorporating other elements into the molecular assemblages of sexual relations: whip, chains, collars, leather, polyvinyl, costumes, masks. The boundaries that circumscribe normative couplings are not only impermanent, via opening out towards multi-configurations, but also porous. These Deleuzian ideas about the unboundedness of corporeality, affect, and becoming-other can be pleated onto Foucauldian ideas about the transgressive possibilities of the body's capacity for pleasure.

We have seen how for Foucault the counter-weighing of peril with contractual-consensual agreement intensifies sexual relations by way of novelty, tension, and uncertainty. Significantly, such an effect of amplified *intensity* is generated by making

use of "every part of the body as a sexual instrument" (Foucault 1988b, 299). Elsewhere, Foucault states that participants of S&M are not seeking to disclose or uncover hidden erotic "tendencies deep within our unconscious", but are rather creating "new possibilities of pleasure" previously unknown to the participant. Consonant with Deleuze, Foucault refers to such erotic practices as a creative endeavour characterised by the "desexualisation of pleasure" whereby "we can produce pleasure with very odd things, very strange parts of our bodies, in very unusual situations" (Foucault 1997, 165).

Foucault further describes S&M as the eroticisation of power or the eroticisation of strategic relations. S&M, he claims, differs from social power in that the strategic relations involved are always fluid, whereas the strategic relations of social power have been stabilised through institutions such that mobility is curtailed by courts, codes, and so on. What occurs in S&M is not so much a "reproduction, inside the erotic relationship, of the structures of power" as "an acting-out of power structures by a strategic game that is able to give sexual pleasure or bodily pleasure" (Foucault 1997, 169). That is to say, S&M entails a process of invention and "the use of a strategic relationship as a source of pleasure (physical pleasure)" (Foucault 1997, 170).

While there are analogous scenarios where people used strategic relations as a source of pleasure—for example, Middle Age "courtly love" or "pick-up" rituals of contemporary nightclubbing—the strategic relation in such heterosexual scenarios is prior to sexual contact. For Foucault, it is "a strategic relation" that enables the movement towards the sexual act. Conversely, in the case of S&M, such strategic relations are *within* the act of sex as "a convention of pleasure within a particular situation" (Foucault 1997, 170). Importantly, for Foucault, the strategic relations enacted in the scene of courtship are purely social relations which involve the individual as social being, whilst in the scene of S&M it is the body that is involved.

Foucault's observation that S&M practice entails a *transduction* of power-strategic relations (and thus holds the potential to interrupt prevailing modes of normativity), dovetails with Deleuze's observation above that the dominant social template of the majoritarian gender order is re-signified by the parties generating an erotic agreement. But where Deleuze adopts the analytic of "desire" to explore the ethico-political possibilities ushered by the corporeal connections and affective becomings of BDSM, Foucault adopts the analytic of "pleasure" instead. Foucault was curious about pleasure because it appears to escape "the medical and naturalistic connotations inherent in the notion of desire... There is no 'pathology' of pleasure, no 'abnormal' pleasure". As illustrated by Foucault's genealogy of the Christian confessional apparatus that traces a line to the will to knowledge-power of modern human sciences, desire "has been used as a tool, as a grid of intelligibility… a basis onto which that psychologico-medical armature can attach itself" (quoted in Halperin

1995, 93). Pleasure, however, is "almost devoid of meaning" and is an event "outside the subject", or "at the limit of the subject, taking place in something which is neither of the body or the soul, which is neither inside nor outside—in short, a notion neither assigned nor assignable" (quoted in Halperin 1995, 93–94). Deleuze (1997) on the other hand, objects to the concept of pleasure because it appears to operate as a block or mode of resistance to the desiring-production—to urge conformity, coherence, and unity by negating fields of immanence. This argument relates to the fulcrum of Deleuze and Guattari's (1983, 1987) writings on capitalism and sexuality—that for them, pleasure, via the institutions of state, family and religion, is co-opted to the service of capital. The question is then, how can pleasure be released from the capitalist machine? It is on this plateau that the Deleuzian notion of desire operates as a productive mechanism, which makes possible "a thousand tiny sexes" that disrupt the unitary bind of heteronormative relations. This apparent tension between Foucault's and Deleuze's thoughts on the dynamics of resistance against normative regimes, however, does not imply that we must opt for the veracity of one perspective over the other. In comparing the two, our aim is not so much to arbitrate on their relative merits as to pave the way open for mutual enhancement and reciprocal learning. As we have demonstrated, Foucault's and Deleuze's respective itineraries can be brought together as a conceptual dialogue between pleasure and desire to map new cartographies of queer ethical landscapes.

Conclusion

Pondering the allure of BDSM, one participant commented: "it's not something that immediately gives me a loin stirring response, [rather it is a question of] how can I make my lover's experience more pleasurable?" This attitude, which illuminates the body's affective *capacity* to resist (hetero)normative power, underlines the productiveness of pursuing the lines of inquiry we have drawn out in this paper. The foregoing discussion has shown how the Foucauldian hypothesis about pleasure as a force of resistance, a force for becoming-other, may not be as incommensurable with Deleuzian ideas on desire as production or assemblage as their respective objections have made it out to be. In order to pave a way through this seeming impasse, we have clarified in this paper the aims and objectives of the "ethical turn" in the history of sexuality project. We have also demonstrated in the context of bisexuality, how Deleuze's and Foucault's work both articulate and pursue a praxis-ideal of autopoiesis that interweaves ethical becomings with notions of the care of the self.

To be clear, our aim is not to effect a fusion or synthesis of Deleuze's and Foucault's thinking. Rather, it is to lay the groundwork for a hospitable exchange between the Deleuzian and Foucauldian itineraries, an exchange that would be hospitable only to

the extent that it does not efface the specificities of and differences between their respective ideas, embracing instead the tensions generated in the encounter as a fecund ground for the rhizomatic outgrowth of the new. One way forward to develop the dialogical exchange is to stage a conversation between the Deleuzian reading of the Body without organs (BwO) and the Foucauldian reading of the anarchic body-as-event (Oksala 2004). This line of inquiry could take into account Deleuze's ideas about de/re-territorialisation and Foucault's early writings on transgression as the movement that marks the limit in its very crossing (Foucault 1977). And as we have indicated at various points throughout the paper, this dialogical exchange could be mapped onto the broader inquiries being developed across the humanities and the social sciences that investigate an ontology of becoming with such concepts as *affect* and *intensity* (Clough and Halley 2007; Coole and Frost 2010; Gregg and Seigworth 2010).

The Deleuzo-Foucauldian approach articulated here has benefitted from applying this to critical interrogation of empirical realities. By way of case studies from Watson's (2012) doctoral research, we have presented a more nuanced understanding of bisexuality that endeavours to foreground its value for, and visibility and viability in queer scholarship. As such, we offer a provocation to the way in which the humanities and social sciences construct knowledge of our "subjects". If fluidity, diversity and multiplicity are problematic empirical concepts, then these need to constitute the epistemic landscape from which questions are open to possibilities and becomings of the bisexual subject, rather constrained by conceptual definitions. Respondents' narratives are at once individual, unique and personal, while addressing and engaging with the socio-cultural and ethico-political fields that their lives encounter.

The problem of liberation, as voiced by participants, was not one of advancing bisexuality as a panacea for socio-sexual disharmony, but one of rupturing the seemingly intractable molarities and hierarchies of sex/gender and sexuality. For Guattari (1996, 204), this ought to be more accurately conceived as a liberation of desire. Foucault (1990a, 159), on the other hand, may conceive of it as the articulation of "a different economy of bodies and pleasures". The differences notwithstanding, the empirical, fleshy realities of (bi)sexuality presented in this paper have opened a door to welcome the fruitful conversations to come between the Deleuzian and Foucauldian itineraries: encounters of mutual enhancement and reciprocal learning, new ways of que(e)rying and (un)becoming.

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