

One thing haunts Foucault – thought [...] To think means to experiment and to problematize.

Gilles Deleuze on Michel Foucault, Foucault 116

The freeing of difference requires thought without contradiction, without dialectics, without negation [...] We must think problematically rather than question and answer dialectically.

Michel Foucault on Gilles Deleuze, “*Theatrum Philosophicum*” 359

There is much at stake in the fertile fields of philosophical exchange where the critical interventions of Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze come into contact. For all their differences,¹ what is singularly impressive in the work of both Foucault and Deleuze has much to do with what the two shared. But to get at this field of exchange we need to move beyond that range of limp categories through which they are usually lumped together with one another (“poststructuralism” or “postmodernism” or “Continental” being the three most familiar offerings). The overstuffed conceptual baskets that invited the initial reception of their work do little to help us pick up those aspects of the work of both that manifest the highest diacritic of their philosophical achievement.

I argue that a philosophical methodology anchored by the category of problematization is central for what is best between Foucault and Deleuze. In arguing this, I shall be claiming that problematization functions in the work of both as a methodological category such that methodology itself is a crucial site of philosophical gain for each.² It is unfortunate that the very

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**PROBLEMATIZATION
IN FOUCAULT’S
GENEALOGY AND
DELEUZE’S
SYMPTOMATOLOGY**
*or, how to study sexuality
without invoking
oppositions*

idea of “method” has fallen into such disrepute (in critical philosophy, in political theory, and elsewhere too) such that today its tones are almost inaudible. In revising the rhythms of philosophical work such that they could enact the work of critique without descending into the applicative production of judgments, Foucault and Deleuze invited a methodological turning of philosophy itself. For the gain of problematization as a mode of critique is the gain of a reconception of critical methodology, and precisely for that reason a gain that need not be viewed in terms of the work of grander visions of what philosophy must be doing (namely, the speculative vision involved in the high theory of metaphysics and ontology).

problematization of sexuality

Problematization as a methodological category need not make a claim about what really must be or what can really be known. Rather, it makes a claim about how philosophy can do the specific work of critical inquiry even where we are still waiting on other visions of philosophy to complete their task. This indicates a crucial gain of problematization as a mode of critique: namely a reconception of critical methodology as focusing on specificities and complexities (analyzable in terms of *agencements* and *dispositifs*, to take just two possible instances from the work of the thinkers under survey here) rather than totalities and systematicities.

What follows is an effort to explicate the gain of problematization as it takes place across, or better yet between, the work of Foucault and Deleuze. In the first section I situate problematization as a philosophical method by way of a series of four distinctions through which I locate a crucial aspect of the work of both thinkers: this yields a conception of a critical (rather than metaphysical), immanent (rather than transcendental), experimental (rather than dialectical), and problematizing (rather than problem-solving) mode of philosophy. After thus locating critical problematization, I situate its importance for each thinker by considering their writings on each other and their surveys of their own work. Following this, the paper is devoted to describing how critical problematization functioned for both thinkers in the context of writings on a shared obsession: sexuality. These sections specifically describe critical problematization as it functioned in Foucault's genealogy and Deleuze's symptomatology of sexuality. The specific focus through which I develop critical problematization in each indicates that the following analysis is not intended as a definitive interpretation of the work of Foucault and Deleuze (for clearly there are texts by both authors that range beyond problematization in the requisite sense, and in Deleuze's case at least even texts that range beyond the work of critique as I describe it here). The discussion, rather, is offered as a way of clarifying, and perhaps even of intensifying, a gain to be

picked up between Foucault and Deleuze in their development of the problem as a methodological category worthy of serious philosophical use.

method: critical, immanent, experimental, problematizing

Foucault and Deleuze both gave expression, in at least some of their work, to philosophy as a mode of experimental immanent critical problematization. Their work that is expressive of such a practice of philosophy is both that which most resonates across their thought and also that which is most fecund in their thought for contemporary philosophy.

There are four terms in my attribution. Foucault and Deleuze are Kantian in that for them philosophy is *critical* philosophy. There are different ways of taking up the project of a critical inquiry into conditions of possibility, and Foucault and Deleuze offer rigorously *immanent* models of the pursuit of critique. While others have pursued the work of immanent critique through the facilities of a negative dialectics of contradiction, Foucault and Deleuze, by contrast, rigorously avoided the negative work of contradiction in favor of pursuits facilitated by an *experimental* methodology. Within the space of experimentation one might experiment with an eye toward the stabilizations gained by answering a question, or one might with Foucault and Deleuze experiment with the different aim of destabilization as facilitated by posing a problem, or *problematizing*. I shall describe each of these four cuts in turn in order to situate the stakes for us today of taking up Foucault's and Deleuze's philosophical mode of experimental immanent critical problematization. My description here will be exceedingly brief as these framing ideas have been developed at greater length in a companion paper (Koopman, "Critical Problematization in Foucault and Deleuze").

First, for philosophy in the aftermath of the decisive Kantian intervention, critique will involve a labor that is beyond dogmatism and skepticism, beyond the illusions of both a metaphysical access to what really must be and the

denial of any such access. Critique, rather, shifts the work of philosophy away from what really is, to the real conditions of possibility of what is. Critique, that is, is all about philosophy as a kind of inquiry that asks what makes possible the various forms of human being in which we find ourselves enmeshed. Critique in this Kantian sense is crucial for what is common between Foucault and Deleuze despite the latter's own occasional forays into metaphysics.³

Second, where transcendental critique was Kant's own preferred path of critique, Deleuze and Foucault in at least some of their work opened new options for immanent critique. What is at stake in this difference? Consider that, according to Kant, transcendental critique involves inquiry into the conditions of possibility of any object of cognition whatsoever insofar as that object can be known a priori (see *Critique of Pure Reason* A11/B25). Transcendental critique, in a fashion appropriate to an investigation of cognition a priori, is thus concerned with possibilities for a cognition both universal in scope and necessary in modality. Such a project of critique could not avoid being called back to the metaphysics that it had promised to avoid. Thus Kant's philosophy, against its own intentions, itself became dogmatic in that its transcendental momentum pushed it back into that domain from which it could issue judgments rather than perform critiques. At least this is how Deleuze saw the matter: "Kant did not invent a true critique of judgment; on the contrary, what the book of this title established was a fantastic subjective tribunal" (Deleuze, "To Have Done" 126). Foucault saw it this way too in specifying the terms of his own critical style:

Criticism is no longer going to be practiced in the search for formal structures with universal value but, rather, as a historical investigation into the events that have led us to constitute ourselves and to recognize ourselves as subjects of what we are doing, thinking, saying. In that sense, this criticism is not transcendental, and its goal is not that of making a metaphysics possible: it is genealogical in its design and archaeological in its method. (Foucault, "What is Enlightenment?" 315)

Foucault and Deleuze sought to transform critique from its initial Kantian moment of transcendental critique into properly immanent critique. Again, it must be acknowledged that Deleuze also sought to set aside space for transcendental thought, for instance with his "transcendental empiricism" (*Difference and Repetition* 144–47). But my point is that what is distinctive in Deleuze's and Foucault's contributions to philosophical critique is additive rather than negative – they created novel modalities of critique that open up new potentialities for philosophy without feeling the need to negate that from which their work differs. Immanent critique differs from transcendental critique in that it would be historically and culturally specific, explicating not necessary and universal conditions for human being but rather contingent and localizable conditions for various ways of thinking, doing, saying, and seeing in the present. In this, it might be thought, Foucault and Deleuze were merely following up on Hegel's early appropriation-cum-transformation of Kantian critique. This thought would not be entirely wrong, but it is also only a half-truth.

Third, the dialectical model of immanent critique developed by Hegel is an unpursued option for Foucault and Deleuze, for whom immanent critique was rather experimental. The Hegelian dialectics of immanent critique amounted to one of the basic philosophical options available to Foucault and Deleuze in the context of their academic apprenticeship in philosophy in mid-twentieth-century France. This is the context for Foucault's remark in a 1980 interview of having sought

to free myself from the dominant influences in my university training in the early fifties – Hegel and phenomenology [...] The work of Jean Wahl and the teaching of Jean Hyppolite. It was a Hegelianism permeated with phenomenology and existentialism, centered on the theme of the unhappy consciousness. ("Interview with Michel Foucault" 246)⁴

Each sought to elaborate a basic divide between two modes of immanent critique: dialectical and experimental.⁵ In the first mode, the work of

problematization of sexuality

critical philosophy is the pursuit of opposition and contradiction from within, and takes as its basic focus the labor of negativity or negation. In the second mode, philosophy is a pursuit in the modality of a critical experimentation from within, and takes as its basic focus the conditions of indeterminacy that enable experimentation. The experimental critic does not find themselves beholden to the negative just insofar as they countenance indeterminacy. The indeterminate is that which is doubtful, unknown, or vague. The indeterminate is always tentative and hesitant, and so is always a bit futural. The indeterminate is suffused in a halo or a fringe that indicates a lack of distinct delimitation. What Deleuze and Guattari wrote of the plane of immanence well describes the indeterminate in its being “not only interleaved but holed, letting through the fogs that surround it” (*What is Philosophy?* 51). The foggy indeterminate is intolerable to dialectical critique, which can only proceed from one determination to another by a progression of negation. That dialectical critique refuses indeterminacy was paradigmatically expressed in Hegel’s pronouncement in *The Philosophy of Right* that, “initial indeterminacy is itself a determinacy” (§34, 40).⁶ If everything is determinate, then the dialectical work of negation is the only possible mechanism of transformation. With this the Hegelian dialectic cannot but be complete. Yet there is an alternative to philosophical absolutization. Foucault and Deleuze offer one in countenancing the indeterminate. Their claim was not that everything is indeterminate – but only that we can make viable a critical method that seeks to grasp the indeterminate. This last point involves a crucial metatheoretical observation: critical experimentation does not seek to negate the critical dialectics of contradiction but rather is merely content in its difference from it. As Deleuze wrote in one of his first essays, dedicated to the work of Jean Hyppolite, “one might ask whether an ontology of difference could not be created that would not go all the way to contradiction, since contradiction would be less and not more than difference” (“Jean Hyppolite” 18). The point is not, of course, that there are no contradictions but

only that the relation of contradiction cannot explain everything when it comes to transformations of thought and practice.

Fourth and finally, the methodology of critical and immanent experimentation makes use of a crucial idea of an indeterminate problematization as a set of conditions of possibility for the elaboration of differing determinations, such that there can be a multiplicity of relations between determinations, all of these relations assuming their form against the broader backdrop of the motivating indeterminacy, that is the problematization, that is productive of them.⁷ As such, problems do not already contain within themselves conditions from which we can deduce the responses that would constitute a determination. Rather, these responses must be tentatively elaborated on the basis of the problematic conditions constraining them. Where the dialectics of contradiction relies on a logic of negative deduction, the work of critical experimentation involves a logic of tentative abduction, that is, a logic of hypothesization (or sophisticated guesswork) which works against the background of a diagnosed problematization.⁸ Speaking to such a contrast, Deleuze would suggest that “the negative is [...] a shadow of problems” (*Difference and Repetition* 202). This fourth and final difference is, again, crucially reliant on the metatheoretical observation that experimentation does not itself contradict the work of contradiction but rather simply works its way out from under the shadow of the dark idea that contradiction can account for all the logical relations and practical transformations we would want accounts of. The important point, for Foucault and Deleuze, is not to show what we must let go of (or, worse yet, actively work to negate) on pain of contradiction. Rather, the important point is to illuminate some of the deepest indeterminacies that we cannot but feel the problematicity of. This is the role of philosophy for Deleuze and Foucault – to dazzle us by the glare cast by shining bright light on the problems at the heart of who we are. The work of problematization in each is the work of expressing and intensifying indeterminacy. In neither thinker was problematization

opposed to the companion work of reconstructing indeterminacies.⁹ Yet both focused on, and appeared drawn toward, that which is indeterminate and might be made more so by the work of philosophy.

foucault and deleuze on problematization in deleuze and foucault

Just how crucial was this notion of problematization for Foucault and Deleuze? Both certainly found it crucial for understanding what one another were doing. In his 1970 review of Deleuze's *Difference and Repetition* and *The Logic of Sense* Foucault wrote:

The freeing of difference requires thought without contradiction, without dialectics, without negation; thought that accepts divergence; affirmative thought whose instrument is disjunction; thought of the multiple [...] We must think problematically rather than question and answer dialectically [...] And now, it is necessary to free ourselves from Hegel – from the opposition of predicates, from contradiction and negation, from all of dialectics. (“Theatrum Philosophicum” 358)

Deleuze repaid the positive half of the compliment years later when he wrote that for Foucault, “To think means to experiment and to problematize” (*Foucault* 116). And more proximately, Deleuze voiced the negative half of the compliment (the skepticism about contradiction) in a since-published letter to Foucault: “Indeed it seems to me that another of Michel's great innovations in the theory of power is that a society does not contradict itself, or hardly does so. Yet his answer is: it strategizes itself, it makes up strategies” (“Desire and Pleasure” 127).

It might be objected that Foucault and Deleuze should not be taken as authorities on one another. If so, then perhaps we might take them as authorities on themselves, at least concerning the importance of the notion of problematization for their work. Consider in this vein two overarching claims, striking for their sweep, in which Foucault and Deleuze both situate the

koopman

very work of philosophy itself in terms of problematization. In Deleuze's case, the overarching claim is offered in his co-authored *What is Philosophy?* in which he and Guattari famously identify philosophy as “the discipline that involves creating concepts.” Less famous, though no less important, is their further claim that “All concepts are connected to problems without which they would have no meaning” (5, 16). In Foucault's case, the sweeping remark can be found in a late 1984 interview:

The notion common to all the work that I have done since *History of Madness* is that of problematization, though it must be said that I never isolated this notion sufficiently. But one always finds what is essential after the event; the most general things are those that appear last. It is the ransom and reward for all work in which theoretical questions are elaborated on the basis of a particular empirical field. (“The Concern for Truth” 257; see also *Fearless Speech* 171)

Both of these are decidedly strong claims.

Yet it is also true that they are not strong in exactly the same way. For instance, there is the matter of terminological difference. Deleuze's pronouncement about philosophy concerns “problems” while Foucault's survey of his own work concerns “problematizations.” Are these two terms really as resonant as I am suggesting? A case that Deleuze's problems and Foucault's problematizations refer to the same idea can be made in at least two ways. First, in light of each philosopher's mutual appreciation of the notion in the work of the other, as quoted just above. Second, in light of the way these two notions function for both Deleuze and Foucault. Problem(atization)s name for each that which is at once indeterminate and generative, both unstable and yet productive. Problem(atization)s can be both of these things at once insofar as they are, for Deleuze and Foucault, heterogeneous singularities. In exhibiting such a complicating (or heterogeneous) consistency (or singularity), problematizations are always themselves mobile, and thus are always sites of mobilization

problematization of sexuality

of whatever they come into contact with. This combination of heterogeneity and consistency is a signature theme in the work of each that would find multiple expressions in their conceptual repertoires, most famously perhaps in Foucault's idea of a *dispositif* (sometimes translated as "apparatus") and Deleuze's idea of an *agencement* (frequently translated as "assemblage").¹⁰ This particular combination is also expressed by the work performed by problem(atization)s for each thinker.

Although Foucault and Deleuze both wrote much about problematization, problematics, and problems, there has been insufficient exploration of the relations between these particular notions in the work of each with respect to both the development and content of these ideas.¹¹ I have been describing some of the resonances in this relation, thereby invoking a resonance, and even a deep sympathy, between Foucault and Deleuze concerning the work of philosophy as critical problematization (my shorthand hereafter for critical immanent experimental problematization). Noting these resonances goes a long way toward capturing the specific gains shared between Foucault and Deleuze. In arguing this, however, I do intend to reach for more. I do not claim that these four commitments are, as it were, structures driving everything Foucault and Deleuze ever wrote. Rather, my view is that they are methodological tendencies that are opened up by some of their works. Specifically, my focus is on critical problematization in Foucault's genealogical writings of the mid-1970s and Deleuze's symptomatological writings of the late 1960s. Critical problematization in these writings is instructive, not necessarily as something like an interpretive key that would enable us to hermeneutically unravel the words of these two philosophers, but rather as a critical option available to us in the present.

The question that is therefore of interest is one that concerns the mechanics in virtue of which the work of critical problematization functions: how do Foucault and Deleuze mobilize these four commitments in their work?

In pursuing this question I shall orient it by a point I offered at the outset, namely that I

situate both Foucault and Deleuze as proposing and enacting philosophical methodologies. By this I intend to signal that their methods of critical problematization do not need a metaphysics to back them up or to ground them.¹² What they need, rather, are contemporary philosophers today, you and me, picking up these methods and putting them to work in the context of inquiries into *emergent* norms and forms. The only way to make use of Foucault and Deleuze is to use them to go beyond where they themselves could have gone. They could not go where we can go today – because our lives, our problematizations, are different.

In putting Foucault and Deleuze to work as methodological precedents for contemporary philosophical inquiry, it pays not only to heed what they share but also to note where they diverge. Foucault and Deleuze offer us two provocative manners of problematization in their genealogical (in Foucault's case) and symptomatological (in Deleuze's case) writings. The focus of each is, respectively, the historical diagnosis of the present and the literary diagnosis of the clinical. Explicating these methodological variations will, I hope, help answer crucial questions concerning how problematization methodology plays out in the texts of Foucault and Deleuze. How does problematization do its work in genealogy and in symptomatology? What work does each form of critical problematization perform? How does problematization in both forms put thought into confrontation with problems? What forms might that confrontation take? What is the force of a problem?

This last question is especially important given that the implicit bid in the development of a philosophical effort centered on problematization is that problems carry a special force which is lacking in contradictions. This may seem implausible just insofar as the force of a contradiction is, seemingly, obvious. And yet once we learn to observe that what philosophers too often chalk up as contradictions manage to persist, we might wish to disabuse ourselves of philosophers' enchantment with contradictions. Contradictions may be forceful, but where are they to be found? Do labor and capital really contradict one another? And if this is a

contradiction how is it that the pair so stubbornly persists? Do desire and morality form a contradictory pair? And, if so, how can we explain the dogged perseverance of that pair? And, what of other familiar pairs in our culture? What of, for instance, sexuality and its repression?

In turning now to genealogy and symptomatology I shall attend to the force of problematization in the last of the domains just mentioned, namely that of sexuality. I will focus on Foucault's much-discussed 1976 book *The Will to Know* (i.e., *La Volonté de savoir*, translated into English under the limp title *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction*) and Deleuze's vastly under-discussed 1967 introduction to masochism, *Coldness and Cruelty*. In doing so my aim is to show how we might learn something new about some of our most ineluctable obsessions if we can find a way to study our sexuality without the comfort of invoking oppositions.

foucault's genealogical problematization

The critical, immanent, experimental, and problematizing mode of inquiry is characteristic of Foucault's famous books on power of the 1970s. It is ironic, then, that *Discipline and Punish* and *The Will to Know* were often received (by critics and celebrants alike) as dark works casting a dire judgment on modern punitive practices and sexual regimes. That familiar story, however, misses what is critical in Foucault's practice of critique. These books are problematizations, not denunciations. They could not denounce, for they are an effort to lay bare the indeterminacy of their objects of inquiry – and only that which is determinate can be judged.

Though I shall focus my discussion on Foucault's political genealogy of sexuality, a preliminary consideration of Foucault's chapter on "Contradictions" in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* will be instructive of the broader resonance of the work of problematization in other of his works. This is one of four chapters in which Foucault differentiates his archaeological methodology from what he calls "the history

of ideas" (138). What he particularly wants to distance his own approach from is a version of the history of ideas that interrogates contradictions appearing on the surface of historical discourse in order to reveal "the fundamental contradiction" that is the "organizing principle" and the "model for all the other oppositions" (151). Foucault's target here is a certain Hegelianism. In the place of the history of ideas that "attempts to melt contradictions in the semi-nocturnal unity of an overall figure," archaeology will be content, says Foucault, to simply describe "different spaces of dissension" so as to "maintain discourse in all its many irregularities" (152, 156). In his analytical attention to splits in sense (dissension) and what cannot be brought under a rule (irregularity) we can already recognize in Foucault's archaeology a methodological investment in indeterminacy. This investment would be further leveraged in Foucault's later genealogy.

Foucault's major gain with the genealogy that orients *The Will to Know* has everything to do with his long-term investment in the idea that something as important to us as our sexuality can be motivated by something as foggy as an indeterminate problematization. What Foucault's genealogy of this problematization helps us understand is how the ensemble that is sexuality is capacious enough to facilitate the simultaneous production of two conspired discourses that on another reading would appear straightforwardly opposed to one another. These two are the discourse of sexual repression (supposedly all on the side of power) and the discourse of sexual liberation (taken to be purely on the side of sex itself). Foucault's point in *The Will to Know* is not that there is no repression but rather only that repression is not as fundamental as we have taken it to be. What is more basic than repression, Foucault argues, is the complex composition of the *dispositif* of sexuality itself. Genealogy for Foucault is an effort in explicating the contingent composition of such complex assemblies. Thus at one point Foucault would define genealogy as an effort "that attempts to restore the conditions for the appearance of a singularity born out of multiple

problematization of sexuality

determining elements of which it is not the product, but rather the effect” (“What is Critique?” 64). It is on the basis of a complex mesh of multiple knowledges, powers, and subjectivities that the *dispositif* of sexuality, that is, our indeterminate and problematic obsession with sexuality, emerged. Thus *The Will to Know* should be read as a history of a range of practices that increasingly intersected across the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries so as to form a deep problematization that sits at the center of who we are today. The knotty problem at the center of it all is naughty sex, such that the book tells the history of how sex itself contingently came into being a surprisingly short time ago.

The story therein digests a remarkable diversity of practices. Foucault casts a wide survey over the nineteenth century in order to gain some grip on the sexuality with which it still haunts us. What this survey shows is the increasing stabilization of a series of practices that Foucault brings into focus under the heading of *scientia sexualis*. Chief among these are the bio-, medico-, and psycho-sciences insofar as these particularly inform our conceptions of the meaning, function, and (limited) possibilities of sexuality today. These sciences of sex formed through a complex mesh of instruments and practices involving a long back-history of confessional rituals whose technologies of truth were later operationalized in a variety of nineteenth-century domains including psychiatric examinations, familial surveillance, pedagogical inculcation, and vast efforts in public health, all of which invoked increasingly meticulous forms of power, knowledge, and subjectivation (all of this is cataloged in Parts III and IV, ch. 4 of *The Will to Know*).

This complex mesh of sexuality wrapped up within itself all manner of bizarre frictions. The steady persistence of these tensile forces within sex is largely inexplicable according to the categories of contradiction and opposition, but can be usefully accounted for by way of a more complicating analytical apparatus. Thus was Foucault’s category of the *dispositif* introduced as a way of getting at “a thoroughly heterogeneous ensemble” that despite its

heterogeneity exhibits a “system of relations” such that it can be a “formation which has as its major function at a given historical moment that of responding to an *urgent need*” (*Will to Know* 194–95). The connected multiplicity of the *dispositif* of sexuality, genealogically explicated, helps explicate how, for example, actual repression is able to persist side by side with a multiplication and arousal of sex itself. The complex *dispositif* of sexuality is a condition of indeterminate excitations and anxieties that are so fraught for us as to facilitate the elaboration of stable practices, techniques, ideas, and behaviors that are in serious tension with one another. If we fail to recognize the underlying indeterminate basis of a fraught sexuality on the basis of which they are elaborated, we may come to regard these tensions as outright oppositions. But, we must ask, where are the oppositions, truly? Is there truly an opposition between male and female genitalia? Between heterosexuality and homosexuality? Between “normal” sexuality and “abnormal” perversions? Between sadistic sexuality and masochistic sexuality, to anticipate the discussion of Deleuze below? Between, to focus on what is central for Foucault’s argument, sexual indulgence and the repression of sexuality? By instead recognizing the indeterminacy of sexuality we can come to understand how these and other tensions sustain one another and persist within the problematization (or what Foucault called the “urgent need”) funding them.

By contrast, psychoanalytic explanations of sexuality are paradigmatic of the failure to employ a positive category of indeterminate problematizations. In part because of their rootedness in dialectical thinking, these discourses can only make available the presence of sex, its opposition by mechanisms of repression, and the subsequent need for a determinate negation of these opposed terms. What such a critique fails to explain is why these supposed oppositions stubbornly persist, why both sex itself and the repression of sex are together so resilient despite their supposed direct oppositionality with one another. If this is indeed a contradiction, then it is a very strange sort of contradiction.

Dispensing with contradiction, opposition, and negation, Foucault's claim was not that sex was a bad thing, that sex needs to be overthrown, or that it is, all by itself, a site of injustice or oppression or (obviously) repression. It is not that sexuality is bad, it is that it is dangerous, to borrow a formulation Foucault offered in another context ("On the Genealogy of Ethics" 256). That it is dangerous means that it is fraught – tangled and frayed, confusing and torn, all mixed up. Sexuality is a site of contestation and well too much condemnation and celebration. Foucault sought to pull back from negative and positive appraisals. Foucault's genealogies are not efforts in appraisal, or judgment, but efforts in critique. Foucault sought to lay out (some of) the historical conditions of possibility of how sexuality has made us into the fraught figures we so often find ourselves being – how sexuality has managed to make us into the kinds of persons who could spend entire lifetimes worrying over a perversion, a fetish, a minor transgression. Explicating these historical conditions of possibility is an achievement of critical thought. It is a work of philosophy in Kant's sense. On this approach, the philosopher does not tell us what to do but only how it has come to be that we find ourselves doing what we so incessantly and spiritedly do. Foucault's work is therefore an effort in critique, not an effort in judgment.¹³

Foucault's genealogical analyses made possible, among other things, a grip on how differential terms persist without negating or excluding one another but rather by supporting and reinforcing one another in their separateness insofar as they both reinvest the underlying indeterminate problematization that is the background for the elaboration of both. This theme is quintessential Foucault. In *History of Madness*, reason does not exclude or negate madness, but both are elaborated as purified of one another on the basis of a complex swarm of psychological, psychiatric, social, ethical, and political indeterminacies. In *Discipline and Punish*, discipline does not negate liberty but both are developed, augmented, and sustained in contexts of complex compositions of all manner of indeterminate and provocative

relations. Sex and its repression are not exclusive of one another but together dependent on an underlying *dispositif* of sexuality that sufficiently stabilizes both sex and repression as in competition with, yet supportive of, one another. Sexuality, in other words, is problematic. We cannot help but feel the welling rumbles of sexuality within ourselves as a problem. But this seeming innermost problem is not in actuality born of some urge deep within us. It emerged historically, on the basis of a long and patient elaboration of an array of cultural practices, sites, and fields in which sexuality came to be what it is for us: knotty, naughty, and so utterly irresistible.

deleuze's symptomatological problematization

Symptomatology is the central method in Deleuze's "critical and clinical" projects, most of which are gathered in his *Essays Critical and Clinical*, and the most sustained instance of which is found in his short text *Coldness and Cruelty*, which was published as an introduction to the French translation of *Venus in Furs* by the nineteenth-century Austrian writer Leopold von Sacher-Masoch. In Deleuze's work, symptomatology is developed as a diagnostic method that reveals the composition of complex syndromes out of a multiplicity of symptoms. Syndromes are thus compositions or arrangements (*agencements*) of concatenated symptoms. A symptomatological diagnosis focuses on the multiplicitous mesh of a syndrome, bringing into view the differentia of symptoms that make it up. Symptomatology in Deleuze thus functions similarly to genealogy in Foucault: both reveal the complexity of a compositional mesh that would otherwise typically be reduced to a kind of homogenized unity.

Before detailing Deleuze's symptomatology of sexual perversion I shall address a preliminary objection that presents itself in the case of symptomatology, though it would clearly not have the same force with respect to an examination of genealogy in Foucault. With Deleuze it is fair to ask: is symptomatological problematization really more than a momentary flourish

problematization of sexuality

in a wide-ranging philosophical career? I think so. Under-appreciated in comparison to other aspects of Deleuze's work, symptomatology may be more central for an understanding of Deleuze than we have commonly thought. I agree with Daniel Smith, who has argued that symptomatology is a precursor of schizoanalysis, such that *Anti-Oedipus* itself can be read as a "critique of psycho-analysis that is primarily symptomatological" insofar as the claim of the book is that psychoanalysis "fundamentally misunderstands signs and symptoms" and presumably also their assembled relations ("A Life of Pure Immanence" xx). Symptomatology also makes a direct appearance in a variety of Deleuze's projects: it is a counterweight to a psychoanalytic literary criticism of Lewis Carroll in *The Logic of Sense* (237), it is presented in the form of "a clinic without psychoanalysis or interpretation, a criticism without linguistics or significance" in the *Dialogues* with Claire Parnet (120), and in the Nietzsche book it is even announced at the outset that philosophy itself is a "symptomatology, and a semeiology" (3). Even such a limited survey as this motivates us to confront the possibility of what might be lost in not paying enough attention to the place of symptomatology as a methodological option within Deleuze's philosophical repertoire.¹⁴

In *Essays Critical and Clinical* Deleuze writes, in the volume's lead essay, that "the writer as such is not a patient but rather a physician, the physician of himself and of the world." And what does this writer do? He dissects a syndrome out of a multiplicity insofar as "[t]he world is the set of symptoms whose illness merges with man" (3). To explicate this symptomatological sensibility, I focus here on *Coldness and Cruelty*, which was among Deleuze's first extended contributions to the symptomatological diagnostics of the critical-clinical project, and remains to my mind the leading exemplar of the project.¹⁵ If this is right, then Deleuze's symptomatology of Sacher-Masoch's masochism may have informed more than a small number of his subsequent works. Having said this, however, it is not my argument that symptomatology is the center of

Deleuze's vision, or that which gives his work an overall unity. There are clearly other branches of Deleuze's work that range beyond symptomatology, beyond problematization, and even beyond critique – for instance, Deleuze repeatedly foraged in the wildernesses of metaphysics. My argument, then, concerns only a distinctive tendency made manifest in some of Deleuze's texts, a tendency that I believe has been unjustly neglected by commentators and critics who would (without argument) privilege more traditional philosophical thrusts exhibited by other of Deleuze's texts.

The object of Deleuze's symptomatology in *Coldness and Cruelty* is the mesh of masochism, a clinical concept that Deleuze passes through a literary analysis in order to isolate its specificity or singularity. It is Deleuze's contention that this specificity is lost on psychoanalytic approaches that would follow Krafft-Ebing, Freud, and others in locating masochism as one part of a broader unity named sadomasochism in which it would function as the unified opposite of sadism: "It is too readily assumed that the symptoms only have to be transposed and the instincts reversed for Masoch to be turned into Sade, according to the principle of the unity of opposites" (*Coldness* 13). The failing of the psychoanalytic approach is that in the first instance it takes masochism as a perversion, that is, as a negation of normal sex, thus preparing its eventual unification with that other supposed perversion of sadism. In so doing, psychoanalysis deprives both sadism and masochism of their specificity as different expressions of an underlying sexuality. This leads, in turn, to massive overstatements of the importance of supposed sadomasochism in our modern psycho-sexual pathologies, as even just a cursory examination of Krafft-Ebing and Freud can show. In *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, Freud writes of sadism and masochism together as a singular abnormality that he considers "The most common and the most significant of all the perversions" (23). Here, Freud is knowingly following Krafft-Ebing's claim in *Psychopathia Sexualis* that "masochism and sadism appear as the fundamental forms of psycho-sexual perversion" (143), a status they can share insofar

as they “represent perfect counterparts” (141) of one another.

The alternative analytical procedure of grasping masochism in its specificity apart from sadism requires, in Deleuze’s essay, a form of immanent critique that is not attached at the beginning to dialectical contradiction. Deleuze writes: “In place of a dialectic which all too readily perceives the link between opposites, we should aim for a critical and clinical appraisal able to reveal the truly differential mechanisms as well as the artistic originalities” (*Coldness* 14). Deleuze develops this idea by way of a contrast between the dialectical mode of etiological deduction and the symptomatological work of abduction. It is worth noting that this contrast is not entirely foreign to Foucault’s work, but whereas Foucault examined the conditions for such a distinction as it operated in psychiatric discourses, Deleuze took up the distinction in his own practice of critique.¹⁶

The specific critical force of symptomatology in Deleuze’s work can be located as follows. Whereas an etiological analysis would work to deduce the symptoms from the syndrome of which they are a sign, Deleuze counter-poses a symptomatological analysis which would work to grasp the complex composition of a multiplicity of symptoms that in their relations form a syndrome.¹⁷ What needs to be marked here is the methodological orientation of symptomatology as a clinical conceptualization of a problematic assemblage. Symptomatology does not deduce a cause according to a “preconceived etiology” but rather assembles a “genuinely differential diagnosis” (58). Symptomatology transforms an over-determined sequence into a differential series which it thereby sets into flight. Symptomatology thus de-determines the over-determined, or renders indeterminate. Other names for this work of becoming-indeterminate in Deleuze include decoding, deterritorialization, and problematization.

For Deleuze, just as for Foucault, the gain of a critical methodology is to be measured by the complexity and specificity of the indeterminate meshes that it brings into view. It is the *literary* art of Sacher-Masoch that enables Deleuze to describe a creative composition of a complex

form of sexuality, just as for Foucault the archive of *history* enables a description of a contingent composition of sexual complexity. The scope with which these two texts operate is obviously quite different (the entire assembly of sexuality for Foucault and the regional apparatus of a single sexual “perversion” for Deleuze), and yet they share so much in the way they train the critical operation on their objects.

Despite its rather limited scope, the masochistic assemblage charted by Deleuze is truly stunning in its complexity. In a text that is rather condensed, Deleuze excavates and describes a complex of eleven characteristics of masochism including: coldness, idealization, contracts, aestheticism, fetishism, fantasy, imagination, suspense, and disavowal (*Coldness* 134). Each term is the result of an analysis that indicates differences from, but not oppositions to or reversals of, sadism. It is, however, the final two of these differences that matter most for Deleuze. He holds that “The fundamental distinction between sadism and masochism can be summarized in the contrasting processes of the negative and negation on the one hand, and of disavowal and suspense on the other” (35). The contrast here should be understood in light of a central distinction for Deleuze according to which, as he stated it in another commentary published the previous year, “the problematic replaces the negative” (“Gilbert Simondon” 88) and as stated again in the following year in his book on difference, “there is a non-being which is by no means the being of the negative, but rather the being of the problematic” (*Difference* 202). Rather than locating the problematic within the dark shadow of the negative, Deleuze locates disavowal and suspense in their own light as indeterminate problematizations.

In claiming suspension and disavowal as central to masochism, Deleuze is thus positioning indeterminate problematicity as part of the conceptual specification of masochism itself. Suspense and disavowal are categories of indeterminacy insofar as they are, as Deleuze reiterates multiple times in *Coldness and Cruelty* (35, 125, 126, 134), categories that do not find themselves under the sway of the negative. That

problematization of sexuality

which is suspended or disavowed, that which is placed in holding, is no longer determinate (if it ever was) but can only be undetermined, because there is in suspense and disavowal nothing that has yet been posited that might be negated. It is in this sense that Deleuze's symptomatology explores the problematization of which masochism is a part, and in doing so also reveals that part of masochism which involves categories that are themselves expressive of the category of the problematic. If the problematic is the category of doubt and indeterminacy, then disavowal and suspense are among some of its many forms. The bearing of indeterminacy within a masochistic sexuality is marked as crucial for Deleuze: "The masochistic process of disavowal is so extensive that it affects sexual pleasure itself; pleasure is postponed for as long as possible and is thus disavowed" (33). Deleuze finds in masochistic sexuality an indeterminacy at its highest pitch.

It is crucial to note how entirely beside the point is the category of opposition for Deleuze's analysis. In masochistic suspense nothing at all is determined or positioned, and so there is nothing at all to be negated, opposed, or contradicted. This differentiates masochism from sadism since "there is a progression in sadism from the negative to negation, that is, from the negative as a partial process of destruction endlessly reiterated, to negation as an absolute idea of reason" (126). In masochism, by contrast, everything remains in floating limbo. For the masochist, nothing definitively is, because everything is suspended into its futurity. This is why it is crucial that, for Deleuze, "[w]aiting and suspense are essential characteristics of the masochistic experience" (70). A suspended sexuality is an embrace of futurity. It is pleasure deferred, contracted, anticipated but never arrived at. It is a kind of pure becoming.

This particular aspect of Deleuze's analysis suggests a way in which perhaps Masoch was more central for his development of an experimental modality of problematization than is typically admitted. If that is correct, then Deleuze's symptomatological method in his clinical and critical essays should be recognized as a critical contribution in its own right without

needing to be underwritten by the Deleuzian metaphysics elaborated in some of his other works. Deleuze's essay on Masoch was published one year before the metaphysical forays undertaken in *Difference and Repetition*; his first essay on Masoch ("From Sacher-Masoch to Masochism") was published one year before his landmark *Nietzsche and Philosophy*. Perhaps what *Coldness and Cruelty* allows us to venture is the possibility that some of the very arguments of *Difference and Repetition* concerning problematicity can themselves be mounted without the cumbersome apparatus of transcendental-cum-metaphysics on which that book sometimes relies. For all of the fireworks of *Difference and Repetition*, it is a book that suffers from a problematic silence about how we might employ a logic of non-negative differentiation to engage the problems that press upon us. If *Coldness and Cruelty* offers as a "fundamental distinction" (35) that between negativity and suspense, then the value of that contrast for an analytics of sexuality can perhaps help us better conceive how to operationalize for critical purposes that crucial "distortion" identified in the conclusion of *Difference and Repetition* whereby Deleuze accuses Hegelianism of "substituting the labor of the negative for the play of difference and the differential" (268). *Coldness and Cruelty* thus perhaps offers a valuable model for thinking about how to actually do the work of philosophical problematization that is defended by, but never performed in the concrete within, *Difference and Repetition*.

conclusion: methodological problematization

What is the effect of symptomatology and genealogy construed as philosophical methods? At least an opening to an alternative to still-prevailing theoretical strategies. Consider critical analyses of sexuality. According to the strictures of a dialectics of contradiction, we must seek to refigure sex as the paired opposite to repression, and masochism as the paired opposite to sadism. This is the methodological commitment within which the influential psychoanalytic

interpretation works. Taken in these terms, it is undeniable that psychoanalysis is a target for both Deleuze in *Coldness and Cruelty* and Foucault in *The Will to Know*. Indeed, psychoanalysis is probably one of the largest targets of both throughout many of their works. But this is not the place to recount Foucault's and Deleuze's assaults on psychoanalysis. My claim is only that the differences are illuminating with respect to what we can do with sex in these competing modes of critique. If I am right that there are such differences, then we ought to be more suspicious than many of us are about contemporary attempts to remarry Foucault and Deleuze to Lacan and Freud. For doing so too often and too easily sets the marriage up by evacuating genealogy and symptomatology of their specific gains as critical methodologies equipped to countenance indeterminacy where the dialectical lineage only ever recognizes negation, opposition, the death drive, and above all repression.

Foucault and Deleuze both situate their accounts of sex within the operations of a perspective of experimental problematization such that they need no longer confine the study of sexuality to all of those utterly banal oppositions we know so well. There are, perhaps, oppositions lurking in some of what we have been pleased to call sex, but these need not be taken as the fundamental thing about sex. They can be admitted to be far less important than we have wanted to assume. For all of the real action is elsewhere. The tension and the movement, the frustration and the excitement, of sex and its many forms has much less to do with oppositions and much more to do with specificities that the category of opposition cannot comprehend. It is in this way that experimental and problematizing thought enabled Foucault and Deleuze to see much more than psychoanalysis makes available when it tried to look at sexuality. We oversimplify if we think through oppositions, working only with sex and what opposes it, or masochism and its opposite. We thereby lose the specificity of multiplicitous practices of sexuality. We ought to begin instead with sexuality, and any of its instances, as problematizations or zones of indeterminacy.

Philosophers are all too often obsessed with the operation of negation in a world in which contradictions are only the slightest shade of a broader and richer array of practicalities, technicalities, medialities, and subjectivities. Philosophers are like all idealists have always been: mostly blind. One way to see again would be to start looking. And yet it is not as if that is as easy as just opening our eyes. Seeing specificities in place of our blinding abstractions requires immense curiosity and dedicated severity. One of the most important gains of Foucault and Deleuze for us today concerns how they were able to peer into the searing specificities of their objects of inquiry. That gain of specificity has everything to do with the methodological orientations and analytical categories by which philosophy puts itself into motion in fertile fields of inquiry.



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notes

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I See instructive discussions by Hallward ("Limits of Individuation") and Grace ("Faux Amis") on divergences; more broadly for comparative work on Foucault and Deleuze exploring both differences and resonances two recent collections by Morar, Nail, and Smith (*Between Deleuze and Foucault* and *Foucault and Deleuze*), as well as work by Kelly ("Discipline is Control").

problematization of sexuality

2 To forestall the most obvious objection to my description of genealogy and symptomatology as methods, I note at the outset that “methodology” is construed here as a term of *modesty* (in contrast to metaphysics), rather than as a term of *bravado* (connoting a failsafe procedure or a guaranteed recipe). Despite misgivings on the part of both Foucault and Deleuze about this term, I take courage from their occasional positive uses. Deleuze, in my focal text of *Coldness and Cruelty*, introduces the question of the masochistic method of disavowal by asking, immediately after exposing the negativity of sadistic method, “whether there is not yet another ‘method’ besides the speculative sadistic one” (31). Perhaps more poignant for my argument here is Deleuze’s description of Bergson’s “essentially *problematizing* method” (Bergsonism 35). In my focal text for Foucault, *The Will to Know* (i.e., *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1*), there is, of course, an entire chapter devoted to “method” (92–102).

3 I thus wish to forestall an initial objection by noting that my argument here can tolerate the fact that Deleuze himself frequently stumbled onto the garden paths of metaphysics. For that fact does nothing to prevent me from prioritizing texts here in which he does not do so. My approach thus raises the question of what Deleuze’s thought would look like were we to discard the old robes of metaphysics in which he sometimes sought to dress it. Scholars might object that such an approach is untenable insofar as the metaphysics of, say, *Difference and Repetition* seems to somehow undergird the analyses undertaken in other texts such as that which I focus on here, namely *Coldness and Cruelty*. Against such an objection I would maintain that Deleuze’s symptomatological writings not only do not themselves engage in metaphysics but also stand in no need of a metaphysics. When comparing two texts like this by the same author, one cannot simply assume that the more metaphysical-sounding texts have default priority. Instead of insisting that a metaphysics underwrites *Coldness and Cruelty*, why could we not say instead that this text develops an ethics and aesthetics that is also expressible by the metaphysical arguments of *Difference and Repetition*? Such a reading, which I only suggest as an untested possibility, might begin, for instance, with Deleuze’s claim that “beneath the sound and the fury of sadism and masochism the terrible force of repetition is at work” (*Coldness and Cruelty* 120).

4 See similar themes in Deleuze (“Jean Hyppolite’s *Logic and Existence*”). The most influential works that both felt the need to push past were Kojève (*Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*) and Hyppolite (*Genesis and Structure*). See Roth (*Knowing and History*) for a useful intellectual history of mid-century French Hegelianism, a book whose final chapter traces that moment’s meanings for both Foucault and Deleuze.

5 It must be noted that in some texts (including *Coldness and Cruelty* analyzed below) Deleuze attempted to retain the term “dialectics” by way of recuperating it into what we might call “differential dialectics.” Terminology notwithstanding, what is clear is that Deleuze’s work requires a difference between dialectical negation and the non-negative work of what I am calling experimentation. Here, I take myself to be following Dan Smith’s suggestion that *Difference and Repetition* “attempts to develop a new concept of dialectics, which is more or less synonymous with the concept of ‘problemativity’” (“Hegel” 69; cf. “Dialectics” 107).

6 See also Hegel’s *Phenomenology* on this theme (§92, 59).

7 Though resonant in this way, it is also clear that Deleuze’s category of the problematic is by far the more general of the two insofar as Foucault’s notion of problematization is always meant to describe the complex singularities in virtue of which regional *dispositifs* are developed. Yet for the fact that Deleuze sought to save space for a more metaphysically robust notion of problems there is no reason to think that he did not also clear space for problematics that are regional (or empirical) in the same way as those that primarily interested Foucault. Paul Patton highlights the status of problems as potentially regional in stating that Deleuze “defended a transcendental *empiricism* according to which what problems exist is an open question to be answered by the exploration of the field of thought in a given society at a given time” (151).

8 I invoke the term “abduction” from Charles Peirce, for whom “Abduction consists in studying facts and devising a theory to explain them” (205).

9 There is, in other words, an element of pragmatism in both Deleuze and Foucault, as commentators on each have noted; see Rajchman (*Deleuze Connections*) in Deleuze’s case and Rabinow (“Dewey and Foucault”) in Foucault’s.

10 On *dispositif*, see Foucault (“The Confession of the Flesh” 194); on *agencement*, see Deleuze and Guattari (*A Thousand Plateaus* 7).

11 See Colwell (“Deleuze and Foucault”) and Gilson (“Ethics and the Ontology of Freedom”) for two exceptions; for a third, see my own discussion of Deleuze’s influence on Foucault’s notion of problematization (Koopman, *Genealogy as Critique* 133–40).

12 No method is appropriate for all possible inquiries. To think otherwise is to stumble onto the garden path of turning a methodological contribution into a metaphysical-ism; for instance, some ugly thing like difference-ism or perhaps even problematization-ism. We should rather accept that there are many ways (in the humbled sense of “way” that is already connoted in “method” and the Greek *methodos*) of problematizing.

13 This is a theme I develop further in forthcoming work (Koopman, “Critique without Judgment”).

14 For other iterations of clinical symptomatology across a wide swath of Deleuze’s work, see Smith’s survey (“A Life of Pure Immanence” xi, 175 n. 6).

15 My focus on *Coldness and Cruelty* resonates with Smith’s claim in “A Life of Pure Immanence” that this work “provides one of the clearest examples of what might be termed Deleuze’s ‘symptomato-logical’ approach” (xviii) as well as with his observation that this book offers the first linkage of “the ‘critical’ and the ‘clinical’ in Deleuze’s thought” (xi).

16 This pairing of etiology and symptomatology compares to Foucault’s use of the same two terms in his 1973–74 Collège de France lectures, titled *Psychiatric Power*. There, Foucault spoke of “the organization of the symptomatological scenario” (309) and the psychiatric search “to discover the etiology” (318). That these terms are also contrastive for Foucault is motivated earlier in the text (133–37). Surveying other work, we find a discussion of symptomatology and etiology in the next year’s 1974–75 *Abnormal* lecture series, but without explicit pairing (241). Earlier, symptomatology as a form of medical analysis is present in many places in Foucault’s 1963 *The Birth of the Clinic*, although medical etiology does not appear there. I shall have to leave it for another occasion to explore the comparison of Foucault’s early 1970s discussion of this contrast to Deleuze’s contrast of the same in the late 1960s.

17 Deleuze explicitly distinguishes etiology from symptomatology in *Coldness* (58). There he also writes, in a passage that reads as genealogical *avant la lettre*:

We should avoid falling into “evolutionism” by aligning in a single chain results which are approximately continuous but which imply irreducible and heterogeneous formations. An eye, for example, could be produced in several independent ways, as the outcome of different sequences, the analogous product of completely different mechanisms. I suggest that this is also true of sadism and masochism and of the pleasure–pain complex as their allegedly common organ. The concurrence of sadism and masochism is fundamentally one of analogy only; their processes and their formations are entirely different. (46)

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problematization of sexuality

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