

# Lacan *avec* Foucault: Insights and Reflections on Monstrosity

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## Introduction

The present article should be read as a collective, "zombified" intellectual effort derived from a "study group" which is simply nothing more. This group was formed during the global pandemic of Covid-19 and aimed at investigating and exploring contemporary forms of how we can think the term, "monstrosity" in contemporary culture, politics, and society. Despite its short lifespan, some members engendered registers of its existence in articles and recordings which are yet to be published. More than getting together to debate and study, the group discussed those common difficulties and struggles inherent in an impoverished Academia. All participants were involved in academia in varying ways, either as students or professors, and most located in a Brazilian context, trying to navigate its vices, symptoms, and troubles. The group found in the collective a bond to navigate together some of these difficulties but nonetheless, for all its effects, this collective effort is now to be said as

"dead and gone". Still, writing from the dead somehow *persists*... Beyond a certain anthropological narration behind this work, we explore the aims towards a philosophical presentation of the method of not only the formation and sustainment of the group, but of its productivity.

The resistance to the label "study group" arises from an openness of the group's proposition and dedication to experimentation. Everything was collectively agreed upon instead of preemptively anticipated. This was a para-Academic effort towards *extimate theories*<sup>1</sup> which combined members from many different areas (e.g., cinema, philosophy, psychoanalysis, literature and so on), structural trajectories (university teachers, professors, undergraduate students, Ph.D. students and independent scholars) and with members based on very distant places from one another. One could say that the "group" unintentionally benefited from the virtual influx imposed by the pandemic, but such implications were never internally discussed; rather, it was organically appreciated.

After agreeing on a common interest on the topic of Monstrosity as a subject and being a group whose members initially met through social media, word of mouth eventually led to its expansion. Our first meeting was prominent especially as we attempted to formulate a collective form of addressing our main topic: instead of rushing towards the usual personalization around an individual or/and *grouping surrounding master's discourse*<sup>2</sup> (Lacan 2007) or a presupposed artificialization of homogeneity among members.<sup>3</sup> The purpose was rather to elicit an open approach towards any attempt, as there was absolutely nothing prepared prior to the experience itself, and those who appeared brought their desires to tag along and showed up.<sup>4</sup> Whatever would emerge in the collective is what we were committed to working with. No prior commitments towards any sort of production, readings, anything at all... the only function in place was the desire behind a driving signifier which combined these people together and which enabled them to repeatedly return to the collective regularly: this is the question of *monstrosity*. This ethic makes for a more unique, relatable collective experience. Nonetheless, the effort towards building the delimitations of collective commonality was always our main challenge (and to a certain extent, also our downfall...)<sup>5</sup>

Within the nuances of the collective dynamics there was an unforgiving openness inherent to the proposed dispositive, and new impasses were incorporated to that; with each decision collectively made less participants were able to sustain the meetings... until the collective effort eventually dissipated. Still many fascinating exchanges were built throughout this process and documents such as this are glimpses of the effort, a sign of its implications. One might say that this work was an effort in what Lacan calls *extimacy* (Lacan 2008), which is an adventure into

a collective form while risking other capabilities in order to live up to the very idea of *Monstrosity* itself. In a certain extent, this is an immanent product of the applied method, the present living-dead writings of this article are the result of a collective effort towards a more open, monstrous attempt at thinking. The general objective of this article is to introduce a discussion between Foucault's philosophy and Lacan's psychoanalysis. The specific objective is to bring forward their critical approach towards power structures and their investigation on *monstrosity*.

### Monstrosity from Canguilhem to Michel Foucault

Perplexed by the local public policies adopted by the Brazilian government in the face of covid-19 (which led to the death of around 664.000 citizens at the time of writing in 2022), the collective aimed at creating a monster-type framework to think through multiple crises of our current times. Georges Canguilhem and Michel Foucault were pertinent thinkers to provide elements to start this endeavor. In 1962, Georges Canguilhem wrote a brief but capital essay on the history of monstrosity, focusing on the distinction between the concept of monstrosity and monstrous. Michel Foucault, who was one of Canguilhem's students, recovers his teacher's interpretation on monstrosity in his classes at the Collège de France between 1974 and 1975. Foucault incorporates Canguilhem's ideas, developing his own theories which further led him to the concept of abnormal. While Canguilhem paid attention to natural transgression as a philosophical object, Foucault will not disassociate the violation of the natural law (monstrosity) from civil law and social order (monstrous). It is from this perspective that Foucault will discuss a monster born and raised by morality but solidified by psychiatric discursivity.

According to Canguilhem, in the chapter *The monstrosity and the monstrous*<sup>6</sup>, the monster is the creature that, by its very existence, interrogates and perverts the order taught by life.<sup>7</sup> And, exactly for this reason, it constitutes a challenge to it.<sup>8</sup> When manifesting itself as a deviation from the supposed organization of nature, the monster makes us suspect this evidence, revealing it as a mere result of habit, which anguished reason transforms into law due to the inability to sustain the difference and inconstancy of the living. In this way, the monster reveals the fragility of nature and life, but above all human fragility, which comes from the fact that we are subjected to rules that radically escape us.

Thus, the horror and fear in relation to the monster are, in fact, expressions of the same feelings in the face of the contingency of the world, of the equivocality of the form, part of the disappointment of the confidence that we have of seeing "the same engender the same" (Canguilhem 2008, p. 134).<sup>9</sup> Horror in the face of the threat

of the unknown, erasure of identity and confrontation with the other—or, rather, with an other and improbable order.<sup>10</sup> Horror, but also fascination while facing a creative overflow of vital forces. In this sense, the monster is *difference* itself, discontinuity introduced into the orderly appearance of life, the effect of its opening to chance. It signals the loss of all predictability and control that reason would long to obtain from what surrounds and affects it. However, it is from the monster, from its disturbing disorder, that we may obtain a correct appreciation of life and measure its value, which we consider a positive attribute when it succeeds in reproducing the species of origin, not limiting the potential of the living being through a morphological deviation. Canguilhem exemplifies the point by bringing forward the ambiguity of the living being within the 'monster'. This idea was collectively appreciated in discussions on the different reactions to the number of bodies and victims produced during the ongoing pandemic as well as the kind of language used to refer to it. Also, the very nature of (viral) mutations themselves and the impasses they are currently imposing on the world under the more recent pandemic.

The contrasting function attributed to monstrosity is connected to the fact that its negative value represents a counterpoint to the normativity of life itself, this is what Canguilhem means in the passage: "[t]he monster is a living being with negative value" (2008, p. 135). In Canguilhem's formulation (*ibid.*, p. 135) this idea sounds even more dramatic: "[t]he vital counter-value is thus not death but monstrosity", which makes the ceasing of life something more productive than the deviation of the species manifested in the deformity of the living being.<sup>11</sup> Such dangerous negativity suggested by the author is inserted as an accidental threat, conditioning the being to deformity, limiting it from the inside and condemning it to the impossibility of expressing itself in the way approved by the species.<sup>12</sup>

However, Canguilhem's assessment about monstrosity refers to the sphere of the physical monster and the biological norm, called into question by the aberrant creature. But, alongside this form of normative-medical judgment, there is also the normative-legal judgment attribution of the "monstrous", i.e., attribution of value to the illicit (Canguilhem 2008, p. 135).<sup>13</sup> For Canguilhem, the relationship between monstrosity and the monstrous is mixed at first, and such forms of judgment are over-imposed. It is only in the 19th century, with the emergence of Étienne Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire's teratology, which transformed the monster into an object of science and thus made rational thought triumph over the anomaly, that the monstrosity would have gotten rid of the monstrous, becoming a biological concept.

If for Canguilhem "...life is relatively poor in monsters" (2008, p. 145) and the flowering of monstrosity would cease with the advent of scientific teratology—despite perpetuating itself in the human imagination, as a "function without an organ" —,

Michel Foucault's analysis on monsters, they only become more pale. For Foucault, monsters transmute from exceptions into everyday figures, since the problem of the anomaly does not end with its naturalization by teratologists, but persists in the 19th and 20th centuries, inherently related to abnormality.

Canguilhem and Foucault agree that the natural monster slowly disappears, however, for the latter, such a monster only disappears insofar it is supplanted by another figure, the moral monster, in which the problem of monstrosity starts to refer not more to physical deformity, but to individual conduct. Another point of dissent in relation to Canguilhem is that, for Foucault, the problem of the anomaly is not limited to its monstrous physicality, since the monster is, above all, a legal notion in its broad sense. The definition of monster for Foucault "is the fact that its existence and form is not only a violation of the laws of society but also a violation of the laws of nature" (Foucault 2003, p. 55-6). It is the challenge that the monster brings to the law, cluttering it, making it question its very foundations that makes it truly monstrous.<sup>14</sup> Thus, for there to be a monster, the severity of the anomaly or the bodily deformation are simply not enough; the violation of civil, religious or canon law is still necessary.<sup>15</sup>

From the brief history of monstrosity presented by Foucault in *The Abnormals*, it becomes clear that the passage from the birth of a legal-natural monstrosity to a legal-moral monstrosity occurs in modernity. In other words, from a monstrosity related to the disarray of the organs, manifested on the surface of the body, to a reference of a "deviant identity", which can be "deduced from behaviors and conducts" and whose nature comes becomes much more intimate: to the "inner, psychic dimension of the subject" (Nuzzo 2018, p. 227). A historical transformation takes place at the end of the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th century, marking the moment in which the monster becomes the privileged object for both legal and political regulations, "the monster is the fundamental figure around which bodies of power and domains of knowledge are disturbed and reorganized." (Foucault 2003, p. 62). This is also the moment where the monstrous appears more evidently as a problem to both law and medicine; more precisely, to psychiatry. This occurs through the cases of the great crimes of violent murder, qualified as *monstrous* crimes. Cases that hindered the penal mechanics and the exercise of punishment, which was then prevented from finding in these crimes the proper element of its justification: the *reason* or the *interests* behind the crime itself.

Foucault chooses the hermaphrodite as the paradigmatic figure of passage from a monstrous nature (criminal in itself) to a monstrous behavior (monstrous criminality)<sup>16</sup>, illustrating the passage from the natural monster to the moral monster. If, until the 17th century, sexual ambiguity was considered a monstrosity and the individuals who carried it were thrown at the stake and punished to death, with the

evolution of knowledge and the economy of the power to punish presented in the end of the following century, this type of condemnation has been eased. Foucault exemplifies this attenuation narrating the case of the hermaphrodite Marie Lamarcis. Marin Lamarcis (as he recognized himself) after undergoing a medical examination where no signs of virility<sup>17</sup> were found, was then condemned by the Court of Rouen to wear women's clothes and was "prohibited to have any sexual intercourse" (Foucault 2003, p. 71).<sup>18</sup>

But it is another case, that of the hermaphrodite Anne Grandjean, who identified himself as a man, which presents the turning point from a natural monstrosity to a moral monstrosity. This transformation comes from the fact that the very discourse on hermaphroditism changed: once a hybrid monster, a mixture of two sexes, hermaphroditism, was now seen as a mere *strangeness*, a predominance of one over the other, a bad adherence which generated a reproductive dysfunction of genital organs. Or, as Foucault puts it (2003, p.72-3),

However, and here the notion of monstrosity that we find at the start of the nineteenth century begins to be developed, there is no mixing of the sexes: There are only eccentricities, kinds of imperfection, errors of nature. These eccentricities, these poor structures, errors, and stammerings of nature are, or at any rate may be, the source or the pretext for a number of forms of criminal conduct (ibid., p.72-3).

Following Foucault, Anne Grandjean's hermaphroditism dealt with criminality and perversion charges, because of her (sexual) behavior, the fact that she, being a woman, loves other women. It is her inclination towards the same sex - the one that was legally attributed to Grandjean, the feminine - an inclination considered perverse, depraved, which makes her monstrous. But Foucault's question in narrating these cases is to know, then, how it was possible to move from a certain type of monstrosity, at the same time a transgression of juridical and natural laws, to a different kind of monstrosity, no longer of nature, with effects in the field of behavior, conduct and criminality. Thus, one no longer finds in monstrosity a systematic foundation, but an overgeneralized suspicion of criminality or deviation as a "renewed" moral core to monstrosity. For Foucault, the answer to these questions lies in the modification of the power to punish.<sup>19</sup>

In classical law, there were no apparent connections between criminality and monstrosity. Thus, face to an atrocious crime, an equally atrocious punishment was applied; an expression, via law itself, of the torturing, vengeful will of the sovereign in relation to the attack committed against a person (Foucault 2003, p.82). With that, one could not get to the idea of the monstrosity of a crime (as transgression of the law, through prohibition), as there was always a surplus of power capable of absorbing it. It is only from the end of the 18th century onwards that the new

technology of power starts to clearly connect crime and punishment through a new measured unit found between the two: the "interest" or the "reason for the crime" (Foucault 2003, p. 85).

The question of intelligibility and rationality intrinsic to the crime is what will henceforth determine its punishment. It is also from the new economy of punishment that the questioning about the nature of crime (especially the "monstrous" one) arises, the attempt to understand the nature of the criminal as well as the idea of a pathology of criminal conduct. In Foucault's words:

This set of texts and projects, especially Prunelle's, marks, I think, the point at which what could be called a pathology of criminal conduct begins to be organized. Henceforth-in virtue of the principles of the functioning of penal power, in virtue, that is, not of a new theory of law, of a new ideology, but of the rules intrinsic to the economy of punitive power-crime will of course continue to be punished in the name of the law according to evidence displayed to all, but the individuals punished will always be referred back to the virtual horizon of illness; they will be judged as criminals but assessed, appraised, and measured in terms of the normal and the pathological. The question of the illegal and the question of the abnormal, or of the criminal and the pathological, are now bound up with each other, not on the basis of a new ideology that may or may not arise from a State apparatus, but according to a technology defining the new rules of the economy of punitive power (Foucault 2003, p. 92).

The first monster that appears at the beginning of this technological shift and reinscribes crime within the social pact is the sovereign monster. A monster that articulates anthropophagy and incest, giving rise to a "system of exchanges between sex and blood" (Mazaleigue-Labaste 2010, p. 9). It is from him, and through a series of transformations of the dispositifs of knowledge and power, that the various little monsters of 19th century legal psychiatry will emerge (Foucault 2003, p.121). In fact, the first cases of legal psychiatric concern are not related to crimes in which madness appears in its delusional and manifest form, but as a problem of the existence of the monster that is at once sexual transgressor and anthropophagic. It is from the interrogation of the latter, the criminal madman/monster, that psychiatry is constituted. Although the newfound medical area shifted the focus of such interrogation and analysis to the most insignificant of deviations and perversities, the ghost of this great murderous, debauched and devouring monster will continue to haunt it to this day.

According to Foucault (2003), psychiatry in its constitution process "was interested" not in madness, but "immediately in the madness that kills" (ibid., p. 121). In psychiatric jargon, this specific kind of madness was called homicidal

monomania<sup>20</sup>; a diagnosis to which all those who committed atrocious crimes were promptly labeled as, up until mid-19th century<sup>21</sup>, meaning *lack* of reason or without unintelligible reasons, from the presumed standpoint of a shared rational dynamics of self-interest amongst individuals. Furthermore, it was through such crimes that the intersection between the psychiatric and the judiciary power took place, thus establishing a kind of continuity between each other. Because faced with the fascination of penal mechanics by the enigma of crimes without reason, in which those responsible were not found to be delirious (absent *of* reason), nor the interest behind the crime carried out (absence of reason *for the crime*)<sup>22</sup>, or that is, the conditions of its punishability, the exercise of the power to punish was obliged to summon the help of psychiatry in order to convict.<sup>23</sup>

In this way, the unreasonable crimes that made psychiatry a key player in courts—as it was the only one capable of recognizing, predicting, and detecting the pathology that incited the practice<sup>24</sup>—gained, within this new scenario, the qualifier of monstrous; those who committed them became monsters themselves. Such monsters are not only related to these blood crimes, because due to the transformation of the exercise of punishing and its alliance with psychiatric knowledge—which together delineate the *abnormal*—even the smallest criminality or the smallest misconduct are considered elements for one to be accused, charged, and eventually punished on the suspicion of monstrosity. *We all become potential monsters.*

Initial reflections of our collective experiment brought up the possibility of additional operators of monstrosity in order to substantiate what it means to say that there is a potential monster inhabiting all human beings. Instead of satisfying ourselves with examining the contours of normative dichotomies, of classically established oppositions, after investigating Canguilhem and Foucault, a hypothesis was brewing for our collective—basically, that monstrosity can serve as a philosophical operator towards transformations. But in order to sustain this, a psychoanalytic discussion towards the psychic impasses between man and monster was required.

### **Lacanian Monstrosities (or the Phallus Monster)**

If the definition of monstrous is, in a broad sense, composed in opposition to human typification, it seems that for Lacan, in a similar way of thinking as in Foucault, there is an injunction between man and monster. Both thinkers share a critical diagnosis towards an anthropocentric modernity: they identify the failure of the Enlightenment which sustains the advent of the modern State and the humanist episteme. The

deterioration of human representative reason and its protocols of knowledge configures, thus, the starting point to think about a certain confluence between man and monster.

It is a matter of presenting, in this context, the reciprocity between the power structure outlined by Foucault in the socio-historical horizon and the psychic structure of the subjects (of the unconscious), as articulated by the French psychoanalyst. Therefore, this panorama integrates the Foucauldian diagnosis of a paradoxical double bind of modernity. If, on the one hand, the advent of the modern state is based on safeguarding the human rights to life and property, on the other hand, holding the state as the guard and provider of such guarantees implies an oppressive regulation device.

Emphasizing the dark side of modernity to its ultimate consequences, Foucault implies his historical-philosophical analysis in the critique of an institutionalized humanism and its hypostasis of freedom. This constriction of individual freedom stands as a protector of human life and property, to the same extent it instrumentalizes reason for the purposes of a hegemonic way of life, commander of sexual alterities and death. As a disciplinary measure to calculate the profit of life and death, institutions such as family, school, factory, hospital, and army would reproduce the regulatory conditioning of bodies in a hierarchical dynamic. Techniques of power that sought to avoid the historical threats of epidemics and deaths provide the mechanisms of letting die or live according to the logic of capitalist utility (Foucault, 2019).

From the perspective of Lacanian psychoanalysis, this device can be replicated in the psyche as a phallic norm: both regarding a hierarchical rationality, guided by submission-domination, and by a subjectivity based on individualized sexual satisfaction, governed by the Freudian pleasure principle (Andreoni, 2020). This also provides a double standpoint: from one side, the subjective constitution has its existence affirmed in the properties of the representational object (phallus as a representative), as an affirmation of the Freudian life drive; and from the other, the presence of death drive.

By naming such a structure as phallic, Lacan implies the parameter of humanity to the human species and to its respective mode of jouissance and power (ibid., 2020). In other words, humanity and the organizations of society over the centuries are marked by a way of acting associated with men as its political-historical agent, which highlights the critical diagnosis that historically there is an identification between the human paradigm, the human species and a type of exclusionary political agency (ibid., 2020).

Through this biunivocal way of thinking, the possibility to affirm oneself as human is to endorse any otherness as monstrous. When thinking about humanity from such a phallic standpoint including its dichotomous logic, the monster becomes everything that does not coincide with the dominant identity – which generates the social exclusion of minority identities, such as women, but mainly an oppressive way of dealing with heterogeneous ways of acting. Echoing Foucault, transgressive attempts at social normativity are easily framed as “mad” and “criminal”<sup>25</sup>.

In addition to the repression implied in the notion of unconsciousness, relating Lacan's conceptual horizon to the phallic norm makes it possible to reflect on a device of psychic power that links the definition of humanity to the normativity of regulatory institutions—which, in theory, are oriented towards a common good. The problem is that not only does History report that the establishment of this Humanistic paradigm and its subsequent repression ended up giving rise to major catastrophes in the 20th century, to which Nazism stands out as the greatest example, but also the psychoanalytic clinic verifies how this psychic constitution is a source of suffering to its subjects.

It is at this point that morality hits its intrinsic and inevitable impasse, since the very attempt to split humanity from the monstrous through the institutionalization of the common good shows the hideous face of what was understood by man from the very beginning. Conceptually, the monstrous dimension of phallic jouissance can be extracted in Lacan from the articulation between the Kantian moral imperative and the perverse pleasure associated with Sade—as discussed by Lacan in his *Kant with Sade* from 1963.

On the one hand, according to the Kantian imperative, regardless of the variety of phenomenal objects, experience practically summons the law of a Universal Good. In this sense, in a Lacanian reading of Kant, morality is a practice conditioned by determined phenomenal objects and reason (Lacan [1963] 2006, p. 780). In each experience, intuition orders the act according to an orientation to the good, elevating the imperative to the status of Universal Good, independent to any relativism or particularity of the situation to configure itself (ibid). On the other, in attention to Sade's *Philosophy in the bedroom*, Lacan addresses the tension between pleasure and perversion: “I have the right to enjoy your body, anyone can tell me, and I will exercise this right, without let no limit stop me from the whim of extortion that I enjoy satisfying in it” (ibid, p. 781). At this point, an equivalence is drawn with Freud's mediation: it is the Freudian pleasure principle that institutes the so-called “happiness of evil” that articulates the satisfaction of sexual pleasure to the perverse absence of any limit. At this point, what is crucial is that the freedom to act according

to one's own pleasure is nothing more than an emancipatory fallacy, since such satisfaction is tied to the Other, the one who is enjoyed. It is, in short, the exaltation of the individual disguised as a "horrible freedom" (ibid, p. 784).

In this context, the group discussed the paradoxes of the "horrible freedom", "abyssal freedom" since, in the specific sense used by Lacan in this particular text (ibid.), "horrible" operates an equivalence between the monstrous and the particular quantification of freedom. The very sense of freedom is at stake, since articulating freedom with horror is a way of distinguishing it from emancipation beyond the individual. Betting on the possibility of a proper collectivity, therefore, implies maintaining a relationship with freedom that goes beyond the individual pleasure and its violent effects in relation to others.

Despite the conceptual difference between the Kantian categorical imperative and the pleasure extracted from Sade's philosophy, it is worth noting that the articulation between them, mediated by the pleasure principle, is operated by Lacan in an attempt to evade the ethical parameters of representative reason: where *Aufklärung* projected human rationality as the placeholder of morality, there was a lack of knowledge about a perverse, coercive—albeit subjectively constitutive—sexual dimension. The conceptual injunction between the Kantian imperative and the pleasure in Sade is directly proportional to the injunction of the phallogocentric human parameter, linked to its normative ambition of a Universal Good, with the monstrous practice of individual satisfaction via subjugation of the Other as an object of pleasure. Therefore, the conjointment between the universal norm, constitutive of the civilizing face of history, and the particularisation of pleasure establishes a quantifiable paradox: while the phallic law instrumentalizes reason in a social organization focused on moral totality, there is another element in this sadistic alcove: a sexual device that particularly enjoys the elimination of the other as an expression of individual domination.

The Lacanian diagnosis thus operates a causal displacement of a modern political issue: instead of ignorance<sup>26</sup>, treatable through humanist pedagogy as the abominable etiology of political ills, the monstrous character of a sexual dynamics intrinsic to man is, from a Lacanian perspective, under the spotlight. If it is the phallic norm that mediates the apparent opposition between the human and the monster, such subjective mediation is fallaciously instituted as implicated in a moral judgment, without which society would be disorganized into a chaotic, lawless anomaly.

This movement of mediation has two relevant theoretical axes, rarely addressed in the psychoanalytic field. On the one hand, the Lacanian critique of the Freudian pleasure principle stands out, both in articulation with the formulation of

phallic jouissance, and in contrast to the dimension of desire. While the pleasure principle informs the notion of jouissance through the attributive character of the good object and the subjective bad object which is enjoyed, desire is singular and open to other alterities, detached from the original attribution judgment (Andreoni, 2020). On the other hand, in relation to the text Kant with Sade (Lacan, 2006), it is noted how the perverse character of sadistic jouissance, when associated with the Kantian moral imperative, forms the Lacanian concept of phallic jouissance, a structuring factor to neurosis (and perversion).<sup>27</sup> In this context, there is, from the outset, a mitigation of the categorical limits that differentiate the clinical structures of psychoanalysis (Andreoni, 2020)—in this case, between neurosis and perversion in correlation to the opposition between man and monster.

Whether through the subversion of the attributive judgment of the pleasure principle, or through the subversion of categorical rationality, the horizon of psychoanalytic healing points directly to the emancipation of dichotomous avatars that encapsulates an essential definition of what is or what is not human (ibid). The monster, as the Other of man, only has relevance in a type of social reason that still elevates the human (Gonsalves, 2021). The impasse between the human and the monstrous concerned not only the content of the group's discussions *per se*, but also our own work dynamics, since questioning (even in theoretical terms) the phallic mode of social relationality, especially in the current Brazilian political scenario, is also a form of reflecting on how the schematism of pleasure and domination of the other is easily reproduced by ourselves.

Along these lines, although Lacan's 1963 text only at its concluding lines enunciates the dissonance of sadistic jouissance with the subject of psychoanalytic desire, it is, above all, in Lacan's formulas of sexuation that possible solutions for this arrangement are further developed. By elaborating on the duality between the phallic jouissance and the jouissance of the Other, related to the woman, the dialectic of the analytical process would imply, as a cure, a different kind of enjoyment: distinct to the Kantian imperative and to the perverse phallic jouissance, Lacan's concept of woman breaks with the grammar of the dichotomous attributive judgment to establish itself as another political rationality based on the singular desire (Andreoni, 2020). Ultimately, the orientation of desire is about going beyond gender, man and human, and its coercive universal parameter to highlight what is most pathological in the civilizing dimension and its ideal of Good. Desire has, thus, a relevant political contribution, since it is only in a desiring act that the subject goes beyond the contours of a morality imposed by the face of man to deform into an a-categorical being, open to otherness and without a defined identity. Neither man nor monster: singular monstrosity.

## Lacan *avec* Foucault: The Impasses of Monstrosity

It goes without saying that, between Lacan and Foucault lies an incompatibility, a gap, which is neither simple, nor even desirable, to be short-circuited or bridged. And yet, the efforts facing the *approximations* and *differences* between psychoanalyst and philosopher, or to put in other words, the very attempt to examine this particular *gap* can prove itself productive in dealing with similar critical understandings but from very heterogeneous perspectives about it. The present discussion does not aim at a naive approach to *bridge* or *suture* the gap between two heterogeneous fields, it aims at investigating specifically a shared diagnosis between Lacan and Foucault respecting the limitations of their fields.

This discussion is mediated by Alenka Zupančič's (2016) article *Biopolitics, Sexuality and the Unconscious* which summarizes and introduces an approximation between Foucault and Lacan. Zupančič (ibid., p.50) exposes how Foucault investigates a crucial object for psychoanalysis, *sexuality*, in order to develop his discussion on "power" and "politics". Nonetheless, there is a crucial missing element in Foucault's approach towards psychoanalysis which introduces a "symptomatic trace in his theory of modern power as biopolitics" (ibid., p.51), that is, the concept of unconscious is missing from Foucault's philosophical endeavors. Following Zupančič, Foucault approaches the Freudian proposals concerning sexuality as a "new way of speaking" about the problem of sex and sexuality (ibid., p.51), but does not articulate with either the unconscious or the Freudian discussion of repression [*Verdrängung*]. In Zupančič's (ibid., p.51) contrast between the psychoanalytic and the Foucauldian render of sex indicates almost opposed implications. For psychoanalysis sex is repressed because something about it is inherently unconscious and "related" to ontological inconsistencies, while the Foucauldian perspective is concerned with moral implications and indoctrination of bodies as a biopolitical agency. In other words, Foucault attributes such "denial" as being morphed into a biopolitical speculation of morality and societal regulations, consequently arguing that the way we think about sex is already constructed for us. Nonetheless, psychoanalysis seems to similarly offer that we think of sex as a relation when this is very much not the case—for both thinkers, sex is a category which is a *non-relation* for different reason. Although Foucault seems quite close to psychoanalysis when it comes the category of sex, *he departs at the point of sexuality*.<sup>28</sup>

Foucault introduces a harsh criticism towards psychoanalysis, understanding it as *the* technology for disciplining bodies and playing a part in the shift of (modern)

power occurring in contemporary times (Zupančič 2016, p.53)—but considering Lacan's "return to Freud" and his subsequent teachings, this is not necessarily a point of conflict, rather, it is actually an identifiable point of convergence. Zupančič suggests that, instead of engaging on the impossibilities of their dialogue, one should focus on the implications drawn from their common commitments (ibid., p.53). In other words, psychoanalysis after Lacan was also conceptualizing a criticism of its own operations and effects, but specifically, it was denouncing the shift from "the law of external ('sovereign') authority to the logic of the superego and the 'discontent in civilization' related to it." (ibid., pp.53-54). In short, both Foucault and Lacan agreed upon the diagnosis of this *shift* but developed heterogeneous procedures of investigating and producing prognostics about it. This certainly does not mean that what Foucault denominates "as a *historically* determinable shift in the logics and dynamics of power" (ibid., p.56) is what psychoanalysis conceptualizes as the "*timeless* instance of the human psyche (the superego)" as Zupančič anticipates (ibid., p.56). One must remember Lacan's insistence that the superego persists as the instance which commands us to enjoy.

From the standpoint of criticism towards this shift on power structures it might be possible to place Foucault and Lacan close to one another. Another point of further investigation suggested here lies between Foucault's "generalized" monstrosity which, under psychoanalytic lenses, would relate to the *symptomatic* inherent in our everyday life<sup>29</sup> (ibid., p.55) and Lacan's *monstrous* dimension of desire leading towards the discussion of the (in)human within all of us. This is not a well-established point of convergence between Foucault and Lacan (actually, quite far from it...), this is an articulation to be further explored—but viably suggested in the present discussion.

Critically, however Slavoj Žižek (2008, p.165) investigates Lacan's *Kant avec Sade* and the usual readings of this text, which he states posits how the Kantian law is understood as a superegoic operation sadistically enjoying from its subject's impasses. Here he uses the example of a sadistic teacher finding pleasure in failing their students with impossible tasks. Nonetheless, this is the opposite point defended by Lacan. As Žižek argues, it is not Kant who is a closeted sadist, but Sade who is secretly Kantian (ibid., p.165). What Lacan introduces is a paradoxical inversion where desire itself (and to *act* towards our desires without compromising it) simply can't be distinguished from any "pathological" motivation, therefore sustaining the definition of the Kantian ethical act (ibid., p.165). But could we venture towards an analogous approach substituting Kant and Sade to suggest a *Lacan avec Foucault*? What would that look like?

This certainly does not work if we ought to encompass the entirety of the psychoanalyst' teachings as well as Foucault's developments. But considering Lacan and Foucault's common criticism on shifts in contemporary power structures and pathologization through normativity, perhaps there lies a viable *locus* of indistinguishability between both (much like the paradoxical point of pathology and ethic between Kant and Sade). In a certain way, Lacan's *monstrosity* enacts a diagnosis on the shifts in contemporary power structures, but also on the implications of patriarchal and symbolic solidifications of the phallic order—it enables the very own possibility to *traverse* them. In a way, *monstrosity* is always a point of excess of desire, or an act towards an excess, devoted to the fidelity of inscribing another grammar into reality (Gonsalves 2021, 2021a). The monstrous dimension of an act (guided by desire) is not to the side of the "pathological" (either of the bodies or language); the *monstrous* dimension *per se* lies at the condition of *possibility* of emancipation itself.

Rigorously, for our proposal to work, after placing Lacan alongside Kant we must also put Foucault and Sade side by side. Consequently, this would have to reveal Foucault as *secretly* more psychoanalytic than one would have assumed him to be — which is certainly not accurate to be affirmed concerning Foucault's philosophy. And yet, for the sake of argumentation, one could defend how Foucault's criticism about psychoanalysis *did* prove itself significant for psychoanalytic theory (but this obviously, does not turn Foucault into a psychoanalyst—just a possible and important contributor to the field). Pushing further towards a more speculative consideration, perhaps Foucault's hypothetical "repression" of the unconscious as a valid discursivity alongside his own theories of discourses or even as a valid operator in his examination of sexuality could sustain a more *psychoanalytical* insight. Assuming this riskier speculative step, perhaps Foucault counted too much on the prior philosophical dichotomies of reason and madness to sustain his critique, missing the logic behind psychotic structure and, certainly, the role of the unconscious within this very discussion.

### A Few Concluding Remarks

The apparent (im)possibility of setting an open dialogue between Foucault and Lacan, instead of persisting in it as a site for silence, could be engaged as a site for thinking about an unheard conversation which productively conveys efforts towards contemporary impasses. This speculative effort, attentive of its limitations and troubles, resonates with the necessary considerations on monstrosity in our contemporary times. On one hand, Foucault problematizes impasses of the

monstrous beyond Canguilhem's examination, philosophizing the historicization of law and morality productively subdued normative pathologies upon the bodies (and subjectivity, subsequently); on the other, Lacan was always already puzzled by impasses of *jouissance*, the subject (of the unconscious) captured by it and the troubles of dealing with the symbolic and imaginary self-restraints unconsciously continuously *persisted* by individuals. This collective thought experiment attempt to philosophically explore monstrosity, mainly through Foucault and Lacan, highlighted its radicalness and openness as a key concept to investigate the monstrous singularity of our (in)humanity. We offer that there are additional lines of investigation to monstrosity to be further explored, the monstrous-framework attempted here, showed us how the circulation and sharing of impasses can be productively integrated at the organizational form of the collective.

The speculative effort of suggesting where Lacan *avec* Foucault takes us to, inspired by the psychoanalyst's text Kant *avec* Sade (2006), introduces an investigation about the limits between philosophy and psychoanalysis, as well as introduces points of commonality between the French contemporary thinker and the psychoanalyst. From the standpoint of their common criticism concerning the shifts on the dimensions of power in society and its subjective implications, it is possible to spot a viable *site* to be further explored; one where monsters lie as a key concept to be approached. If monstrosity is usually seen as the encapsulation of social-symbolic contradictions which requires a *diagnosis* of what needs to be transformed, it can also be regarded as the condition of transformation itself. In other words, the necessity of another grammar as a proper transformation of subjective suffering can only be properly traversed through monstrosity. Only a proper approach to the subjectivity of (in)humanity, as well its implications, can introduce proper alternatives towards the imprisonment of symbolic normativity, and beyond that, the delimitations of *sites* for transformations.

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## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> *Extimacy* is neologism coined by Jacques Lacan for the first time in his seventh Seminar (1992) [1959-60] to address "the intimate exteriority or "extimacy," that is the Thing" (ibid. p. 139), which gained another treatment in his teachings in his sixteenth Seminar (2008), a common gesture in Lacan's teachings. In this later moment extimacy translates a dialectical relation between the self and the Other through identifications, designating how the more external of the Other is the innermost aspect of the subject (of the unconscious) within ourselves. This experiment wanted to propose openness to heterogeneity as a methodological approach to the subject of monstrosity, constantly inscribing it to our collective construction.

<sup>2</sup> Lacan's theory of discourses (2007) is a psychoanalytic appreciation of the conditions of possibility for transformation in a dialectical movement through shifting discourses. Such dialectics engendered history, developments, and local conditions, in a logic where language established for the subject (of the unconscious) formulations towards other discourses in order to emancipate from the symbolic-imaginary restraints in reality. Lacan coined 4(+1) discourses: the university's discourse, the master's discourse, the analyst's discourse, the hysteric's discourse and later on, the capitalist's discourse (open to the possibility of having other discourses, but these are the ones Lacan focused on). Each kind of discourse sustains a relationship of power between occupied positions and their subsequent discursive productions for the subject (of the unconscious). And Foucault's *Archeology of Knowledge* (2002) [1969] focuses on discursivity as an exercise of power, where systems of thought and knowledge operate through discursive formations, conquering subjectivity through language. Foucault noticed an epistemological issue for philosophy concerning concept formations and discursive surfaces, but also discursive practices. Overall, Foucault reveals in his analysis of him the existence of a certain lack of clarity of subordination between these categories for human sciences. He notices how the branching of knowledge production through many different lines of thought have seemed to lose their object of investigation along the way, specifically for lacking the ability to conceive their own archaeologies in this process. This work comes right after Foucault's *The order of things* (1994)[1966] and it seems valid to defend how this assumes a step of maturity in Foucault's thinking, since it introduces archaeology to philosophy itself as a development against his prior work.

<sup>3</sup> A power dynamic through relationships of knowledge, where one knows and "homogenizes knowledge" to all the other members, infiltrating his/her authority to the group.

<sup>4</sup> Here lies another psychoanalytic insight infiltrating our method, i.e., much like the analyst who never preemptively knows what will take place in a session...each and every session has the radical condition of possibility of being productively new in its dedication to repeat.

<sup>5</sup> The heterogeneity of approaches (and personal interests) between the participants quickly manifested itself. While some of them were very keen on investigating Lacanian psychoanalysis, adding up Foucault to that, others wanted to discuss Donna Hawaway (2003), the monster implications of the Anthropocene in Tsing, Swanson, Gan and Bubandt (2017) and theses on leftist accelerationism (Fisher 2009). The collective creative impasse lied in attempting to introduce these heterogeneous approaches to monstrosity through a common ground of discussion, which led to this discussion between Lacan and Foucault, but never took another step forward. In more psychoanalytic terms, this common agreed experiment resembles a philosophically oriented Lacanian cartel without having a School affiliation or a prior line of thinking as its background. Although desire and production did mobilize its participants, without sustaining a +1 (as a Lacanian cartel would have to) but with a certain +1 *general attitude*

distributed towards the group itself, nonetheless, in order to affirm this a further investigation would be required.

<sup>6</sup> Chapter 5 from the book *The Knowledge of life*.

<sup>7</sup> "The existence of monsters questions life as to the power it has to teach us order" (Canguilhem, 2012, p. 187).

<sup>8</sup> For Canguilhem (2008, p. 134-5), the figure of the monster concerns the subject of *transformation* and *sameness*, e.g., "tadpoles turning into frogs" and so on. Canguilhem philosophically appreciates monstrosity and the monstrous as the fusion and subsequent normative breaking out between the medical and juridical fields of knowledge.

<sup>9</sup> "The existence of monsters calls into question the capacity of life to teach us order. This calling into question is immediate-so comprehensive was our prior confidence, so firmly accustomed had we been to seeing wild roses blooming on rosebushes, tadpoles turning into frogs, mares suckling foals, and, in general, the same engender the same" (Canguilhem 2008, p. 134).

<sup>10</sup> "...the monster would be merely what is other than the same, an order other than the most probable order" (Canguilhem 2008, p. 134).

<sup>11</sup> "What makes the value of living beings, or more exactly, what makes living beings valorized in relation to the mode of being of their physical milieu is their consistency as a species. Slicing through the vicissitudes of the material environment, consistency expresses itself through resistance to deformation and a struggle for the integrity of form-by the regeneration of mutilated organs in some species, and by re- production in all" (Canguilhem 2008, p. 135).

<sup>12</sup> According to Canguilhem (2008, pp. 135-6), "Death is the permanent and unconditional threat of the organism's decomposition, the limitation from without, the negation of the living by the nonliving. Monstrosity is the accidental and conditional threat of incompleteness or distortion in the formation of the form; it is the limitation from within, the negation of the living by the nonviable."

<sup>13</sup> "It is here that the thorny question of the relation between monstrosity and the monstrous arises. They are two concepts from the same etymological stock. They are in the service of two forms of normative judgment-the medical and the juridical-which were initially confounded rather than combined in religious thought, and then progressively abstracted and secularized" (Canguilhem 2008, p. 137).

<sup>14</sup> "Monstrosity, however, is the kind of natural irregularity that calls law into question and disables it. Law must either question its own foundations, or its practice, or fall silent, or abdicate, or appeal to another reference system, or again invent a casuistry. Essentially, the monster is the casuistry that is necessarily introduced into law by the confusion of nature" (Foucault 2003, p. 64)

<sup>15</sup> "Monstrosity requires a transgression of the natural limit, of the law-table, to fall under, or at any rate challenge, an interdiction of civil and religious or divine law. There is monstrosity only when the confusion comes up against, overturns, or disturbs civil, canon, or religious law." (Foucault 2003, p. 63)

<sup>16</sup> "The new figure of the monster, which appears at the end of the eighteenth century and is at work at the start of the nineteenth century, is elaborated, or begins to be elaborated, around the question of hermaphrodites" (Foucault 2003, pp. 66-7)

<sup>17</sup> With the exception of Duval, who attests to the presence of signs of virility in the hermaphrodite. In fact, the examination carried out by this doctor is highlighted by Foucault for presenting "the very first rudiments of a clinical approach to sexuality" (Foucault 2003, pp. 68-9).

<sup>18</sup> Back to our collective thought experiment, the practice of commitments agreed amongst ourselves as "tasks" to be pursued by ourselves, manage to circulate in our practice an engagement and subjectivization, which rescues Foucault's argument towards impasses of normativity and the importance of considering lines of flight beyond it. Nonetheless, it was Canguilhem's argument on a life being "poor of monsters" (2008, p.145) that persisted in our horizon, translated into a monstrous-oriented

practice of the collective towards circulating impasses instead of forcing homogenous "solutions" or repeating exhausted formats. Perhaps, to persist towards this 'poor' (of monsters) can also mean to rearticulate imaginary-symbolic into creating alternatives to current deadlocks.

<sup>19</sup> Which, in turn, supposes the transition from the legal model of sovereignty – linked to the idea of a negative, repressive political power, which generates "effects of ignorance" and operates at the "superstructural level" (Foucault 2003, p. 43) – to biopower – related to "population regulations" and "body disciplines" (Foucault 2011, p. 152).

<sup>20</sup> Homicidal monomania is a partial madness that, in many cases, affects only the affective faculties of the individual, without compromising his intellectual faculties. It is a mental illness whose object of delusion is restricted to murder. In it, the patient retains the awareness of his state, but is taken by an irresistible instinct to kill against which he engages in a moral struggle in order to prevent the passage to the act (Georget 1825, p. 95).

<sup>21</sup> Period of the heyday of the doctrine of monomanias in French alienism.

<sup>22</sup> The difficulty in punishing such crimes lies in the fact that in them there is both an absence *of* reason, understood as the absence of the subject's lucidity (presence of delusion), lucidity that is taken as the condition of imputability of the subject's act, as well as an absence of reason, in the sense of intelligibility of the criminal act (Foucault 2003, p. 121).

<sup>23</sup> For, according to the new penal theory, the reason for the crime is its reason for punishing. Reason, in this context, is understood in its double sense, as reason (interest) underlying the act and reason as the absence of dementia, delirium, total impairment of the individual's intellectual faculties. Thus, "[t]here is merely the famous Article 64, which says: There is no crime if the subject, the defendant, is in a state of dementia at the time of the act. That is to say, inasmuch as it legislates for the applicability of the right to punish, the code only ever refers to the old system of dementia. It requires only one thing, that the subject's dementia has not been demonstrated. As a result, the law can be applied. But in reality, the code expresses in law the structural principles of a punitive power that demands much more, since it requires rationality, the rational state of the subject who committed the crime, and the intrinsic ra-tionality of the crime itself" (Foucault 2003, pp. 115-116).

<sup>24</sup> "Psychiatry sets itself this kind of test of recognition of its royalty, of its sovereignty, of its knowledge and power: I can identify an illness; I can discover the signs of what has never been recognized. Imagine a crime that is unforeseeable, but which could be recognized as the particular sign of madness that a doctor could diagnose and foresee. Give it to me, says psychiatry, I can recognize it as I can recognize a motiveless crime, a crime that is therefore the absolute danger, hidden deep in the body of society. If I can analyze a motiveless crime, then I will be queen. The literally frenetic interest that psychiatry has in motiveless crimes at the beginning of the nineteenth century should, I think, be understood as its test of enthronement, the feat by which its sovereignty is recognized." (Foucault 2003, pp. 121-2)

<sup>25</sup> See more in Jean Allouch (2007) *La psychanalyse est-elle un exercice spirituel?*

<sup>26</sup> Another collective insight gave us this understanding: there is no simple opposition between knowledge and ignorance as approached by the Enlightenment. From the moment that the cause of political violence is attributed to an exercise of *jouissance* that governs reason, knowledge and the passion for ignorance mingle at its worst. The very notion of stupidity is, in a way, re-signified: instead of the opposite of rational knowledge, the "stupid" subject, as the aforementioned "horrible" adjective, is the one who reproduces the logic of individual pleasure at the cost of the death of others.

<sup>27</sup> We would like to thank Cindy Zeiher for this most crucial remark.

<sup>28</sup> Here lies another crucial intervention we would like to thank Cindy Zeiher for.

<sup>29</sup> Both Lacan and Foucault agree that 'symptoms' are affective and yet, they depart on the 'nature' of these symptoms. There appears a horrible 'nature' of the unconscious effects which Foucault denies

but which allow for a different monster to emerge. This is precisely what our investigation of monstrosity was keen to further examine.