

## ARTICLE

### **Foucault and Sedgwick: The Repressive Hypothesis Revisited**

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**ABSTRACT:** This essay examines the Foucauldian foundations of queer theory in the work of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick. The essay argues that Sedgwick's increasing disappointment with Foucault's critique of the repressive hypothesis is in part produced by the slippery rhetoric of *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1: An Introduction*. Specifically, Foucault's use of free indirect discourse in that volume destabilizes both the theory of repression and the critique Foucault mounts against it, thereby rendering ambiguous any political promise his critique might seem to offer. Returning to the fraught relation between Foucault and Sedgwick, the essay concludes by reading Foucault and Sedgwick together through the lens of a reparative ethics in which the felt experience of knowing the world is also an experiment in new ways of living.

**Keywords:** Sedgwick, repressive hypothesis, free indirect discourse, reparative reading, queer ethics.

In my personal life, from the moment of my sexual awakening, I felt excluded, not so much rejected, but belonging to society's shadow. It's especially striking as a problem when you discover it for yourself.<sup>1</sup>

In this rare, unpublished remark from 1975, Foucault describes his own sexual experience of exclusion, marginalization, and queer self-discovery growing up in France in the 1940s and 50s. Given Foucault's well-known doubts about a repressive hypothesis that conceives of modern sexuality as an inner secret to be hidden or revealed, this archival coming-out story is surprising. Indeed, it appears to contradict what Judith Butler and many other modern theorists of sexuality inspired by Foucault have consistently asserted, that Foucault "always resisted the confessional moment."<sup>2</sup> But here in an interview conducted precisely

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<sup>1</sup> Michel Foucault, "Entretien avec Roger-Pol Droit," 9 cassettes, *Institut Mémoires de l'Édition Contemporaine (IMEC)*, (June 1975), 29, translation mine. The French original reads: "Je me suis senti, dès l'éveil de ma sexualité, exclu non pas tellement rejeté que appartenant à la part d'ombre de la société, et que finalement c'est tout de même un problème qui est impressionnant quand on le découvre pour soi-même."

<sup>2</sup> Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 110. In her later book, *Giving an Account of Oneself* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), Butler argues that Foucault modified his view of confession in his later work on the ancient world. But as Dave Tell explains ("Rhetoric and Power: An Inquiry into Foucault's Critique of Confession," *Philosophy and Rhe-*

at the time Foucault was writing what would become his influential critique of the Freudian theory of repression, his revelation of a “moment” of “sexual awakening” appears to repeat the dualistic logic of secrecy and exposure he challenged in *History of Sexuality, Volume One*.<sup>3</sup>

Or does it? To be sure, Foucault’s declaration of his “sexual awakening” looks, at first glance, like the paradigmatic closet structure—from darkness to light, from ignorance to knowledge—that Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick famously identified in *Epistemology of the Closet* (1990) as “inexhaustibly productive of modern Western culture and history at large.”<sup>4</sup> But a closer look at Foucault’s remark suggests there is another, nondualistic logic at work here. Plotted against the modern epistemology of the closet analyzed by Sedgwick, where “knowledge means in the first place sexual knowledge” and “ignorance, sexual ignorance,”<sup>5</sup> Foucault’s sexual self-exposure doesn’t quite match the standard truth-telling structure by which queers are typically enjoined to come out. Indeed, if Foucault stages a certain kind of coming out here, its scenic backdrop is not an Enlightenment landscape where darkness gives way to light. Rather, Foucault’s “sexual awakening” leaves him in a more ambiguous, penumbral space, as one who belongs to “society’s shadow.”

I will resist the temptation to decipher this statement in a biographical mode, where its shadowy imagery might be illuminated by referring to France in the mid-twentieth century as a homophobic place and time not conducive to queer coming out, a place and time that continued to consign abnormal to “society’s shadow.” Such a socio-historical reading risks being complicit with psychiatric power by turning Foucault into a modern deviant “whose slow formation is shown in a biographical investigation.”<sup>6</sup> Such a reading also risks glossing over important questions about the relation between philosophy and rhetoric, questions that are relevant to Foucault’s position as a founding thinker of queer theory.

Rather than adopting the lens of psychobiography, I want to read Foucault’s shadow figure as a way to name his problematization<sup>7</sup> of the dark/light dualism that structures Western thinking. That problematization not only nuances what at first appears to be a seemingly straightforward, if rare, coming out confession by Foucault. It also complicates our

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*toric* vol. 43, no. 2 (2010)), Foucault returns to confession in the Greeks and Romans in order to distinguish the ancient techniques of the self from Christian confession. Tell argues that those Greek techniques are “nonrhetorical.” (96) Although this may be correct in a strictly historical sense—that is, Greek techniques do not depend on modern rhetorical modes—Tell’s privileging of the nonrhetorical here corresponds with his attempt to classify Foucault as a “positivist” whose only desire is to gain immediate, empirical (nonrhetorical) access to reality’s “surfaces.” This understanding of rhetoric distorts Foucault’s own description of his work as problematization: that is, “the ensemble of *discursive and non-discursive* practices that make something into the play of true and false and constitute it as an object of thought.” (Michel Foucault, “Le Souci de vérité” [1984], in *Dits et écrits 2* (Paris: Quarto Gallimard, 2001), 1487) (translation and emphasis mine). The constitutive forces of that discursive and non-discursive ensemble must be, by definition, both rhetorical and nonrhetorical.

<sup>3</sup> Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1: An Introduction*, translated by Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage, 1990), 10. Hereafter cited as *HS1*.

<sup>4</sup> Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 68.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 73.

<sup>6</sup> Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: Birth of the Prison*, translated by Alan Sheridan (New York: Random House, 1977), 252.

<sup>7</sup> See footnote 2 for an explanation of this term.

sometimes too easy, dualistic assumption that Foucault simply says no to the repressive hypothesis.<sup>8</sup> Following Sedgwick in her later work, I engage Foucault's shadow play as a way "to explore promising tools and techniques for nondualistic thought and pedagogy"<sup>9</sup>: the gray, in-between space of agency's middle ranges. I use Foucault to trace the *how* of that nondualism, still recognizing, with Sedgwick, the dark/light paradox of negation: that "even to invoke *nondualism*... is to tumble right into the dualistic trap."<sup>10</sup> In Foucault, the *how* of nondualism involves a contestation of the subject-object, transcendental-empirical doublet that defines the modern analytic of finitude.<sup>11</sup> Foucault's autobiographical remark brings our attention to "society's shadow" not as an object to be known by a subject who stands outside it but as a cognitive, affective, and ethical experience that blurs the boundaries of subject and object.

"I *felt* excluded," Foucault says, "not so much rejected, but belonging to society's shadow."<sup>12</sup> Importantly, Foucault's challenge to Western dualism is not achieved through a propositional logic. Rather, Foucault's readers receive that challenge as a felt experience of knowing. And as I will demonstrate later in this essay, this felt experience is a disorienting one that Foucault achieves through the use of free indirect discourse. How does it feel to know Foucault's contestation of Western thinking? A technical exposition of his use of the novelistic technique of free indirect discourse offers a way to explore the *how* of that feeling and knowing.

Thinking with Sedgwick, I want to give this rhetorical approach to Foucault another name, in a non-pejorative sense: "touchy-feely."<sup>13</sup> In *Touching Feeling*, Sedgwick names a shift in her own work: away from paranoid exposure toward a reparative position that "inaugurates ethical possibility," away from questions of knowing toward "new questions about phenomenology and affect."<sup>14</sup> In aligning Foucault with a touchy-feely Sedgwick, I do not want to erase the differences between them. The journey I trace here toward a queer rapprochement that outlives them both is also a dialogue about a difficult love. As a drama about queer theory's foundations in Sedgwick and, specifically, her focus on Foucault's critique of the repressive hypothesis, that dialogue includes all the elements of the classic love plot: the initial, electrifying *coup de foudre* (Sedgwick falls in love with Foucault's cri-

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<sup>8</sup> Such readings of Foucault are pervasive. In the field of queer theory, Robert J. Corber and Stephen Valocchi's "Introduction" to *Queer Studies: An Interdisciplinary Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003) is typical, where Foucault's notion of productive power is presented as "*contrary to what Foucault called 'the repressive hypothesis,'*" 10 (emphasis added). My point is not that such readings are incorrect, but that the no-yes logic of replacement they assume elides some of the rhetorical nuances of Foucault's thinking.

<sup>9</sup> Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 1. Hereafter cited as *TF*.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>11</sup> For Foucault's explication of this argument see especially Chapter Nine, "Man and his Doubles," in *The Order of Things* (New York: Vintage, 1994), 303-343.

<sup>12</sup> Foucault, "Entretien," 29, emphasis added.

<sup>13</sup> Sedgwick, *TF*, 17.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 137, 17. In Chapter Four of *Touching Feeling*, "Paranoid Readings, Reparative Readings," Sedgwick draws on Melanie Klein's concept of the depressive position (as opposed to the paranoid position) to explore the possibility of reparative critical practices that would offer an alternative to the "infinitely doable and teachable protocols of unveiling [that] have become the common currency" (143) of contemporary critical work.

tique of the repressive hypothesis), the disappointment that ensues as the *coup de foudre* fizzles (Sedgwick is increasingly disappointed by the critique's unrealized promise), and love's dénouement in a final renunciation (Sedgwick finally gives up on Foucault and repression to focus on other questions). Over the course of that drama, and even after the curtain falls, Foucault and Sedgwick talk back to each other. We keep hearing their voices because the issues that concern them resist resolution. Nowhere is this more true than in the felt aspects of their work. Sedgwick's "touchy-feely" thought and pedagogy repudiates epistemology in favor of "a particular intimacy... between textures and emotions."<sup>15</sup> Foucault, by contrast, devoted his life to an affectively charged archival thinking about the relation between subjectivity and truth; his focus on truth-telling suggests a refusal to simply dismiss epistemological questions. So too contra Sedgwick's assertion in her later work that "touching and feeling are irreducibly phenomenological,"<sup>16</sup> Foucault would insist that her phenomenological claim (in support of her move away from epistemology) both assumes and denies her own engagement in the epistemic "games of truth" that make such claim-making possible at all. To resolve these differences between Foucault and Sedgwick by subsuming the touchy-feely into a greater knowing would flatten the nuance that differentiates the two thinkers.

Rather than sublating Foucault and Sedgwick into a happy resolution, I want to read their fraught relation as a story that outlives them, in a dedialectizing rhetorical mode that will link Foucault's use of free indirect discourse to a desubjectivating, reparative ethics made possible by Sedgwick. In Part One, "Sedgwick's Disappointment," I track one strand of that story through Sedgwick's engagement with Foucault, exploring in particular the possible reasons for the fizzling of her initial *coup de foudre*. Noting Sedgwick's increasing frustration with a Foucault whose thinking had been axiomatic for her, I suggest that her almost exclusive focus on Foucault's critique of the repressive hypothesis to the exclusion of other aspects of his work inevitably results in the disappointment she articulates in her later writings.<sup>17</sup> I focus specifically on how *Sexuality One's* ironic rhetorical structure produces a blind spot that keeps Sedgwick fixated on the no-yes logic of repression and liberation even as power in Foucault becomes increasingly governed by biopower's gradational logic of continuity.<sup>18</sup>

In Part Two, "A Slippery Obsession," I offer a more detailed explanation of the reasons for *Sexuality One's* failure to deliver on the promise it held out for Sedgwick. I focus in this section on the shadowy rhetoric called free indirect discourse that frames Foucault's critique of the repressive hypothesis. Foucault exploits the ironic force of free indirect dis-

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>17</sup> Although the narrative I trace from initial enthusiasm to later disappointment is broadly accurate, there are nuances to be noted in this story. As Sedgwick herself notes, some of her earlier writings hold the seeds of her later critique of Foucault. See for example her 1992 essay, "Gender Criticism" in *Redrawing the Boundaries: The Transformation of English and American Literary Studies*, edited by Stephen Greenblatt and Giles Gunn (New York: MLA, 1992), 271-302, where Sedgwick faults Foucault for overemphasizing the proliferation of perversions at the expense of a blindness to the persistent homo/heterosexual division that structures Western thinking in the 20th century.

<sup>18</sup> On biopower's logic of gradation see especially Mary Beth Mader, *Sleights of Reason: Norm, Bisexuality, Development* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2011), 46.

course's "dual voice,"<sup>19</sup> thereby destabilizing both the theory of repression and that theory's (ironically) repressive critique. In so doing, Foucault mounts an almost Sedgwickian challenge to dualism: the text's ironic rhetorical force destabilizes the mind-body split that defines the Cartesian thinking subject. Foucault's anti-dualism thus aligns him with Sedgwick but also marks a moment when he departs from her. As mentioned earlier, Foucault highlights epistemological questions, whereas Sedgwick separates questions of knowing from those involved in the "tactile plus emotional" realm of the "touchy-feely."<sup>20</sup> Foucault might respond that his archivally based contestation of the Western *ratio* exposes the cost of the Cartesian split by producing in his readers an affective and corporeal experience of knowing.

All well and good, Sedgwick might say. But this *exposure* of the cost of Cartesian dualism is itself dualistic because it participates in a paranoid critical project whose logic is ultimately repressive. And so the debate might continue. In Part Three, "Ridiculous Love," I show how the nay-saying antagonisms underlying such a debate collapse into a Foucauldian reparative strand made visible by Sedgwick's Kleinian thinking. I argue in this final section that Foucault's paranoid ironies exhibit other-than-paranoid dimensions. Adopting Sedgwick's reparative terms, I suggest that Foucault articulates a practical ethics in which the felt experience of knowing the world is also an experiment in new ways of living. Love is the word Sedgwick offers for this queer experiment about being with others: "like a big/allegory about love./Experimental."<sup>21</sup> I have argued elsewhere that Foucault's work might be read, similarly, through the lens of love: that Foucault offers us the traces of an ethics of eros.<sup>22</sup> But that ancient word, eros, exposes the strangeness and difficulty of such experimentation. Reading Foucault and Sedgwick together, as "a big allegory about love," might offer another way to pursue such a difficult, "sweetbitter" ethics. As Sappho inimitably puts it in Fragment 71:

Eros once again limb-loosener whirls me sweetbitter, impossible to fight off, creature stealing up.<sup>23</sup>

Perhaps together Foucault and Sedgwick can teach us to practice a desubjectivating erotic ethics that might whirl us, sweetbitter (and still a little paranoid), into reparative ways of thinking, feeling, and acting in the world.

### 1. Sedgwick's Disappointment

While Sedgwick's earlier engagement with epistemology raises questions about Western binarisms, her challenge to dualistic thinking becomes more salient in her later work even as she brackets epistemological questions. I focus here on how she articulates her critique of dualism around the problem of repression and Foucault's famous critique of the repressive

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<sup>19</sup> Monika Fludernik, "The Illusion of Linguistic Alterity: The Free Indirect as Paradigm of Discourse Representation," *Diacritics* vol. 25, no. 4 (1995), 105.

<sup>20</sup> Sedgwick, *TF*, 17.

<sup>21</sup> Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *A Dialogue on Love* (Boston: Beacon, 1999), 155.

<sup>22</sup> See Lynne Huffer, *Mad for Foucault: Rethinking the Foundations of Queer Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), especially Chapter Five.

<sup>23</sup> In Anne Carson, *Eros the Bittersweet* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), 3.

hypothesis in *Sexuality One*. In *Shame and Its Sisters* (1995), *Touching Feeling* (2003), and *The Weather in Proust* (2011), Sedgwick mounts a repeated challenge to the relentless binarism that clings to “repression and the critical analysis of repression.”<sup>24</sup> Her critique of analytic repressive binarisms conveys an increasing sense of disappointment with Foucault and his “implicit promise”<sup>25</sup> to get us out from under repression’s thumb. Where Sedgwick thought she might find in Foucault “a point of departure for nondualistic ways of thinking”<sup>26</sup> and a “project of thinking otherwise,”<sup>27</sup> she finds instead a rhetorical game that keeps us stuck. Sedgwick writes:

The triumphally charismatic rhetorical force of *Volume One* suggests that Foucault convinced himself—certainly he has convinced many readers—that that analysis itself represented an exemplary instance of working outside of the repressive hypothesis. Rather than working outside of it, however, *Volume One*, like much of Foucault’s earlier work, might better be described as propagating the repressive hypothesis ever more broadly by means of displacement, multiplication, and hypostatization.<sup>28</sup>

Even more pointedly, in *The Weather in Proust*, Sedgwick argues that *Sexuality One* is “justly famous” but “ultimately circular”:<sup>29</sup>

Foucault demonstrates a devastating performative continuity between the diagnostics of these projects, the way they analyze the central problematic of Western culture (repression), on the one hand, and on the other hand their therapeutics, the ways in which they propose to rectify it. For if there is some problem with the repressive hypothesis itself, if in important ways repression is a misleading or even damaging way to understand the conditions of societies and individuals, then the main performative effect of these centuries-long anti-repressive projects may be the way they function as near-irresistible propaganda for the repressive hypothesis itself.<sup>30</sup>

Sedgwick’s claims about the self-propagating logic of both repression and the critique of repression are astute and important. As she points out in *Touching Feeling*, Foucault is ultimately “more struck by the proliferation of modern discourses of sexuality than by their suppression,”<sup>31</sup> and this insight demonstrates his sense “that there may really be no ‘rupture’ between ‘repression and the critical analysis of repression.’”<sup>32</sup> However, Sedgwick’s difficulty in separating Foucault from the queer Foucauldianism that draws on his work ultimately leads to a partial and misleading characterization of Foucault in the story she tells about the persistence of critical work structured by the repressive hypothesis.

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<sup>24</sup> Sedgwick, *TF*, 10. See also Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Adam Frank, *Shame and Its Sisters: A Silvan Tomkins Reader* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *The Weather in Proust*, edited by Jonathan Goldberg (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011).

<sup>25</sup> Sedgwick, *TF*, 12.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> Sedgwick, *Weather*, 133.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 133.

<sup>31</sup> Sedgwick, *TF*, 10.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 10. Sedgwick cites Foucault, *HS1*, 10.

Sedgwick's increasing disappointment with Foucault stems, in my view, from an overreading of repression in *Sexuality One*. Unlike Butler and many other queer theorists, Sedgwick is not a Freudo-Foucauldian.<sup>33</sup> But she does, like many first-generation queer theorists, limit her use of Foucault primarily to his critique of the repressive hypothesis, to the exclusion of other aspects of his thinking. In particular, Sedgwick's overreading of repression in *Sexuality One* leads her to ignore biopower, the continuous, nonindividualizing but decidedly nonreparative mode of power Foucault highlights in the final section of the volume.

As Mary Beth Mader explains, in Foucault's view one of the key features of modern biopower is "the production of a kind of continuity" where "a gradational ontology replaces one of opposition."<sup>34</sup> If repression is based on an oppositional logic—repressed or liberated, no or yes—biopower is based on a scalar logic of gradation. As statistical, medicalized, measuring devices that order life at every scale—from population control to genetic engineering—the instruments of biopower are "not deployed in a field of *opposition*, but in a field of *gradation* from the normal to the abnormal."<sup>35</sup> Framed within biopower, the "idea of sex,"<sup>36</sup> Foucault writes, actually "makes it possible to *evade* what gives 'power' its power; it enables one to conceive power solely as law and taboo."<sup>37</sup> As queer theory's aegis-creating analytic focus, this "idea of sex" thus threatens to mask the nonindividualizing, gradational ontology that characterizes biopower.

There are both conceptual and rhetorical explanations for Sedgwick's Foucauldian blind spot regarding the evasion of biopower's nonindividualizing continuities. Specifically, Sedgwick's repeated focus on repression to the exclusion of biopower produces a conception of Foucault's rhetorical strategies as "triumphally charismatic"<sup>38</sup> and ultimately complicit with repressive "propaganda."<sup>39</sup> Her conceptual oversight stems, in part, from a rhetorical underreading: Sedgwick seems not to hear or feel the volume's most pervasive rhetorical mode, that of irony—the rhetoric of self-division par excellence—despite her own insight that the book may be "divided against itself":<sup>40</sup> divided, we might say in conceptual terms, between a logic of opposition and a logic of gradation.<sup>41</sup>

Foucault's irony not only destabilizes his truth claims about repression's oppositional logic, but also distracts its readers into focusing on repression and its overcoming, even as the volume sounds the alarm about a biopower that extends rather than negates the logic of repression. And indeed, Sedgwick never directly addresses the shift Foucault tra-

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<sup>33</sup> For a book-length analysis of queer Freudo-Foucauldianism see Huffer.

<sup>34</sup> Mader, 46.

<sup>35</sup> Michel Foucault, *Abnormal: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1974-1975*, translated by Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2003), 42. (Emphasis added).

<sup>36</sup> Foucault, *HS1*, 155.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 155. (Emphasis added).

<sup>38</sup> Sedgwick, *TF*, 11.

<sup>39</sup> Sedgwick, *Weather*, 133.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>41</sup> This self-divided logic appears in various ways throughout *Sexuality One*; the most obvious appears in Part Five, where Foucault describes disciplinary power and regulatory biopower as "the two poles around which the organization over life was deployed." (139) As Mader explains, the disciplinary/regulatory distinction at work here highlights the shift from law to norm in the logic of modern biopower (Mader, 50).

ces in Part Five of *Sexuality One* from disciplinary to biopower. But importantly for Sedgwick, that shift is a mutation from the dualistic, no-yes logic of the repressive hypothesis to the nondualistic but hardly beneficent yes-saying power of biopolitics. Sedgwick's swerve away from biopower makes it difficult to reconcile her sense of Foucault's "triumphally charismatic" rhetoric with *Sexuality One's* dénouement in the genocidal politics of the Final Solution and a multi-scalar ordering of existence by "managers of life and survival."<sup>42</sup>

Although ultimately my aim is to think Foucault with Sedgwick, here my reading of Foucault obviously departs from hers. In explaining the reasons for my disagreement with a scholar whose capacity to think rhetorically and philosophically has long inspired my own interpretive methods, I want to show how *Sexuality One's* ironic structure and tone underscores its concluding biopolitical theme even as we, its readers, continue to fall into the crack of Victorian repression and its critique. As a rhetorical mode that expresses self-division, irony is the great deceiver whose force derives from its capacity to appear simultaneously as what it *is* and what it *is not*. As I will show in Part Two, Foucault's ironic assertions in *Sexuality One* appear to reproduce a non-ironic, no-yes dualism consistent with the logic of repression even as irony's self-fracturing destabilization of meaning undoes the very dualism on which yes-or-no certitudes depend. This helps to explain the dizzying afterlife of *Sexuality One*, where Foucault's ironic rhetorical force has left all of us both bedazzled and confused, both poised for liberation and disappointed by the volume's broken promises. To be sure, a few readers have hinted at Foucault's irony, remarking on the double-voiced "ventriloquism" of *Sexuality One*.<sup>43</sup> But many read it, in the end, as offering some ethical guidance in the form of an *ought*: "The rallying point for the counterattack against the deployment of sexuality *ought* not to be sex-desire, but bodies and pleasures."<sup>44</sup>

But two pages later that guidance is complicated by another, slightly different "ought." Foucault writes that our entire sexual *dispositif*—"these devices," which I take to include not only sex-desire, but also bodies and pleasures—"ought to make us wonder today."<sup>45</sup> This second "ought" doesn't cancel out the earlier call for bodies and pleasures as a counterattack against sex-desire, but it complicates that call considerably by invoking a form of thinking or wondering that would make our own present strange. Foucault invokes that strangeness when he writes that one day "people will no longer quite understand"<sup>46</sup> what we now accept, unthinkingly, as the epistemic foundations of the age of sex. But as the volume's winking last sentence suggests, even this more complex, thinkerly "ought"—these directions to imagine a future thinking that would allow us to queer our sexual present—threatens to repeat the dualistic, no-yes logic of repression and liberation:

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<sup>42</sup> Foucault, *HS1*, 137.

<sup>43</sup> On Foucault's ventriloquism see especially Andrew Parker, "Foucault's Tongues," *Mediations* vol. 18, no. 2 (1994), 80-88.

<sup>44</sup> Foucault, *HS1*, 157. (Emphasis added). A comprehensive overview of queer theory's deployment of "bodies and pleasures" in *Sexuality One* is beyond the scope of this essay. For a classic example of bodies and pleasures as the site of queer freedom see David Halperin, *Saint Foucault: Towards a Gay Hagiography* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995). For a useful overview and more nuanced view, see Ladelle McWhorter, *Bodies and Pleasures: Foucault and the Politics of Sexual Normalization* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999).

<sup>45</sup> Foucault, *HS1*, 159. (Emphasis added).

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*



“The irony of this deployment is in having us believe that our ‘liberation’ is in the balance.”<sup>47</sup> Even the different thinking Foucault repeatedly advocates runs the risk of self-projection into a future freedom through an act of negation that repudiates the present: saying no to a now in which we perceive ourselves to be unfree, we say yes to our own desire for (a future) freedom and thereby repeat the structure of sex-desire. Such “I”-driven projections certainly have inspired us to act politically and to fight for LGBT rights of various kinds. But as Sedgwick points out, those projections are also inexorably bound to repressive thinking. And as Foucault insists again and again, freedom cannot be a transcendental ideal: it can only be a difficult, uncertain, desubjectivating practice in the present.<sup>48</sup>

With this background in mind, the reservations I’ve articulated about Sedgwick’s critique of Foucault should not be construed as in any way dismissing the overwhelmingly helpful “thinking other than dualistically”<sup>49</sup> project she develops in *Touching Feeling* and throughout her work. Rather, I want to linger over Foucault and *Sexuality One* in order to amplify and extend Sedgwick’s insights into the paradoxes of queer Foucauldianism. As Sedgwick infers, we all repeatedly stumble into the repressive trap Foucault so dramatically brought to our attention. Indeed, it is virtually impossible not to do so. But contra Sedgwick, I argue that *Sexuality One*’s rhetoric is ironic rather than triumphally charismatic. And further, if we have all been ambushed by that rhetoric, this is hardly a sign that Foucault had convinced himself, against all evidence, that he alone could step “outside” the repressive hypothesis. As I demonstrate in detail in Part Two, Foucault’s use of irony allows him to take a different tack as he navigates his way through the age of sex. Irony’s tropological grammar of self-division fissures meaning from within. Through free indirect discourse, Foucault’s self-splitting utterances destabilize repressive dualism through a de-dialectizing movement of aporetic irresolution and fracture.

If Sedgwick’s critique of Foucault is contestable, her critique of queer Foucauldianism hits its mark. One of *Touching Feeling*’s powerful correctives to queer Foucauldianism is Sedgwick’s concise but accurate taxonomy of the many ways contemporary theories have been ensnared by Foucault: how they have *failed* to bypass the repressive hypothesis even as they’ve claimed to do so. Her five-part listing reads like the conceptual greatest hits of Foucault-inspired theory over the past thirty years; it includes productive, internalized, proliferating, discursive, and falsely naturalizing conceptions of power. According to Sedgwick, what these theories obstinately share, despite their sophistication and variance from one another, is their common belief that “even beyond the repressive hypothesis, some version of prohibition is still the most important thing to understand.”<sup>50</sup> In the face of

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> For an excellent analysis of freedom as a practice see Johanna Oksala, *Foucault on Freedom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

<sup>49</sup> Sedgwick, *TF*, 1.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 11. To be sure, Sedgwick’s list is vulnerable to the charge of reductivism. But her condensation of fifteen years of queer theory into a pithy list of critical habits that *also characterize her own earlier work* is both rhetorically powerful and conceptually freeing; such poetic concision allows her to elaborate new modes of thinking that depart from the same queer conceptual foundations she herself helped to establish. My purpose here is neither to prove nor disprove, on evidentiary grounds, the validity of Sedgwick’s claim about *all* of queer theory. No doubt there are exceptions and the list could be nuanced in

that stubborn critical worry about prohibition above all else, Sedgwick rightly concludes that Foucault's "analysis of the pseudodichotomy between repression and liberation has led, in many cases, to its conceptual reimposition in the even more abstractly reified form of the hegemonic and the subversive."<sup>51</sup> This "Gramscian-Foucauldian contagion" turns "'hegemonic' into another name for the status quo (i.e., everything that *is*)"<sup>52</sup> and "subversive" into everything that *is not*. Thus antinormative, antihegemonic theorists of every stripe have ended up performing "the same 'negative relation' that had, in Foucault's argument, defined the repressive hypothesis in the first place."<sup>53</sup> The result is what Sedgwick calls "a moralistic tautology" whose "seeming ethical urgency" disguises its "gradual evacuation of substance."<sup>54</sup>

Sedgwick's arguments in *Touching Feeling* highlight her frustrations with a queer theoretical field she was largely responsible for founding. Importantly, her increasing dissatisfaction, over the course of the 1990s, with the binary "moralisms of the repressive hypothesis"<sup>55</sup> led her to explore alternative sources for understanding that strange, inchoate, "artificial unity"<sup>56</sup> called sexuality: away from Oedipal Freudianism toward Melanie Klein, away from discursive language toward the tactile immediacy of the textile arts, away from Western epistemologies toward Buddhist practices. But these departures were always accompanied by what she called "stubborn" returns to her "obsessions"<sup>57</sup>: J. L. Austin's *How to Do Things With Words*, Silvan Tomkins's *Affect Imagery Consciousness*, Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble*, and Michel Foucault's *Sexuality One*.

Sedgwick's early work is marked by a welcoming disposition toward her Foucault obsession; as she puts it in *Epistemology of the Closet*, the book was written "in accord with Foucault's demonstration, whose results I will take to be axiomatic."<sup>58</sup> Over a decade later, in *Touching Feeling*, she is still a "goodish Foucauldian subject"<sup>59</sup> but admits to major misgivings about his work. In the posthumously published *The Weather in Proust*, those misgivings have morphed into a more decisive repudiation of Foucault. Comparing him unfavorably to writer-activists such as Guy Hocquenghem, Sedgwick surprisingly finds Foucault to be an "inapt choice" as "a French exemplar for American queer theory."<sup>60</sup> And regarding Foucault's value for new ways of thinking, Sedgwick asserts even more dismissively that "the invigorating perspectives" of thinkers like Silvan Tomkins "make Foucault look particularly marmoreal."<sup>61</sup> Why such a definitive condemnation? Did Sedgwick find herself caught in the repressive hypothesis trap as well? Does her repudiation of Foucault

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various ways. But Sedgwick's general claim about a critical investment in a repressive structure seems valid enough on conceptual grounds; as she herself goes on to demonstrate.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 12-13.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 64.

<sup>56</sup> Foucault, *HS1*, 154.

<sup>57</sup> Sedgwick, *TF*, 2.

<sup>58</sup> Sedgwick, *Epistemology*, 3.

<sup>59</sup> Sedgwick, *TF*, 13.

<sup>60</sup> Sedgwick, *Weather*, 182n8.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 182n8.

and his paranoid exposures signal her sense that there is no way out except by rejecting Foucault altogether? Perhaps part of her frustration is the result of a self-recognition: an awareness that such nay-saying departures cannot help but repeat the relentless logic of repression. (Is this why she tucked those dismissals of Foucault into a footnote: into the shadow cast by the body of her text?)

And yet, even in her disappointment Sedgwick keeps returning to *Sexuality One*, a volume whose force in her life she describes as obsessive. Again, this almost exclusive focus on *Sexuality One*—an exclusivity Sedgwick shares with many other queer theorists—explains much of Sedgwick’s frustration with an “inexhaustible”<sup>62</sup> Foucauldian promise that never quite delivers. The disappointment is instructive not only for what it reveals about the shifting complexities of Sedgwick’s Foucauldian obsession, but also for what it can tell us more generally about the felt experience of knowing Foucault. So let me follow queer theory—like a fly to honey, like an addict to her drug—to the obsessive object: *Sexuality One*.

## 2. A Slippery Obsession

Literary analysis offers us a technical term for naming the Foucauldian trap whose ironies ensnare us: free indirect discourse. This section’s focus on this rhetorical structure in *Sexuality One* goes a long way toward explaining what Sedgwick describes as “(mis?)understandings”<sup>63</sup> of Foucault’s discussion of the repressive hypothesis. The uncertainty conveyed by Sedgwick’s awkward parenthesis—“(mis?)understandings”—alerts us to the difficulties of untangling repression in Foucauldian queer theory. Did Foucault dupe himself or only his readers? A technical discussion of free indirect discourse can help us to better grasp, in rhetorical terms, the irresolvable ambiguities involved in Foucault’s critique of the repressive hypothesis.

As Marguerite Lips explains in her classic 1926 study of the form, free indirect discourse is linked to direct and indirect discourse, “the two procedures for reproducing inner states (perception, volition, feeling, knowledge), or manifestations of inner states (speech)”<sup>64</sup> within the frame of an enunciating proposition. Lips explains that free indirect discourse is an intermediary form of utterance that is neither direct—“She said, ‘I love you’”—nor explicitly indirect—“She said she loved her.”<sup>65</sup> In explicit indirect discourse, the indirect nature of the reported speech is made clear by a framing enunciation such as the

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<sup>62</sup> Sedgwick, *TF*, 2.

<sup>63</sup> Sedgwick, *TF*, 11.

<sup>64</sup> Marguerite Lips, *Le Style indirect libre* (Paris: Payot, 1926), 7. (Translation mine). Lips was influenced by the analyses of free indirect discourse begun by her teacher, Charles Bally, a student of the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure. One of the many valuable contributions of Lips’s study is her careful tracing of the emergence of free indirect discourse as an object of linguistic analysis at the turn of the 20th century. See especially Charles Bally, “Le Style indirect libre en français moderne,” *Germanisch-Romanische Monatschrift*, vol. 4 (1912), 549–556.

<sup>65</sup> For the sake of simplicity, I use examples in English here. Lips’s analysis mostly focuses on French examples whose verbal transpositions in particular differ from free indirect discourse in English. In the case of the English translation of Foucault, I draw attention to those grammatical differences where they are relevant.

“she said” of my example.<sup>66</sup> Further, the shift from direct to indirect discourse is grammatically marked by pronominal and verbal transpositions. Thus, in the sentence—“She said she loved her”—the direct utterance “I love you” is grammatically transposed from a present to past verb and a first-person to third-person pronoun.

So what is *free* indirect discourse? Free indirect discourse does two things: first, it deprives the indirect utterance of the enunciating frame that would make its indirection clear (“she said”) but, second, it retains some grammatical trace of the pronominal and verbal transpositions that mark the discourse as indirect.<sup>67</sup> Thus “she said, ‘I love you’” (direct discourse) becomes “she loved her” (free indirect discourse), where the enunciating frame of indirect discourse (“she said” in “she said she loved her”) is removed. Importantly, free indirect discourse’s double-voiced irony stems from its explicit orientation within a narrative frame. As Monika Fludernik puts it: it “boils down to a contradiction between one’s reading of expressive features on the linguistic plane of the reported discourse and the larger discourse context that puts into doubt the verity or persuasiveness of the reported discourse.”<sup>68</sup> The elimination of the framing enunciation makes the subjective intentionality or “inner state”<sup>69</sup> of the utterance ambiguous and thereby destabilizes the utterance’s meaning. In literary terms, free indirect discourse exposes the “intentional fallacy.”<sup>70</sup> In philosophical terms, it knocks the cogito off its pedestal as the first principle from which all other truths can be deduced.<sup>71</sup> Unlike the cogito’s propositions, free indirect discourse’s headless utterances are riven with doubt.

In *Sexuality One*, Foucault exploits the radical doubt of free indirect discourse not only to destabilize the philosophical subject and its claims to truth, but also harnesses it for its rhetorical capacity to produce in the reader a felt experience of cognitive and ethical disorientation. Although the complex question of Foucault’s relation to rhetoric as a field is beyond the scope of this essay, it is worth pointing out that Foucault’s use of free indirect discourse demonstrates an aspect of his writing that has not been acknowledged by his rhetorical readers. Most theorists of rhetoric have argued that Foucault’s use of rhetoric is primarily tropological. Dave Tell’s assertion is typical: “we know that Foucault understood

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<sup>66</sup> Sometimes the framing enunciation is implicit. See Lips, Chapter Three, “Le Style indirect,” 24-49.

<sup>67</sup> The precise criteria for determining which utterances qualify as free indirect discourse have been the subject of heated debate among linguists. For an overview of these debates see Fludernik. My definition of free indirect discourse paraphrases Fludernik’s more technical definition of the two “minimal syntactic conditions” (95) that must be in place for free indirect discourse to be operative.

<sup>68</sup> Fludernik, 105-106.

<sup>69</sup> Lips, 7.

<sup>70</sup> For the classic New Critical argument against the notion of an authorial design or plan behind the text see William Wimsatt and Monroe Beardsley, “The Intentional Fallacy,” in *The Verbal Icon: Studies in the Meaning of Poetry* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1954), 3-18.

<sup>71</sup> As Descartes puts it in the Preface to his *Principles of Philosophy*: “Thus I considered that someone who wishes to doubt everything cannot, for all that, doubt that he exists while he is doubting. ...Accordingly I took the being or existence of this thought as my first principle, and from it deduced very clearly the following principles.” See René Descartes, *Principles of Philosophy*, in John Cottingham et. al. (eds. and trans.), *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes, Volume One* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 184.

rhetoric in terms of tropes."<sup>72</sup> But free indirect discourse is a rhetorical effect whose *tropological* force is achieved primarily through shifts in *grammar*.<sup>73</sup> In the case of *Sexuality One*, the tropological power of repression, metaphorically figured as darkness blotting out the light, is both heightened and undone through the grammatical alterations of free indirect discourse. That shifting relation between trope and grammar produces a rhetorical experience whose reverberations present knowledge in Foucault as a play of shadows.

Free indirect discourse cannot be perceived outside of the specific discursive contexts in which it occurs: indeed, its force is a function of its context. Along these lines, the context for *Sexuality One's* free indirect utterances is a series of nested narrative frames in a *mise en abyme* structure of reported speech acts that destabilize the narrative voice and unmoor the reader.<sup>74</sup> This structure not only demonstrates the rhetorical complexity of Foucault's writing, but also offers an explanation for the cognitive disorientation that attends any reading of *Sexuality One* in relation to questions about the truth of sexuality. What is the truth of our sex? Are we repressed or liberated? hegemonic or subversive? Status quo perpetrators or disruptors? Normative or queer?

As Sedgwick points out, these questions have become tedious. And yet, the more we read Foucault, the more he pulls us into the self-mirroring trap of these yes-or-no questions about the truth of sex, despite his admonition that the question we need to ask is precisely the question of the enunciating frame that free indirect discourse calls into question. The warning is clear. As Foucault puts it, the question is not "why are we repressed"<sup>75</sup> (or liberated), normative (or queer), but rather: "why do *we say*, with so much passion and so much resentment against our most recent past, against our present, and against ourselves, *that we are repressed*"<sup>76</sup> (or liberated), normative or queer? And yet despite the clear warning, we all (myself included!) end up falling into the trap of making truth claims about Foucault's theory of sexuality that bracket off the theory's rhetorical framing.

In these terms, Foucault's clear question—"why do *we say* [...] that we are repressed?"—can be reexamined as a question about rhetoric and, specifically, about free indirect discourse: about killing the subject by lopping off its head, where its head is the framing enunciation ("she said"). Further, although Foucault repeatedly reminds his readers about the importance of the narrative, writerly, constructed dimension of his work—that he has

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<sup>72</sup> Tell, 96. Tell references page 84 of Foucault's *The Order of Things* to support this claim. However, the supporting passage he references is a description of rhetoric in the Classical Age. In referencing the passage as evidence of Foucault's understanding of rhetoric, Tell collapses the epistemic distinctions that structure Foucault's archeology of the human sciences. For a similar view of Foucault as a thinker of tropes see Martha Cooper, "Rhetorical Criticism and Foucault's Philosophy of Discursive Events," *Central States Speech Journal*, vol. 39, no. 1 (1988), 1-7.

<sup>73</sup> For an influential articulation of the interdependent relation between the tropological and grammatical functions of language, see Paul de Man, "Semiology and Rhetoric," in *Allegories of Reading: Figural Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke, and Proust* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), 3-19. For De Man's conception of irony as nontropological see "The Concept of Irony" in *Aesthetic Ideology*. Also see De Man's "The Rhetoric of Temporality," in *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), 187-228.

<sup>74</sup> For a detailed explication of the nested or embedded structure of *mise en abyme* narratives and poems see Lucien Dällenbach, *The Mirror in the Text* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989).

<sup>75</sup> Foucault, *HS1*, 8.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 8-9. (Emphasis added).

only ever written fictions, that his *histoires* are more story than history—we have not fully absorbed the rhetorical implications of his assertion about the enunciating frame (“she said”). We have also missed how the framelessness of *everyday* discourse—the constant removal of enunciating frames as we, other Victorians, move about in a repressive (and liberated) world—produces the same experience of disorientation we feel in the more formal fictional world of *Sexuality One*.<sup>77</sup>

What can be said, more specifically, about Foucault’s use of free indirect discourse in a story about modern sexuality as a felt experience of cognitive and moral disorientation? Let me situate this question within the specifically French literary context out of which Foucault was writing. As is well known even outside the francophone world, Gustave Flaubert offers the canonical example of the strategic use of free indirect discourse in French for producing, through irony, psychological disorientation and moral ambiguity. As any textbook in French literary history will tell us, Flaubert used the form so successfully that he was brought to trial for it;<sup>78</sup> the dubious moral and epistemological status of free indirect discourse was made spectacularly clear when the prosecutor at Flaubert’s trial, Pinard, blamed *Madame Bovary*’s obscenity on a morally transgressive content that was a result of its style. That style was not obscene in the pornographic sense—we find none of Sade’s salacious vocabulary or titillating plot-line in Flaubert’s story about an adulterous housewife—but rather because of the even more obscene beheading of the subject through the evacuation of the narrative anchor, “she said.” The quote Pinard chose from Flaubert’s novel to support his point is, like my own examples, a passage about love:

She said to herself again and again: “I have a lover! A lover!” reveling in the thought as though she had come into a second puberty. At last she would possess those joys of love, that fever of happiness of which she had despaired. She was entering something marvelous in which all was passion, ecstasy, delirium.<sup>79</sup>

The effect of the shift from the first to the second and third sentences—from indirect discourse to free indirect discourse—is dramatic and unmistakable. Hardly a literary critic,

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<sup>77</sup> My contention here, that free indirect discourse is a linguistic form that captures the lived disorientation of our everyday world, may appear to contradict the assertion of Lips and others that complex forms of free indirect discourse pertain only to “written language.” (Lips, 83, translation mine) But Lips herself begins to undo the written/spoken language opposition that Jacques Derrida in particular will famously dismantle forty years later in *Of Grammatology* (1967). “Indirect discourse,” Lips writes, “derives from literary language’s increasing tendency to merge with the procedures of spoken language” (83, translation mine).

<sup>78</sup> This is not to imply that Flaubert’s rhetorical style was literally put on trial. As Dominick LaCapra explains in *Madame Bovary on Trial* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982): “the trial of course did not investigate the problem of the so-called free indirect style. And Flaubert himself does not use the term *style indirect libre*.” (127) The trial revolved around a perception of the novel’s moral transgressions which are a result of a rhetorical style that was not acknowledged as such.

<sup>79</sup> Gustave Flaubert, *Madame Bovary*, translated by Lydia Davis (New York: Viking, 2010), 143. For French original see Gustave Flaubert, *Madame Bovary* (Paris: Flammarion, 1986), 229. Analyses of this passage and the trial are abundant. See especially Hans Robert Jauss, “Literary History as Challenge to Literary Theory,” *New Literary History* vol. 2, no. 1 (1970), 7-37, and Dominick LaCapra, *Madame Bovary on Trial*, 56-59. Also see Elisabeth Ladenson, *Dirt for Art’s Sake: Books on Trial from “Madame Bovary” to “Lolita”* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007).

even Pinard realized that the subjective ground from which Emma's thoughts are reported in sentence one crumbles completely by the third sentence. The oft-noted effect of this ungrounding is not only the diegetic confusion of which Pinard complained (whose thoughts are these? the narrator's, the author's, or the character's?) but also, more important, an irresolvable split within the thoughts the reader is forced to inhabit: we both anticipate, with Emma, "those joys of love," "that fever of happiness," and the "passion, ecstasy, delirium" of "something marvelous" and, at the same time, disavow such fantasies as nothing more than the illusions of a bourgeois condition from which we want to distance ourselves. We simultaneously disidentify with Emma's mind and are forced, by the narrative's ironic grammar, to know with Emma "that fever of happiness": to inhabit her ridiculous love. In that self-contradictory positioning, the reader simultaneously adopts and repudiates a mental state as powerfully present as it is unlocateable. Entering a discourse that eliminates any narrative subject position to ground it, the reader's subjectivity is temporarily undone. Rendered powerless to correct Emma's delirious thoughts with moral truths of our own, we are left falling into a bottomless uncertainty: both in the "something marvelous" of Emma's mind and, at the same time, plunged into a Goya-esque night without stars.

The same thing happens to Foucault's readers when we enter the "mind" of the repressive hypothesis. Here, in French and English is *Sexuality One's* opening sentence:

*Longtemps nous aurions supporté, et nous subirions aujourd'hui encore, un régime victorien.*<sup>80</sup>  
[For a long time, the story goes, we supported a Victorian regime, and we continue to be dominated by it even today.<sup>81</sup>]

To a French ear, the first verb in the past conditional makes this a very strange opening sentence. The strangeness can be explained in rhetorical terms, through specific linguistic and literary features that frame *Sexuality One* as reported speech. To begin, the book's first word, *longtemps*, will immediately resonate for any bourgeois French reader with the most famous first word of the French literary canon, Proust's "*Longtemps, je me suis couché de bonne heure*"<sup>82</sup> in the opening line of *A la recherche du temps perdu*. Foucault's mimicry of the modern French exemplar of psychological interiority includes more than *Sexuality One's* first word; in the subsequent phrase, Foucault both repeats and displaces the Proustian temporal incongruity of *longtemps* followed by a verb in the composite past form that grammatically signals a completed action. In Proust's case, the oddness of the completed action of the *passé composé* ("*je me suis couché*" [I went to bed]), where the reader expects the indefinite temporality of the *imparfait*, is what makes the opening *longtemps* so famous.

Foucault repeats-with-a-difference that temporal incongruity through the use of free indirect discourse. He does so specifically by transforming the Proustian first person singular *passé composé* into a verb in the first person plural past conditional (*nous aurions supporté*) whose strangeness marks the opening sentence as free indirect discourse. If Foucault were simply repeating Proust, the sentence would read: *Longtemps nous avons supporté* (For a long time we tolerated). The verbal transposition from the Proustian *passé composé*

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<sup>80</sup> Michel Foucault, *La Volonté de savoir: Histoire de la sexualité, vol. 1* (Paris: Gallimard, 1976), 9. Hereafter VS.

<sup>81</sup> Foucault, *HS1*, 3.

<sup>82</sup> Marcel Proust, *Du côté de chez Swann* (Paris: Gallimard, 1987), 3.

into the past conditional can only be explained as an effect of free indirect discourse. The Proustian subject has been beheaded: Foucault has removed the enunciating frame that would stabilize the sentence as an utterance by someone in the past and thereby explain the past conditional as reported speech. To be grammatically correct as indirect discourse, such a sentence would read something like: *On disait que longtemps nous aurions supporté* (It was said that for a long time we tolerated).<sup>83</sup> That complex, implicit transposition of indirect discourse into free indirect discourse in the very first sentence of *Sexuality One* is rendered in the published English translation as “the story goes” (followed by the somewhat imperfect translation of the faux ami, “*supporté*,” as “supported” rather than the more accurate “tolerated” or “endured”). To be sure, the verbal transposition that marks the sentence as free indirect discourse is somewhat lost in translation: “the story goes” doesn’t quite capture the strangeness or cognitive disorientation of the French original. But translation problems notwithstanding, the opening sentence clearly tags *this* history of sexuality as reported speech about an inner state whose veracity, even as a Proustian fiction, is dubious at best.

In the text’s third sentence, the suspected source of the reported discourse—the impersonal, third-person voice of the “*on*” —reveals itself:

*Au début du XVIIe siècle encore, une certaine franchise avait cours, dit-on.*<sup>84</sup> [At the beginning of the seventeenth century a certain frankness was still common, it would seem.<sup>85</sup>]

The French “*dit-on*” (“it is said” or “one says”) pronominally confirms the first sentence’s status as free indirect discourse (where the implicit *on disait que*—*dit-on* in the past—has been removed). The *dit-on* also relays the relentless epistemic and moral power of French universalism: the *dit-on* is the rule-bound, normative voice that collapses the past of *on disait* into the eternal truth of the present. The *dit-on* is the truth of what-everyone-knows. (Again, the English translation of “it is said” into “it would seem” fails to render these subtleties.) Most important, the third sentence of *Sexuality One* exposes the source of the first sentence’s fictional truth as the veridiction of universal consensus.

This careful staging of the history of sexuality as a psychological fiction that comes to be taken as universal truth frames the subsequent grammatical and tropological shifts that will further destabilize any truth claims the reader might understand Foucault to be making over the course of the rest of the book. As Paul de Man points out, referring to Quintilian’s theory of rhetoric, irony is “capable of coloring an entire discourse” or even “an entire life.”<sup>86</sup> Such would be irony’s claims on *Sexuality One* were it not for the fact that the reader is repeatedly led to forget them. Thus in the fourth sentence, the narrative frame of the *dit-on* disappears, and the reader falls into a historical world whose fabular status as a reported and therefore ironic discourse dissolves under the force of the *dit-on*’s truth. This

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<sup>83</sup> As Lips explains, in French the verbal transpositions that follow the enunciating proposition (*on dit que*) of indirect discourse do not signify actual temporal shifts in the subordinated phrase but simply express the rule-bound subordination of the reported utterance to the enunciation through the verbal concordances of basic grammar (25). Because the English rules of concordance are different, the subordinated verbs of my translation do not appear in the past conditional as they do in the French original.

<sup>84</sup> Foucault, *VS*, 9.

<sup>85</sup> Foucault, *HS1*, 3.

<sup>86</sup> De Man, “Rhetoric of Temporality,” 210.



fabular, earlier time is a time even before the once-upon-a-time temporality of *longtemps* when “sexual practices had little need of secrecy”: it is, like Emma’s fantasy love, a marvelous “time of direct gestures, shameless discourse, and open transgressions.”<sup>87</sup> But in the play between the conditionality of the Proustian first sentence in free indirect discourse and the universalizing anchoring of the *dit-on*, the stability of the reader’s conception of time and historical truth is radically undermined. This disorientation is an effect of grammar: the verbal shifts and enunciating frames which, as we’ve seen, structure the utterances of the first two paragraphs.

These grammatical effects of disorientation are then *tropologically* sublated and given form as an image: as the half-light/half-dark figure of twilight. This moment of tropological sublation on the opening page marks the entry of repression into Foucault’s story about sex: repression *is* the shadowy twilight:

*A ce plein jour, un rapide crépuscule aurait fait suite, jusqu’aux nuits monotones de la bourgeoisie victorienne. La sexualité est alors soigneusement renfermée. Elle emménage. ...Le couple, légitime et procréateur, fait la loi.*<sup>88</sup> [But twilight soon fell upon this bright day, followed by the monotonous nights of the Victorian bourgeoisie. Sexuality was carefully confined. It moved into the home... The legitimate and procreative couple laid down the law.<sup>89</sup>]

The image of twilight gives figural form to a discursive shift the reader experiences as a fall. Such falling, as De Man explains, is “ultimately ironical.”<sup>90</sup> The sublation of truth as a “bright day” immediately tumbles us back into the shadowy twilight that will end in the monotonous nights of bourgeois bedrooms: the same bottomless void of Flaubert’s fictional world, the same, “most monotonous” of Goya-esque “nights” that “no star lights up.”<sup>91</sup> Specifically, the shift from the fictional realm of the book’s first sentence to the realm of universally accepted veridiction in the second paragraph is compressed, here in the third “twilight” paragraph, in the fall from the paragraph’s first sentence in free indirect discourse to a historical present tense framed by a repressive twilight.<sup>92</sup> But like the first sentence, repression falls in a past conditional (*aurait fait suite*) that marks the utterance as free indirect discourse: this twilit truth is riven with doubt. The grammatical shift from the past conditional is missed in the English translation, where the dubious veracity of a figural twilight is rendered in the simple past as “twilight soon fell,” and where the abrupt plunge from the doubt-ridden, twilit realm of free indirect discourse into the historical present (“*la*

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<sup>87</sup> Foucault, *HS1*, 3.

<sup>88</sup> Foucault, *VS*, 9.

<sup>89</sup> Foucault, *HS1*, 3.

<sup>90</sup> De Man, “Rhetoric of Temporality,” 214.

<sup>91</sup> Michel Foucault, *History of Madness*, translated by Jonathan Murphy and Jean Khalifa (London: Routledge, 2006), 531.

<sup>92</sup> Foucault’s use of the historical present tense (also known as the dramatic present or narrative present because it makes past events seem more vivid) is ubiquitous, but this stylistic feature of his works has not been rendered in their English translations, which translate the present-tense verbs back into the past. The significance of Foucault’s use of the historical present is not only stylistic but also philosophical: the historical present gives grammatical form to Foucault’s conception of genealogies as histories of the present.

*sexualité est*," "elle emménage," "le couple, légitime et producteur, fait la loi") is lost altogether with the English preterite verbs ("sexuality was carefully confined; it moved into the home ...the legitimate and procreative couple laid down the law.")

The crucial point here is that the French sentences in the present quoted above are framed by the free indirect discourse of the twilight sentence. This free indirect discursive frame exposes the slipperiness of the present-tense sentences as propositional statements (*la sexualité est* [sexuality is]). Although they appear as grammatical forms that express indicative truth, the present they convey is radically destabilized by time's contingency, a fracturing temporality we habitually stabilize as a history that finds its completion in the now, in us. Although grammatically these sentences appear to speak the truth of history, they are unmoored by a free indirect discourse that makes them float, like Goya's witches, as verbal "forms born of nothing."<sup>93</sup> The present tense deployed here is, indeed, the historical present, but it is the ruptured historical present of a Foucauldian genealogy. The reader falls, with twilight, into the cracks of that present, plunging simultaneously into an illusory stability we want to imagine (tropologically, like Emma) as true, but whose temporal instability we feel (grammatically) as a radical disorientation that unmoors us. When we read these sentences we experience, simultaneously, the certainty of truth and the nagging sense of a massive deception. Isn't it true that "sexuality is confined," that "it is dominated by the figure of the procreative couple?" Isn't it true, as queer theorists might put it, that sexuality is heteronormative? What they say is true ...isn't it?

### 3. Ridiculous Love

Despite our *not* clear and distinct *feeling* about heteronormativity when we read Foucault, we remain Cartesian in our stubborn faith in a God—our sexuality—who guarantees the cogito's certainty. That certainty gives us back ourselves through a tautological circle Foucault defines in *The Order of Things* as the transcendental-empirical doublet of modern knowledge. The dualistic logic of that subject-object circle gauges our freedom, per the repressive hypothesis, in accordance with our capacity to resist the very self-objectification that allows us to know ourselves as subjects. At the same time, over the course of *Sexuality One*, we are led into a different, more insidious logic: the biopolitical ontology of gradation. But in our repressive habits we both acknowledge and forget the gradual, overlapping shift Foucault describes from opposition to gradation. From the disciplinary nights of the Victorian bourgeoisie we have been freed, it would seem, into the televised titillation of *Girls Gone Wild*, even as we are being constituted as the results of an equation that transposes such titillation into mathematical measures on a normal curve. And even knowing this—understanding normalization and biopower's statistical reordering of sexuality as life itself—it is nearly impossible not to find ourselves, when acting politically, acting oppositionally in accordance with a repressive logic: "we are conscious of defying established power, our tone of voice shows that we know we are being subversive, and we ardently conjure away the present and appeal to the future, whose day will be hastened by the contribution we believe we are making. Something... smacks of revolt, of promised freedom, of the coming age of a different law."<sup>94</sup> This is powerful stuff—it is queer politics as we

<sup>93</sup> Foucault, *History of Madness*, 531.

<sup>94</sup> Foucault, *HS1*, 6-7.

know it—and no sexual activist, myself included, can simply bypass this repressive structure.

But what would it feel like to think sexuality differently than this? Let me bring these reflections to a provisional conclusion by bringing Foucault and Sedgwick together again. I opened by suggesting that Foucault's shadow confession about his own sexuality is not a confession at all, but rather a problematization of the dark/light dualism of Western thought. I also argued that free indirect discourse offers a rhetorical lens onto the *how of non-dualism* in *Sexuality One*, where the radical disorientation of Foucault's headless sentences exposes the illusory stabilities of the present, the subject, and repressive sexuality. Finally, I suggested that the figure of shadow gives tropological form to the felt experience of cognitive and moral disorientation that free indirect discourse both produces and explains.

But it is here that Sedgwick's Kleinian worries about the "Foucauldian paranoid"<sup>95</sup> nag at the neatness of my rhetorical exposures. As long ago as 1986, in *The Coherence of Gothic Conventions* (before *Epistemology of the Closet* and the birth of queer theory), Sedgwick wrote: "The problem here is not simply that paranoia is a form of love, for—in a certain language—what is not? The problem is rather that, of all forms of love, paranoia is the most ascetic, *the love that demands least from its object.*"<sup>96</sup> In this self-citational *mise en abyme* of her doubts about paranoid reading, Sedgwick implicitly produces Foucault as the ascetic version of her own more greedy, even "ridiculous love."<sup>97</sup> For all his "gorgeous narrative work" and "drop-dead-elegant"<sup>98</sup> conceptual transformations, Foucault exemplifies for Sedgwick the "paranoid subject's proffer of himself and his cognitive talent"<sup>99</sup> in a demand on the reader that is a kind of love, but a "love that demands least from its object."<sup>100</sup>

This vision of a paranoid Foucault whose love offerings are meager is a common one (although usually not expressed in a prose as exquisite as Sedgwick's); it is a vision of Foucault that Sedgwick aligns specifically with his early work: the paranoid project of "*unveiling hidden violence,*" she writes, "would seem to depend on a cultural context, like the one assumed in Foucault's early works, in which violence would be deprecated and hence hidden in the first place."<sup>101</sup> Sedgwick also seems to imply, without developing her thought, that some other-than-paranoid possibilities emerge in Foucault's later writings. She specifically aligns the "ethical possibility"<sup>102</sup> inherent in Kleinian reparative strategies "with the subject's movement toward what Foucault calls 'care of the self,' the often very fragile concern to provide the self with pleasure and nourishment in an environment that is perceived as not particularly offering them."<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *The Coherence of Gothic Conventions* (New York: Methuen, 1986), xi; cited in Sedgwick, *TF*, 132.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 132.

<sup>97</sup> Sedgwick, *TF*, vii (dedication page).

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 132.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 140.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, 137.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*

In a sense, then, in *Touching Feeling* Foucault and Sedgwick come together again in an inverted *mise en abyme* of an ascetic love Sedgwick located in Foucault long ago. In true Foucauldian (or is it Sedgwickian?) fashion, the beautiful symmetry of Foucault's early ascetic love as the inverted double of Sedgwick's later ridiculous love stands as an emblem of the relation between them. The antagonistic dualisms of the *mise en abyme*—Foucault versus Sedgwick, paranoid versus reparative—begin to collapse in on themselves, as lovers who have been fighting often do: Foucault with Sedgwick, paranoid with reparative, ascetic with ridiculous love.

The how of that nondualism belongs as much to Foucault as it does to Sedgwick. I have tried to show this in the rhetorical textures of Foucault's shadow play, with a specific focus on a free indirect discourse that unmoors the reader and dissolves the subject. To invoke the language of a later Foucault who was always allowing himself to be undone, even and especially in the mad beginning of his work, free indirect discourse creates a self-releasing grammar with ethical possibility: a desubjectivating, rhetorical practice that "enables one to get free of oneself"<sup>104</sup> and to "free thought from what it silently thinks, and so enable it to think differently."<sup>105</sup>

If this self-undoing dissolution is the form of love Foucault offers to his reader, it is not only an ascetic love that demands little from its object. From *History of Madness* to his final work, Foucault's paranoid exposures are impelled by a love whose rhetorical, conceptual, and ethical demand on its reader can be excessive and, at times, overwhelming. It is a "ridiculous love" whose reparative textures are better expressed in the "touchy-feely" language of felt experience than they are in any language of science. Foucault obliges us, in his demand on us, "to take part in a process of recognition and *reparation*"<sup>106</sup> without any final sublation of ourselves into a tidy Hegelian self-recognition. Instead, Foucault's "oeuvre plunges [us] into a void [that] is the space of our work... [in] our confused vocation as apostles and interpreters."<sup>107</sup> It is "the historian [who] belongs to the family of ascetics,"<sup>108</sup> but Foucault is not simply a historian. He is also a poet-philosopher who, like Nietzsche before him, practices an archival, rhetorical, self-undoing art he calls genealogy.

That Nietzschean word—genealogy, with all its post-moral ethical resonance—returns me to the place I started: an unpublished, archival trace of Foucault that has tugged at me for years, ever since I came across it, in 2006, in the Foucault archives in Normandy. "I felt excluded," the trace says, "not so much rejected, but belonging to society's shadow."<sup>109</sup> In the end, it matters little to whom that voice belongs. "What difference does it make who is speaking?"<sup>110</sup> The *famous* Foucault of that trace could just as easily be one of

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<sup>104</sup> Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, vol. 2: The Use of Pleasure*, translated by Robert Hurley (New York: Random House, 1985), 8.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 9. Per my argument in Part One, it is important to note that this oft-cited call to think otherwise is a genealogical thinking of an unstable present rather than the projection of a future freedom.

<sup>106</sup> Foucault, *History of Madness*, 537. (Emphasis added).

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>108</sup> Michel Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," in Paul Rabinow (eds.), *Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1984*, vol. 2, 384.

<sup>109</sup> Foucault, "Entretien," 29.

<sup>110</sup> Michel Foucault, "What Is an Author?" in *Essential Works* vol. 2, 222.

those “*infamous men*”<sup>111</sup> encountered by a not-yet-famous Foucault in the archives of madness in the late 1950s. What matters more than the name of that voice is its queer solidarity with a shadowed world which, in modernity, is given the face of deviant sexuality. The reparative, ethical promise of that queer solidarity has not been exhausted, and will surely outlive its figuration as sex.

Eros is a word I borrow from Sappho to name that outliving. Outliving is our continually renewed encounter with the concrete traces of queer modes of belonging that exceed both the oppositional logic of repression-liberation and the continuous ontology of biopolitical gradation. The demand those queer traces make on us is necessarily excessive because outliving, by definition, exceeds us: it produces a difficult, erotic love that is as much a practice as a way of knowing. Foucault, like Sedgwick, demands of us a ridiculous love. It is a love we might experience, after Foucault and Sedgwick, in the reparative mode of the touchy-feely: as a queer twilight whose shadows, limb-loosening, undo us.

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<sup>111</sup> See Michel Foucault's 1977 essay, “Lives of Infamous Men,” in Paul Rabinow (eds.), *Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1984*, vol. 3, 157-175, where Foucault describes his own experience in the archives he consulted while writing *History of Madness*.