The Physiology of Inscription: Foucault's Genealogy as Curative Science

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Abstract

In "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," Foucault suggests that genealogy is a sort of "curative science." The genealogist must be a physiologist and a pathologist as well as an historian, for his task is to decipher the marks that power relations and historical events leave on the subjugated body; "he must be able to diagnose the illnesses of the body, its conditions of weakness and strength, its breakdowns and resistances, to be in a position to judge philosophical discourse." But this claim seems to be incongruent with another major task of genealogy. After all, genealogy is supposed to show us that the things we take to be absolute are in fact discontinuous and historically situated: "Nothing in man—*not even his body*—is sufficiently stable to serve as the basis for self-recognition or for understanding other men." If this is true, then the subjugated body can never be restored to a healthy state because it has no essential or original nature. There are no universal standards by which we can even distinguish between healthy and unhealthy bodies. So in what sense is genealogy to be a "curative science"?

In my thesis, I try to elucidate the complex relationship between genealogy and the body. I argue that genealogy can be a curative science even while it "multiplies our body and sets it against itself." If we place a special emphasis on the role that transgression plays in Foucault's genealogical works, then the healthy body is precisely the body that resists universal standards and classifications. If genealogy is to be a curative science, then it must restore to the subjugated body an "identity" that transgresses its own limits and that constitutes itself, paradoxically, in the very effacement of identity.

In the first chapter of my thesis, I examine the body's role as "surface of the inscription of events." Power relations inscribe on and around the body an identity or subjectivity that appears to be unified and universal, but which is in fact disparate and historically situated. The "subjected" body is the sick and pathologically weak body. In Chapters 2 and 3, I describe how it is possible for the unhealthy body to become healthy by resisting the subjectivity that has been inscribed upon it. Chapter 4 explains how Foucault's later works fit into this characterization of genealogy.

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Introduction

In "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," where he first formulates the principles of his genealogical method, Michel Foucault declares that the task of history "is to become a curative science."[1] In its immature state, history plays the role of "handmaiden to philosophy" by tracing the metaphysical origin and subsequent evolution of truths and values. It spurns those singular events that occur at the level of the bodily and the base, and instead adopts "the famous perspective of frogs" and turns its attention upward towards "the noblest periods, the highest forms, the most abstract ideas, the purest individualities." In order for this history to become a curative science, it must first shorten its vision "to those things nearest to it—the body, the nervous system, nutrition, digestion, and energies."[2] Thus, history will reach maturity when it descends to the level of the bodily and the base, when it recognizes in human physiology the marks that indicate not the universal laws of nature or of evolution, but "a profusion of entangled events."

It is not surprising that Foucault would compare his own "genealogical" critique to medicine, since, in Discipline and Punish and The History of Sexuality, he identifies the body as the target of a whole range of power strategies and disciplinary measures. One has only to know how to read the traces left on the subjugated body to be able to identify the singular events that have contributed to its subjugation. But after these traces have been deciphered, that is, after the conditions of domination and of discipline have been "diagnosed," genealogy seems to offer no resolution. In an interview given several years after the publication of "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," Foucault states that genealogical critique "doesn't have to be the premise of a deduction that concludes, 'this, then, is what needs to be done.' It should be an instrument for

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[1] Michel Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology: Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1984, Volume Two, ed. James D. Faubion (New York: The New Press, 1998) 382.
[2] Ibid, 381.

those who fight, those who resist and refuse what is."[3] Genealogy can be taken up and used by anyone who is in a position to resist power. But power relations, for Foucault, are fluid, reversible, infinite, and ultimately inescapable. Resistance, therefore, can only take us from one system of imbalances to another without ever levelling out the differences that constitute a state of domination. Thus, instead of "curing" the body of its subjugated state, genealogy exposes relations of power only to reconfigure them or to supplant them with new ones. At first glance, an historical project such as this does not appear to be "curative" at all.

Furthermore, the very project of genealogy seems to contradict its characterization as a curative science. After all, genealogy "introduces discontinuity into our very being—as it divides our emotions, dramatizes our instincts, multiplies our body and sets it against itself."[4] Its task is to reveal the confusion of events that gave rise to what we thought was universal, what we thought was outside of history, and to unmask the apparent unity of the subject: "Nothing in man—not even his body—is sufficiently stable to serve as the basis for self-recognition or for understanding other men."[5] The subjugated body can never be restored to a healthy state because it has no essential or original nature. There are no universal criteria by which we can even distinguish between healthy and unhealthy bodies.

Nevertheless, Foucault does present the image of an unhealthy body. *Herkunft*, or "descent," which genealogy seeks to identify in the inscriptions of the body,

> appears in *faulty* respiration, in *improper* diets, in the *debilitated* and *prostrate* bodies of those whose ancestors committed errors. Fathers have only to mistake effects for causes, believe in the reality of an 'afterlife' or

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[3] Michel Foucault, "Questions of Method," Power: Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1985, Volume Three, ed. James D. Faubion (New York: The New Press, 2000) 236.
[4] Michel Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology: Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1984, Volume Two, ed. James D. Faubion (New York: The New Press, 1998) 380.
[5] Ibid, 380.

> maintain the value of eternal truths, and *the bodies of their children will suffer.*[6]

This language of illness, malnutrition, and pathology seems to indicate that there is a standard of health, or some sort of value system, by which certain historical effects can be judged as being positive or negative, healthy or unhealthy. This language therefore reinforces the characterization of genealogy as a curative science, notwithstanding the fact that genealogy also "multiplies our body and sets it against itself." But how do we reconcile this contradiction? How can we restore the subjugated body to a healthy state if no such state exists? The purpose of this thesis is to argue that the genealogist's project of introducing discontinuity into the being of things is in fact curative in nature, and that the healthy body is precisely this body that has been multiplied and set against itself. This, of course, is not a return to an essential and original nature, but rather the very dissolution of essences and origins. It is the transgression of the limits, both subjective and physiological, that constitute one's "nature." Since there is nothing in us that is sufficiently stable to serve as the basis for self-recognition or for understanding others, genealogy "cures" us by exposing the body as it is in its dispersed and *un*stable state, by diffusing our identities and our physiology and thus revealing to us the possibility of creating ourselves anew.

But "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History" seems to state this project only in its negative terms. At the other end of Foucault's genealogical work, given only shortly before his death, the lecture "What is Enlightenment?" is the next major statement of Foucault's methodology. While "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History" (1971) was written before the real work of genealogy had begun, "What is Enlightenment?" (1983) is a more or less retrospective look at and perhaps even a revision of Foucault's critical project. In this lecture, Foucault seems to have abandoned the

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[6] Ibid, 375. Emphases added.

rhetoric of the body, and has resituated himself, surprisingly, in the critical tradition of Kant. This means that there is no more talk of the body marked by historical events or of genealogy as a curative science. Genealogy is now employed in the work that Foucault calls "a historical ontology of ourselves." Yet this historical ontology is in fact curative in nature, and its critical project is continuous with the one stated in "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History." Only now this project is defined positively as well as negatively. By multiplying our body and setting it against itself, by destroying any illusion of a unified identity, historical ontology opens up for us "the possibility of no longer being, doing, or thinking what we are, do, or think."[7] Its philosophical ethos can be characterized "as a historico-practical test of the limits we may go beyond, and thus as work carried out by ourselves upon ourselves as free beings."[8] The curative project of genealogy is therefore preserved and even furthered, since by introducing discontinuity into the being of things, a historical ontology dismantles the subjectivity that is the contingent effect of historical forces; it displaces and challenges the attitudes that we have taken towards our bodies and our sexuality; and it restores to our subjected bodies an "identity" that transgresses its own limits and that constitutes itself, paradoxically, in the very effacement of identity.

Three Bodies of Genealogy

In Foucault's genealogies, the body can be understood to play at least three different roles. In Discipline and Punish (1975) and the first volume of The History of Sexuality (1976),[9] the body plays the role of target to certain technologies of power. It is the more or less passive object of a number of disciplinary controls and mechanisms of constraint. Thus, despite its claim

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[7] Michel Foucault, "What is Enlightenment?" Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth: Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1984, Volume One, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: The New Press, 1997) 315-6

[8] Ibid, 316.

[9] I will henceforth refer to this first volume of The History of Sexuality as, simply, The History of Sexuality. Volumes two and three I will refer to as The Use of Pleasure and The Care of the Self, respectively.

to more humanitarian methods of punishment, the modern prison bears some resemblance to the outdated practice of torture, which used to take direct hold of "the least body of the condemned man"[10]:

> we can surely accept the general proposition that, in our societies, the systems of punishment are to be situated in a certain 'political economy' of the body: even if they do not make use of violent or bloody punishment, even when they use 'lenient' methods involving confinement or correction, it is always the body that is at issue—the body and its forces, their utility and their docility, their distribution and their submission.[11]

Unlike torture, however, disciplinary power does not take hold of bodies directly. Instead, it acts on actions, and thus traces around the subjugated body a field of possible actions that at once constrains it and makes it useful. Power must therefore invest forces into the body in order to make it productive, while at the same time dissociating these same forces from it: "the body becomes a useful force only if it is both a productive body and a subjected body."[12]

This same objective can also be found in The History of Sexuality, albeit in a slightly different form. Here, again, power takes the body as its target. But in this case it is "sex" that is at issue, not the forces of production. By stimulating and arousing bodies and by encouraging perversions and aberrant behaviour, power dissociates from the "pervert" the very pleasures that it promotes. It objectifies these pleasures and makes them intelligible, thus driving sex "out of hiding" and forcing it "to lead a discursive existence"[13]:

> The power which thus took charge of sexuality set about contacting bodies, caressing them with its eyes, intensifying areas, electrifying surfaces, dramatizing troubled moments. It wrapped the sexual body in its embrace.[14]

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[10] Michel Foucault, Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1995) 29.
[11] Ibid, 25.
[12] Ibid, 26.
[13] Michel Foucault, The History of Sexuality, Volume I: An Introduction, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1990) 33.
[14] Ibid, 44.

Power does not seek to condemn sex to a life of silence and repression, or to erase it altogether from the human body. Rather, its aim is precisely to stimulate the sexual body and bring the pervert and his pleasures into full view of an objectifying discourse. The objective is thus similar to the one found in Discipline and Punish, where forces are invested into the body only to be systematically dissociated from it. In this case, pleasures are aroused in and subsequently dissociated from the sexual body. This passive or "docile" body, this body whose forces and pleasures have been dissociated from it, is undoubtedly the body in its sick and pathologically weak state. After all, it seems to never be in possession of its own forces or pleasures. The first chapter of this thesis will take a more detailed look at the docile body and the relationship between investment, dissociation, and degeneration.

This passivity or docility of the body raises several questions. First of all, it is precisely this passivity with which Scott Lash takes issue in his study of genealogy and the body: "Resistances are rarely constructed, struggles are not engaged."[15] Indeed, how are we to expect any kind of resistance from a body whose forces are not its own, from "a body largely deprived of causal powers"?[16] This question addresses the problem of *how* to resist. The second chapter of this thesis will examine some general principles of power and resistance, and will try to determine whether it is possible for the body to overcome its passivity. We shall see that the body can in fact overcome its passivity by appropriating the forces that have been invested into it, and by turning these forces against power. But even if this is the case, one may ask, with Habermas: Why fight at all, if we can never escape the ebb and flow of power relations? Or to restate this question in terms of our analysis: What is the point of resisting when the body can never be restored to any natural, unsubjugated state? Every liberation merely opens the way for

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[15] Scott Lash, "Genealogy and the Body: Foucault/Deleuze/Nietzsche," Theory, Culture, and Society, 2, no. 2 (1984): 3.
[16] Ibid, 5.

new power relations, new subjugations and, conversely, new resistances. Power is infinitely reversible, and thus also inescapable. But this problem of resistance will lead us into a discussion of the "healthy" body, which, we will see, is precisely the body that resists power by appropriating the forces that have been invested into it. "Health" is not a condition that can be found outside of the dynamic of power relations. Rather, it is a permanent reaction to power; it is the activation of what was at first passive and unable to resist.

Thus, the second role that the body plays in genealogy is that of the healthy or active body, the body that resists power. Foucault makes this transition only at the very end of The History of Sexuality, and without ever giving it any theoretical elaboration: "The rallying point for the counterattack against the deployment of sexuality ought not to be sex-desire, but bodies and pleasures." The third chapter of this thesis will examine these "bodies and pleasures" and the "counterattack" that is supposed to be launched from them. In order to make sense of this somewhat puzzling statement, we will make reference to one of Foucault's interviews, in which he states that sadomasochists "are inventing new possibilities of pleasure with strange parts of their body—through the eroticization of the body."[17] If we are to use this perhaps equally puzzling claim as the key to the meaning of bodies and pleasures, then we must first unlock the disruptive potential of sadomasochism. This will take us into an investigation of resistance as it functions at the local level, and will give us the opportunity to see what curative effects, if any, are produced by a specific act of resistance. In this case, the body is multiplied and set against itself and its subjectivity is transgressed. When power traces around the passive body a field of possible actions, it sets limits that constrain the body and make it useful: limits on the body's potential to act, and limits on the subjectivity or identity that is created in the process.

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[17] Michel Foucault, "Sex, Power, and the Politics of Identity," Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth: Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1984, Volume One, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: The New Press, 1997) 165.

Sadomasochism is an effective site of resistance because it transgresses all of these limits: it diffuses the body and makes it volatile, and it displaces identity by situating it within the dynamics of a game that is reversible and always unstable. Thus, sadomasochism disrupts the deployment of sexuality by making bodies and pleasures "unintelligible" to power and by placing the "pervert" out of view of any objectifying discourse.

Foucault's later genealogies, namely The Use of Pleasure (1984) and The Care of the Self (1984), do not fit quite as neatly into the discourse of "health." They turn away from the power axis of genealogy and are concerned more with what Foucault calls the "ethical" axis. Here the issue is not with the power mechanisms that manipulate the passive and subjugated body, but rather with the ancient Greco-Roman relationship between oneself and one's own body. Thus, in The Use of Pleasure,

> the practice of regimen as an art of living was something more than a set of precautions designed to prevent illnesses or complete their cure. It was a whole manner of forming oneself as a subject who had the proper, necessary, and sufficient concern for his body. A concern that permeated everyday life, making the major or common activities of existence a matter both of health and of ethics.[18]

And in The Care of the Self:

> The reasonable soul thus has a dual role to play: it needs to assign a regimen for the body that is actually determined by the latter's nature, its tensions, the condition and circumstances in which it finds itself. But it will be able to assign this regimen correctly only provided it has done a good deal of work on itself: eliminated the errors, reduced the imaginings, mastered the desires, that cause it to misconstrue the sober law of the body.[19]

In both of these cases, Foucault's interest in the ancient Greco-Roman concern with "regimen" differs significantly from his earlier examinations of the subjugated body. In the earlier

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[18] Michel Foucault, The Use of Pleasure: Volume 2 of The History of Sexuality, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1990): 108.
[19] Michel Foucault, The Care of the Self: Volume 3 of The History of Sexuality, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1988): 133.

genealogies, Foucault discusses the actual subjugation of passive bodies. But here his attention is directed towards certain conceptual problematizations of the body in ancient Greco-Roman societies. His concern is less with the body itself than with the subject or "reasonable soul" that fashions itself out of the attitudes it takes towards itself and its body. Thus, the later two genealogies focus not on the various mechanisms of manipulation and control, but rather on the individual who shapes himself as an ethical subject, and who has a certain relationship with his body and his environment. If the curative potential of genealogy lies in its ability to spark resistances and counterattacks against power, then The Use of Pleasure and The Care of the Self must play a different role than the earlier genealogies. After all, unlike Discipline and Punish and The History of Sexuality, they do not reveal to us a body that has been subjugated and weakened and whose forces have been dissociated from it. Rather, they present to us individuals who seem to be in complete control of their bodies, and who even work at shaping their own subjectivities. Has genealogy thus taken a new turn and developed new objectives? If so, what are these objectives, and are they compatible with the curative project of genealogy as it is defined in "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History"?

The final chapter of this thesis will argue that The Use of Pleasure and The Care of the Self are not at all discontinuous with Discipline and Punish and The History of Sexuality. Rather, they are in fact complementary to these two earlier genealogies, since they perform the work of historical ontology by demonstrating that the attitudes we now take towards the body are different from those taken in the past, that our bodies and our subjectivity were not always as they now are. They demonstrate, moreover, that the limits that are imposed on us are not universally fixed, and thus also that there is always the possibility of transgressing these limits. The third genealogical role of the body is therefore that of the historical or discursive body, the

body that is shown to be in a diffused and volatile state and that is multiplied and set against itself by the disparities of history and discourse.

The "three bodies" of genealogy stand in relation to each other in the following way. First of all, the docile or pathologically weak body must recognize itself as having the potential to become active and healthy. That is, it must be made to realize that it is in a position to appropriate the forces that power has invested into it. But power operates in such a way as to conceal this fact by creating the impression that the current state of things is how things have always been, that the values and truths that are its contingent effects are in fact universal and incontestable. It is the task of genealogy, then, to disrupt this order of things by pitting our bodies and our identities against those bodies and identities that appear historically as completely "other," and by demonstrating that the truths and values of the past are in fact discontinuous with those of the present. Genealogy is a curative science because it reveals to us the body as it is dispersed throughout history and discourse; because in doing so it exposes those limits that we may transgress and go beyond; and because it helps us to appropriate those forces that have been dissociated from us by demonstrating that "docility" is not necessary or essential to our being.

Chapter 1: Inscription

The body, for Foucault, is "the surface of the inscription of events."[20] It is that surface upon which power struggles and ethical choices come to manifest themselves in the forms of diet, work habit, sexual behaviour, and various other physiological practices and prohibitions. It is the task of genealogy, as a curative science, to decipher these "inscriptions," to identify the forces and technologies that have contributed to the domination, degeneration, and even destruction of the body. This means that rather than concerning itself with great epochs and lofty origins, genealogy is most interested in those singular events to which the nerves, the respiratory system, and the bowels bear witness. The genealogist must be a physiologist and a pathologist; "he must be able to diagnose the illnesses of the body, its conditions of weakness and strength, its breakdowns and resistances, to be in a position to judge philosophical discourse."[21] What these pathological investigations reveal is a multiplicity of discourses and technologies whose aims and tactics are always local, dispersed, and discontinuous. Yet despite their disparity, these technologies and discourses all seem to have at least one common object. They all seek, in different ways, to dominate and take hold of the bodies of individuals. This does not mean, however, that they seek the strict submission of individuals through the deprivation of the body's forces. A power relation is always also an investment of power into the subjugated body.

In Discipline and Punish, Foucault argues that disciplinary power seeks to increase the body's intelligibility as well as its usefulness. This interest in intelligibility can also be seen in The History of Sexuality; here Foucault shows how the body is made the object of knowledge and power by means of an increase in pleasure. We will also see in this chapter that "subjectivity" is invested into the subjugated body. The essential point is that relations of power

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[20] Michel Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology: Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1984, Volume Two, ed. James D. Faubion (New York: The New Press, 1998) 375.
[21] Ibid, 373.

do not seek simply to divest the body of its forces. Rather, they tend to dissociate these forces from it by drawing them out, by multiplying them and increasing their intensity.

The Body and its Forces

Relations of power do not act directly on the bodies of individuals. They act, rather, on the actions of those bodies: "an action upon an action, on possible or actual future or present actions."[22] This means that power relations place limits on the individual's field of possible actions. They close off certain undesired possibilities and restrict various unwanted patterns of behaviour. But this also means that the one over whom power is exercised must be "recognized and maintained to the very end as a subject who acts; and that, faced with a relationship of power, a whole field of responses, reactions, results, and possible inventions may open up."[23] By Foucault's definition, power relations act only on the actions of free subjects, "and only insofar as they are 'free.'"[24] The closing off of certain undesired possibilities is therefore also the opening up of several other possible actions, some of which may be just as undesirable. The individual over whom power is exercised is always presented with a field of possible actions that includes certain possibilities of resistance, struggle, refusal and contradiction. To put it simply, every "action upon an action" opens up a field of possible reactions. Power relations are therefore always precarious and unstable, always given to the possibility of resistance or even the complete reversal of forces.

It thus follows that power is not exercised unrestrictedly over the subjugated body. It is not exercised in such a way that the individual becomes the passive object of unchecked

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[22] Michel Foucault, "The Subject and Power," Power: Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1985, Volume Three, ed. James D. Faubion (New York: The New Press, 2000) 340.
[23] Ibid, 340.
[24] Ibid, 342.

manipulation. Such a relation is not a relation of power in the strict sense. We must exclude all relations of unrestrained violence and of passive consent from our definition of power if we are to maintain that power relations operate only on a field of possible actions. It is for this reason that Foucault employs the term "government" in its broadest sense. To govern is "to structure the possible field of action of others."[25] This means that in order for government and for power relations to be possible, the individual over whom power is exercised must be cultivated as a free subject. Since power relations cannot exist without action, it is in the interest of power to provoke and to stimulate the actions and reactions of the subjugated body. This point will become clearer once we have looked at some examples from Discipline and Punish and The History of Sexuality.

But in order to understand how a field of action can be "inscribed" on and around the human body, we will first have to make some general remarks about genealogy. In "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," Foucault explains that genealogy is not a search for "origins" in the sense of *Ursprung*. Unlike traditional history and metaphysics, it does not search for the unity of its objects in the purity of their birth. The historical beginnings to which genealogy refers are not lofty; they do not mark the springing forth of an idea or of a thing into the fullness and transparency of its being: "historical beginnings are lowly."[26] Genealogy dissolves the unity of everything that seems to transcend history, "everything considered immortal in man."[27] Into every seemingly coherent identity it reintroduces the motley and fragmented interplay of historical events. This means that genealogy unveils the discontinuity, disparity, and heterogeneity that lurk behind every mask. Foucault therefore recasts the concept of *Ursprung*

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[25] Ibid, 341.
[26] Michel Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology: Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1984, Volume Two, ed. James D. Faubion (New York: The New Press, 1998) 372.
[27] Ibid, 379.

in terms of *Entstehung* and *Herkunft*. *Herkunft* designates "stock" or "descent." Through the analysis of descent, genealogy seeks to identify those discontinuities that disguise themselves as being continuous and unitary. It follows carefully the dispersed and discontinuous course of events that has constituted those instincts, values, and concepts that we take for granted. *Entstehung*, on the other hand, refers to a thing's emergence or moment of arising, a moment that occurs only within an "endlessly repeated play of dominations."[28] In terms of emergence, an historical beginning is the consequence or the effect of struggle, confrontation, and domination.

Both *Herkunft* and *Entstehung* leave their physical mark on the body. It is therefore the task of genealogy "to expose a body totally imprinted by history and the process of history's destruction of the body."[29] Power struggles, ethical choices and truth games—those local and dispersed events that constitute *Herkunft* and set *Entstehung* in motion—all inscribe themselves in the nervous system, in the digestive apparatus, and in the sexual organs. Events touch the surfaces of bodies and even cut through to their most basic functions. It is for this reason that Foucault claims that historical sense "has more in common with medicine than philosophy."[30] What, then, are the "symptoms" that the genealogist looks for and attempts to diagnose? As Foucault has indicated in his earlier genealogies, i.e., Discipline and Punish and The History of Sexuality, these symptoms include work routines, sleep schedules, sexual tendencies, standards of hygiene, etc. In other words, what is inscribed on the body is a certain field of action. Every event traces on and around the body a field of possible actions that includes, for example, choices in sexual behaviour and orientation. We must therefore understand "inscription" in a very precise way. It does not refer to the engraving of visible marks or signs. It refers, rather, to government, to the structuring of the body's field of possible actions. Disciplinary power, for

[28] Ibid, 377.
[29] Ibid, 376.
[30] Ibid, 382.

example, leaves its "mark" or memory in one's muscles and nerves by making habitual a number of repeated activities, movements, postures, and gestures. It demands of the subjugated body a strict routine that must be practiced until it can be gone through reflexively and automatically. Disciplinary power inscribes in the very functioning of the subjugated body a field of action, so that every practiced movement, every repeated gesture is not compelled by any external force, but rather seems to come naturally to the individual over whom this power is exercised. Thus, the individual is maintained as a "free," acting subject, though his "freedom" is necessarily confined to a somewhat narrow and limited field.

In Discipline and Punish, Foucault discusses the "political economy" of the body: "it is always the body that is at issue—the body and its forces, their utility and their docility, their distribution and their submission."[31] This "economy" is apparently an economy of forces or of actions. It is concerned with the daily schedules and the regular routines of workers, children, criminals, etc. It is a disciplinary economy. In any disciplinary society, even the slightest movements of the body are of interest. Take for example the military. Every step the soldier takes, every glance he may take, every one of his turns and pivots—all these movements are carefully calculated and are synchronized with the actions of other soldiers. Such calculation and synchronicity serve to maximize efficiency; every action is utilized to its fullest potential. It is precisely the movements of the body, and not the body itself, that are taken hold of in these relations of power. In any case, power acts upon the utility and the distribution of the body's forces: it is in this way an action upon an action.

Of course, this type of disciplinary power has a double and apparently paradoxical objective. While it seeks to invest forces into the body for the sake of utility, it also tries to

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[31] Michel Foucault, Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1995) 25.

divest the body of those same forces. As a relation of power, discipline dissociates from the body those forces that it has invested into it, and thus appropriates them. In this way, discipline produces useful bodies:

> Discipline increases the forces of the body (in economic terms of utility) and diminishes these same forces (in political terms of obedience). In short, it dissociates power from the body; on the one hand, it turns it into an 'aptitude', a 'capacity', which it seeks to increase; on the other hand, it reverses the course of the energy, the power that might result from it, and turns it into a relation of strict subjection.[32]

First of all, power is invested into the body by means of physical training, exercises, drills, etc. For the disciplined soldier, every movement or gesture is broken down into its minutest elements so that it can be repeated again and again with maximum efficiency. And from the soldier's body, which operates a rifle, assumes a certain position, and occupies a specific place in relation to other soldiers, the greatest possible intensity of force is drawn. But although this force circulates within the body of the soldier, it is simultaneously dissociated from it. After all, the disciplined army must be able to act as one body, as a well-oiled machine; the soldier's actions must be directed not by his own will but by the movements of the division or unit in which he occupies a specific place and performs a certain function. Thus, discipline invests forces into the body only to redirect them towards its own ends. The soldier feels an increase of power in his own body, but is consequently caught up in a relation of power that is far beyond his control.

Discipline also produces "intelligible" bodies by holding subjects "in a mechanism of objectification."[33] This means that subjects are held in a web of surveillance, examination, and observation; they are placed under the steady gaze of a power that extracts knowledge from them. The behaviour of criminals is watched and studied, the performance of students observed and compared, and the progress of hospital patients carefully recorded. In this mechanism of

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[32] Ibid, 138.
[33] Ibid, 187.

objectification, "discipline brings into play its power, which is one of analysis."[34] Bodies are made the objects of analysis; their functions, their gestures, and their behaviour are observed, recorded, differentiated and objectified. Ideally, the individual who is the object of this type of analysis will succumb to disciplinary power. As Foucault puts it, "Visibility is a trap"[35]: the individual should become distinctly aware of the visibility of his actions and of his behaviour, and thus regulate his actions and behaviour accordingly. In other words, he should act as if he is always being watched. This effect is best illustrated by Foucault's description of Bentham's Panopticon, a circular prison in which every inmate can be observed from a central tower, without being able to see his observer:

> He who is subjected to a field of visibility, and who knows it, assumes responsibility for the constraints of power; he makes them play spontaneously upon himself; he inscribes in himself the power relation in which he simultaneously plays both roles; he becomes the principle of his own subjection.[36]

"Panopticism" produces individuals who have internalized the effects of power to the point where they become their own oppressors. This type of power relation produces a field of action that is governed by the "power of the Norm."[37] Under the gaze of disciplinary power, bodies are individualized and differentiated; their defects, deficiencies, and abnormalities are identified; and their norms of health are defined. The subject who has become the principle of his own subjection will supposedly want to be classified by this normalizing gaze as sane rather than insane, healthy rather than unhealthy, normal rather than abnormal. He will therefore adopt the outward behaviour of the "mentally healthy" person; he will therefore adopt a particular field of

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[34] Ibid, 197.
[35] Ibid, 200.
[36] Ibid, 202-3.
[37] Ibid, 184.

action. In this way, panopticism dissociates power from the body only by inscribing on and around it a field of possible actions that is structured by the binary schema, normal-abnormal.

In The History of Sexuality, Foucault subverts what he calls the "repressive hypothesis" of power.[38] According to this hypothesis, power operates as repression by condemning sexuality to lead a silent and frustrated existence. Consequently, every mention of sex is viewed as a deliberate transgression and a step towards liberation. But with all of the talk about sex today, why are we not yet liberated? After all, our society engages in a constant discourse on sex and sexual liberation, and even speaks paradoxically of its own silence. But according to Foucault, power functions precisely as the opposite of repression. Rather than silencing sex, it incites it to speak. We have already seen how visibility can be a trap. In The History of Sexuality, Foucault shows how sex "was driven out of hiding and constrained to lead a discursive existence."[39] It was made the object of knowledge by a power that sought to multiply and intensify it. In the past two centuries we have seen not the repression or the reduction of sex, but rather "a dispersion of sexualities, a strengthening of their disparate forms, a multiple implantation of 'perversions.' Our epoch has initiated sexual heterogeneities."[40] This multiplication of sex brings individuals under the gaze of power by classifying them and by naming their perversions and their orientations. Again, we can see how a particular field of action is opened up under an objectifying gaze. An individual's actions can be licit or illicit, natural or unnatural, moral or immoral. And that is not to mention the many variations of perverse behaviour that were given "strange baptismal names"[41] by nineteenth-century psychiatrists. All of these divisions and

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[38] Michel Foucault, The History of Sexuality, Volume I: An Introduction, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1990) 10.
[39] Ibid, 33.
[40] Ibid, 37.
[41] Ibid, 43.

classifications make sex visible and analysable. They bring it under the gaze of power by forcing it to lead a "discursive existence."

This deliberate stimulation of sexual discourse results in a peculiar relationship between power and pleasure. On the one hand, the exercise of power, which includes the examination and the intensification of the sexual body, is accompanied by a voyeuristic pleasure. On the other hand, there is also a certain pleasure in evading this power, in eluding the gaze and escaping classification. It is a game of seduction and of provocation, a chase that is enjoyed both by those who exercise power and by those over whom it is exercised. The sexual body is therefore stimulated and intensified. It is incited to engage in all manner of perverse acts and to invent new perversions. Around every body are traced "perpetual spirals of power and pleasure."[42] These "spirals" do not constrain the body or limit its actions, but rather draw it out into a field of action that is constantly expanding and multiplying.

We are now in a better position to understand what Foucault means when he says that power is an action upon an action. Every relation of power that we have thus far considered involves some sort of investment into the subjugated body, some sort of deliberate increase of its forces. In Discipline and Punish, disciplinary power maximizes the potential of the body by making it useful, by increasing its aptitudes and capacities. It also produces intelligible bodies by placing subjects under an objectifying gaze. In The History of Sexuality, on the other hand, it is pleasure that is at issue. Pleasure is not only increased by power, but its possible forms and variations are multiplied into a plethora of perversions. In any case, what is at issue for both of these relations of power is action. Disciplinary power structures the body's field of possible actions by setting up routines and schedules, and also by establishing a norm that can be either followed or transgressed. In The History of Sexuality, power acts on the body by inciting it to

[42] Ibid, 45.

action; it stimulates and provokes the body and even rouses it deliberately to resistance and to evasion. Power, therefore, acts directly on actions. But rather than closing off all possibilities of action, it seeks to open a field in which the forces of the body are dissociated, certainly, but also increased. Power acts upon the actions of subjects, and it is for this reason that it can be exercised only over "free" subjects.

Our discussion of action has perhaps drawn our attention away from the body itself. In fact, it may have given the impression that inscription takes place in a kind of social space, in a domain of language in which an individual's actions are called by this or that name, labelled "normal" or "abnormal." It is important to point out here that "inscription" is meant quite literally. To say that power acts directly upon the actions of the body and not upon the body itself is certainly not to say that it concerns itself only with the anticipation of movements and the channelling of forces. Nor is it to say that power ignores the body itself in favour of the energies that may emanate from it. In fact, a field of action is not just a web of possibilities that is constructed around the subject and which limits his options; it is, rather, part of a mechanism of power that inscribes itself directly on the physical body of the subject. Its effects are physiological; they manifest themselves in the nervous system, in the digestive apparatus, "in faulty respiration, in improper diets, in the debilitated and prostrate bodies of those whose ancestors committed errors."[43] Every event inscribes its memory into the organs, the nerves, and the surfaces of the body. This means that every ethical choice and every power struggle becomes embedded in the most basic functions of the body and thereby directs or diverts its actions. In any case, the field of action that is opened up by an event is opened up within the very nerves and sinews of the subjugated body; it traces the possibilities of movement and of

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[43] Michel Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology: Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1984, Volume Two, ed. James D. Faubion (New York: The New Press, 1998) 375.

direction not around the subject and externally to him, but within the minutest elements of his flesh. Thus, if power is always an action upon an action, then the body is the material substrate of those actions upon which power acts. It is quite literally "the surface of the inscription of events."

Thus, to say that power does not act directly upon the body is simply to say that it does not seek to constrain the individual by means of physical violence. Power may, of course, use violent methods to achieve certain ends, but it is always and necessarily exercised over "free" subjects. A relation of pure violence or a state of unchecked domination, on the other hand, aims for the strict submission of the subjugated body; it aims for the restriction or destruction of its forces. Since power relations seek to produce action rather than inertia, and since they do not attempt to relegate the subject to a state of slavery, let us maintain our thesis that power does not act directly upon the body. But let us not forget that the body is nevertheless quite literally the surface of the inscription of events. Disciplinary power, for example, is certainly not indifferent towards the bodies that it wishes to maximize as a useful force. In order to exploit the forces of the body, it must be able to master their corporal elements in a calculative way: "a calculated constraint runs slowly through each part of the body, mastering it, making it pliable, ready at all times, turning silently into the automatism of habit."[44] In other words, the physical reflexes of the human organism are saturated with a "constraint" that grips them not directly or forcefully, but in a way that is "all the less 'corporal' in that it is more subtly 'physical'."[45] The effects are felt in the nerves and muscles, which are not acted upon directly, but which are shaped by rigorous exercise and routine. The actions of the disciplined body should be guided entirely by habit, by a practiced routine that is the effect of disciplinary power.

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[44] Michel Foucault, Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1995) 135.
[45] Ibid, 177.

In The History of Sexuality, too, the body is inscribed upon in a physical way. Its parts are stimulated and its pleasures intensified. Its sexuality is systematically driven out of its hiding places and forced to show itself in the individual's behaviour, in his body parts and on the surfaces of his skin: "The power which thus took charge of sexuality set about contacting bodies, caressing them with its eyes, intensifying areas, electrifying surfaces, dramatizing troubled moments. It wrapped the sexual body in its embrace."[46] Power does not "act upon actions" in a circuitous and non-physical way. It inscribes a field of action directly onto the sexual body by investing forces into specific areas and by stimulating them in certain ways. An individual can be labelled a zoophile, a mixoscopophile, a gynecomast, a presbyophile, or a sexoesthetic invert[47] only because each one of these labels includes a very specific field of actions and behaviours into which the individual is drawn by an objectifying (and also a "caressing") gaze. In other words, researchers and psychiatrists incite and encourage perversions as well as the distinctive behaviours that accompany them. In order to understand the "pervert," they must stimulate his body in certain ways and in certain places; they must direct him towards his respective perversion.

The Subject

All of this physical contact between power and the body results in something that is altogether "non-physical." Every field of action that is inscribed upon bodies produces on and around them an identity or subjectivity. The "subject who acts," in other words, is the necessary

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[46] Michel Foucault, The History of Sexuality, Volume I: An Introduction, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1990) 44.

[47] These are some of the "strange baptismal names" that were given by psychiatrists to "all those minor perverts" of the nineteenth century. Cf. Michel Foucault, The History of Sexuality, Volume I: An Introduction, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1990) 43.

product of all of these investments and subtle coercions. It cannot be otherwise, for the acting subject must, by definition, have at its disposal a field of actions. But what really is subjectivity?

The word "subject" can be understood in two complementary ways: "subject to someone else by control and dependence, and tied to his own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge. Both meanings suggest a form of power that subjugates and makes subject to."[48] The first meaning is somewhat self-explanatory: one is *subject to* others when one is dependent upon them, when one's actions are determined by their manipulation and control. The second meaning, however, suggests that subjectivity, as a form of identity or "self-knowledge," is actually produced through power relations. But why should power produce subjects? The answer to this question has already been touched upon. First of all, power is, by definition, an action upon an action; it "is exercised only over *free subjects*, and only insofar as they are 'free.'"[49] If there is no subject who acts, there can be no action upon an action. Thus, the subjectivity of the subjugated body is a necessary element in any relation of power. Moreover, since power tries to inscribe upon the subjugated body a particular field of action, it must produce a subject who not only acts, but who acts in a very specific way and within the limitations of a given field of action. It must produce a particular type of subject.

In order to produce a desirable type of subject, power must engage in what Foucault calls "dividing practices," by which the subject "is either divided inside himself or divided from others."[50] We have already seen how disciplinary power produces a subject who is the principle of his own subjection: "He who is subjected to a field of visibility, and who knows it, assumes responsibility for the constraints of power; he makes them play spontaneously upon himself; he

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[48] Michel Foucault, "The Subject and Power," Power: Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1985, Volume Three, ed. James D. Faubion (New York: The New Press, 2000) 331.
[49] Ibid, 342. Italics added.
[50] Ibid, 326.

inscribes in himself the power relation in which he simultaneously plays both roles; he becomes the principle of his own subjection."[51] The individual who "assumes responsibility for the constraints of power" is a "subject" in both senses of the word. He is, first of all, *subject to* disciplinary power, to a power mechanism that takes hold of his body and directs his actions by means of subtle coercions. But since he "assumes responsibility" for the operation of this power relation, he is also "tied to his own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge." His actions are determined by his relation to himself, that is, by his status as a moral agent or as a subject who acts. And since he "simultaneously plays both roles," power has succeeded in dividing him within himself. He is, in a manner of speaking, both the oppressor and the oppressed.

Disciplinary power also produces the subject who is "divided from others." That is, it produces the "individual":

> The individual is no doubt the fictitious atom of an 'ideological' representation of society; but he is also a reality fabricated by this specific technology of power that I have called 'discipline'. We must cease once and for all to describe the effects of power in negative terms: it 'excludes', it 'represses', it 'censors', it 'abstracts', it 'masks', it 'conceals'. In fact, power produces; it produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth. The individual and the knowledge that may be gained of him belong to this production.[52]

As we have discussed earlier in this essay, disciplinary power objectifies and individualizes. It divides each body part and its respective movements in order to take hold of them and appropriate their forces. But it also divides, for example, the individual soldier from the rest of the ranks. It assigns him a place and a function; it puts him under the gaze of power and makes him an object of knowledge. In order to accomplish the normalization or "homogenization" of individuals, disciplinary power must, paradoxically, promote heterogeneities and divisions. It

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[51] Michel Foucault, Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1995) 202-3.
[52] Ibid, 194.

must become increasingly interested in the quirks and idiosyncrasies of the individual, if only to smooth them over and neutralize them. And it is for this reason that we have the human sciences, such as psychiatry and clinical medicine, which make the individual the object of analysis. "Is this the birth of the sciences of man? It is probably to be found in these 'ignoble' archives, where the modern play of coercion over bodies, gestures and behaviour has its beginnings."[53] As we have already seen, "historical beginnings are lowly." It is certainly no different with the birth of the "individual" and with the emergence of a whole body of knowledge that has made him its object.

And there is another, more literal way in which subjects are "divided from others." We have already discussed the power of the norm and the creation of binary schemas such as normal-abnormal, licit-illicit, sane-insane. In dividing practices such as these, "criminals" are separated out from solid citizens, "perverts" from the decent and the wholesome, "madmen" from the mentally sound. And these criminals, perverts and madmen are separated quite literally from the general population, by the walls of the prison, the clinic or the asylum. It is behind the walls of the Panopticon, for example, that the criminal comes under the objectifying gaze that makes him the principle of his own subjection. And it is here that the real work of *subjectivation* occurs, that is, where individuals are made into subjects with particular fields of action. As well as being the surface of the inscription of events, the body is "the locus of the dissociation of the Me (to which it tries to impart the chimera of a substantial unity)."[54] That is, it is the centre around which subjectivity or the "Me" is formed. But the Me is dissociated in the same way that forces are dissociated from the body. That is, by producing subjects, power produces "docile" bodies. It produces "free" subjects over whom it can exercise acts of coercion and domination.

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[53] Ibid, 191.

[54] Michel Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology: Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1984, Volume Two, ed. James D. Faubion (New York: The New Press, 1998) 375.

In this framework, "pure" subjectivity can be nothing more than an abstraction. The pure subject, the cogito, is unlimited and has all fields of action available to it, at least *in potentia*. But power produces different kinds of subjects, each with its respective field of action. It makes bodies docile by forming on and around them identities that are seemingly continuous and unified, but which are in fact discontinuous and disparate. For example, the "pervert" attempts to liberate his sexuality in order to discover his identity. But this identity is the effect of the spirals of power and pleasure that surround his body and make him visible and intelligible to an objectifying discourse. Power therefore invests not only forces into the body, but also subjectivity; it creates "free," acting subjects so that it can impose upon them a particular field of action.

Unhealthy Bodies

For the genealogist, the "weak" or "unhealthy" body is certainly not to be understood in the medical sense as a "diseased" or "infected" body. But this does not mean that Foucault is speaking figuratively. Weakness, for the genealogist, is quite physical and very real. We have already discussed the ways in which events manifest themselves physically and physiologically. Subjectivity, too, has very real effects. The disciplined individual, for example, discovers his individuality in the very processes that make him an object of knowledge. His identity is shaped by a disciplinary power that demands of him rigorous exercises, strict routines, and physical and mental examinations. And this identity is presented to him as something unified and continuous. He is an "individual," with his unique experiences, his idiosyncrasies, and his personal neuroses.

The "weak" body, then, is the body around which a dissociated Me has been formed. Now, the Me is "dissociated" because power has invested it into the body precisely in order to

dominate it. Thus, subjectivity and individualization must be taken as symptoms of weakness. Genealogy treats the weak body by dissolving such unities and identities; it "introduces discontinuity into our very being."[55] Since power produces subjects and individuals, it is the task of genealogy to remove masks and to shatter identities. But we are now presented with a problem. Even the body itself is subject to the meandering and discontinuous movements of history:

> We believe, in any event, that the body obeys the exclusive laws of physiology, and that it escapes the influence of history, but this too is false. The body is molded by a great many regimes; it is broken down by the rhythms of work, rest, and holidays; it is poisoned by food or values, through eating habits or moral laws; it constructs resistances.[56]

In the above discussion, one may have gotten the impression that the body is the one stable element within history, as if it maintained its uniformity as the "surface" of the inscription of events. But this is not exactly the case. Indeed, the body has always been the immediate target of power relations, but its very functions have been cut through by history and by inscription. The digestive apparatus, the nervous system, the sex organs—every part of the body is touched and moulded by events and by power relations. Thus, even the body must be disabused of its apparent uniformity, of its "identity." It is, after all, marked by *Entstehung* and shaped by *Herkunft*. Fields of action have been inscribed upon it, and subjectivities have been produced around it.

A power relation, then, involves the investment of subjectivity into the subjugated body. This brings us back to our thesis. Power seeks not simply to divest the body of its forces, but rather to draw these forces out, to stimulate and incite them. It inscribes on and around the body a field of action that both engages and constrains the "free" subject. And along with this "field

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[55] Ibid, 380.
[56] Ibid, 380.

of action," it produces the "subjectivity" of the subject. Now, let us say in general terms, as Foucault does, that power produces. We can therefore understand power as a positive force that produces the subject and its field of action. Of course, this conclusion raises some new questions. For example, what does it mean to be "dominated" by a power that does not suppress action, but rather incites it? And, inversely, what does it mean to be "liberated" from such a relation of power? Is liberation even possible; or, as Habermas puts it, "why fight at all?"[57] Also, we have been discussing "power" and "power relations" without providing a very clear definition of either term. What we have learned thus far is that where there is no free and active subject, there is no relation of power. The next chapter will ascertain not only the nature of this power that constrains the body by investing it with forces, but also the importance of resistance within this framework.

[57] Jurgen Habermas, The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures, trans. Fredrick G. Lawrence (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1987) 284.

Chapter 2: Resistance

We have seen how the mechanisms of power function with regard to the body and subjectivity. Now let us discuss some general principles of power. "Useless to Revolt" is a short political piece written by Foucault in response to the overturning of an oppressive regime in Iran. It addresses the theme of revolt, specifically the question of "the man who rebels," that "inexplicable" individual who is able "to prefer the risk of death to the certainty of having to obey."[58] Towards the end of this discussion, Foucault lists two "principles" that do not appear in any of his other, more philosophical works on power—at least not so explicitly.

(1) The first of these principles concerns those who rebel against what they claim to be some injustice or abuse of power: "no one is obliged to support them. No one is obliged to find that these confused voices sing better than the others and speak the truth itself. It is enough that they exist and that they have against them everything that is dead set on shutting them up for there to be a sense in listening to them and in seeing what they mean to say." Moreover, "it is because there are such voices that the time of human beings does not have the form of evolution but that of 'history,' precisely."[59]

(2) This brings us to the second principle: "the power that one man exerts over another is always perilous." Foucault goes on: "I am not saying that power, by nature, is evil; I am saying that power, with its mechanisms, is infinite (which does not mean that it is omnipotent, quite the contrary)."[60]

Taken together, these principles suggest that although there can be no final liberation of all human beings, it is nevertheless important for us to heed the voices of those who protest,

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[58] Michel Foucault, "Useless to Revolt?" Power: Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1985, Volume Three, ed. James D. Faubion (New York: The New Press, 2000) 449.
[59] Ibid, 452.
[60] Ibid, 452-3.

revolt, or rebel against the various mechanisms of power. And it is of course important that these voices exist in the first place, if for no other reason than that power is dangerous. Thus, the rhythm of *history*, which is driven by the ups and downs of conflict and struggle, must be secured against the power mechanisms that prompt the movement of a totalizing and uncompromising *evolution*. But it is here, just where Foucault seems to have given a universally valid reason to revolt, that we must address the question raised by Jürgen Habermas in The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Why fight at all, if we can never escape the ebb and flow of power relations?[61] After all, if there is no escape from the constant, all-embracing dynamic of power, and if the rhythm of history is determined by this dynamic, then "liberation" is nothing more than the passage from one power relation to another. How can such a conception of history not give rise to a sense of apathy and defeat? Indeed, what is the point of resisting when resistance itself is only a moment in the perpetual movement of power?

The question, then, concerns the nature of resistance: Why resist what can never actually be resisted? The first part of the present chapter will outline some general characteristics of power and will then discuss Foucault's "analytics" of resistance. The second part of the chapter will restate Habermas's question in terms of genealogy's curative project. The question "Why fight?" thus becomes: Why should we attempt to "cure" the body of its subjugation? If nothing is universal in man, not even the rules of physiology, then how can we even conceive of restoring the body to a healthy, unsubjugated state?

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[61] Jürgen Habermas, The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures, trans. Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1987) 284.

Foucault's Analytics of Resistance

First of all, let us try to understand what is meant by the term "power." Foucault makes it clear that he is not dealing with a traditional definition: power is not something that one may or may not possess, nor is it something that one may exercise unrestrictedly over individuals; it is much more complex than that:

> Power functions. Power is exercised through networks, and individuals do not simply circulate in those networks; they are in a position to both submit to and exercise this power. They are never the inert or consenting targets of power; they are always its relays. In other words, power passes through individuals. It is not applied to them.[62]

Power is spread across the entire social network. This means that it is not concentrated around the body of the sovereign and that it is not exercised in a hegemonic fashion, from the top down. Rather, power is deeply rooted in social relations and is in fact the very condition of the social. Every social relation must account for the wants and needs of each individual, and the discrepancies and imbalances that inevitably occur are expressions of power in its most basic form. "[I]n human relationships," Foucault explains to one of his interviewers, "whether they involve verbal communication such as we are engaged in at this moment, or amorous, institutional, or economic relationships, power is always present: I mean a relationship in which one person tries to control the conduct of the other."[63] Even the seemingly innocent verbal exchange between interviewer and interviewee is a game of traps and intimidations, direct confrontations and subtle evasions. There is a whole range of power relations that come into play among individuals, within families, in schools, workplaces, etc. Thus, it is true that we can never escape the ebb and flow of power relations, since they constitute the very basis of human

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[62] Michel Foucault, "Society Must Be Defended," trans. David Macey (New York: Picador, 2003) 29.
[63] Michel Foucault, "The Ethics of the Concern for the Self as a Practice of Freedom," Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth: Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1984, Volume One, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: The New Press, 1997) 291-2.

relationships. "A society without power relations can only be an abstraction"[64]; it would, in fact, be a contradiction in terms. It is on this basis that Foucault elaborates his "ascending analysis" of power:

> It seems to me that power must be understood in the first instance as the multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate and which constitute their own organization; as the process which, through ceaseless struggles and confrontations, transforms, strengthens, or reverses them; as the support which these force relations find in one another, thus forming a chain or a system, or on the contrary, the disjunctions and contradictions which isolate them from one another; and lastly, as the strategies in which they take effect, whose general design or institutional crystallization is embodied in the state apparatus, in the formulation of the law, in the various social hegemonies.[65]

This "ascending analysis" takes into account those instances of struggle and imbalance that are local, dispersed, and unsystematized, but which are nevertheless drawn to each other by virtue of a common object or a similar set of tactics. Such is the case in Discipline and Punish, in which Foucault describes the complex network of disciplinary power in the nineteenth century. Disciplinary control had its origins in the military, but was eventually disseminated through a number of different institutions. The prison, the barracks, the school, the hospital, and the workhouse all appropriated the mechanisms of discipline until they all came to resemble one another in their practices and objectives. The essential point is that these institutions remained autonomous and dispersed in their respective functions while at the same time adopting a common set of mechanisms and tactics. This network of control crystallized into what Foucault dubbed "a disciplinary society."[66] What is most important here is the ascending nature of power:

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[64] Michel Foucault, "The Subject and Power," Power: Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1985, Volume Three, ed. James D. Faubion (New York: The New Press, 2000) 343. I will henceforth refer to this work as SP.
[65] Michel Foucault, The History of Sexuality, Volume I: An Introduction, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1990) 92-3. I will henceforth refer to this work as HS.
[66] Michel Foucault, Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1995) 216.

"Power comes from below."[67] In other words, disciplinary society as a whole is the result of a radical organization that occurred at the local level; its institutions remain dispersed and unstable, always subject to possible revisions and reversals.

Now that we have briefly discussed Foucault's analytics of power, we can go on to ascertain the role that resistance plays in this schema. First of all, it would not be unreasonable for us to say that, just as we can employ an ascending analysis of power, we can also speak of an ascending analysis of *resistance*:

> Just as the network of power relations ends by forming a dense web that passes through apparatuses and institutions, without being exactly localized in them, so too the swarm of points of resistance traverses social stratifications and individual unities. And it is doubtless the strategic codification of these points that makes a revolution possible, somewhat similar to the way in which the state relies on the institutional integration of power relationships.[68]

This means that, in a manner of speaking, resistance *comes from below*. It can be organized into a coherent movement only after a number of its localized "points" have come together by means of a common objective. But this also means that resistance and its objectives are always local. In other words, one can answer Habermas's question by pointing out that there is no single, universally valid reason to fight. There are only dispersed and incomplete groupings, more or less organized movements against a certain form of oppression or in the name of a particular set of values.

Yet one may argue that we have only strengthened Habermas's point that Foucault's analytics offers no way out of power relations. After all, resistance in this schema can be nothing more than the flipside of power, a somewhat limited response to the existing mechanisms of control and domination. Habermas's question is perhaps now more demoralizing

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[67] Michel Foucault, The History of Sexuality, Volume I: An Introduction, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1990) 94.
[68] Ibid, 96.

than ever: Why bother fighting when every act of resistance only perpetuates the to and fro of power relations? Instead of providing us with an answer to this question, Foucault simply reverses its terms. It is not that resistance is a futile and pointless response to power; rather, it is of the nature of power to respond to resistance. This reversal, which at first glance may seem meaningless, changes the whole dynamic of the power-resistance relationship. Power, which is no longer viewed as an instigative agent, is in the first instance nothing more than a point of reference. As I have already mentioned, power relations are at bottom nothing more than an expression of social relations, that is, of a difference or an imbalance between two or more individuals. When an individual or a group of individuals is unhappy with the current conditions of this imbalance, "power" becomes a problem. "So resistance comes first, and resistance remains superior to the forces of the process; power relations are obliged to change with the resistance."[69] In other words, it is the first act of resistance that sets a relation of power in motion, not some instigative act on the part of the oppressor. As Foucault so concisely puts it, *resistance* is the "key word."[70] This has the necessary consequence that "power" is by itself only an abstraction, an empty concept that can be picked up and used by those who are unhappy with the current state of things. But of course this does not mean that the disagreeable imbalances will ever be levelled out and stabilized. An act of resistance can at best change or perhaps reverse the current power-resistance dynamic, thus creating new imbalances and new resistances. We fight, then, because resistance is a necessity, because without it there would be only fixed imbalances and a state of pure, unchallenged domination.

This helps us to refine the first principle stated in "Useless to Revolt?": *Resistance ensures "that the time of human beings does not have the form of evolution but that of 'history,'*

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[69] Michel Foucault, "Sex, Power, and the Politics of Identity," Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth: Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1984, Volume One, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: The New Press, 1997) 167.
[70] Ibid, 167.

precisely." We fight for many reasons, and, because these reasons are multiple and diverse, we resist the totalizing force of "evolution." In other words, we fight precisely in order to *secure* the ebb and flow of power relations against the stasis of domination.

This conclusion is supported by the second principle: *the power that one man exerts over another is always perilous*. A power relation is "perilous" because it is always in danger of crystallizing into a state of domination. Although we can never be "liberated" from the general framework of power relations, we can at least prevent those relations from crystallizing into states of domination, in which individuals would no longer have any outlet of resistance: "a system of constraint becomes truly intolerable when the individuals who are affected by it don't have the means of modifying it."[71] After all, power relations are a "social" dynamic, and without such a dynamic there could be only strict obedience and unchecked domination. If there were no power relations, there could be no *social* relations.

It is true that, according to Foucault's analytics, there is no single or universal reason to fight, that resistance is always local, and thus also that every instance of revolt contains its own, singular rationality, independent of any normative claim. But in spite of all this, Foucault does in fact provide us with something like a universally valid reason to fight. One resists for the sake of resistance itself; one fights against the structures of domination in order to secure the fluidity and reversibility of power relations. But this explanation neither answers nor successfully diverts Habermas's question. We must now ask why it is that power relations are better than states of domination. What makes fluidity and reversibility preferable to fixed imbalances? And what makes these fixed imbalances so dangerous? In fact, what does it even mean to claim that

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[71] Michel Foucault, "Sexual Choice, Sexual Act," Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth: Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1984, Volume One, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: The New Press, 1997) 148.

something is dangerous? It is clear that Foucault must be called upon to account for the *value judgments* implied by his analytics of power.

One of the reasons that "Useless to Revolt?" is such an interesting piece is that, after stating his second principle, that power is always perilous, Foucault goes on to say something that is very out of character: "The rules that exist to limit [power] can never be stringent enough; the *universal principles* for dispossessing it of all the occasions it seizes are never sufficiently rigorous. Against power one must always set *inviolable laws* and *unrestricted rights*."[72] Since Foucault's project is to neutralize and dissolve all universals, it is perhaps tempting to either ignore this statement or dismiss it as being a reference to those laws and rights to which the rebel appeals only for the sake of disrupting the totalizing effects of domination. In the first case, we may regard this particular essay as a strictly political statement, out of line with Foucault's more philosophical texts; in the latter case, we can see the appeal to inviolable laws and unrestricted rights as a disruptive *strategy*, useful and flexible enough to be taken up and employed in various local points of resistance, but never really constituting a solid normative foundation. Either way, we would likely not be recognizing the importance of this claim. For Foucault *does* make value judgments in his philosophical works, and he *does* appeal to universal principles, albeit in an original and sometimes obscure way. Nancy Fraser recognizes this, but is ultimately disappointed by Foucault's refusal to provide some sort of normative *justification* for his "extreme metaethical position": "This puts Foucault in the paradoxical position of being unable to account for or justify the sorts of normative political judgments he makes all the time—for example, that 'discipline' is a bad thing."[73] Foucault's objection to disciplinary regimes is most

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[72] Michel Foucault, "Useless to Revolt?" Power: Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1985, Volume Three, ed. James D. Faubion (New York: The New Press, 2000) 452-3. Emphases added.
[73] Nancy Fraser, "Michel Foucault: A 'Young Conservative'?" Critique and Power: Recasting the Foucault/Habermas Debate, ed. Michael Kelly (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1994) 194-5.

likely directed not against discipline itself, but rather against its potential to become crystallized into a state of pure domination. But even if this is the case, "Useless to Revolt?" seems to lead us to the following question: What are the *laws* that discipline threatens to transgress, and what *rights* do we fear it might violate? From whence, moreover, do these laws and rights derive their validity?

The Healthy Body

Perhaps an understanding of these laws and rights, of the "values" that lurk more or less implicitly behind Foucault's genealogical work, will help us to develop a clearer conception of the healthy body. After all, if the idea of "health" cannot be related to any natural or original state of the human body, then it must be formulated in terms of a positive valuation. One can diagnose bodies as being sick and pathologically weak only if one has some sort of standard of health by which one can make such physiological judgments. But does Foucault provide us with such a standard?

One thing we do know is that power relations are preferable to states of domination. If we take this as a clue, then we may recall that states of domination take hold of and constrain bodies directly, whereas power acts only on actions and therefore necessitates some degree of freedom. To the objection that the omnipresence of power means that there is no freedom, Foucault always answers "that if there are relations of power in every social field, this is because there is freedom everywhere."[74] This answer perhaps justifies the claim that power is better than or preferable to domination. A state of domination is always static since it demands strict obedience or simply renders the body immobile by divesting it entirely of its freedom to act.

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[74] Michel Foucault, "The Ethics of the Concern for the Self as a Practice of Freedom," Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth: Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1984, Volume One, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: The New Press, 1997) 292.

One therefore resists the totalizing and debilitating effects of domination in order to preserve the fluidity and reversibility of power relations and thus also to protect one's right to freedom. However, this explanation creates two distinct but related problems. The first problem is that neither the free individual nor his or her right to freedom can escape the critical gaze of genealogy. That is, if the project of genealogy is to introduce discontinuity into the being of things and to dismantle identities, then both the individual and his or her rights are inevitably exposed as being dispersed, disparate, and historically contingent. Even if we were to grant that freedom is a positive thing and that it is better than the debilitating effects of domination, the problem remains that the subject is nothing more than an historical effect and is therefore incapable of possessing any essential, *unrestricted rights*. Thus, if we attempt to make an appeal to the subject's right to freedom, we inevitably run into the following question: *Whose* rights are we talking about? Are we talking about human rights? The rights of the individual? The rights of criminals, of madmen, of workers? Has Foucault not proven to us, again and again, that these "subjects" are only the contingent effects of historical paradigms?

The second problem is that power promotes "freedom" not in order to uphold the rights of the individual, but rather in order to turn the individual into a "subject" that can be controlled. Power creates subjects, and it is this very "subjectivation" that we must resist: "We have to promote new forms of subjectivity through the refusal of this kind of individuality that has been imposed on us for several centuries."[75] Resistance now has a dual and paradoxical objective: to preserve the power/freedom in which subjects are formed while at the same time denying the very subjectivity that is its result. This problem forces us to admit that the standards of health cannot be found in the sort of freedom that is promoted by power. Rather, they must be sought

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[75] Michel Foucault, "The Subject and Power," Power: Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1985, Volume Three, ed. James D. Faubion (New York: The New Press, 2000) 336.

in the "new forms of subjectivity" that Foucault wishes to establish. But what are these new forms of subjectivity, and how are we to promote them?

Let us recall that power invests forces into the body only to dissociate those same forces from it. Power traces around the subjugated body a field of possible actions in order to close off the possibility of certain adverse and undesirable actions. According to this formula, "freedom" is little more than a tool used to create docile bodies. Thus, it is precisely the free subject who is pathologically weak. In order to create healthy bodies and new forms of subjectivity, it seems likely that the first step is to (re)appropriate the very forces that power has invested into the body in order to subjugate it:

> Mastery and awareness of one's own body can be acquired only through the effect of an investment of power in the body: gymnastics, exercises, muscle-building, nudism, glorification of the body beautiful. [...] But once power produces this effect, there inevitably emerge the responding claims and affirmations, those of one's own body against power, of health against the economic system, of pleasure against the moral norms of sexuality, marriage, decency. Suddenly, what had made power strong becomes used to attack it. Power, after investing itself in the body, finds itself exposed to a counterattack in that same body.[76]

Power relations are preferable to states of domination not only because they invest forces into the body, but precisely because these forces can be appropriated and turned against power. The freedom that results from a relation of power is therefore not an end in itself, but is instead the space in which a reversal of forces is made possible. We may recall from the previous chapter that the field of actions that is traced around the subjugated body does not exclude the possibility of acts of resistance. In fact, a power relation, by definition, does not crystallize into a state of pure domination as long as it leaves such possibilities of resistance open. The healthy body is therefore the body in the act of resisting, the body that has acquired "mastery" and "awareness"

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[76] Michel Foucault, "Body/Power," Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977, ed. Colin Gordon (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980) 56.

of itself through those very forces that power has invested into it. Certainly, by thus appropriating the body's forces, one should now have the sovereignty to carve out one's own field of action and to create new forms of subjectivity. This is accomplished on the ethical axis of genealogy, where one constitutes oneself "as a moral subject of his own actions."[77] But we will discuss Foucault's "ethics" later. For now, let us consider the ramifications of taking this first step towards convalescence.

If the pathologically weak body is the body whose forces have been dissociated from it, then the healthy body is the one to whom these forces have been restored. We now have a more succinct answer for Habermas. We fight because our "health" is on the line, because our health is secured by the very act of fighting. Certainly, power is everywhere, but this is not a reason to despair. In fact, it is only because power invests forces into the body that these forces can be appropriated and turned against power. It is only because power creates "free" subjects that these subjects can in turn seize their freedom and thus establish their sovereignty as the moral subjects of their own actions.

The two principles of power, stated at the beginning of this chapter, can now be seen in an entirely new light. According to the first principle, *resistance ensures "that the time of human beings does not have the form of evolution but that of 'history,' precisely."* History must be understood here as a series of *events*:

> An event [...] is not a decision, a treaty, a reign, or a battle, but the reversal of a relationship of forces, the usurpation of power, the appropriation of a vocabulary turned against those who had once used it, a domination that grows feeble, poisons itself, grows slack, the entry of a masked "other."[78]

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[77] Michel Foucault, "On the Genealogy of Ethics: An Overview of Work in Progress," Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth: Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1984, Volume One, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: The New Press, 1997) 263.

[78] Michel Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology: Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1984, Volume Two, ed. James D. Faubion (New York: The New Press, 1998) 380-1.

Thus, history is marked by the continual revision or reversal of power relations. History, as opposed to a totalizing and irreversible evolution, manifests itself in those singular events in which subjected bodies claim as their own the forces that power has systematically dissociated from them. Resistance is important because it brings about the ebb and flow of these disruptive and revolutionary events.

The power that one man exerts over another is always perilous because, first of all, it threatens constantly to crystallize into a state of pure domination, thus closing off all possibilities of resistance. The body that is unable to resist power is the body that is pathologically weak. But power is dangerous for another, somewhat more insidious reason. Every time resistance is successful, that is, every time the subjugated body has "liberated" itself, it supplants the old relations of power with entirely new ones. In other words, power relations are never replaced by anything other than power relations. There is no hope for any final liberation:

> if [the notion of liberation] is not treated with precautions and within certain limits, one runs the risk of falling back on the idea that there exists a human nature or base that, as a consequence of certain historical, economic, and social processes, has been concealed, alienated, or imprisoned in and by mechanisms of repression. According to this hypothesis, all that is required is to break these repressive deadlocks and man will be reconciled with himself, rediscover his nature or regain contact with his origin, and reestablish a full and positive relationship with himself.[79]

If there were some essential or original human nature that has been obscured and covered over by power relations, then the task of genealogy as a curative science would be to restore the subjugated body to its natural state. But the genealogist's project is by no means restorative in this sense. Rather, it is a matter of allowing the body to appropriate the forces that arise within

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[79] Michel Foucault, "The Ethics of the Concern for the Self as a Practice of Freedom," Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth: Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1984, Volume One, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: The New Press, 1997) 282.

the very dynamic of power relations. This means that liberation is not without its dangers, since it never actually frees one from the general movement of power. Instead of levelling out the differences and imbalances maintained in power relations, liberation merely reverses these imbalances or creates new systems of differentiation. But this also means that with every reversal of forces new points of resistance are opened up, and thus the struggle begins again. And as long as there is such a struggle, the rhythm of history is secured against the debilitating advances of domination.

We can perhaps now take the liberty of giving some more definite form to the "unrestricted rights" and "inviolable laws" that Foucault mentions in "Useless to Revolt?" We can define them, at least tentatively, as the right to resist power and the law of historical events. According to the latter, power relations are always reversible and subject to revisions and reconfigurations. No one has the right to subjugate others in the name of universal values or absolute truths, since genealogy exposes such truths and values as being discontinuous and historically contingent. And it is precisely because relationships of power can have no claim to universal validity that those who are subjugated have the "right" to revolt. But of course this right does not attach itself to the individual, and it cannot be appealed to as an essential component of human nature. Rather, this right is external to the individual; its authority is established outside of the human subject, in the law of historical events. One has the right to resist power simply because power opens up points of resistance, because power is *by definition* subject to revision.

We now have a relatively clear idea of what constitutes a "healthy" body. We have identified the standard of health that guides Foucault's genealogical work, and we have determined that the subjugated body is in a position to seize the forces that power has invested

into it. But thus far we have spoken only in general terms. We have looked at the role that resistance plays in the appropriation of the body's forces, but we have not discussed any specific instances of resistance. Thus, the following chapter will examine the counterattack against the deployment of sexuality as it plays out in bodies and pleasures. This counterattack is launched from a very specific point of resistance, namely sadomasochism. The next chapter will also discuss Foucault's "ethics" in terms of the promotion of new forms of subjectivity. The healthy body is not, after all, a mere subjectless automaton. It dismantles the subjectivity that power has invested into it only to supplant it with its own desubjugated sovereignty. Thus, the following chapter will give us a clearer picture of the healthy body as it seizes forces and delineates its own subjectivity.

Chapter 3: Counterattack

Anyone who is familiar with Foucault's work is likely also familiar with this famously provocative statement, found in the final pages of the first volume of the History of Sexuality: "The rallying point for the counterattack against the deployment of sexuality ought not to be sex-desire, but bodies and pleasures."[80] What Foucault means by "bodies and pleasures" is somewhat unclear, and is left unexplained in his major works. Yet we can perhaps make some sense of his meaning if we turn to a few of his published interviews. In an interview conducted in Toronto in 1982, Foucault offers us a significant clue when he characterizes sadomasochism or "S&M" as a creative practice: those who practice S&M "are inventing new possibilities of pleasure with strange parts of their body—through the eroticization of the body."[81] Are these sadomasochistic bodies and pleasures the same bodies and pleasures mentioned at the end of the History of Sexuality? If so, then an understanding of these new possibilities of pleasure and of the eroticization of the body should help us to position ourselves within the counterattack against the deployment of sexuality. In this chapter, we will try to understand why Foucault designates sadomasochism as a privileged point of resistance. The resulting discussion should also allow us to make some general claims about resistance and the healthy body.

Bodies and Pleasures

Let us look briefly at the Freudian construction of pleasure.[82] According to Freud's pleasure principle, sexual excitation occurs as the result of a build-up of tension in the sexual

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[80] Michel Foucault, The History of Sexuality, Volume I: An Introduction, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1990): 157.
[81] Michel Foucault, "Sex, Power, and the Politics of Identity," Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth: Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1984, Volume One, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: The New Press, 1997) 165.
[82] For a similar discussion of Freud and Foucault, cf. Karmen MacKormick, Counterpleasures (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999).

organs. One seeks satisfaction in the removal of this tension. Thus, the aim of sexual activity is "a release in the sexual tension and a temporary extinction of the sexual instinct."[83] This principle places the moment of pleasure at the very end of sexual activity, in the orgasm or in what Freud calls the "end-pleasure." However, the tension that gives rise to the initial excitation "necessarily involves unpleasure."[84] This formulation seems to suggest that the preliminary sexual activities leading up to the end-pleasure are not in themselves pleasurable, and therefore should be rushed through on the way towards the satisfaction of release. The prolongation of sexual tension could perhaps be explained as the anticipation of an intensified end-pleasure, since, presumably, the greater the tension, the greater the feeling of satisfaction accompanying its release. Yet such an explanation cannot possibly account for the fact that a great number of people seem to take real pleasure in these preliminary sexual activities. Freud, of course, is not unaware of this phenomenon, though it does not at first fit neatly into the formulation of his pleasure principle. In fact, he refers to such pleasures as "fore-pleasures." Their function is purely anticipatory, as they are meant to conduct one through the unpleasure of tension and towards the release of that tension in the end-pleasure. The body parts that are stimulated in these anticipatory activities, for example the breasts or the lips, take on the temporary role of the genitals. In Freud's words, they are "treated as genitals."[85] The tension that arises in them is in the form of the need for contact, somewhat similar to the need of an itch on the skin to be scratched. Thus, Freud manages to account for the phenomenon of "fore-pleasures" without diverging from his original pleasure principle.

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[83] Sigmund Freud, Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality, trans. James Strachey (New York: Avon Books, 1962) 38.
[84] Ibid, 109.
[85] Ibid, 42.

In sadomasochism, it is the skin that is treated as genitalia. Yet sadomasochism does not fit so neatly into the Freudian construction of pleasure. At first glance, it would certainly seem that it poses a threat to the pleasure principle as it has been formulated. After all, how can Freud account for the "pleasure" that the sadomasochist experiences in pain, if we consider "pain," like unpleasure, to be opposed to pleasure? This contradiction is not easily remedied. To be sure, this contradiction is apparent in masochism, but not necessarily in sadism. It is the masochist who finds pleasure in his or her own pain, whereas the sadist finds pleasure in the pain of others. However, according to Freud, "[a] sadist is always at the same time a masochist," and vice versa.[86] Both tendencies are often found in one and the same individual, though one of these tendencies may be more or less prominent in that individual. In fact, Freud asserts that masochism is most likely the result of a transformation of sadism: "It can often be shown that masochism is nothing more than an extension of sadism turned round upon the subject's own self, which thus, to begin with, takes the place of the sexual object."[87] This explanation alleviates the contradiction with which we are concerned, since for the masochist the self simply takes the place of the Other. Pain, therefore, is experienced as the pain of the Other, and is "pleasurable" only as such. Yet this explanation is perhaps not quite satisfying. First of all, it seems to suggest that the masochist, in treating his or her self as an Other, remains detached from his or her pain. This is not necessarily the case, since the masochist tends to seek the very intensity of pain as a stimulant. Secondly, one may point out the fact that in many legal S&M establishments, orgasm or end-pleasure is often postponed indefinitely.[88] If we are to regard sadomasochism as a sexual perversion, then we must account for its preoccupation with pain, unpleasure, and tension. After all, the kind of pleasure that is experienced in S&M is decidedly

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[86] Ibid, 50.
[87] Ibid, 48-9.
[88] Cf. Nick Broomfield, dir., Fetishes: Mistresses and Domination at Pandora's Box, A-Pix Entertainment, 1996.

not meant to conduct one painlessly through unpleasure and towards the release of tension in the end-pleasure. It is directly opposed to the end-pleasure and to the principle that governs it. Ultimately, in fact, Freud himself admits that "no satisfactory explanation of this perversion has been put forward."[89]

It is perhaps because of this uncertainty that Foucault describes S&M as a possible point of resistance. The sadomasochist is not your typical "pervert" simply because the pleasure he experiences falls outside the Freudian construction of pleasure, and because his "perversion" cannot be described as properly "sexual": he is inventing new possibilities of pleasure with strange parts of his body; he snubs pleasure per se in favour of pain; and whatever sexual tension he accumulates remains unreleased, unsatisfied. These inassimilable characteristics prevent the sadomasochist from being properly defined, categorized, and incorporated into a definitive body of knowledge. The sadomasochist therefore remains on the margins of a class of perverts who, strange and varied as they may be, can nevertheless be analyzed and understood in terms of the pleasure principle: though they may snub what we consider to be "normal" sexual objects, their pleasures do not necessarily conflict with the Freudian pleasure principle. Let us recall that the deployment of sexuality creates and multiplies perversions for the sake of classification and specification, that is, in order to make individuals *intelligible*. It implants sexuality in and around bodies, and traces around them perpetual spirals of power and pleasure. The spirals traced around the body of the sadomasochist, however, are always incomplete and broken, since sadomasochistic pleasures are paradoxical and therefore inassimilable. The sadomasochist effects what Foucault calls "the desexualization of pleasure."[90] This means, simply, that he or

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[89] Sigmund Freud, Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality, trans. James Strachey (New York: Avon Books, 1962) 49.

[90] Michel Foucault, "Sex, Power, and the Politics of Identity," Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth: Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1984, Volume One, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: The New Press, 1997) 165.

she pursues pleasures that cannot be easily assimilated by the deployment of sexuality. Of course, that is not to say that these pleasures can *never* be assimilated, since power relations are always dynamic and extremely adaptable. But since knowledge operates alongside and even in the service of power, the *uncertainty* that presently surrounds S&M makes for a potentially very effective site of resistance.

But there is more to this "counterattack" than the mere engenderment of uncertainty. Let us consider Foucault's thoughts on contemporary film culture. A great deal of feminist film theory criticizes cinema on the basis that it presents the female star as a passive object to the sadistic gazes of the male protagonist, the camera, and the spectator.[91] This is the matter of a question directed to Foucault in a 1975 interview: "When you go to the movies, are you struck by the sadism of some recent films, whether they take place in a hospital, or, as in the last Pasolini, in a false prison?"[92] Interestingly, Foucault answers this question by noting "the absence of Sade" in contemporary films. There is an important distinction to be made between the sadomasochistic pleasures found in the legal S&M establishments, on the one hand, and the cruel pleasures to be found in the works of the Marquis de Sade, on the other. This distinction will become clear after we have discussed Foucault's response to the above question.

According to Foucault, there is in Sade a certain anatomical organization, a hierarchy that is organized around sex. An organ or a body part is "relentlessly targeted" in a manner that is proper to its respective function: "You have an eye that looks, I tear it from you. You have a tongue that I have taken between my lips and bitten, I'm going to cut it off. With these eyes you

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[91] Cf. Gaylyn Studlar's book In the Realm of Pleasure: von Sternberg, Dietrich, and the Masochistic Aesthetic, in which the author attempts to dispel this belief that cinematic pleasures are essentially "sadistic."

[92] Michel Foucault, "Sade: Sergeant of Sex," Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology: Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1984, Volume Two, ed. James D. Faubion (New York: The New Press, 1998) 223. Interview conducted by G. Dupont.

will no longer be able to see, with this tongue you will no longer be able to eat or speak."[93] The pleasure that is taken in such cruelty is based entirely on a functional or "organic" image of the body. However, Foucault sees something very different happening in many contemporary films, and specifically in Werner Schroeter's The Death of Maria Malibran. In such films there is "an anarchizing of the body" and a dismantling of "organicity":

> The goal is to dismantle this organicity: this is no longer a tongue but something completely different that comes out of the mouth. It's not the organ of a mouth that has been soiled and meant for someone else's pleasure. It's an 'unnameable,' 'unusual' thing, outside of all programs of desire. It's the body made entirely malleable by pleasure: something that opens itself, tightens, palpitates, beats, gapes.[94]

Suddenly the body is no longer reduced to its functions and to a symbolism based upon those functions. The tongue, for example, becomes something more (or perhaps something less) than an organ for speaking and eating or for kissing and licking: it loses its designation altogether and becomes something else, unrecognizable, "unnameable." The camera has the ability to explore the body in new ways, to illuminate its most unlikely curves and angles, and to let it emerge as something entirely new and indeterminate:

> It's an encounter at once calculated and aleatory between bodies and the camera, discovering something, breaking up an angle, a volume, a curve, following a trace, a line, possibly a ripple. And then suddenly the body derails itself, becomes a landscape, a caravan, a storm, a mountain of sand, and so on.[95]

The images produced here are not images of desire. That is, they do not present the body as a hierarchy of organs, each organ "relentlessly targeted" with respect to its functions. The appearance of the tongue, for example, calls to mind not the corresponding function of speech, but rather certain images which seem to have nothing to do with the organ itself: "images of

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[93] Ibid, 224.
[94] Ibid, 224.
[95] Ibid, 225.

pleasure and images for pleasure."[96] For Freud, the pleasure principle is a principle of organicity; that is, it is formulated in terms of a hierarchy that privileges the sex organs: end-pleasure is everything, while fore-pleasures only emulate the former. But the sadomasochist dissolves this hierarchy. We have already seen that in S&M pleasures are "desexualized" to the extent that they do not satisfy the criteria of the pleasure principle. Paradoxically, the masochist seeks pleasure in pain; and, in the legal S&M establishments, neither the sadist nor the masochist concludes his or her acts with end-pleasure or genital orgasm. This means, among many things, that neither the genitalia nor those other body parts commonly associated with sex perform the functions that are somewhat stringently expected of them. Thus, sadomasochism accomplishes the same dismantling of organicity that is accomplished, though by very different means, in contemporary film. That is, while the latter presents images of an anarchized or non-functional body, the former invents "new possibilities of pleasure" with "strange parts" of the body. For both S&M and contemporary film, the body is no longer organized hierarchically around sex; rather, its parts have lost their functionality or their *telos* in the name of a pleasure that is immediate, unnameable, and sometimes even paradoxical.

Thus, the counterattack against the deployment of sexuality comes specifically in the forms of S&M and contemporary film, since both the sadomasochist and the film spectator enjoy pleasures that fall outside of the controllable and quantifiable pleasures aroused by power. In film, the tongue loses its "organicity" and becomes something else altogether, unnameable and *unusable*. That is, it is no longer an organ used for speaking and eating, or for kissing and licking—it now produces a kind of pleasure for which power and knowledge cannot account, one that cannot be pinned down and classified. Similarly, the sadomasochist does not use his or her body parts in order to convey him or her towards the end-pleasure or genital orgasm. His or her

[96] Ibid, 225.

pleasures are sought, paradoxically, in pain, a fact that is not reconcilable to the pleasure principle or to the expectations of those who exercise power (i.e., doctors, psychoanalysts, psychologists, etc.). These are not the kinds of pleasure that can be easily delineated, named, and classified as perversions. They are, in a sense, what one can call *anti-perverse* or "nondisciplinary": "We must invent with the body, with its elements, surfaces, volumes, and thicknesses, a nondisciplinary eroticism—that of a body in a volatile and diffused state, with its chance encounters and unplanned pleasures."[97]

Sex-Desire

Let us now discuss the difference between "desire," which remains on the side of the deployment of sexuality, and the "pleasures" that Foucault sets against this deployment. On the level of causality, the difference is apparent: desire leads to the sexual act, which brings about pleasure. Yet our concern is not with the causal relation between these two terms, but rather with their problematization. First of all, let us take a look at desire as it has been problematized in the West.

According to Foucault, "Western man has become a confessing animal."[98] Since the fourth century, confession has played an important role in Christianity, and from the eighteenth century to the present its techniques of verbalization have been taken up by the human sciences. In both Christianity and the human sciences, the techniques of verbalization are used to uncover certain truths that are hidden deep within the soul or psyche of the confessor. One has only to

[97] Michel Foucault, "Sade: Sergeant of Sex," Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology: Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1984, Volume Two, ed. James D. Faubion (New York: The New Press, 1998) 227.
[98] Michel Foucault, The History of Sexuality, Volume I: An Introduction, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1990) 59.

compare Cassian's "permanent verbal"[99] with Freud's carthartic method, or "talking cure," to notice the continuity between the techniques used by Christianity and those used by psychoanalysis. However, for our purposes we are interested less in the techniques themselves, though they are by no means insignificant, than in the truths that they uncover. Confession and the methods of verbalization are supposed to reveal the slightest movements of conscience, the minutest stirrings of desire. For the truths of one's soul or psyche are locked deep within one's darkest and most hidden desires, and in confession these truths are brought out into the light. This is how desire has been problematized in the West, since the fourth century. That is, the emphasis has been placed on desire rather than on pleasures or on the sexual act itself: "The main question of sexual ethics has moved from relations to people, and from the penetration model to the relation to oneself and to the erection problem: I mean to the set of internal movements that develop from the first and nearly imperceptible thought to the final but still solitary pollution."[100] For the ancient Greeks, it was the sexual act itself that was problematized. One was considered pure if one was able to lie down with a young and beautiful boy without giving in to one's desires, as Socrates was able to do with Alcibiades. In Christianity, however, purity consists in nothing less than the detection and subsequent eradication of such desires. Hence the shift from "the penetration model" to "the erection problem": one is now less interested in the act of penetration itself than in the "internal movements" that lead to it. Thus, according to Cassian, the Christian must be towards his thoughts as a "moneychanger."[101] He

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[99] Cf. Michel Foucault, "Technologies of the Self," Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth: Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1984, Volume One, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: The New Press, 1997) 248.
[100] Michel Foucault, "Sexuality and Solitude," Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth: Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1984, Volume One, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: The New Press, 1997) 183.
[101] Michel Foucault, "Technologies of the Self," Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth: Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1984, Volume One, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: The New Press, 1997) 249.

must examine the effigy and metal of each thought, to discover whether it is pure or whether it has been tainted by desire or concupiscence.

This "hermeneutics of the self," by which one's thoughts are deciphered in order to reveal something secret and hidden, can be found, albeit in a different form, in certain attitudes held today in the West. We have seen how the deployment of sexuality stimulates bodies and incites sex as well as the discourse on sex. What the discourse on sex promises us is a certain truth about ourselves: "Between each of us and our sex, the West has placed a never-ending demand for truth: it is up to us to extract the truth of sex, since this truth is beyond our grasp; it is up to sex to tell us our truth, since sex is what holds it in darkness."[102] In order to "extract" this truth, we confess endlessly, in "scandalous" literature,[103] on the psychiatrist's couch, in Charcot's Salpêtrière.[104] And what is this truth that sex must finally reveal to us? It is the truth of our identity. We have seen in the first chapter how the deployment of sexuality fixes our subjectivity by making us into "perverts." By means of the confession it uncovers those desires, hidden deep within our darkest and most hidden thoughts, which may reveal our "true" identity as homosexuals, scopophiles, zoophiles, etc. And since it is desire that remains problematized, rather than pleasures or the act itself, we continue to look for our identity in these "internal movements" rather than in our actual sexual activities. Consider whether it is not uncommon for a man to "realize" that he is a homosexual before ever entering into a physical relationship with

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[102] Michel Foucault, The History of Sexuality, Volume I: An Introduction, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1990) 77.
[103] Cf. ibid, 21.
[104] Cf. ibid, 55-6, where Foucault describes Charcot's Salpêtrière, an institution used for the study of hysterics: "it was an enormous apparatus for observation, with its examinations, interrogations, and experiments, but it was also a machinery for incitement, with its public presentations, its theater of ritual crises, carefully staged with the help of ether or amyl nitrate, its interplay of dialogues, palpations, laying on of hands, postures which the doctors elicited or obliterated with a gesture or a word, its hierarchy of personnel who kept watch, organized, provoked, monitored, and reported, and who accumulated an immense pyramid of observations and dossiers."

another man. Like the Christians of the fourth century, we are still today less concerned with our actions than with the thoughts and desires that may account for them.

This problematization of desire is dangerous because it promises us the truth of ourselves. It leads us to believe that we must "liberate" our sexuality in order to discover who we are. But as we have seen, power subjects; that is, it makes subjects and fixes subjectivity. In this case, the deployment of sexuality creates "perverts" and offers to us an identity based entirely on our darkest desires and our most secret thoughts and urges. It is simply a matter of bringing these desires out into the light, that is, of bringing them out into discourse. The final line of the History of Sexuality states the danger very explicitly: "The irony of this deployment is in having us believe that our 'liberation' is in the balance."[105] The more adamantly we declare the identity that is revealed to us by our sexuality, the tighter becomes the sexual embrace of power, which observes, classifies, and offers an explanation for every one of our various sexual peculiarities.

So how do we counter this sexual embrace of power? Let us recall Freud's statement that "[a] sadist is always at the same time a masochist," and vice versa. Foucault sees a similar trend, but instead of seeing sadism and masochism as two sides of the same perversion, he considers them in terms of opposite roles and strategic relations. The roles played by the sadomasochist are in fact fluid and reversible:

> Sometimes the scene begins with the master and slave, and at the end the slave has become the master. Or, even when the roles are stabilized, you know very well that it is always a game. Either the rules are transgressed, or there is an agreement, either explicit or tacit, that makes them aware of certain boundaries.[106]

As the eroticization of power and of strategic relations, S&M runs the risk of harming its participants. Sadism in particular, taken out of the context of the legal S&M establishment, can

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[105] Ibid, 159.
[106] Michel Foucault, "Sex, Power, and the Politics of Identity," Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth: Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1984, Volume One, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: The New Press, 1997) 169.

be considered the indulgence in a form of cruelty that is potentially very dangerous and hardly justifiable. But within the context of the strategic relation, which involves rules as well as the acknowledgement of consent, the master is constrained by the slave's threshold of pain. For example, the slave may call out the "safe-word" when he or she decides that the pain is no longer enjoyable, and the master must respect his or her decision to stop.[107] This means that the sadist is only a sadist within the dimensions of the strategic relation. He or she may enjoy the pain of the other only to the extent that the other enjoys that pain as well. Here we have something very different than the problematization of desire, in which one's identity is determined by certain thoughts and "internal movements," regardless of any actual engagement in sexual acts. In S&M, one takes up a certain role within the dynamic of a "game." This means that, in a sense, identity is itself only a game. That is, one's identity is determined not internally and absolutely, but rather externally through the observance of certain rules and within the context of a given relation. As long as the sadomasochist is playing a fluid and reversible role within a game, and not trying to liberate his or her identity *as* a sadomasochist, he or she is able to evade the sexual embrace of power, which as we know attempts to fix identities.

But there is much more to S&M than the observance of rules. Foucault sees it as "the real creation of new possibilities of pleasure, which people had no idea about previously."[108] We have already seen that the experience of pleasure in pain presents a problem for the modern construction of pleasure. But we are not just interested in this form of pleasure as a conceptual problem. In fact, Freud has also noted that S&M involves the use of the entire surface of the skin as an erotogenic zone, such that he considers the skin in this case to be "the erotogenic zone

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[107] Cf. Broomfield, Nick, dir., Fetishes: Mistresses and Domination at Pandora's Box, A-Pix Entertainment, 1996.
[108] Michel Foucault, "Sex, Power, and the Politics of Identity," Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth: Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1984, Volume One, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: The New Press, 1997) 165.

par excellence."[109] It is this particular trait of S&M that lends it well to the creation of new possibilities of pleasure. In Foucault's words: "These practices are insisting that we can produce pleasure with very odd things, very strange parts of our bodies, in very unusual situations, and so on."[110] Also: "The possibility of using our bodies as a possible source of very numerous pleasures is something that is very important."[111] And finally: "The idea is [...] to make use of every part of the body as a sexual instrument."[112] Whereas the deployment of sexuality problematizes desire, Foucault is obviously more interested in the question of pleasure, in the creation of pleasures. The sadomasochist is in a position of possible resistance because he or she is not necessarily interested in liberating his or her desire. What he or she must seek, if he or she wants to resist, is not identity: it is more pleasure.

Transgression

We now have a relatively clear understanding of what Foucault means by "bodies and pleasures." It is now just a matter of organizing this knowledge into a more comprehensive characterization of our "counterattack." First of all, let us recall that the body, at least as it is treated in S&M and in the films of Werner Schroeter, is "anarchized" and "non-functional," and is in "a volatile and diffused state." The pleasures experienced in this state are unexpected, unclassifiable, and "non-genital." Furthermore, the sadomasochist seeks to create such pleasures in the dynamic of a game that offers only temporary and reversible roles, not an identity that must be liberated once and for all. One may have already noticed a certain trend in the foregoing

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[109] Sigmund Freud, Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality, trans. James Strachey (New York: Avon Books, 1962) 61.
[110] Michel Foucault, "Sex, Power, and the Politics of Identity," Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth: Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1984, Volume One, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: The New Press, 1997) 165.
[111] Ibid, 165.
[112] Michel Foucault, "Sexual Choice, Sexual Act," Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth: Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1984, Volume One, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: The New Press, 1997) 152.

discussion. The sadomasochist, his or her body, and the pleasures he or she experiences, are all, in a sense, ambiguous. That is, they all evade classification and identification. Does this mean, then, that the most effective form of resistance to the deployment of sexuality is the complete annihilation of one's identity? Does it mean that one must lose oneself entirely in the ecstasy of unnameable pleasures and anarchised bodies? Such a dizzying and chaotic way of defiance can hardly serve as a "rallying point" for a counterattack. It seems more likely to induce psychosis than to offer a point of resistance. Certainly, Foucault is interested not in the utter annihilation of subjectivity, but rather in the promotion of "new forms of subjectivity."[113] But what forms can subjectivity take without still making us *subject to* the deployment of sexuality?

Perhaps Deleuze offers the answer to this question in his book on Foucault, when he says that "[t]he struggle for subjectivity presents itself [...] as the right to difference, variation, and metamorphosis."[114] This answer is quite simple, and yet it creates an interesting problem: What kind of subject exercises the right to difference, variation, and metamorphosis without, in effect, negating its subjectivity? Is it not a subject without limits, or, rather, a subject with limits meant only to be transgressed?

> Transgression carries the limit right to the limit of its being; transgression forces the limit to face the fact of its imminent disappearance, to find itself in what it excludes (perhaps, to be more exact, to recognize itself for the first time), to experience its positive truth in its downward fall.[115]

In Batailles' works, Foucault saw that the subject disappeared only to be recaptured again.[116] He saw that the relationship between transgression and limit is in fact an intimate one, one that

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[113] Michel Foucault, "The Subject and Power," Power: Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1985, Volume Three, ed. James D. Faubion (New York: The New Press, 2000) 336.
[114] Gilles Deleuze, Foucault, trans. Sean Hand (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988) 106.
[115] Michel Foucault, "A Preface to Transgression," Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology: Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1984, Volume Two, ed. James D. Faubion (New York: The New Press, 1998) 73.
[116] Cf. ibid, 80.

"takes the form of a spiral that no simple infraction can exhaust."[117] Thus, he saw that beyond its own limits the subject discovers itself. Certainly, it must experience a dizzying loss of self, but in this "downward fall" it recognizes, for the first time, the very limits it has transgressed. The sadomasochist loses himself in the ecstasy of unnameable pleasures and in the anonymity of a game, only to recapture himself in the search for such pleasures and in the very dynamic of this game. In one of his essays, Foucault says that "[m]y way of being no longer the same is, by definition, the most singular part of what I am."[118] Thus, the sadomasochist *is* a sadomasochist by virtue not of certain "internal movements" that tell him the truth about himself, but rather of his creation of new pleasures, his delight in the anarchised body, and his participation in roles that are temporary and reversible. He is that subject which crosses its own limits only to discover itself in its transgression.

But how are we to understand Foucault's endorsement of S&M? Is S&M the rallying point to which he alluded at the end of the History of Sexuality? Should we all become sadomasochists? Foucault is certainly not one to prescribe solutions. If he sees in S&M a certain subversive potential, it is not because he is looking for the answer to all our problems. Rather, it is because he is in search of possible points of resistance, points that are opened up only in relation to a given power dynamic. In this case, S&M serves as a good example of the investment in bodies and pleasures rather than of that in sex and desire. It is for this reason that it has potential as a point of resistance. But rather than becoming sadomasochists, it is probably better for us to simply learn from its example. Foucault seems to ask the gay community for

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[117] Ibid, 74.
[118] Michel Foucault, "For an Ethic of Discomfort," Power: Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1985, Volume Three, ed. James D. Faubion (New York: The New Press, 2000) 444.

nothing less: "we have to create a gay life. To *become.*"[119] That is to say, one must not *be* gay, meaning one must not be pinned to one's identity and desire. Rather, one must *become* gay by continually transgressing one's limits, by creating new pleasures, and perhaps also by delighting in an anarchised body. Thus, in Foucault's words, "we have to create ourselves as a work of art."[120] Foucault calls such creative activity an aesthetics of existence, or "the art of life."[121] In essence, we must continually transform ourselves, transgress our limits, and assert our "right to difference, variation, and metamorphosis." Only in this way can we continue to assert our subjectivity without it having been handed to us by the deployment of sexuality.

In the previous chapter, we learned why it is important for us to resist the mechanisms of power. Now we know *how* to resist. The sadomasochist serves as a model because he refuses both the pleasures and the subjectivity that the deployment of sexuality invests in him, and because he discovers his identity not in the truth of his sex, but rather in a movement of transgression that effaces the very identity that it reveals to him. As a "free" subject, he chooses to act against power and thus promote new forms of subjectivity. His paradoxical pleasures disrupt the deployment of sexuality and therefore help to secure the dynamic of history over the totalizing movement of evolution.

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[119] Michel Foucault, "Sex, Power, and the Politics of Identity," Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth: Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1984, Volume One, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: The New Press, 1997) 163.
[120] Michel Foucault, "On the Genealogy of Ethics: An Overview of Work in Progress," Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth: Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1984, Volume One, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: The New Press, 1997) 262.
[121] Michel Foucault, "Sex, Power, and the Politics of Identity," Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth: Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1984, Volume One, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: The New Press, 1997) 163.

Chapter 4: Critique

The first volume of the History of Sexuality (1976) was followed by the next two volumes after a hiatus of about eight years. Over that period of time, Foucault had apparently found it necessary to make the third major "theoretical shift" of his career. The first such shift had led him "to examine the forms of discursive practices that articulated the human sciences" (the truth axis of genealogy/archaeology), the second "to examine [...] the manifold relations, the open strategies, and the rational techniques that articulate the exercise of powers" (the power axis). Now he was confronted with the need for a third genealogical axis, namely that of "ethics" or "the subject." This need had been brought about by Foucault's recognition that he could not carry out a complete analysis of the domain of "sexuality" without first understanding how Western man had come to recognize himself as a subject of desire: "It seemed appropriate to look for the forms and modalities of the relation to self by which the individual constitutes and recognizes himself *qua* subject." In short, Foucault found it necessary to do "the history of desiring man."[122]

This most recent theoretical shift had four major consequences for the analysis of sex. First of all, Foucault had to modify his *objective*. In the first volume of the History of Sexuality he had stated that the overall project of the genealogy of sex was to establish an "analytics" of power that would serve as a new "grid of historical decipherment."[123] An analytics such as this would explain the subject's formation in terms of its place within a network of power relations. In The Use of Pleasure and The Care of the Self, however, Foucault began to set up an entirely different grid of historical decipherment. Now the subject was being questioned at the level of

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[122] Michel Foucault, The Use of Pleasure: Volume 2 of The History of Sexuality, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1990): 6.
[123] Michel Foucault, The History of Sexuality, Volume I: An Introduction, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1990): 90.

its relation to itself; it was allowed to speak for itself and to account for its own formation and moment of self-recognition. Of course, this new direction did not disqualify the work done towards an analytics of power. Nor did it mean that Foucault was moving towards a phenomenological approach to history. Rather, by establishing a new genealogical axis, Foucault was attempting to account for the various problematizations and practices through which "Western man had been brought to recognize himself as a subject of desire."[124]

The second consequence concerns the *method* originally chosen for the series of studies on sex. The first volume of the History of Sexuality outlines four rules or "cautionary prescriptions" that any further analyses should follow: (1) the *rule of immanence*, which states, basically, that sexuality was constituted as an area of investigation precisely because "relations of power had established it as a possible object"; (2) the *rule of continual variations*, which states that "[r]elations of power-knowledge are not static forms of distribution, they are 'matrices of transformations'"; (3) the *rule of double conditioning*, which holds that every local instance of power finds its support in an "over-all strategy," and vice versa; and, finally, (4) the *rule of the tactical polyvalence of discourse*, which describes "the complex and unstable process whereby discourse can be both an instrument and an effect of power, but also a hindrance, a stumbling-block, a point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy."[125] A cursory glance at these rules tells us that they had been grounded in the power axis of genealogy and that they were no longer relevant, since the genealogy of sex was now going to be undertaken on the axis of the subject. It was thus necessary to prescribe new "rules," or rather new considerations that must be taken into account when examining the ethical relationship between self and self.

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[124] Michel Foucault, The Use of Pleasure: Volume 2 of The History of Sexuality, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1990): 6.
[125] Michel Foucault, The History of Sexuality, Volume I: An Introduction, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1990): 98-102.

Foucault delineated "four major aspects" of the relationship to oneself: (1) the *determination of the ethical substance*, "that is, the way in which the individual has to constitute this or that part of himself [e.g., "the flesh" in Christianity or the *aphrodisia* for the ancient Greeks] as the prime material of his moral conduct"; (2) the *mode of subjection*, or "the way in which the individual establishes his relation to the rule and recognizes himself as obliged to put it into practice"; (3) the forms of *elaboration* or of the *ethical work* "that one performs on oneself, not only in order to bring one's conduct into compliance with a given rule, but to attempt to transform oneself into the ethical subject of one's behavior"; and (4) the *telos* of the ethical subject, which is the mode of being to which the subject aspires (e.g., immortality, purity, self-mastery, etc.).[126] One can see that the direction of the analysis of sex was now determined by very different guidelines, guidelines that shifted emphasis from power relations over to the subject and its ethical relation to itself. The creation of a new genealogical axis thus meant that Foucault had to renovate his genealogy of sex from the ground up.

A third consequence of this theoretical shift was that Foucault had to redefine the *domain* that genealogy would take as its object of study. In Volume One of the History of Sexuality, Foucault had set out to investigate the deployment of sexuality as it related to desire and to the subject's position in the interplay of power and pleasure. "Sexuality" was to be understood not as an existing drive or instinct that power tries to repress, but rather as "an especially dense transfer point for relations of power":

> It is the name that can be given to a historical construct: not a furtive reality that is difficult to grasp, but a great surface network in which the stimulation of bodies, the intensification of pleasures, the incitement to discourse, the formation of special knowledges, the strengthening of

[126] Michel Foucault, The Use of Pleasure: Volume 2 of The History of Sexuality, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1990): 26-8. Cf. also Michel Foucault, "On the Genealogy of Ethics," Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth: Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1984, Volume One, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: The New Press, 1997) 263-5.

> controls and resistances, are linked to one another, in accordance with a few major strategies of knowledge and power.[127]

But if sexuality is a "historical construct," then genealogy's task is not only to examine its relations to power and knowledge, but also to uncover its conditions of possibility. Thus, in The Use of Pleasure, Foucault decided to take the ancient Greek notion of the *aphrodisia* as his domain of study. This notion, which embraces erotic acts as they are linked to pleasure and desire in their unity, precedes the deployment of sexuality as it relates to the modern subject. But it is precisely the historical shift from the ancient Greek matrix of act-pleasure-desire to the later Christian problematization of sex-desire that explains the formation of the modern subject as a subject of desire. Thus, Foucault found it necessary to trace the genealogy of this shift from *aphrodisia* to "sexuality."

This brings us to the fourth consequence of Foucault's adoption of a third genealogical axis. Originally, Foucault had restricted the genealogy of sex to a relatively limited period of history. Certainly, the chronology of the deployment of sexuality "goes back a long way," since its historical beginnings can be traced to as far back as medieval Christianity.[128] But for The Use of Pleasure and The Care of the Self Foucault extended the *periodization* of his genealogy of sex even further to include certain epochs that predate the deployment of sexuality by several centuries. Thus it was the ancient Greeks of the fourth century B.C.E. and those of the first and second century A.D. that came under the lens of genealogy. Foucault was now able to free himself from the constrictions of an analysis based on the functioning of power relations, and to give an entirely new shape to the history of sexuality: that is, rather than continuing to describe the strategies of power and knowledge that give rise to the modern subject as we know it, he was

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[127] Michel Foucault, The History of Sexuality, Volume I: An Introduction, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1990): 105-6.
[128] Ibid, 115-6.

able to attempt a genealogy of the individual who constitutes himself as the moral subject of his own actions.

It should be clear that, despite all these differences, The Use of Pleasure and The Care of the Self are not completely discontinuous with the first volume of the History of Sexuality, since they describe precisely how Western man came to constitute himself as a subject of desire, or in other words, how he fashioned himself into a possible target of the deployment of sexuality. But these differences were nevertheless enough to constitute a profound restructuring of Foucault's history of sex. And if they permeated the genealogy of sex at every level, from objective to method, to domain, to periodization, then one is compelled to ask whether genealogy itself was not deeply transformed. Was this "theoretical shift" perhaps something more than just a shift in perspective? Was genealogy being asked to do different things, to produce a different kind of result? Was its project still curative, or was it given a new task? What, in other words, is the critical value of a genealogical historiography that is based on the axis of the subject?

The Genealogy of Problems

The first volume of the History of Sexuality ends with what could perhaps be interpreted as a promise: "The rallying point for the counterattack against the deployment of sexuality ought not to be sex-desire, but bodies and pleasures." What are these "bodies and pleasures," and how are they to be employed against the deployment of sexuality? This is the question that seems always to be left lingering in the air after a reading of the History of Sexuality. One might reasonably expect it to be answered in the second or third volume; in fact, one might even find encouragement in the fact that the second volume is entitled The Use of Pleasure, or in the fact that part four of The Care of the Self is called "The Body." But these coincidences are

misleading, and anyone who expects to find a clear analysis of bodies and pleasures as they are to be employed in the counterattack against the deployment of sexuality is bound to be disappointed. Since the genealogy of sex has been unhinged from the axis of power, it has as a result also been dissociated from the theme of resistance. Contrary to the expectations of many, The Use of Pleasure and The Care of the Self break with the original project of the genealogy of sex, and thus they do not appear to offer a way out of the deployment of sexuality. After all, the objective has changed: Foucault no longer intends to complete the project of an analytics of power. The method employs different cautionary prescriptions: its guidelines are based not on relations of power, but rather on the ethical relationship between self and self. The domain has changed: modern "sexuality" is no longer the object of study. And so has the periodization: now it is the ancient Greeks that are under investigation. Is it still possible, after all these changes, to construct a strategy of resistance? Why has Foucault shifted his focus from modern sexuality to the ancient Greeks and their *aphrodisia*?

It is perhaps tempting to view the ancient Greek formula of the *aphrodisia* as an alternative to the power-laden deployment of sexuality. We would thus be able to bridge the gap between the first volume of the History of Sexuality and the second and third volumes, since the latter could then be read as complementary to the former. But we must be careful not to make this mistake. In fact, Foucault makes it clear that he does not advocate a modern renewal of the *aphrodisia*:

> I am not looking for an alternative; you can't find the solution of a problem in the solution of another problem raised at another moment by other people. You see, what I want to do is not the history of solutions—and that's the reason why I don't accept the word *alternative*. I would like to do the genealogy of problems, of *problématiques*.[129]

[129] Michel Foucault, "On the Genealogy of Ethics," Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth: Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1984, Volume One, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: The New Press, 1997) 256.

It is clear that The Use of Pleasure and The Care of the Self do not provide alternatives to the problems posed in the first volume of the History of Sexuality. This is perhaps confirmed by the fact that the "pleasures" they describe are by no means comparable to the anonymous and non-genital pleasures of the sadomasochist. For the ancient Greeks, it was a matter of controlling one's pleasures and of adhering to a strict regimen concerning the *aphrodisia* as a whole. Pleasure was only a problem insofar as it was connected to one's formation as an ethical subject. Only in a small few of Foucault's interviews do we find sadomasochism posed as a revolutionary alternative to the modern paradigm of sex-desire. The *aphrodisia* of the ancient Greeks, on the other hand, are clearly not the bodies and pleasures that are supposed to be the rallying point against the deployment of sexuality.

But this raises a new question: What is the relationship, if there is any at all, between the *aphrodisia* and sadomasochistic pleasures? Why does the Greek offer us no alternative to sex-desire, while on the other hand the sadomasochist provides us with the means to resist the deployment of sexuality on all fronts? Let us assume that, even if the ancient Greeks offer no solution to today's problems, there must be some aspect of the *aphrodisia* that brought Foucault to an understanding of the importance of pleasure in our time. In this way we should be able to ascertain the strategic value of a genealogy based on the axis of the subject.

But first of all, let us make an important distinction. It is essential that we understand that pleasures and the *aphrodisia* cannot be analyzed at the same level: pleasure, in fact, is only one element in the "formula" of the *aphrodisia*, which comprises acts, pleasures, and desire in their unity. In the previous chapter we have seen that, in modern society, it is desire that is at issue: we believe, after all, that the truth of our identity can be found in the slightest stirring of our sexual desire. But for the ancient Greeks, on the other hand, desire takes a more or less equal

place alongside the other two elements of the *aphrodisia*: the performance of the *act* is associated with feelings of *pleasure*, which in turn give rise to the *desire* that is directed toward them. "In the experience of the *aphrodisia* [...] act, desire, and pleasure formed an ensemble whose elements were distinguishable certainly, but closely bound to one another."[130] And instead of trying to uncover the hidden truth of their identity, the Greeks were concerned with the question: "how could one, how must one 'make use' of this dynamics of pleasures, desires, and acts? A question of right use."[131] Thus, in contrast to the modern attempt to liberate one's sexuality in order to discover who or what one really is, the Greeks made an effort to construct their own identity by forming themselves as ethical subjects in relation to their sexual activities. It was a question not of making conscious one's latent sexual tendencies and desires, but rather of "making use" of and managing an entire formula of erotic experience.

In the *aphrodisia*, however, the sexual act emerges as primary to pleasure and desire, since it becomes a question of when, under what circumstances, and how often one should engage in erotic activities. The act was a problem for the ancient Greeks insofar as they were able to construct an ethics around it. For this reason, Foucault expresses the ancient Greek formula thus: *acte—plaisir—[désir]*. Pleasure is not emphasized in this scheme, since it only accompanies the act, the circumstances and frequency of which were a problem for the Greeks, and desire is excluded because "in the Stoic ethics you start a kind of elision of desire; desire begins to be condemned."[132] Pleasure is therefore not offered here as a point of resistance, and it apparently did not play the same role for the ancient Greeks as it now does for sadomasochists; it is in no way an alternative to the modern paradigm of sex-desire.

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[130] Michel Foucault, The Use of Pleasure: Volume 2 of The History of Sexuality, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1990): 42.
[131] Ibid, 52.
[132] Michel Foucault, "On the Genealogy of Ethics," Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth: Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1984, Volume One, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: The New Press, 1997) 268.

But the ancient Greek "formula" of the *aphrodisia*, which genealogy has uncovered for us, can be placed alongside and contrasted with certain other formulae. For example, there is that of the Chinese: *plaisir—désir—[acte]*. "Acts are put aside because you have to restrain acts in order to get the maximum duration and intensity of pleasure." There is the Christian formula, which "puts an accent on desire and tries to eradicate it. Acts have to become something neutral; you have to act only to produce children or to fulfill your conjugal duty. And pleasure is both practically and theoretically excluded: *[désir]—acte—[plaisir]*." And, finally, "the modern 'formula' is desire, which is theoretically underlined and practically accepted, since you have to liberate your own desire. Acts are not very important, and pleasure—nobody knows what it is!"[133] Neither the Greek, nor the Chinese, nor the Christian formula is offered as an alternative to sex-desire, and yet each has a certain value when it is expressed alongside it; that is, each provides us with an awareness that the modern formula of *[acte]—désir—[plaisir]* is only one historical configuration among many possible others:

> If we compare [the Greek ethical experience] to our experience now, where everybody—the philosopher or the psychoanalyst—explains that what is important is desire, and pleasure is nothing at all, we can wonder whether this disconnection wasn't a historical event, one that was not at all necessary, not linked to human nature, or to any anthropological necessity.[134]

We can perhaps now truly appreciate the value of a genealogy of problems. If desire is what is at issue today, we have only to consider that it was not a practical or theoretical problem for the ancient Greeks, or for the Chinese, and we can then become aware that we are not bound to desire by any absolute necessity: "history serves to show how that-which-is has not always been; that is, that the things which seem most evident to us are always formed in the confluence of

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[133] Ibid, 269.
[134] Ibid, 259.

encounters and chances, during the course of a precarious and fragile history."[135] And thus it is apparent that genealogy has maintained its role through the years, regardless of Foucault's latest theoretical shift and his move away from an analytics of power. Genealogy continues to break down absolutes, to show that they have a history and that they are not universally given; and in doing so, it provides us not with alternatives to our current situation, but rather with the knowledge that change is possible: genealogy is a vehicle for change.

In paving the way for change, genealogy continues to be "curative" in its project. After all, we can resist the deployment of sexuality only when we are armed with the knowledge that modern sexuality is an historical phenomenon and that there are other possibilities available to us. The Use of Pleasure and The Care of the Self function therefore not as the rallying point for the counterattack against the deployment of sexuality, but rather as the preparatory work that makes such a rallying point possible: "I don't think that people who try to decipher the truth should have to provide ethical principles or practical advice at the same moment, in the same book and the same analysis. All this prescriptive network has to be elaborated and transformed by people themselves."[136] Thus, Foucault leaves it to us to organize and to carry out an actual "counterattack," in whatever shape that may take: his work is merely preparatory.

But Foucault does tell us where the rallying point should be: in bodies and pleasures. And here we are given the connection between the Greek *aphrodisia* and sadomasochistic pleasures. An historical understanding of the former leads to the possibility of a revolutionary deployment of the latter. Perhaps the formula for the counterattack against the deployment of sexuality will read something like this: *[désir]—plaisir—[acte]*. The sexual act would be

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[135] Michel Foucault, "Critical Theory/Intellectual History," Critique and Power: Recasting the Foucault/Habermas Debate, ed. Michael Kelly (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1994) 127.
[136] Michel Foucault, "Michel Foucault: An Interview by Stephen Riggins," Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth: Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1984, Volume One, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: The New Press, 1997) 132.

practically excluded because, as we have seen in the previous chapter, the sadomasochist is able to experience pleasure in strange ways and in the absence of genital stimulation, and desire would be theoretically excluded because it no longer serves as the key to one's identity. In this new formula, pleasure moves to the forefront and, in direct opposition to the deployment of sexuality, becomes the exclusive domain of sexual behaviour. But this reconfiguration is made possible only in the historical field of a genealogy of problems:

> Among the cultural inventions of mankind there is a treasury of devices, techniques, ideas, procedures, and so on, that cannot exactly be reactivated but at least constitute, or help to constitute, a certain point of view which can be very useful as a tool for analyzing what's going on now—and to change it.[137]

Historical Ontology

In "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," Foucault suggests that genealogy "has value as critique" because of its ability "to discover that truth or being lies not at the root of what we know and what we are but the exteriority of accidents."[138] But this definition of critique is perhaps incomplete. It is true that the critical project of genealogy is to dissolve universals and to reveal that their historical beginnings are in fact contingent and "lowly." But if we look at this definition retrospectively, from the perspective of "What is Enlightenment?," which was not published until after Foucault's death, then it becomes clear that it expresses only the negative half of genealogy's critical project. In fact, genealogical critique sets out to accomplish more than the systematic destruction of universal values; as we have seen with the analysis of sex, its

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[137] Michel Foucault, "On the Genealogy of Ethics," Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth: Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1984, Volume One, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: The New Press, 1997) 261.
[138] Michel Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology: Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1984, Volume Two, ed. James D. Faubion (New York: The New Press, 1998) 374.

real mission is to pave the way for change. And change is made possible by what Foucault calls "a historical ontology of ourselves."[139]

The term "historical ontology" presents us immediately with a paradox: How can ontology, the study of being, be elaborated in an historical field, that is, in the field of becoming? Or in other words, how can the "essence" of subjectivity or of sexuality take an historical shape? Does sexuality, for example, not transcend history? Does it not take the same form in every culture, in every age? But we have already seen that this is not the case and that Foucault's studies are in direct opposition to the metaphysical project of uncovering essences. So then how does Foucault justify the use of the word "ontology"? His analysis of the ancient Greek *aphrodisia* is certainly not the work of ontology in the traditional sense of the word. But it is nevertheless the "being" of the *aphrodisia* that is in question. After all, what Foucault uncovers is the historically contingent yet very real moral experience of the ancient Greeks, and in doing so he is able to discover the "essence" of the *aphrodisia*, that is, the conditions through which it was possible for the *aphrodisia* to be talked about, experienced, and related to. Historical ontology thus uncovers the historical limits of a concept, a practice, or a mode of being.

But "historical ontology" is not just a fancy new name given to the genealogy of problems. It is in fact the term used to designate Foucault's project in general, as it employs both genealogy and archaeology in their respective roles. Historical ontology

> is genealogical in its design and archaeological in its method. Archaeological—and not transcendental—in the sense that it will not seek to identify the universal structures of all knowledge [*connaissance*] or of all possible moral action, but will seek to treat the instances of discourse that articulate what we think, say, and do as so many historical events. And this critique will be genealogical in the sense that it will not deduce from the form of what we are what it is impossible for us to do and to know; but it will separate out, from the contingency that has made us what

[139] Michel Foucault, "What is Enlightenment?" Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth: Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1984, Volume One, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: The New Press, 1997) 315.

> we are, the possibility of no longer being, doing, or thinking what we are, do, or think.[140]

This description helps us to place genealogy in its critical context. In the work of historical ontology, genealogy and archaeology are complementary to one another. It is the task of the latter to uncover the discursive elements and events that have given rise to a particular set of problems, while the former takes these problems and redistributes them within the historical field of problematizations in general. Thus, for example, The Use of Pleasure analyses the *aphrodisia* as they appeared in the discourse of the ancient Greeks, while at the same time making sure to pit them against the modern problematization of sexuality. The result is that we become acutely aware that the Greek experience of sex is completely discontinuous from our own, and that, consequently, new experiences must also be possible.

Foucault's critical project is guided by what he calls a "*limit-attitude*": "The point, in brief, is to transform the critique conducted in the form of necessary limitation into a practical critique that takes the form of a possible crossing-over [*franchissement*]."[141] Rather than tracing out the necessary limits of our knowledge or of our subjectivity, historical ontology uses archaeology and genealogy to discover those same limits so that we may go beyond them. This is a theme that we have confronted in the previous chapter: we may recall that transgression "carries the limit right to the limit of its being," and that it is precisely in the transgression of his own subjectivity that the sadomasochist discovers himself for the first time. In this case, the role that historical ontology plays is to show Foucault just what sadomasochism means for the counterattack against the deployment of sexuality. After all, the revolutionary potential of "desexualized pleasures" and the "anarchised body" can be fully realized only after archaeology has discerned the limits of the modern subject of desire and genealogy has shown us that it is

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[140] Ibid, 315-6.
[141] Ibid, 315.

possible to "go beyond" these limits. And thus, though they are only "preparatory" and not "prescriptive," Foucault's analyses of sex can be picked up and used in the counterattack against the deployment of sexuality:

> Critique doesn't have to be the premise of a deduction that concludes, 'this, then, is what needs to be done.' It should be an instrument for those who fight, those who resist and refuse what is. Its use should be in processes of conflict and confrontation, essays in refusal. It doesn't have to lay down the law for the law. It isn't a stage in a programming. It is a challenge directed to what is.[142]

Foucault's works are available as support to the sadomasochist or to anyone else who is in a position to resist power. In fact, they contribute to the struggle precisely by providing one with the *awareness* that one is in a position to resist power. Thus, with the aid of historical ontology, the sadomasochist can exercise every effort to dodge the traps of the deployment of sexuality or to keep his transgressive behaviour from being assimilated into the ever-expanding discourse of sexual perversions, and can as a result construct a coherent strategy of resistance.

Historical ontology is "critical," therefore, precisely to the extent that it opens up the possibility of radical change. And if genealogy has "the value of critique," this is because it can be employed positively, within the general scope of an historical ontology that aims for the subject's self-realization through the transgression of its own limits. It remains "curative" in its outlook because it promotes change and because it can be used as "an instrument for those who fight," because it can be used in a strategy of resistance. And the "healthy body," we may recall, is the body that resists power, the body that rejects the subjectivity that has been thrust upon it by the mechanisms of power.

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[142] Michel Foucault, "Questions of Method," Power: Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1985, Volume Three, ed. James D. Faubion (New York: The New Press, 2000) 236.

The Aesthetic Experience

Although it is apparent that the genealogy of sex has been deeply transformed by Foucault's latest theoretical shift, its curative project has generally remained the same. In fact, when we take all of Foucault's "genealogies" into account, it is possible for us to return to "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History" in order to clarify Foucault's critical project in general. "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History" states that the "historical sense" that is associated with genealogy "gives rise to three uses that oppose and correspond to the three Platonic modalities of history": *parodic*, *dissociative*, and *sacrificial*. "They imply a use of history that severs its connection to memory, its metaphysical and anthropological model, and constructs a countermemory—a transformation of history into a totally different form of time."[143] If we attempt to understand these three modalities of history and the construction of a "countermemory" in light of the analysis of sex, then we can perhaps give some representative content to Foucault's original statement of his genealogical method, as well as grasp certain fundamental principles of genealogy as they operate specifically in the history of sexuality. So let us look first at the three "uses" of history.

The first use of history is "parodic." According to this first modality, the genealogist will always recognize as absurd and carnivalesque the traditional historian's attempts to reactivate history or to identify our present with the heroic characters of the past: "Historians supplied the Revolution with Roman prototypes, Romanticism with knight's armor, and the Wagnerian era was given the sword of a German hero—ephemeral props whose unreality points to our own."[144] But the genealogist

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[143] Michel Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology: Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1984, Volume Two, ed. James D. Faubion (New York: The New Press, 1998) 385.
[144] Ibid, 385.

> will know what to make of this masquerade. He will not be too serious to enjoy it; on the contrary, he will push the masquerade to its limit and prepare the great carnival of time where masks are constantly reappearing. No longer the identification of our faint individuality with the solid identities of the past, but our "unrealization" through the excessive choice of identities—Frederick of Hohenstaufen, Caesar, Jesus, Dionysus, and possibly Zarathustra.[145]

Foucault's actual genealogies are perhaps less sardonic and mocking. But one can observe a sort of play of masks and identities that occurs in the history of sexuality. After all, since modern man is continually trying to "liberate" his sexuality, it may be tempting for him to identify with the ancient Greeks, who are considered to have been extremely liberal and tolerant of all kinds of sexual behaviour, including homosexuality. But in The Use of Pleasure, Foucault demonstrates that "homosexuality" and "tolerance" are both thoroughly modern labels, and are as such inadequate terms for expressing the erotic experience of the ancient Greeks. For the Greeks, the love for boys was not of a completely different nature than the love for women; "the choice between girls and boys in no way relates to the distinction between two tendencies or to the opposition between two forms of desire."[146] Rather, the Greeks "saw two ways of enjoying one's pleasure, one of which was more suited to certain individuals or certain periods of existence."[147]

Thus, for them, the modern distinction between "homosexual" and "heterosexual" behaviour would have been completely meaningless. And furthermore, the perception that the Greeks were "tolerant" is also inaccurate: "Since there is an important and large literature about loving boys in Greek culture, some historians say, 'Well, that's the proof that they loved boys.'

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[145] Ibid, 385-6.
[146] Michel Foucault, The Use of Pleasure: Volume 2 of The History of Sexuality, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1990): 189.
[147] Ibid, 190.

But I say that proves that loving boys was a problem."[148] Even though the love for boys was common and accepted practice, and even though it was not considered to be governed by a tendency that is naturally opposed to the love for women, it was nevertheless a problem for the ancient Greeks. But it was a problem that was postulated in terms of "reciprocity" rather than "nature." It is not that the love for boys was "unnatural," but rather that, at least according to Plutarch, a male should not be "passive" in his sexual relations: "The problem was that they couldn't accept that a young boy who was supposed to become a free citizen could be dominated and used as an object for someone's pleasure."[149] Thus, to say that the Greeks were "tolerant" of "homosexuality" would be to misconstrue their attitude towards the love for boys. In fact, the love for boys was an object of discourse not because it could be practiced "freely" and without judgment, but precisely because it posed an ethical problem for the Greeks.

But what does this problematization mean for modern man? How does Foucault "push the masquerade to its limit"? Let us recall the final sentence of the History of Sexuality: "The irony of this deployment is in having us believe that our 'liberation' is in the balance."[150] By appealing to the ancient Greek "tolerance" of "homosexuality," modern man only binds himself even more firmly to the deployment of sexuality. After all, his own tolerance points him right back in the direction of sex-desire and away from the ancient Greeks, since it is formulated on the basis of a natural distinction between homosexuality and heterosexuality:

> We focus our questioning on the singularity of a desire that is not directed toward the other sex; and at the same time, we affirm that this type of relation should not be assigned a lesser value, nor given a special status.

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[148] Michel Foucault, "On the Genealogy of Ethics," Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth: Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1984, Volume One, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: The New Press, 1997) 257.
[149] Ibid, 257.
[150] Michel Foucault, The History of Sexuality, Volume I: An Introduction, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1990): 159.

> Now, it seems that the Greeks thought very differently about these things…[151]

The ancient Greek practice of loving boys can clearly not be expressed in terms of the modern tolerance of homosexuality. Any attempt to applaud the Greeks for their "tolerance" misses the mark completely and in fact plays directly into the hands of the deployment of sexuality, thus consolidating one's identity as a modern subject of desire. To become tolerant of homosexuality, therefore, is not to become more "Greek," nor is it to emulate the Greeks; rather, it is on a par with "liberating" one's sexuality: ironically, it only confirms one's place in the modern paradigm of sex-desire.

The second use of history is called "dissociative" because it aims for "the systematic dissociation of our identity."[152] This modality requires less explanation because it is a little more straightforward, and because we have already seen how it works. Let us recall that genealogy has identified modern man as a subject of desire. But at the same time it has shown us that this identity is contingent and fragmentary. It has demonstrated that "modern man" is the effect of a complex relation between power and knowledge, and also that his experience of self is not universal or necessary, that it is the result of a purely historical problematization of desire. In a word, genealogy has made it clear that modern man's identity is not his own, that it is merely the effect of power relations and of history: "If genealogy in its own right gives rise to questions concerning our native land, native language, or the laws that govern us, its intention is to reveal the heterogeneous systems that, masked by the self, inhibit the formation of any form of identity."[153]

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[151] Michel Foucault, The Use of Pleasure: Volume 2 of The History of Sexuality, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1990): 192.
[152] Michel Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology: Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1984, Volume Two, ed. James D. Faubion (New York: The New Press, 1998) 386.
[153] Ibid, 387.

Foucault calls the third use of history "the sacrifice of the subject of knowledge [*connaissance*]." This modality reveals that historical consciousness, which presents itself as neutral, dispassionate, and "committed solely to truth," is in fact permeated by "aspects of the will to knowledge [*savoir*]: instinct, passion, the inquisitor's devotion, cruel subtlety, and malice."[154] In the first volume of the History of Sexuality, Foucault explains that the discourse surrounding sexuality is devoted not to its elucidation *per se*, but rather to its appropriation into the overwhelming interplay of power and pleasure. The doctors and psychoanalysts who study the pervert and his abhorrent behaviour try to understand them precisely to the extent that they can capture them in an ever-expanding body of knowledge and thus diffuse them as a threat to society. And consequently the "subject of knowledge" is itself captured in the dynamics of these power relations: "Knowledge [*savoir*] does not slowly detach itself from its empirical roots, the initial needs from which it arose, to become pure speculation subject only to the demands of reason; its development is not tied to the constitution and affirmation of a free subject; rather, it creates a progressive enslavement to its instinctive violence."[155] But if this is true for the doctor, the psychoanalyst, and even the historian, then it must also be true for the genealogist. In fact, Foucault has made it clear that his own works are by no means "committed solely to the truth": "the people who read me—particularly those who value what I do—often tell me with a laugh, 'You know very well that what you say is really just fiction.' I always reply, 'Of course, there's no question of it being anything else but fiction.'"[156] But if Foucault's genealogies are nothing more or less than "fiction," then what was the point of writing them? What were his reasons for writing them, and were they determined by instincts, passions, malice, and a "rancorous will to

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[154] Ibid, 387.
[155] Ibid, 388.
[156] Michel Foucault, "Interview with Michel Foucault," Power: Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1985, Volume Three, ed. James D. Faubion (New York: The New Press, 2000) 242.

knowledge"[157]? Foucault explains that although he makes use of "the most conventional methods"—"demonstration or, at any rate, proof in historical matters, textual references, citations of authorities, drawing connections between texts and facts, suggesting schemes of intelligibility, offering different types of explanation"[158]—, his objective is certainly not that of other historians: "my problem is to construct myself, and to invite others to share an experience of what we are, not only our past but also our present, an experience of our modernity in such a way that we might come out of it transformed."[159] The "instinctive violence" of the will to knowledge is therefore perpetrated against the forms of who or what we are. Foucault "sacrifices" himself as a subject of knowledge because every work of genealogy produces not an incontrovertible truth, but rather a "violent" transformation that affects reader and author alike: "the I who wrote the book and those who have read it would have a different relationship with [e.g.] madness, with its contemporary status, and its history in the modern world."[160]

Although The Use of Pleasure and The Care of the Self bear little resemblance to Foucault's earlier genealogies, it is clear that this is only a surface effect of the theoretical shift from the power axis to that of the subject. On a much deeper and almost imperceptible level, these last two works of genealogy continue to employ the methodology first laid out in "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History." But they also clarify and perhaps even reinterpret the meaning of this methodology. If the genealogist "uses" history to parody and to dissociate our identity, and also to sacrifice the subject of knowledge, then it is clear that genealogy cannot be considered a "discipline" or a "science"; it does not contribute anything to the "body of

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[157] Michel Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology: Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1984, Volume Two, ed. James D. Faubion (New York: The New Press, 1998) 387.
[158] Michel Foucault, "Interview with Michel Foucault," Power: Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1985, Volume Three, ed. James D. Faubion (New York: The New Press, 2000) 242.
[159] Ibid, 242.
[160] Ibid, 242.

knowledge" that constitutes traditional history; rather, it is a *practice* directed towards transformation and towards the transgression of our subjectivity and our identity; it is, first and foremost, an *ethos*, a way of relating to oneself.

In "What is Enlightenment?" Foucault describes what he calls "the attitude of modernity":

> And by "attitude," I mean a mode of relating to contemporary reality; a voluntary choice made by certain people; in the end, a way of thinking and feeling; a way, too, of acting and behaving that at one and the same time marks a relation of belonging and presents itself as a task. No doubt, a bit like what the Greeks called an *ethos*.[161]

This attitude of modernity is the defining characteristic of genealogical critique. It is true that Foucault did not develop the idea of an ethical relationship to oneself until late in his career, when he began to study the ancient Greeks. But what he found in the ancient Greek texts was something that had been present in his own works from the very beginning: a critical attitude directed towards one's own subjectivity. Although it would be pointless to compare Foucault's "ethics" with that of the ancient Greeks, we can at least observe in Foucault's own formative experience a certain relationship between self and self:

> I am not interested in the academic status of what I am doing because *my problem is my own transformation.* That's the reason also why, when people say, "Well, you thought this a few years ago and now you say something else," my answer is...[*Laughs*] "Well, do you think I have worked like that all those years to say the same thing and not to be changed?" This transformation of one's self by one's own knowledge is, I think, something rather close to the *aesthetic experience. Why should a painter work if he is not transformed by his own painting?*[162]

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[161] Michel Foucault, "What is Enlightenment?" Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth: Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1984, Volume One, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: The New Press, 1997) 309.

[162] Michel Foucault, "Michel Foucault: An Interview by Stephen Riggins," Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth: Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1984, Volume One, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: The New Press, 1997) 131. Italics added.

Let us recall that Foucault's career is characterized by a number of "theoretical shifts," and that as a result of one of these shifts the history of sexuality had to be modified from the ground up. Foucault's approach to history, which has taken the more or less successive forms of archaeology, genealogy, and an historical ontology that makes use of both of the former, cannot be explained in terms of a methodological ambivalence or indecisiveness. Instead, these theoretical adjustments and modifications should be understood as part of Foucault's own "aesthetic experience." That is, genealogical critique does more than simply describe or reveal, for example, the ancient Greek relation to self; it is itself an ethos or a way of working on one's own subjectivity. Foucault uses genealogy as a vehicle for change, not just for his readers or for the subjects that come under his lens, but for himself as well. And Foucault's own transformations can be seen in the various theoretical shifts and methodological adjustments that characterize his career as a writer.

But these transformations are valuable to Foucault's readers precisely to the extent that they are experiences that can be shared. After admitting that his historical works are in fact "fictions," Foucault explains that

> the essential thing is not in the series of those true or historically verifiable findings but, rather, in the experience that the book makes possible. Now, the fact is, this experience is neither true nor false. An experience is always a fiction: it's something that one fabricates oneself, that doesn't exist before and will exist afterward. That is the difficult relationship with truth, the way in which the latter is bound up with an experience that is not bound to it and, in some degree, destroys it.[163]

We have seen how genealogy creates possibilities of resistance by opening the way for change. We have also seen that the subject discovers itself in the act of transgressing its own limits. We can now add that the writing and the reading of genealogy is itself an act of resistance and

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[163] Michel Foucault, "Interview with Michel Foucault," Power: Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1985, Volume Three, ed. James D. Faubion (New York: The New Press, 2000) 243.

transgression. After all, genealogical critique is Foucault's own way of changing in the face of power and the universals that it employs. And he invites his readers to share in this experience of transformation by creating a perspectival knowledge of truth, power, and subjects, that is, by creating the possibility of no longer being, doing, or thinking what we are, do, or think.

Conclusion

Genealogy is an ethos or a way of relating to oneself. This is perhaps not a new or a late revelation, since it seems to have been Foucault's intention all along. After all, Foucault never claimed to be seeking "truths" or "origins." Rather, his objective had always been to initiate the dissolution of accepted truths and the dispersion of metaphysical origins. But until he began studying the ancient Greeks, this objective had been carried out only on the truth and power axes of genealogy, that is, on the basis of the subject's relations to truth and to other individuals. On these two axes, the ethos or the attitude of modernity that guided genealogy remained implicit. Genealogical critique seemed to bring about change only indirectly and after the fact, since its function was to explain power relations and hence also to create possibilities for resistance. But the shift from the power axis to that of the subject allowed Foucault to bring his "ethics" to the forefront of his methodology and to make sure that the subject's transformation was more than just an after effect of genealogical critique. The Greek ethos, or the relationship between self and self, must have been an attractive topic for Foucault, since he was able to use it to explain his own position. Without treating the Greek paradigm as an alternative to our own, Foucault borrowed the idea of the relation of self to self in order to justify the themes of transgression, transformation, and resistance that had permeated his philosophical writings from his earliest archaeologies to the last volumes of the history of sexuality. Genealogical critique had always been Foucault's way of transgressing his own subjectivity and of carrying out the work of deep transformation. It is, in and of itself, an act of pure resistance directed against the forms of identity that make us "subjects" in both senses of the word.

If we look back on what we have learned, we can recognize in Foucault's own work certain variations of the four aspects of the relation to self. There is, first of all, an *ethical*

substance that must be worked on and modified. In Foucault's case, this ethical substance can be called the subjectivity of the subject, which has been the target of genealogy and archaeology from the very beginning. This "subjectivity" takes various forms throughout Foucault's works—for example, the "soul" of the criminal, or the psyche of the "pervert"—but it is always inscribed on the body of the individual for one reason, that is, to trap the individual in a particular field of possible actions. But the creation of this field of actions also results in the investment of forces into the subjugated body, thus creating for the individual the opportunity to appropriate these forces and turn them against power. Genealogy contributes to this kind of resistance by dispersing our various identities and by showing us that they are historically contingent. And in doing so, genealogy opens the way for change and for the transgression of our old subjectivities: "We have to promote new forms of subjectivity through the refusal of this kind of individuality that has been imposed on us for several centuries."[164]

Secondly, we can identify the *mode of subjection* or the way in which Foucault "establishes his relation to the rule and recognizes himself as obliged to put it into practice." As an intellectual, Foucault regards it as his responsibility to deprive power of all the universals and absolute principles that impress themselves upon individuals and make them "subjects." Genealogy is important because it promotes the ebb and flow of history over the totalizing movement of evolution, and because it advocates power relations over and against relations of strict domination. And Foucault regards himself as obligated to practice genealogical critique because power is "always perilous" and because "[t]he rules that exist to limit it can never be

[164] Michel Foucault, "The Subject and Power," Power: Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1985, Volume Three, ed. James D. Faubion (New York: The New Press, 2000) 336.

stringent enough; the universal principles for dispossessing it of all the occasions it seizes are never sufficiently rigorous."[165]

We have perhaps already identified the *ethical work* that must be done on the subject in order to bring it in line with the mode of subjection. In the third chapter of this thesis we have examined the revolutionary potential of sadomasochism. The sadomasochist is able to escape being classified by the deployment of sexuality since he or she enjoys pleasures that are at once paradoxical and non-genital, and since he or she enters into the dynamics of a game in which the roles are temporary and reversible, and in which any attempt to discover a permanent "identity" is bound to fail. One who wishes to promote "bodies and pleasures" and "new forms of subjectivity" can find in sadomasochism a number of useful tools, since the sadomasochist does the sort of ethical work that is necessary in order to establish the kind of relation to self that Foucault finds desirable. But we are by no means limited to the sadomasochist's paradoxical pleasures, as we have seen in the final chapter of this thesis. In fact, genealogical critique is itself an ethical practice that engenders new forms of subjectivity: "my problem is to construct myself, and to invite others to share an experience of what we are, not only our past but also our present, an experience of our modernity in such a way that we might come out of it transformed."[166] Genealogy allows us to experiment with our identities by making it possible for us to transgress the limits that define what we are, what we do, and what we think. For example, by showing us the historical limits of the subject of desire, genealogy helps us to think outside of the paradigm of sex-desire and thus also to initiate real change.

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[165] Michel Foucault, "Useless to Revolt?" Power: Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1985, Volume Three, ed. James D. Faubion (New York: The New Press, 2000) 453.
[166] Michel Foucault, "Interview with Michel Foucault," Power: Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1985, Volume Three, ed. James D. Faubion (New York: The New Press, 2000) 242.

The fourth aspect of the relation to oneself is the *telos*. What mental, physical, or spiritual state does Foucault aspire to? For the Greeks this telos was self-mastery, and for the Christians it was immortality. For Foucault, however, it is the somewhat paradoxical "state" of transformation; it is the state of "health" possessed by the body that appropriates the forces that power has invested into it and deploys them in a continual cycle of resistance; it is, finally, the "aesthetic experience," or the discovery of oneself in the transgression of one's own subjectivity. Even though it rejects all normative standards of health, genealogy is "curative" precisely to the extent that it has a *telos*. But in this case, the state of being toward which the genealogist aspires is in fact a non-state, or a state of non-being. After all, "health" can be found not in the new forms of subjectivity that supplant the old ones, but rather in the very movement of transgression that takes us from one form to another. In other words, the individual discovers beyond the limits of his subjectivity nothing other than new limits, which must in their turn be transgressed. And the cycle continues infinitely: "[m]y way of being no longer the same is, by definition, the most singular part of what I am."[167]

[167] Michel Foucault, "For an Ethic of Discomfort," Power: Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1984, Volume Three, ed. James D. Faubion (New York: The New Press, 2000) 444.

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