

Q. You're in your fifties. You're a reader of *Le Gai Pied*, which has been in existence now for two years. Is the kind of discourse you find there something positive for you?

M.F. That the magazine exists is the positive and important thing. In answer to your question, I could say that I don't have to read it to voice the question of my age. What I could ask of your magazine is that I do not, in reading it, have to pose the question of my age. Now, reading it...

Q. Perhaps the problem is the age group of those who contribute to it and read it; the majority are between twenty-five and thirty-five.

M.F. Of course. The more it is written by young people the more it concerns young people. But the problem is not to make room for one age group alongside another but to find out what can be done in relation to the quasi identification between homosexuality and the love among young people.

Another thing to distrust is the tendency to relate the question of homosexuality to the problem of "Who am I?" and "What is the secret of my desire?" Perhaps it would be better to ask oneself, "What relations, through homosexuality, can be established, invented, multiplied, and modulated?" The problem is not to discover in oneself the truth of one's sex, but, rather, to use one's sexuality henceforth to arrive at a multiplicity of relationships. And, no doubt, that's the real reason why

*R. de Ceccaty, J. Danet, and J. Le Bitoux conducted this interview with Foucault for the French magazine *Gai Pied*. It appeared in April 1981. The text that appears here, translated by John Johnston, has been amended.

homosexuality is not a form of desire but something desirable. Therefore, we have to work at becoming homosexuals and not be obstinate in recognizing that we are. The development toward which the problem of homosexuality tends is the one of friendship.

Q. Did you think so at twenty, or have you discovered it over the years?

M.F. As far back as I remember, to want guys [*garçons*] was to want relations with guys. That has always been important for me. Not necessarily in the form of a couple but as a matter of existence: how is it possible for men to be together? To live together, to share their time, their meals, their room, their leisure, their grief, their knowledge, their confidences? What is it to be "naked" among men, outside of institutional relations, family, profession, and obligatory camaraderie? It's a desire, an uneasiness, a desire-in-uneasiness that exists among a lot of people.

Q. Can you say that desire and pleasure, and the relationships one can have, are dependent on one's age?

M.F. Yes, very profoundly. Between a man and a younger woman, the marriage institution makes it easier: she accepts it and makes it work. But two men of noticeably different ages—what code would allow them to communicate? They face each other without terms or convenient words, with nothing to assure them about the meaning of the movement that carries them toward each other. They have to invent, from A to Z, a relationship that is still formless, which is friendship: that is to say, the sum of everything through which they can give each other pleasure.

One of the concessions one makes to others is not to present homosexuality as anything but a kind of immediate pleasure, of two young men meeting in the street, seducing each other with a look, grabbing each other's asses and getting each other off in a quarter of an hour. There you have a kind of neat image of homosexuality without any possibility of generating unease, and for two reasons: it responds to a reassuring canon of beauty, and it cancels everything that can be troubling in affection, tenderness, friendship, fidelity, camaraderie, and companionship, things that our rather sanitized society can't allow a place for without fearing the formation of new alliances and the tying together of unforeseen lines of force. I think that's what makes homosexuality "disturbing": the homosexual mode of life, much more than the sexual act itself. To imagine a sexual act that doesn't conform to law or

nature is not what disturbs people. But that individuals are beginning to love one another—there's the problem. The institution is caught in a contradiction; affective intensities traverse it which at one and the same time keep it going and shake it up. Look at the army, where love between men is ceaselessly provoked [*appelé*] and shamed. Institutional codes can't validate these relations with multiple intensities, variable colors, imperceptible movements and changing forms. These relations short-circuit it and introduce love where there's supposed to be only law, rule, or habit.

Q. You were saying a little while ago: "Rather than crying about faded pleasures, I'm interested in what we ourselves can do." Could you explain that more precisely?

M.F. Asceticism as the renunciation of pleasure has bad connotations. But ascesis is something else: it's the work that one performs on oneself in order to transform oneself or make the self appear which, happily, one never attains. Can that be our problem today? We've rid ourselves of asceticism. Yet it's up to us to advance into a homosexual ascesis that would make us work on ourselves and invent—I do not say discover—a manner of being that is still improbable.

Q. That means that a young homosexual must be very cautious in regard to homosexual imagery; he must work at something else?

M.F. What we must work on, it seems to me, is not so much to liberate our desires but to make ourselves infinitely more susceptible to pleasure [*plaisirs*]. We must escape and help others to escape the two readymade formulas of the pure sexual encounter and the lovers' fusion of identities.

Q. Can one see the first fruits of strong constructive relationships in the United States, in any case in the cities where the problem of sexual misery seems under control?

M.F. To me, it appears certain that in the United States, even if the basis of sexual misery still exists, the interest in friendship has become very important; one doesn't enter a relationship simply in order to be able to consummate it sexually, which happens very easily. But toward friendship, people are very polarized. How can a relational system be reached through sexual practices? Is it possible to create a homosexual mode of life?

This notion of mode of life seems important to me. Will it require the introduction of a diversification different from the ones due to social class, differences in profession and culture, a diversification that would

also be a form of relationship and would be a "way of life"? A way of life can be shared among individuals of different age, status, and social activity. It can yield intense relations not resembling those that are institutionalized. It seems to me that a way of life can yield a culture and an ethics. To be "gay," I think, is not to identify with the psychological traits and the visible masks of the homosexual but to try to define and develop a way of life.

Q. Isn't it a myth to say: Here we are enjoying the first fruits of a socialization between different classes, ages, and countries?

M.F. Yes, like the great myth of saying: There will no longer be any difference between homo- and heterosexuality. Moreover, I think that it's one of the reasons that homosexuality presents a problem today. Many sexual liberation movements project this idea of "liberating yourself from the hideous constraints that weigh upon you." Yet the affirmation that to be a homosexual is for a man to love another man—this search for a way of life runs counter to the ideology of the sexual liberation movements of the sixties. It's in this sense that the mustached "clones" are significant. It's a way of responding: "Have nothing to fear; the more one is liberated, the less one will love women, the less one will founder in this polysexuality where there are no longer any differences between the two." It's not at all the idea of a great community fusion.

Homosexuality is a historic occasion to reopen affective and relational virtualities, not so much through the intrinsic qualities of the homosexual but because the "slantwise" position of the latter, as it were, the diagonal lines he can lay out in the social fabric allow these virtualities to come to light.

Q. Women might object: What do men together have to win compared to the relations between a man and a woman or between two women?

M.F. There is a book that just appeared in the U.S. on the friendships between women.¹ The affection and passion between women is well documented. In the preface, the author states that she began with the idea of unearthing homosexual relationships—but perceived that not only were these relationships not always present but that it was uninteresting whether relationships could be called "homosexual" or not. And by letting the relationship manifest itself as it appeared in words and gestures, other very essential things also appeared: dense, bright, marvelous loves and affections or very dark and sad loves. The

book shows the extent to which woman's body has played a great role, and the importance of physical contact between women: women do each other's hair, help each other with make up, dress each other. Women have had access to the bodies of other women: they put their arms around each other, kiss each other. Man's body has been forbidden to other men in a much more drastic way. If it's true that life between women was tolerated, it's only in certain periods and since the nineteenth century that life between men not only was tolerated but rigorously necessary: very simply, during war.

And equally in prison camps. You had soldiers and young officers who spent months and even years together. During World War I, men lived together completely, one on top of another, and for them it was nothing at all, insofar as death was present and finally the devotion to one another and the services rendered were sanctioned by the play of life and death. And apart from several remarks on camaraderie, the brotherhood of spirit, and some very partial observations, what do we know about these emotional uproars and storms of feeling that took place in those times? One can wonder how, in these absurd and grotesque wars and infernal massacres, the men managed to hold on in spite of everything. Through some emotional fabric, no doubt. I don't mean that it was because they were each other's lovers that they continued to fight; but honor, courage, not losing face, sacrifice, leaving the trench with the captain—all that implied a very intense emotional tie. It's not to say: "Ah, there you have homosexuality!" I detest that kind of reasoning. But no doubt you have there one of the conditions, not the only one, that has permitted this infernal life where for weeks guys floundered in the mud and shit, among corpses, starving for food, and were drunk the morning of the assault.

I would like to say, finally, that something well considered and voluntary like a magazine ought to make possible a homosexual culture, that is to say, the instruments for polymorphic, varied, and individually modulated relationships. But the idea of a program of proposals is dangerous. As soon as a program is presented, it becomes a law, and there's a prohibition against inventing. There ought to be an inventiveness special to a situation like ours and to these feelings, this need that Americans call "coming out," that is, showing oneself. The program must be wide open. We have to dig deeply to show how things have been historically contingent, for such and such reason intelligible but not necessary. We must make the intelligible appear against a back-

ground of emptiness and deny its necessity. We must think that what exists is far from filling all possible spaces. To make a truly unavoidable challenge of the question: What can be played?

NOTE

- 1 Lillian Faderman, *Surpassing the Love of Men* (New York: Morrow, 1980).