Coldness and Cruelty as Performance in Deleuze's Proust

In the context of their discussion of critics' exploration of the homosexual elements of *A la recherche de temps perdu* in their book *Anti-Oedipe*, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari point out how commonly such critics diagnose 'Oedipal homosexuality with a mother fixation', as well as a 'dominant depressive nature and a sadomasochistic guilt'(Deleuze & Guattari 1983, 68). The authors are, in my view, correct to distrust such a simplistic reading of Proust or any other writer or individual in terms of the standard Freudian prognosis of Oedipal guilt. In various ways, both the dark vision of female submission presented in Michael Haneke's film *La Pianiste* (2001) (even darker in Elfriede Jelinek's book *Die Klavierspielerin* upon which the film is based) or the cautiously optimistic view to be found in Steven Shainberg's *Secretary* (2002), suffer from being predicated upon such reductive quasi-Freudian models. Deleuze and Guattari's view, elaborated in their various co-authored books and some of Deleuze's own, resists interpretations of desire as grounded in the actions and histories of particular beings and subjectivities, and thus abstracted from them, in favour of the 'desiring-machine' model, by which desire as an abstract relation precedes its manifestation in particular individuals. I find this model compelling if not entirely sufficient. It provides a radical alternative to Freudian reductiveness which significantly exceeds the partial critical revisions of Freud to be found in the work of Julia Kristeva or Jacques Lacan. As such, it provides a useable framework within which to consider sadomasochism.

For the purposes of this article, I seek to elaborate upon the implications of a view of such a desiring-machine *as exists under capitalism*, without seeking to pronounce upon whether such a machinic force would exist, at least in any recognisable form, in pre-capitalist or post-capitalist societies. The truth or otherwise of the latter possibility may or may not impact upon the veracity of describing such as a desiring-machine in the first place, depending upon whether one believes that in order to satisfy the definition of the term, such a machine must have concrete representation at all points in history, or whether it simply needs to have the potential to exist in some form at some time. This difficult philosophical point is not one I wish to pursue further; for the purposes of this paper, this historically-specific model of the desiring-machine is appropriate.

Unlike various other searching commentators on Proust's work, including Kristeva, Georges Bataille and René Girard, Deleuze does not deal explicitly with sadomasochistic elements in Proust's life or work, yet in many ways some of his observations and interpretations reveal deeper insights into the subject of sadomasochism in general. In this critical reading of Deleuze's Proust, I am not attempting to uncover some more acutely refined and nuanced interpretation of the 'real' Proust. One could present detailed interpretive, psychological and biographical theories concerning the flagellation scenes involving Charlus at Jupien's bordello, in *La recherche*, as well as the many other ways in which desire is linked with power and cruelty in Proust, drawn together with the young Proust's letters to Daniel Halévy, describing the thrashing he received at the latter's hands (Proust 1985, 24) and other information that biographers have gleaned about Proust's own sexual predilections, but that is for another article. Rather, my starting point is a selection of Deleuze's readings of particular aspects of Proust, those particular aspects of his work that are *created* from his perspectives on Proust, in conjunction with some of Deleuze's wider thoughts both on sexuality (especially in the essay 'Le Froid et La

Cruel' (Deleuze & Sacher-Masoch 1989 9-138), brought into a brief dialogue with other perspectives from some of the aforementioned commentators, as well as my own perspective as one familiar with contemporary sadomasochistic culture, and a brief consideration of the wider ethical implications in terms of contemporary capitalist society, so as to work creatively through some of the implications of this particular type of process, itself machinic, that itself works its way through Deleuze's work.

Terminology

As in Deleuze's work there is some controversy to be found about terminology to connotate certain desires and practices, it is necessary to clarify some terms:

(a) *Sadism, Masochism* and *Sadomasochism*. Throughout 'Le Froid et La Cruel', Deleuze is adamant about asserting the utterly different nature of the former two categories, and as such rejecting their conflation in the latter, as found above all in Freud (Freud 1973, 137-139; 1977, 70-73, 109-111, 114-115; 1979, 163-193, 268-270; 1984, 124-126; 1985, 308-309) [1].The former terms were first coined by Richard Freiherr von Kraft-Ebing in his *Psychopathia Sexualis* (qtd. in Deleuze 1989, 135 n.1) as generalised instances of the types of behavioural traits articulated in the work of Sade and Sacher-Masoch respectively. Deleuze also points out (Deleuze 1989, 13) the unfairness of naming whole sexual inclinations after singular individuals. Both terms have come to attain wider meanings (which I will adopt in this essay), whereby *sadism* denotes the desire to inflict cruelty on another, whereas *masochism* denotes the desire to suffer oneself. Freud claimed that both qualities were often found in the same individuals, thus arguing in essence that both were representations of the same basic impulse, hence his use of the conflated term. Deleuze is unusual (compared to Bataille and Kristeva in particular, see Bataille, 1991, 437 n.2 and Kristeva, 2004) in making masochism rather than sadism the focus of his attention, and granting it ethical primacy, yet this view does not sit so easily with some of his views on Proust, as we shall see.

(b) *Domination* and *Submission*. *Domination* denotes the act of exercising control over another (by various means), and a *dominant* is one who gains satisfaction (sometimes erotic, though not necessarily so) by enacting such control. *Submission* is the act of being controlled by another; one who desires this is a *submissive*. Such control can involve cruelty, though this is by no means a necessarily condition – domination can equally often take on a certain paternal quality. In some sections of contemporary BDSM (see below) subculture, domination and submission (*D/s*) have a specific meaning, referring to a particular type of contractual agreement between parties, whereby the submissive agrees to submit to a set of rules laid down by the dominant, and agree to accept punishment if these rules are broken, all subject to negotiation and renegotiation of particular limits. However, I will use the terms more broadly to encompass all forms of controlling or controlled behaviour, whether or not outwardly (or even inwardly) agreed to as a voluntary act on the part of the submissive (or, more subtlely, by the dominant – see the mention of 'topping from the bottom' below). Alternative terms for the individuals appertaining to these umbrella concepts are simply *top* and *bottom*.

(c) *BDSM – Bondage, Domination, Sadomasochism*. This is a term frequently used by contemporary practitioners (or *players*, as they are often called, whose activities are

sometimes called *scening*). I will use the term simply to describe the contemporary field of cultural practices involving domination and submission in the sense I defined above.

Deleuze cites a particular view of the human 'soul' and its journey towards self-realisation that is found directly before the infamous 'madeleine' passage in Proust:

I feel that there is much to be said for the Celtic belief that the souls of those whom we have lost are held captive in some inferior being, in an animal, in a plant, in some inanimate object, and thus effectively lost to us until the day (which to many never comes) when we happen to pass by the tree or to obtain possession of the object which forms their prison. Then they start and tremble, they call us by our name, and as soon as we have recognised their voice the spell is broken. Delivered by us, they have overcome death and return to share our life. (Proust Vol. 1, 49; qtd. Deleuze 2000, 90).

He precedes this by stating:

The signs emanate from objects which are like boxes or containers. The objects hold a captive soul, the soul of something else which tries to open the lid. (Deleuze 2000, 90)

The impulses that produce the will to domination or submission are, in my opinion, contained within such boxes and containers, and in this way both tendencies can be viewed as manifestations of abstract 'desiring-machines' (their manifestation in terms of either same-sex or opposite-sex interactions I do not believe to be intrinsic to the issues I am dealing with here). It is valuable for both individuals and society to attempt to comprehend the nature of their manifestations or, more precisely, the ways in which such models seem fruitful for explaining manifestations of human interactions.

The Jealous Lover

Deleuze comments in *Proust et les Signes* on the detailed treatment of jealousy in Proust:

The jealous lover develops the possible worlds enclosed within the beloved. The sensitive man liberates the souls implicated in things: somewhat as we see the pieces of Japanese paper flower in the water, expanding or extending, forming blossoms, houses and characters. (Deleuze 2000, 90).

Such a view has an obvious (if darker) precedent in Baudelaire's instilling of cruel and hurt passion in the beloved: '*Et, vertigineuse douceur?/ À travers ces lèvres nouvelles / Plus éclatantes et plus belles, /' T'infuser mon venin, ma soeur!'* ('À celle qui est trop gai'), but Deleuze develops this into a more comprehensive view of jealousy betokening the will to domination:

Jealousy is the very delirium of signs. And, in Proust, we shall find the confirmation of a fundamental link between jealousy and homosexuality, though it affords an entirely new interpretation of the latter. Insofar as the beloved contains possible worlds, it is a matter of explicating, of unfolding all these worlds. But precisely because these worlds are made valid only by the beloved's viewpoint of them, which is what determines the way in which they are implicated within the beloved, the lover can never be sufficiently *involved* in these worlds, without being thereby excluded from them as well, since he belongs to them only as a thing seen, hence also as a thing scarcely seen, not remarked, excluded from the superior viewpoint from which the choice is made. (Deleuze 2000, 138-139).

One can apply this reading of Proust to a wider view of BDSM, seen thus as a *creative* rather than simply 'revealing' form of activity. The mechanisms by which dominant people attract their prey and entice their submission (itself one of their

'possible worlds'), and conversely by which submissive people entice the attention of a dominant (likewise), similarly work through the mechanism of signs – bodily and verbal, sometimes with the aid of external objects, location, smells, or a combination of all of these to create a sense of demeanour and atmosphere. Of course this is not in essence different to any other form of seduction, itself a particular instance of domination. But from the perspective of a fundamental aspect of Proust, as pointed out most clearly by Adorno:

Proust knows that there are no human beings in themselves beyond this world of images; that the individual is an abstraction, that its being-for-itself has as little reality as its mere being-for-us, which the vulgar prejudice considers an illusion. (Adorno 1991, p. 177)

then this phenomenon need not and should not be seen as somehow *false* merely by virtue of frequently being the product of conscious intention (and this concurs with Deleuze's comments about how in Proust there are only signs, not facts, as will be discussed in the next section). From this perspective we can view Deleuze's (and Proust's) 'jealous lover' as an especially creative individual, spurred by passion into developing the ecstasies of possibility. As Deleuze puts it in *Qu'est-ce que la philosophie?*:

When Proust seems to be describing jealousy in such minute detail, he is inventing an affect, because he constantly reverses the order in affections presupposed by opinion, according to which jealousy would be an unhappy consequence of love: for him, on the contrary, jealousy is finality, destination; and if we must love, it is so that we can be jealous, jealousy being the meaning of signs – affect as semiology. (Deleuze 1994, 175).

The dominant (in which category I include the sadist as a particular type, for the reasons given above) controls (or attempts to control) reactions, desires, emotions, sensations, in a manner akin to a conjurer. At the same time the submissive also controls, both consciously and otherwise in various possible ways, through their choice to engage in such activity in the first place or simply not to withdraw at the first sign, through deliberately affecting certain types of reactions (blushing, pouting, sulking, cringing, etc.) all in order to stimulate the dominant more, or through deliberately contriving a sequence of events in the full knowledge of how the dominant is likely to react, thus using provocation as a strategy for satisfying desire, commonly known in BDSM parlance as 'topping from the bottom', just like the phenomenon that Deleuze identifies when he describes how whilst 'the masochistic hero appears to be educated and fashioned by the authoritarian woman whereas basically it is he who forms her, dresses her for the part and prompts the harsh words she addresses to him' (Deleuze 1989, 22).

Deleuze links such creative play, making use of signs in order to elicit realms of the possible, or perhaps the *latent*, with jealousy and then with homosexuality. Yet the model he presents is more akin to that of the dominant (if not specifically the sadist) than to the masochistic nature (in this respect his reading is significantly different to that of Girard – see Girard 1965, 176-192 for a particular view of masochism (with examples from Proust) that links such an impulse to covetousness and Christian morality, but which is ultimately reductive in a way that Deleuze's readings are not). If we consider jealousy as an instance of resentment stemming from individualised alienation, then Deleuze is touching on a category I call *alienated sexuality*. Lest one uses the word 'alienation' too casually (and individualistically) in this context, it might be pointed out that the type of alienation experienced in sexual jealousy may

sometimes be considered to have a social basis. Through the lens of their own desires, the jealous lover envisages a possible future together with the desired one, itself inevitably a *social* future. It may be possible that the ways in which the wider society will perceive either individual by virtue of their being a couple has no impact upon the jealous lover's desires, but I would doubt there are many cases where this can be asserted dogmatically. So, at least as a possibility, one should consider the jealous lover as alienated because their potential rejection by the one they desire, and with whom they wish to be enjoined, betokens a further estrangement from the social position they wish to inhabit. This possibility exceeds the boundaries of the essentially individualistic and biologically determinist model of love and sexuality provided by Freud, as critiqued by Erich Fromm in *The Art of Loving* (Fromm, 67-68).

Deleuze states in *Difference et Repetition*:

There is no love which does not begin with the revelation of a possible world as such, enwound in the other which expresses it. Albertine's face expressed the blending of beach and waves: "From what unknown world does she distinguish me?" The entire history of that exemplary love is the long explication of the possible worlds expressed by Albertine, which transform her now into a fascinating subject, now into a deceptive object. It is true that the other disposes of a means to endow the possibles that it expresses with reality, independently of the development we cause them to undergo. This means is language. Words offered by the other confer reality on the possible as such; whence the foundation of the lie inscribed within language itself. (Deleuze 2004, 324; see also Parr, 96-98, for a reasonable summary of Deleuze's conception of 'faciality').

In such a situation, as Deleuze implies, the jealous lover, undeterred, seeks to unlock such possibility in the loved one ('the Other *as the expression of a possible world*, Deleuze 2004, 324). This can take two quite distinct forms, though; in the first case, it is a strategy towards ultimately persuading the loved one to love in return (as is presented in Pedro Almodovar's 1990 film *¡Átame!* (known in English as *Tie Me Up, Tie Me Down*)) by somewhat unusual, possibly coercive, means. The second form entails a more extreme ritualisation of the jealous lover's alienation, by seeking to make the one who spurns them suffer and possibly thus 'bring them down' to their own level. However, this sequence of events may itself have been willed by the one who rejects the jealous lover, and indeed frequently is by active submissives as a strategy to bring down the cruelty of the dominant in a way that seems motivated by genuine passion ('topping from the bottom' again, here corresponding to the submissive being able to 'endow the possibles that it expresses with reality').

Signs and Role-Play

There is a Proustian vision of the world. It is defined initially by what it excludes: crude matter, mental deliberation; physics, philosophy. Philosophy supposes direct declaration and explicit signification, proceeding from a mind seeking the truth. Physics supposes an objective and unambiguous matter subject to the conditions of reality. We are wrong to believe in facts; there are only signs. We are wrong to believe in truth; there are only interpretations. The sign is an ever-equivocal, implicit, and implicated meaning. (Deleuze 2000, 91-92).

The biologists would be right, if they knew that bodies in themselves are already a language. The linguists would be right if they knew that language is always the language of bodies. Every symptom is a word, but first of all every word is a symptom (Deleuze 2000, 92).

The primacy of the sign elucidated in the above by Deleuze links directly with what is commonly known amongst BDSM practitioners as *role-play*. This is, very simply, a

form of practice where the players, through verbal manner, mode of dress, mode of interaction with one another, visual or physical environment in which they scene, inhabit particular 'roles'. These are often based upon social archetypes (teachers, pupils, police, law-breakers, family figures, etc.) seen as distinct (especially in their archetypal nature) from their more usual outward personae. I am limiting my definition here to *interactive* role-play, so as exclude for the purposes of this discussion such activities as private cross-dressing, wearing uniforms of various types when alone (despite the fact that Proust himself did so), etc., carried out in order to generate some sort of internal feeling or sensation (though which of course may be predicated on the notion of some imaginary spectator). In interactive role-play, a primary motivation is the sense of what one's role signifies to the other player or players, how these signs might stimulate certain types of reactions which in turn suggest various responses, all consistent with the 'role'. A section from Deleuze's *Difference et Repetition*, expanding a paradigm from Proust, encapsulates the relationship between the 'role' (if seen as an instance of the 'virtual') and the 'actual':

> The virtual is opposed not to the real but to the actual. *The virtual is fully real in so far as it is virtual*. Exactly what Proust said of states of resonance must be said of the virtual: "Real without being actual, ideal without being abstract"; and symbolic without being fictional. Indeed, the virtual must be defined as strictly a part of the real object – as though the object had one part of itself in the virtual into which it plunges as though into an objective dimension (Deleuze 2004, 260).

What is signified by the role being played is indeed 'symbolic without being fictional', and the notion of the real excluding the virtual in terms of human behaviour is only possible for one living the hermit-like existence (the myth of 'being-for-itself' as described above by Adorno). Yet disdain for role-play from some quarters is predicated upon such mythical notions of authenticity; such activity is viewed as frivolous and unbefitting of passionate, emotionally engaged, adult human-beings for such a reason. But whilst the surface effect may seem frivolous (as could equally be said of the charming but openly posturing seducer), the deep-seated cravings to be able to act in such a manner may not be. Such asocial notions of identity deny the value or importance of human interactions in a semiotic manner, the ways in which humans discover, develop and *construct themselves* through their interactions with others; in a word, the essential role of the *performative* in dynamic social identity, which in this context corresponds to Deleuze's 'virtual'. Seen this way, role-play is not an appendage to human existence, but constitutes a fundamental component of it; those who engage deliberately with it wish simply to explore its potential more consciously and creatively.

Those who do so by conscious use of their bodily comportment to appropriate known types of demeanour associated with figures of authority are merely exploiting the fact that 'bodies in themselves are already a language'. More unthinking forms of demeanour equally exhibit signifying connotations; Mme Verdurin, through her 'gestures, her fear that her jaw will come unhinged, her artistic posturings that resemble those of sleep, her medicated nose', all of which 'constitute an alphabet for the initiated' (Deleuze 2000, 93), inhabits the latter realm as her 'posturings' signify in a manner different to that intended.. An equivalent situation applies to forms of dress. It may be common to label 'false' one who dresses in order to deliberately signify something to others, to create an 'effect', a particular type of response, this criticism is relatively meaningless unless one believes the only 'true' state of dress is nakedness, which of course itself also cannot help but signify in a cultural context (as, sometimes acutely so, can partial rather than complete undress, a situation frequently

exploited in fetish wear). [One might also ponder the voluntary choice of some Muslim women, living in the West, to wear the veil as a statement of cultural identity in this context – tired questions, endlessly evoked by those of a liberal imperialist mentality, as to whether their choice is genuinely 'their own', in the absence of literal coercion, seem rather irrelevant for similar reasons. – *maybe omit this sentence, or relegate it once more to a footnote?*]

Deleuze and Guattari encapsulate the fluid nature of being and the primacy of sexual becoming most compellingly in the following passage from *Mille Plateaux*:

Knowing how to age does not mean remaining young: it means extracting from one's age the particles, the speeds and slownesses, the flows that constitute the youth of *that* age. Knowing how to love does not mean remaining a man or a woman; it means extracting from one's sex the particles, the speeds and slownesses, the flows, the *n* sexes that constitute the girl of *that* sexuality. It is Age itself that is a becoming-child, just as Sexuality, any sexuality, is a becoming-woman, in other words, a girl. This by way of response to the stupid question, Why did Proust make Albert Albertine? (Deleuze & Guattari 2004, 305-306).

The implicit equation that the authors make between sexuality and the feminine (and indeed the conflation of youth with becoming) is perhaps rather facile, but the flexibility and performative attributes which they associate with sexuality might also be used to answer the question 'Why does one role-play'? To do so is to control one's sexuality as a signifying process, to affect the reactions it engenders in others and as such use it to one's advantage, to see 'Sexuality, any sexuality' as a creative force, in a word, to *dominate*.

Non-Fascist Life?

Some of Deleuze and Guattari's most radical ideas on the relationship between the individual and society are to be found in one of the discussions of Proust in *Anti-Oedipe*:

For the rigors of the law are only an apparent repression of the protest of the One, whereas their real object is the absolution of fragmented universes, in which the law never unites anything in a single Whole, but on the contrary measures and maps out the divergences, the dispersions, the exploding into fragments of something that is innocent precisely because its source is madness (Deleuze & Guattari 1983, 43, compare also Deleuze 2000, 131-133).

The similarity between this formation and Adorno's negative dialectics[2] is made even more palpable in what follows:

This is why in Proust's work the apparent theme of guilt is tightly interwoven with a completely different theme totally contradicting it; the plantlike innocence that results from the total compartmentalization of the sexes, both in Charlus's encounters and in Albertine's lumber, where flowers blossom in profusion and the utter innocence of madness is revealed, whether it be the patent madness of Charlus of the supposed madness of Albertine (Deleuze & Guattari 1983, 43).

Both Adorno and Deleuze/Guattari are here in danger of succumbing to a romanticised (and perhaps Foucault-like) view of madness that can descend into the seductive and perversely 'easy' world of misanthropic nihilism as an alternative to meaningful social (and political) engagement[3]. This view must be considered most seriously in the context of the ethics of sexualised activity involving cruelty, for if such cruelty is simply allowed free reign, untethered by the law, what is to stop it finding expression in a society built upon neo-Darwinian ruthlessness, entailing the

downtreading of the weak or disadvantaged, in such a manner that is akin at least to aspects of fascism? Adorno, as an implacable ideological opponent of neo-primitivism, would of course have no time for romanticisation of the 'natural'; the types of ultimate aporias he locates psychologically in the contemporary human subject (owing rather too much to Freud) are to him simply an outgrowth of such a subject's alienated situation in late capitalist society. Deleuze and Guattari's Proust-influenced view is rather less clear in this respect and demonstrates some questionable liberal individualistic tendencies. The 'utter innocence of madness' takes on a much darker tinge when one realises such a concept must by definition also incorporate the madness of a serial killer who feels unavoidably drawn by inner demons beyond their control to murder and mutilate young women, for example. It is not impossible that such urges might in some sense resonate with such an individual's sense of alienation from 'the rigors of the law' and 'the apparent repression of the protest of the One' in more generalised senses, which become manifested in a horrifically hyperbolised form, but there seems little will or effort on the part of Deleuze and Guattari to deal with this type of phenomenon.

Proust himself describes a stark opposition between kindness and desire as follows:

The reader will observe that, after an interpolation of common parlance, M. de Charlus had suddenly become once more as precious and haughty in his speech as he normally was. The idea of Morel's "ditching" without compunction a girl whom he had outraged had enabled him to enjoy an abrupt and consummate pleasure. From that moment his sensual appetites were satisfied for a time and the sadist (a true medium, he) who had for a few moments taken the place of M. de Charlus had fled, handing over to the real M. de Charlus, full of artistic refinement, sensibility and kindness. (Proust 1983, Vol. 2, 1042)

If such a 'consummate pleasure' is inevitably predicated upon another's suffering, if pleasure of this type is inextricably linked to cruelty, then the implications could be extremely stark and potentially barbarous, not withstanding the relative innocuousness of the particular example given. Yet one of Deleuze and Guattari's Nietzsche-inspired formulations provide a partial way out from this problem:

Cruelty has nothing to do with some ill-defined or natural violence that might be commissioned to explain the history of mankind; cruelty is the movement of culture that is realized in bodies and inscribed on them, belabouring them. That is what cruelty means. This culture is not the movement of ideology: on the contrary, it forcibly injects production into desire, and conversely, it forcibly inserts desire into social production and reproduction. For even death, punishment, and torture are desired, and are instances of production (compare the history of fatalism). It makes men or their organs into the parts and wheels of the social machine. (Deleuze and Guattari 1983, 145).

This passage comes in the context of a critical reading of the history of capitalism (and, interestingly, resonates with certain ultra-leftist readings of the Nazi genocide as being primarily motivated by economic production, readings that seek to ignore the possibility that racial hatred and barbarous urges, as part of the superstructure, may come to assume a relatively autonomous role, as elucidated by more sophisticated Marxist thinkers). Deleuze and Guattari do not seem prepared simply to accept the more obvious forms of cruelty simply as an aberration in the manner espoused by Girard ('social coexistence would be impossible if no surrogate victim existed, if violence persisted beyond a certain threshold and failed to be transmuted into culture', Girard 1977, 144). However, if one takes a classic Marxist view of capitalism and the cultural processes thus engendered as an inevitable and necessary historical stage (a necessary position if opposition to capitalism is not to lapse into nostalgia, neo-

primitivism and the like), then it is possible to modify this view of cruelty into a form workable for a socialist or simply a humanitarian. Desire and production (or rather production as one possible territorialisation of the Deleuzean desiring-machine) may be inseparable under capitalism, and as such cruel urges as a by-product of the will-to-production may be an inevitable consequence of capitalist society. This is a diagnosis rather than a celebration; its realisation (and I believe such a model to be compelling) constitutes a primary motivator towards finding a way of dealing with such a phenomenon whilst avoiding a descent into barbarism when the prospect of socialist transformation remains remote.

Proust's elucidation of the distinction between the 'sensual' and the 'real' Charlus given above also provides a key in this respect. If the two categories are recognised as antagonistic, in keeping with the 'alienated sexuality' I described earlier, then a natural response is to insist on their separation. This, in my opinion, is best achieved by an insistence upon a progressive ethical and political outlook as a necessary accompaniment to a recognition of the often irrational and amoral nature of sexuality. Thus sexual desire can be allowed free rein in controlled conditions providing it constitutes a realm of activity kept separate from the rest of one's interactions with others. [To unashamedly flaunt the distinction between the two arenas of human interactions most definitely denies the notion that desire is founded upon ethics, but at the same time reinforces the importance of ethics (which are themselves part of culture) as having a meaning and value over and above the possibly selfish desires of the individual. – *maybe omit this sentence?*] In Proust's description of Mlle Vinteuil's actions and motivations when desecrating the photograph of her late father, he simultaneously illuminates the potency of desire as the flipside of ethical practice and renders the former within the realms of the performative:

A sadist of her kind is an artist in evil, which a wholly wicked person could not be, for in that case the evil would not have been external, it would have seemed quite natural to her, and would not even have been distinguishable from herself….Sadists of Mlle Vinteuil's sort are creatures so purely sentimental, so naturally virtuous, that even sensual pleasure appears to them as something bad, the prerogative of the wicked. And when they allow themselves for a moment to enjoy it they endeavour to impersonate, to identify with, the wicked, and to make their partners do likewise, in order to gain the momentary illusion of having escaped beyond the control of their own gentle and scrupulous natures into the inhuman world of pleasure. (Proust 1983, Vol. 1, 179).

But Proust's rather disparaging tone with respect to the 'purely sentimental' and the 'naturally virtuous' would seem to allow little place for ethics, even virtue, as positive entities, in such a way as any socialist or humanitarian must surely insist upon; thus Proust himself succumbs to the type of selfish liberal individualism that cannot be entirely separated from Nietzsche. If both Proust and his characters had inhabited a period a few decades later, and Mlle Vinteuil's father had perished in a Nazi concentration camp, the erotic charge of desecrating his memory might not necessarily lose its potency (indeed, the extremity of the taboo might conceivably increase it), but we would be forced to deal much more seriously with the ethical implications of such an act. To respect his memory would then be much more than simply a 'gentle and scrupulous nature', it would be seen as a moral imperative.

Yet, in light of the fact that the ultimate taboo of role-playing within the realms of the most hideous barbarism known to man has been shown to have a charge of itself (as witnessed in the adoption of Nazi icons in some of the punk movement as much as a statement of anti-normative subversion as any particular ideological identification

with fascism (see Savage 1991, 135, 188-189, 241-242 on the use of the swastika), and with great frequency within the BDSM movement, as can be witnessed through the presence of Nazi costumes that most who have frequented clubs will have noticed), then one must also consider seriously the possibility of desire working at cross-purposes not simply with bourgeois morality but also against a form of ethics that all but an ideologically-committed neo-Nazi would accept. Put starkly, can desire rooted in cruelty be in any way reconciled with 'non-fascist life', to use part of the alternative title (*Introduction to the Non-Fascist Life*) provided by Michel Foucault for *Anti-Oedipe* (Deluze & Guattari 1983, xiii)? Foucault asserts that:

Last but not least, the major enemy, the strategic adversary is fascism (whereas *Anti-Oedipus'* opposition to the others is more of a tactical engagement). And not only historical fascism, the fascism of Hitler and Mussolini – which was able to mobilize and use the desire of the masses so effectively – but also the fascism in us all, in our heads and in our everyday behavior, the fascism that causes us to love power, to desire the very thing that dominates and exploits us (Deleuze & Guattari 1983, xiii).

Most of Foucault's prescriptions in this respect are sound ('Free political action from all unitary and totalizing paranoia', 'Prefer what is positive and multiple, difference over uniformity, flows over unities, mobile arrangements over systems' 'Use political practice as an intensifier of thought' rather than to 'ground apolitical practice in Truth', etc. (Deleuze & Guattari, 1983, xiii-xiv)) but his injunction 'Do not become enamored of power' is facile in light of the fact that such an enamouration is fundamental to BDSM-related desire. I would rewrite this as 'Do not necessarily assign a rational or ethical basis to that of which one is enamoured, and which relates to power', thus insisting once again on the non-simultaneity of desire and rational and ethical concerns. 'Be an artist in evil' (like Mlle Vinteuil) if one wishes, in a safe and controlled environment founded upon pure desire, 'but recognise that evil, for all its potency, has no necessary value in and of itself in wider social terms'.

Proust's Charlus is indeed enamored of power, but does not submit to it (as later would Genet during the Nazi occupation of France):

Now in him pleasure was not unaccompanied by a certain idea of cruelty of which I had not at that time learned the full force: the man whom he loved appeared to him in the guise of a delightful torturer. In taking sides against the Germans he would have seemed to himself to be acting as he did only in his hours of physical pleasure, to be acting, that is, in a manner contrary to his merciful nature, fired with passion for seductive evil and helping to crush virtuous ugliness (Proust 1983, Vol. 3, 801-802).

There is no sense of righteousness, no ethical justification, underlying Charlus's desires here, just simple disdain for virtue and a wish to desecrate it, like one more 'artist in evil'. Charlus here, as clearly as anywhere, has succeeded in divorcing desire and ethics, rendering cruelty into the realms of pure 'physical pleasure' in a way that is far preferable to ideological militarism or nationalistic self-righteousness. There is nothing inherently quasi-fascistic about his thoughts for this very reason. Similarly, some of those who adopt fascist iconography, costume or demeanour may at best be those most cognisant of the fact that the pull of power *is on the level of desire*, which is nothing if not *aesthetic*. To understand this is to be its master, whether or not one is to master or be mastered in a sexualised arena.

But I must contrast this with the antithetical argument, by which the legitimisation of such sexualised practices legitimises other forms of fascist politics and behaviour.

Deleuze's thoughts on the underdetermination of masks provides a way out from this dichotomy:

Repetition is truly that which disguises itself in constituting itself, that which constitutes itself only by disguising itself. It is not underneath the masks, but is formed from one mask to another, as though from one distinctive point to another, from one privileged instant to another, with and within the variations. The masks do not hide anything except other masks. There is no first term which is repeated, and even our childhood love for the mother repeats other adult loves with regard to other women, rather like the way in which the hero of *In Search of Lost Time*, replays with his mother Swann's passion for Odette. There is nothing repeated which may be isolated or abstracted from the repetition in which it was formed, but in which it is also hidden. There is no bare repetition which may be abstracted or inferred from the disguise itself. The same thing is both disguising and disguised (Deleuze 2004, 19).

Neither the sexualisation of power in a strictly erotic arena or as a form of consenting recreational activity, or actual fascism as a political force and means of coercive behaviour in economic life should be seen as a bare repetition of the other; rather both are masks, both are 'both disguising and disguised' forms of the same abstract (if historically determined) desiring-machine. Deleuze's view of difference and repetition can in this manner provide a route beyond the psychological reductiveness of many neo-Freudian views of BDSM. Exploration of power-based desire can also be a means of illuminating the attributes and implications of such forces when they are known to exist in individuals, which might otherwise escape cognition if allowed to proceed in the distorted and part-repressed form they might otherwise take in ordinary reality.

An ethical framework for BDSM-related consciousness and activity is required; what I refer to by this does not correspond to the 'justification for masochistic behavior in the most varied motivations or in the demands of fateful and agonizing situations' that Deleuze finds in Sacher-Masoch (Deleuze 1989, 26) but which he finds lacking in Sade; nor do I mean solely a set of codes of behaviour for how one conducts BDSM activity, whether in or out of the bedroom (though such codes are essential), but also a set of principles and beliefs for the wider society, which I would hope would resist both domination for individualistic ends, or submission towards such domination. Such a framework gives real meaning to BDSM as an expression of alienated desire under capitalism. To posit imaginary utopian notions of how desire might manifest itself in a post-capitalist world, let alone imply that it would take a perfectly egalitarian form, would be relatively meaningless at this historical moment. The same is true of pronouncements to do with which certain forms of power relationship are more acceptable on account of their being more transgressive and less implicitly complicit with certain forms of inequality as exist externally, depending upon which paradigms (in terms of gender, class, etc.) one privileges, though of course such factors can often influence the forms of activity individuals feel most comfortable with.

Whether Proust himself, in terms of his life and his work (which was of course part of his life) can be cited as an example of 'non-fascist living' in all respects, is something about which I have mixed feelings. The questions of his possible snobbery (notwithstanding the disillusion of the narrator upon encountering the Guermantes) are too complex to deal with adequately here, but to absolve Proust of all such charges would in my view be rash; one might also consider his apparent anti-humanism expressed through his portrayals of others (many of the characters in *La recherche*, as

Margaret Topping points out elsewhere in this volume, are portrayed as if 'puppets' with little conscious will of their own, whereas the narrator is knowing and subjective), also concurring uneasily with aspects of the authoritarian personality. However, Proust's relatively democratic views on artistic possibility, by which most individuals are capable of producing art by transforming life's experiences may serve as a mitigating factor. And Proust's presentations of BDSM-related desire do not conflate it with ethics but render it within the realms of the performative, albeit somewhat lacking in a wider and meaningful ethical framework, which such an aesthetician of desire might find disdainful. Brought together with aspects of Deleuze's extrapolation of wider conceptions of jealousy, the inhabitation of roles and an anti-ontological view of desire as a manifestation of an abstracted creative force, together with wider ethical and political considerations which both writers can fairly be said to neglect to an extent though not directly contravene, it becomes possible to arrive at a workable and humanitarian framework for accepting the obstinate presence of taboo desire in contemporary society. The second half of Julie Kristeva's comment that '*The sado-masochism of* Sodom and Gomorrah *is the truth underlying eroticism and feeling and, on a deeper level, sado-masochism is the very bond that brings society together*' (Kristeva 1993, 13) is hyperbolic in the extreme if read more broadly than in terms of mere sexuality alone; nonetheless both Proust and Deleuze go part of the way towards offering the possibility of a nuanced modification: *the acceptance of creative sadomasochism is an important bond for preventing society lapsing into total barbarism.*

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[1] Freud does not use the actual term 'sadomasochism', but makes clear that he views sadism and masochism as complementary phenomena.

[2] Adorno's views on these matters are at the heart of many of his writings on culture, society and psychology. See Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswick, Levinson & Sanford; Adorno 1974, Adorno 1973, Adorno & Horkheimer, 168-208 and Adorno 1998, 191-204.

[3] In this sense they come close to the starker opposition presented by Bataille, who considers both erotic impulses and the will to political action as different manifestations of the same *part maudité*, leading him to conclude that 'Men committed to political struggle will never be able to yield to the truth of eroticism. Erotic activity always takes place at the expense of the forces committed to their combat' (Bataille 1991, 191).