

## **Power, Sexuality, and Individual Identity in Jean-Luc Godard's *Masculin***

### ***Féminin* and Michel Foucault's *History of Sexuality Vol. 1***

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In this paper, I intend to study the discourses of power, knowledge, and sexuality in Michel Foucault's *History of Sexuality Vol. 1*, as well as his lectures on "biopolitics" and some selected films of Jean-Luc Godard. I will study Godard's films, in particular the film *Masculin Féminin* (1966), in the light of Foucault's critical study of the history of modernity with a focus on his conceptualization of power as a "complex arrangements of forces in society" (*History of Sexuality* 90) in relation to the production of knowledge and discourses about sexuality and subjectivity in the modern West under capitalism.

Indeed, I would like to examine how Godard's filmmaking practice, which is influenced by his leftist critical approach to capitalist ideology, provides a cinematic demonstration of Foucault's thoughts on how the historical process of production of knowledge and culture in the modern era has formed and transformed the interpersonal relations between human subjects, as well as their social and sexual bodies. In doing so, I would examine Godard's critique of power relationships, sex, and sexuality under capitalism in the aforementioned films in a theoretical framework informed by Foucault's thoughts on the possibilities of finding new leftist critical approaches to the analysis of power and knowledge discourses in the modern West "that are not reducible to Marxist dogmatism" (Trombadori 94-95, qtd. in Rizvi).

*Masculin Féminin* was produced and released in 1966, and Foucault wrote the first volume of *The History of Sexuality* in 1976; the years between these dates, which comprise a critical historical period for European youth leftist movements, are highly influential and reflected in the artistic and intellectual endeavours of Godard and Foucault. In this regard, one of the main challenges they investigate in their works is the relation between power, sexuality, and knowledge; and the effects of these discourses on human subjectivity in modern Europe under late capitalism. Indeed, they are experimentalist intellectuals whose first and foremost concern is human subjectivity; this is how Foucault describes himself, as he says “I consider myself more an experimenter than a theorist; I don’t develop deductive systems to apply uniformly in different fields of research. When I write, I do it above all to change myself and not to think the same thing as before” (qtd. in Trombadori 28). Godard also describes his practice of filmmaking, not merely as a narrative art form, but most of all as “a new way of seeing” (qtd. in Morrey 2).

Both Godard and Foucault examine the effects of power and sex relationships on one’s life in the family, as well as the workplace and social institutions. However, while Godard criticizes the modern social condition on human subjects – in particular in his late 1960s and early 1970s filmmaking – in the light of his involvement with Marxist and Maoist movements of resistance in France, Foucault proposes a critical and historical study of the modern social condition with the focus on a notion of power different from the Marxist definition of power as domination upon or repression of the citizens by any given state (*History of Sexuality* 92).

In this regard, while one could find points of commonality between Godard and

Foucault's overall critical approaches to the mechanism of the production of knowledge and formation of the subject in contemporary neo-liberal Europe, there are differences in their definitions or approaches to the notions of "power," "resistance," and "change." These differences – which are mostly in terms of their mechanisms, possible ways of realization, consequences, and effects on social subjects – could be studied in the wider context of Foucault's critique of Marxism. In order to examine Foucault's critical investigations, I would first like to draw briefly on the status of his "critical history of modernity" in the context of contemporary European leftist thoughts and movements. In doing so, I would take his argument about "the discourse of power" as a point of departure.

As Duccio Trombadori notes in an introduction to his extensive interview with Foucault, entitled "Remarks on Marx," the relations of Foucault's opinions to Marxism (in particular the Marxism of the 1960s) could mostly be found in his "discourse on power," which as Trombadori writes, Foucault tends to coincide it with "*the internal truth* of the radical movements of resistance" (16). As Foucault says:

If I look back today at my past [he observes during the discussion] I can see that the true motivating force was really this problem of power. Ultimately I had done nothing but attempt to trace the way in which certain institutions, in the name of "reason" or "normality," had ended up exercising their power on groups of individuals, in relation to established ways of behavior, of being, of acting or speaking, by labeling them as anomalies, madness, etc. In the end, I had only produced a history of power. (qtd. in Trombadori 16)

In this regard, the first question could be: what does Foucault mean by the discourse of "power"?

In *The History of Sexuality Vol. 1*, Foucault elaborates on the objective of his study: "to analyze a certain form of knowledge regarding sex, not in terms of repression

or law, but in terms of power” (92). Furthermore, he emphasizes that he intends to distinguish his notion of power from “a number of misunderstandings” about the definition and form of power, saying: “I do not mean ‘Power’ as a group of institutions and mechanisms that ensures the subservience of the citizens of a given state. By power, I do not mean, either, a mode of subjugation, which, in contrast to violence, has the form of the rule” (92). Referring to Marxists’ notion of power, and in order to separate his notion of power from the Marxist critique of power, he adds: “Finally, I do not have in mind a general system of domination exerted by one group over another, a system whose effects, through successive derivations, pervade the entire social body. The analysis, made in terms of power, must not assume that the sovereignty of the state, the form of the law, or the overall unity of a domination are given at the outset; rather, these are only the terminal forms power takes” (93). For Foucault, “power” could first be discussed “as the multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate and which constitute their own organization;” second, “as the process which, through ceaseless struggles and confrontations, transforms, strengthens, or reverses them;” third, “as the support which these force relations find in one another, thus forming a chain or a system, or on the contrary, the disjunctions and contradictions which isolate them from one another;” and finally, “as the strategies in which they take effect, whose general design or institutional crystallization is embodied in the state apparatus, in the formulation of the law, in the various social hegemonies” (92-93). Foucault studies power as a “polymorphous” and “omnipotent” discourse that could be found “everywhere not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere” (93).

Based on this, it could be argued that the difference between Foucault’s argument

about “Power” and that of most contemporary European leftist theories and movements is first in Foucault’s thoughts on the origin of power; second, the way he examines the human subject’s response or reaction to power, or more precisely the subject’s “modes of subjugation” (Rabinow & Rose 195); and the third is about the consequences of the subject’s encounter with and resistance against power.

Further in his discussion about the form and nature of power in *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault argues that power “comes from opposition between rulers and ruled at the root that there is no binary and all-encompassing between rulers and ruled at the root of power relationships” (94). This also refers to Foucault’s emphasis on the circulation and transformation of the discourse of power from the bottom of the social pyramid to the top. In this way, a dominant class or the state as sovereign authority does not possess power, but rather power is exercised in varying degrees through the complex social relationships between human subjects in any given social interaction (94-95).

The second part of Foucault’s argument is the position or reaction of the subject to the power. As he puts it: “where there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power” (95). For Foucault, the subject’s resistance to power has also a polymorphous and omnipotent presence in the power network. Further in his discussion about the relationship between power, knowledge, and sexuality, Foucault shows that it is at this point of resistance in the power relationship that the knowledge about discourses such as sex are formed and transformed (97). In contrary to the Marxist notion of “resistance” as a form of struggle against dominant oppression, Foucault sees the mechanisms and discourses of power relationship and resistance as productive spheres for the formation of

certain forms of knowledge about power and sexuality in relation to the individual's subjectivity in modern Europe.

Elaborating on his point about the productive nature of the power-resistance discourse on sexuality over the course of European history, Foucault asks:

Given a specific state structure, how and why is it that power needs to establish knowledge of sex? Neither is the question: What over-all domination was served by the concern, evidenced since the eighteenth century, to produce true discourses on sex? ...Nor is it: What law presided over both the regularity of sexual behavior and the conformity of what was said about it? It is rather: In a specific type' of discourse on sex, in a specific form of extortion of truth, appearing historically and in specific places (around the child's body, apropos of women's sex, in connection with practices restricting births, and so on), what were the most immediate, the most local power relations at work? ...How was the action of these power relations modified by their very exercise, entailing a strengthening of some terms and a weakening of others, with effects of resistance and counter investments, so that there has never existed one type of stable subjugation, given once and for all?

Foucault concludes that, rather than a unique form of a great "Power," one should explore the expanding production of discourses on sex in the field of multiple and dynamic power relations (97-98).

This statement reflects how Foucault discusses power and power relationships as a productive discourse in modern societies. As Dreyfus and Rabinow note, Foucault argues that the juridical theory – as well as Marxist and Freudian theories in different ways – is centered on the repressive, and thereby obscures, the productive side of power (128-33 qtd. in Kumar 15). Based on this, my paper would examine the power relationships in Godard's *Masculin Féminin* in relation to the aforementioned Foucauldian discourse on power as a critique of Marxist views of power and its effects on human subjects.

*Masculin Féminin* is Godard's eleventh film and is highly influenced by his

involvement with Marxist ideology. The film explicitly challenges the parallel and ambivalent influences of Marx and American capitalism on a generation of youth in France in the '60s and '70s. The film's opening credits announce that it is about the "children of Marx and Coca-Cola," a generation of young people in France who will be voting for the first time in the forthcoming presidential election on December 5, 1965. As Joel Haycock elaborates on the social and historical context of *Masculin Féminin*, in this historical period in France a coalition called the Federation of the Democratic Socialist Left united to support the candidacy of François Mitterrand to oppose de Gaulle. On the other hand, the ethnographic and anthropological surveys in the film echo the time's trend of surveying the opinions of the Parisian population by opinion polling companies gathering information for different social institutions (Haycock 52-56, qtd. in Morrey 47-48). Haycock suggests that *Masculin Féminin* is mostly based on Godard's question of "how to give an account of contemporary French society through film" (53). To answer this question, I would argue that Godard shows his young characters' personal as well as social lives in relation to power, either power as the state and its policies for managing the population, or power relationships exercised by characters in relation to one another. To study these power relationships in *Masculin Féminin*, I would draw on Foucault's analysis of the two main forms of power in modern Europe.

In *The History of Sexuality Vol. 1* and in his further 1975-1976 lectures at the College de France, Foucault traces the transformation of sovereign power to two modern forms of power, namely "disciplinary" and "biopower" (Tyler 41). In chapter five of *The History of Sexuality Vol. 1*, entitled "Right of Death and Power over Life," Foucault discusses the deployment of power over life in two basic forms since the seventeenth

century. The first focuses on “the body as a machine: its disciplining, the optimization of its capabilities, the extortion of its forces, the parallel increase of its usefulness and its docility, its integration into systems of efficient and economic controls, all this was ensured by the procedures of power that characterized the disciplines: an anatomo-politics of the human body” (139). The second, which was formed later, is centered on all the discourses formed around “the species body, the body imbued with the mechanics of life and serving as the basis of the biological processes: propagation, births and mortality, the level of health, life expectancy and longevity, with all the conditions that can cause these to vary. Their supervision was effected through an entire series of interventions and regulatory controls: a biopolitics of the population” (139).

As Paul Rabinow and Nikolas Rose show in their study “Biopower Today,” Foucault’s concept of biopower discusses “a field composed of more or less rationalized attempts to intervene upon vital characteristics of human existence” (197). In this regard, the term biopolitics refers to “all the specific strategies and contestations over problemizations of collective human vitality, morbidity and mortality; over the forms of knowledge, regimes of authority and practices of interventions that are desirable, legitimate and efficacious” (197).

In this sense, the Foucauldian notion of biopolitics is exemplified in the formal strategies and thematic concerns of Godard’s *Masculin Féminin*. In the film, Godard employs interrogatory interviews, either as polls and public opinion surveys or as characters’ everyday dialogue, as the main formal strategy for investigating the social conditions and interpersonal relations of the film’s young characters. In a sense, Godard’s story is a visual exploration of what Foucault studied in a wider socio-historical context:

certain forms of knowledge formed by the interrelation between sex and politics.

In the introduction to *The History of Sexuality Vol. 1*, Foucault writes:

One of the great innovations in the techniques of power in the eighteenth century was the emergence of “population” as an economic and political problem: population as wealth, population as manpower or labor capacity, population balanced between its own growth and the resources it commanded. Governments perceived that they were not dealing simply with subjects, or even with a “people,” but with a “population,” with its specific phenomena and its peculiar variables: birth and death rates, life expectancy, fertility, state of health, frequency of illnesses, patterns of diet and habitation. (46)

Furthermore, he emphasizes that the citizenry’s sex and sexuality was the key to this economic and political problem of population. As he puts it: “It was essential that the state know what was happening with its citizens’ sex, and the use they made of it, but also that each individual be capable of controlling the use he made of it. Between the state and the individual, sex became an issue, and a public issue no less; a whole web of discourses, special knowledge, analyses, and injunctions settled upon it” (26-27).

*Masculin Féminin* revolves around brief accounts of the social and personal lives of its four young characters: sons of Marx and daughters of Coca-Cola in the socio-political context of Paris between the first and second round of presidential elections in 1965. Godard shows his characters’ involvement with sex, work, and politics through interview-style dialogue that takes place in urban as well as domestic spaces. In the beginning of the film, we find Paul, a young radical Marxist and political activist, sitting in a Parisian café and reading lines echoing Marx’s thoughts on the alienating nature of everyday labour; however, his Marxist reflections are interrupted by the entrance of Madeline, his love interest, who works as archivist in the fashion photography section of a Parisian magazine named *Mademoiselle 19* and has a strong aspiration to launch a career as a pop star. As Douglas Morrey notes in the book

*Jean-Luc Godard, Masculin Féminin* is marked by a certain ambivalence: “on one hand, his characters display energy and optimism and a healthy political idealism; but, on the other, they are just as likely to be led into political complacency, or even apathy, by their overriding concerns with consumer items, popular culture, and the opposite sex” (47). This ambivalent social condition is shown through Godard’s two main formal strategies in the film, which in a sense are both influenced by his involvement with Marxism and Maoist politics in the late 1960s and early 1970s; or, in a broader sense, his leftist critique of modern social conditions under late capitalist culture.

The first stylistic strategy is Godard’s choice for distancing and disillusioning the audience from the story and is influenced by Bertolt Brecht’s “theory of distancing.” The second is the interview or more precisely “interrogation” style of dialogues between the characters. Throughout these interviews, characters become engaged in a game of power relationships, in which they are either exercising varying degrees of power over one another, or resisting against one another.

Godard’s stylistic choice to resist the illusion of reality created by mainstream or Hollywood cinema in a US-led capitalist culture is discussed in most articles about his cinema. In *Masculin Féminin*, this strategy is best shown through the fragmentary docu-drama style of narrative, as well as non-linear editing. The film’s narrative is structured within 15 “specific events” (*faits précis*) that are independent episodes about the personal and social lives of the film’s youth characters. There is no dramatic continuity, emotional involvement, or identification with the actions or the characters on the screen. Instead, the inter-titles persistently demand that the audience get some distance from the narrative and be aware of the socio-political and historical context of

the story, namely US-led imperialism, the Vietnam War, Third World movements of resistance, and the rise of late capitalism and consumer culture. To achieve this Brechtian effect in *Masculin Féminin*, Godard uses an unconventional editing style in dialogue scenes that eventually situates the audience in the position of a distanced observer. As Penely notes in her study “Les enfant de la Patrie”: “We are not given the usual choreography of shot/reverse-shot and the reaction shot, as we never see the interviewer. This arrangement effectively implicates the viewer in the scene far more than having us look on and overhear the interviewer from a position outside it. We share the imaginary off-screen space of the interviewer and this is a distinctly uncomfortable place in which to be” (Penely 109, qtd. in Halasz 28).

Godard’s second stylistic choice, which would be the focus of this study, is the way he uses interview and opinion polling as the dominant narrative strategy to explore a generation of French youths’ involvement with sex, politics, and labour. In this sense, Godard explores concerns somewhat similar to those investigated by Foucault in *The History of Sexuality Vol. 1*, as well as his lectures *The Birth of Biopolitics* in 1978-1979.

Throughout *Masculin Féminin*, the main character, Paul, a 21-year old young Marxist, is engaged with opinion polls as well as interview-style conversations with Robert, his fellow Marxist and labour movements organizer; Madeline, his love interest; and Madeline’s roommates, Catharine and Elizabeth. These interviews, which revolve around topics ranging from personal sexual habits to political ideas, are reminiscent of what Foucault discusses as “biopolitical strategies.” According to Foucault, biopolitical strategies are about “the attempt, starting from the eighteenth century, to rationalize the problems posed to governmental practice by phenomena characteristic of a set of living

beings forming a population: health, hygiene, birth rate, life expectancy, race..." (*The Birth of Biopolitics* 336).

As Foucault argues, since the nineteenth century, interviews and public opinion surveys about citizens have become an important tactic for government and also a theme of political operations, economic interventions, and ideological campaigns for raising the standards of morality and responsibility (*History of Sexuality* 146). Foucault sees this process overall as a productive function of power, which in an ideal situation could be used as a feature of "the liberal art government" for managing the population (*The Birth of Biopolitics* 325, 347).

The first interview-style conversation in *Masculin Féminin* takes place between Paul and Madeline in the magazine's bathroom. It is the first scene in which Paul interrogates Madeline about her body and sexual habits as a "product of consumer culture." The scene shows Madeline combing her hair and fixing her makeup, and Paul courting her and trying to persuade her to go out with him. As they continue talking about themselves, sex, and their relationships, Madeline asks Paul what he knows about her and Paul starts talking about her physical characteristics: "your hair, eyes, nose, hands..." Then, Paul asks Madeline to look at him and say what she thinks about him. First, she evades answering him, but then asks him, "what's the center of the world for you?" While he answers that, for him, love is the center of the world, she says she sees herself as a center of the world; a disappointing answer for a young idealist Marxist. Finding him surprised at her answer, Madeline asks whether Paul really doesn't think that way. Paul pauses for a while, and then admits that he may see himself as the center of the world, but in a sense that he lives or sees with his own eyes, as a matter of existentialist worldview.

The second interview, which in my opinion is the most significant interview in the film, is Paul's interview with "Mademoiselle19." She has been selected as the winner of a beauty contest sponsored by the youth magazine *Mademoiselle19* where Paul used to work and Madeleine still works. The interview precedes an inter-title saying: "Dialogue with a consumer product." In response to Mademoiselle19's question about why he asks her personal questions, Paul says that he has changed his job in the magazine and is working as pollster for a poll institute titled IFOP. However, he does not do the interview merely as an objective survey for his affiliated company, but rather his questions are mostly posed with a kind of accusatory or interrogatory tone that intensifies as the interview progresses. Throughout the interview, Paul moves back and forth between his own personal concerns and the questions he is supposed to ask for the poll about French women.

Paul uses this opinion poll interview to prove his point about how a "product of consumerism" is a passive and socio-historically ignorant prey of capitalism; to support his "value judgment," Paul asks Mademoiselle19 if she knows what will be the future of socialism. In a gesture and attitude that could be described as being realistically aware of one's limitations – rather than naïve, ignorant, or superficial – Mademoiselle19 says that she thinks she is not qualified to answer his question. Then, he wants her to compare socialism with American life to show how she is fascinated with the "extraordinary" American or capitalist lifestyle. Similar to this are the questions about whether she knows about the terms "reactionary" and "popular front." At some point in the interview, returning to the poll's questions, Paul asks Mademoiselle19 if she knows about birth control; while she feels uncomfortable talking about it, he insists on getting practical

answers. Irritated by Paul's various interrogatory questions about her political views and sexual life, Mademoiselle19 says she doesn't want to answer his questions any more.

The third interview takes place in a kitchen between young Marxist Robert – Paul's Marxist comrade – and Catherine, Madeline's roommate and a product of consumerist capitalism. Earlier in the film, Paul gives Catherine a higher status compared to other girls, with Madeline and Elizabeth calling her "a potential future militant;" however, she also experiences a somewhat similar interrogatory conversation/interview that Godard's female characters experienced earlier in the film.

The scene begins with Robert courting Catherine and continues with the third and last part of the repetitive structure of a conversation or interview that turns to be an interrogation. Robert interrogates Catherine about her sexual habits and interests. While he insists to know about her relationships and personal life attitudes and choices, she resists his questions and reminds him to respect her privacy. When he asks her if she has any idea about what democracy is, she says no or not particularly. She adds that she is not interested in politics, but believes there are things that could be done to change the situation; though she doesn't know what they are or how they could be done. As Robert continues questioning Catherine about her sexual and personal life, Catherine also begins to take the position of interviewer or interrogator, and asks questions about Robert's personal life and sexual habits; eventually, both become involved in the process of interrogating the other as well as being interrogated by the other.

The interview scenes in *Masculin Féminin* have been mostly studied from Marxist and Marxist-feminist points of view. Yosefa Loshitzky, in a chapter on Godard's images of sexuality in the book *The Radical Faces of Godard and Bertolucci*, argues that the

method of interview in Godard's films is used as a "reflective device" that "expresses the power relationship between women and men" (Loshitzky 167). Discussing Godard's 1975 film *Number Two*, Loshitzky notes that the interview format becomes more significant in showing the dynamics of power relationships between male and female characters in Godard's later films. This is the case in *Two or Three Things I Know About Her* (1968); in the conversation scene between Juliette's husband and a young woman in the café, the woman says that "Men are always asking the questions. Women answer or do not" (168). Furthermore, he argues that in most of Godard's films, male characters lead the conversation and direct it, while women are the researched objects whose subjectivity is questioned and denied by men (168). This may reflect the Marxist reading of radical Godard in the 1960s. As Morrey also shows, they see the female characters as "hopelessly superficial" as opposed to the male characters' "political awareness" and "emotional depth" (Morrey 50). Similarly, a feminist or Marxist feminist may find the interview scenes as examples of patriarchal power relationships under capitalism, in which male characters view and interrogate females, both as products of consumer society and objects of pleasure. However, I would argue that the ambivalent relationship between ideological idealism and the social and personal lives of Godard's male characters in *Masculin Féminin* – namely Paul and Robert – shows that the outcome of the ongoing power relationships is not a matter of dominance over one another. Rather, there is an ongoing mutual lose-and-gain at play, in which both characters participate and become actively involved. That is, there are male characters that begin and run the dialogue by asking questions; however, one can find moments throughout the interviews and conversations that show how they themselves are products of an ideological system

that forms or directs their thoughts, attitudes, and choices.

We see in both cases that due to the alienating force of capitalist culture, as Marxists like Paul believe, and the anti-individual and biased attitude of the ideological struggle in Marxism, what is at stake is the characters' subjectivity, which is perhaps the main concern shared by Godard and Foucault. Regardless of their approaches and socio-political stances, both Foucault and Godard explore the constraints and possibilities of maintaining one's subjectivity or individual identity while living and interacting with others.

In his study on Godard's film, Douglas Morrey argues that Godard's stylistic choices in all of the interview scenes in *Masculin Féminin* show how women are subjects of Paul and Robert's interrogations. He notes that female characters are being interrogated while they are trapped in the closed spaces of bathroom, kitchen, or windowsill (Morrey 50). This seems to be a plausible stylistic choice for depicting the power relationships between the male and female characters; however, one might also argue that the females' reactions or responses are not always from a submissive, passive, or even ignorant status, as some critics note. Rather, despite the film's formal choices, the narrative and character treatments of Paul and to some degree, his fellow Marxist Robert, resist what Morrey and Loshtizky discuss as Godard's formal strategies favouring his male characters. Throughout the film, Paul and Robert, with their unsecure and ambivalent states of mind, find themselves tangled as they constantly move back and forth between their Marxist socio-political ideals and their interest in the products of consumer culture. In this sense, at some points in the film, it seems that the female characters are more confident and aware of what they want to do individually. Madeline's

choice of being a pop star or Mademoiselle19's plan to travel around the world may not involve any ideological or humanitarian commitment, but compared with the ideological partiality and bigotry that are associated with Paul and Robert Marxist's commitments, they experience a higher degree of freedom and independence to make their individual choices. In contrast to what Paul, or perhaps Godard, may think about female characters as passive consumers of capitalism, they are closer to that status of subjectivity Foucault describes as being oneself, so as to be able to seek the possibilities of a change in one's own mind rather than trying to change other people or the overall social condition (Foucault, "L'Espresso" 61).

A Foucauldian-informed reading may suggest that being one's true self, even in the egoist sense Madeline appreciates, is more authentic than being committed to a biased and ideological vision of the world. The ideological struggle, as Foucault argues, is based on a "model of war" and negation that threatens one's subjectivity, intellectual independence, and freedom. In the final analysis, this would deprive the subject from viewing the world, and its challenges beyond and independent from the ideological struggle.

As shown in *Masculin Féminin*, the female characters enjoy a broader view of the world around them. A case in point would be that they have higher degrees of tolerance for the diversity of unconventional sexual orientations and relationships; while Paul, in reaction to Madeline's lesbian affair with her roommate Elizabeth, explicitly expresses his intolerance or disgust for lesbians (or more broadly homosexuality). Another case is the scene that takes place in the movie theater's washroom; watching two men kissing each other in the washroom, Paul gets irritated and calls them cowards. Then, in a

reactionary act similar to the way he writes “Peace in Vietnam” on an American military official’s limousine, he writes “Down with the republic of cowards” on the washroom’s door. While the first one could be appreciated as a part of the humanitarian movement against the US-led war in Vietnam, the second reactionary act originated from Paul’s biased point of view.

The narrow attitude that ideology (here Marxism) imposes on Paul’s mentality, subjectivity, and vision of the world is reminiscent of Foucault’s criticism of contemporary Marxist youth movements in 1960s and 1970s Europe in his interview with Duccio Trombadori. In response to a question about his criticism of French and Italian Communist parties, Foucault says:

What is tiresome in ideological arguments is that one is necessarily swept away by the “model of war.” That is to say that when you find yourself facing someone with ideas different from your own, you are always led to identify that person as an enemy (of your class, your society, etc.). And we know that it is necessary to wage combat against the enemy until triumphing over him. This grand theme of ideological struggle has really disturbed me. First of all because the theoretical coordinates of each of us are often, no, always, confused and fluctuating, especially if they are observed in their genesis. Furthermore: might not this “struggle” that one tries to wage against the “enemy” only be a way of making a petty dispute without much importance seem more serious than it really is? I mean, don’t certain intellectuals hope to lend themselves greater political weight with their “ideological struggle” than they really have? A book is consumed very quickly, you know. An article, well ....What is more serious: acting out a struggle against the “enemy,” or investigating, together or perhaps divergently, the important problems that are posed? (182)

In his books *The History of Sexuality Vol. I* and *Discipline and Punish: the Birth of the Prison*, as well as his interviews and lectures, Foucault shows how power creates subjects and modes of subjugation, emphasizing that: “One must remember that power is not an ensemble of mechanisms of negation, refusal, and exclusion. But it produces effectively. It is likely that it produces right down to individuals themselves.

Individuality, individual identity, are the products of power” (qtd. in Heyes 159).

This statement, with the degree of certainty that Foucault expresses, may sound allusive and thus somehow problematic. However, to a certain extent, one could find it exemplified in the thoughts, actions, desires and relationships of the young characters in *Masculin Féminin*. In this regard, the overall conversations and interviews in the film, which revolve around sex, sexuality, and politics and involve varying degrees of power relationships, are not merely refusals or negations of the different other as an “enemy” in “combat;” but rather could be productive in terms of making the characters review and rework what they are seeking in their lives as individuals.

In particular, we may consider this in terms of what Foucault proposes as the productive effects of the capacity of subjects to resist disciplinary power. That is, while most of the political theories of power and oppression argue that the subject’s resistance is possible by standing outside of the system or mechanisms of power, Foucault posits resistance within subject-positions, which are the particular spaces within a system of power. Within these spaces, individual subjects challenge the possibilities and constraints of achieving individual identities and being autonomous and liberated selves within the complicated and dynamic networks and mechanisms of the power system. It is through this act of resistance that one could overcome repressive and oppressive modes of subjugation and moves toward liberation and subjectivity (qtd. in Heyes 159-161, 167-168).

I would draw on this Foucauldian notion of the dialectics between power and resistance in the power relationship to argue that both male and female characters in *Masculin Féminin* are taking positions in relation to power; and in doing so are defining,

defending, or reworking their individual identities and choices. There are two levels of power involved: in the content of back-and-forth dialogues, and the social and historical context of the story. The first is the power that characters exercise to make the other talk about her/his individual choices and identity; and the second is the overall system and mechanisms of “disciplinary power” that affect the characters “modes of subjugation.” Thus, these interviews are productive in the sense that Foucault argues power could enable certain subject-positions: mutual identification as well as possibilities or capacities for the individual to practice their authentic individuality.

As it is shown, while Godard appreciates his main character Paul’s social and political commitments, he admits his failure and uncertainty. Paul’s suicide at the end of the story shows that he does not hold the upper hand in power relationships between the characters in the story, although the formal choices may convey that. Godard’s disappointment in his character is also echoed in Paul’s monologue heard over the montaged images of Parisian citizens in different urban settings in the final scene. Reviewing a wide range of questions, he asks people about their opinions as well as personal habits and social attitudes, and realizes that the questions he asked “didn’t reflect but deformed the collective mentality.” As he puts it, his lack of objectivity, either conscious or unconscious, tends to provoke “a predictable lack of sincerity” in the people he was interviewing or polling. He continues: “Unawares, I was deceiving and deceived by them. Why? Probably because polls and surveys quickly veer from their true goal, the observation of behaviors and insidiously go for value judgments. I discovered that the question I would ask any French person expressed an ideology that reflects not present mores but those of the past.”(Godard).

This quite lengthy and at some points fractured monologue, which seems to be a kind of self-critique and liberating resolution, is severed by a cut to black and then the sound of Paul shooting himself.

During the interview with Trombadori, in talking about his disappointing experiences in the French communist party and his further act of distancing from the P.C.F., Foucault says: "In any case, my brief experience with the Party was useful, above all, for what it enabled me to see. I witnessed and took part in a series of episodes which I accepted and shared with others because of that kind of 'will to change oneself' which I spoke to you about" (*Remarks on Marx* 52-53).

This statement is emblematic of the point where Foucault, Godard, and his young Marxist Paul converge. While the Western ideologies of the 20<sup>th</sup> century ultimately failed to provide a plausible account of the human condition, as Foucault suggests, one should seek new ways to focus on the change in one's mind and take care of one's individual identity – rather than trying to change other people's mentality or attitudes or the overall social condition (Foucault, "L'Espresso" 61). Only then can we have a broader view of the external world's reality and develop our understanding of the problems that face us in our everyday lives.

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