

Ethics and the Evolving Deployments of Disciplinary Practices: A Foucauldian Analysis of the Glamorization of Bodies

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Abstract

The paper discusses how individuals are constituted by disciplinary practices as presented in Michel Foucault's two major works: *Discipline and Punish* and *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction*. The workings of power-knowledge gave rise to the penal apparatus and deployments of sexuality, which affected entire populations. But even as these disciplinary practices evolve and become seemingly more humane and liberating, they continue to produce docile and normalized subjects. One particular example of this process, discussed here in detail, is the transition from the figure of the hysterical woman to

the modern glamorous (beautiful) woman. Such a transition extends Foucault's ideas to show the immense variety of disciplinary practices. The last section explores a Foucauldian conception of ethics that seeks to reclaim the autonomy of subjects through self-creation.

Keywords *Disciplinarity, governmentality, sexuality, subjectivity, ethics, askēsis*

I. Constituting Individuals as Subjects of Disciplinary Practices

In *Discipline and Punish* and *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction*, which are considered to be his “social historical” works¹ and arguably his most influential, French philosopher Michel Foucault describes how individuals are constituted and organized through practices of power. The modern self, as it turns out, is a mere fabrication of technologies and relations of power, realized by training bodies, thoughts, and desires. Hence, through the institutionalized and ubiquitous mechanisms of power, the

¹ Matti Peltonen, “From Discourse to *Dispositif*: Michel Foucault’s Two Histories,” *Historical Reflections/Réflexions Historiques* 30, no. 2 (Summer 2004): 212.

mass production of normalized and well-disciplined subjects is effected. But these fabricated individuals lack freedom, and cannot therefore be the autonomous subjects of an ethics.

Discipline and Punish (in the French original, *Surveiller et punir*) chronicles the development of a penal system that managed criminals primarily through surveillance. The transition from the torture of prisoners to the constant surveillance and control of their movements led to the marginalization of the body as the major target of penal correction. Penal reform instituted practices that effectively targeted the soul instead of the body. But the soul that is the target of disciplinarity is not a pre-existing entity and is not to be identified with the (Christian) theologian's soul. It is rather the product of discourse, specifically, of the diagnostic and prognostic assessments and normative judgments of prison officials, the police, psychiatrists, and educators concerning the criminal. Consequently, this synthetic soul, which is but the effect and instrument of a political apparatus, in fact became the prison of the body.²

For Foucault, the real function of the prison is less to rehabilitate criminals than to discipline and transform them into delinquents. Indeed, the likelihood of recidivism only increases with imprisonment. But despite its utter failure in

² Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1977), 30.

fulfilling its declared mandate of extinguishing criminality, the prison remains a useful institution insofar as it produces delinquents as manageable and therefore predictable objects of knowledge within the population. Accordingly, critiques of the prison never led to its abolition but only to reform and an expansion of the mechanism of the prison itself.

From the modern, and supposedly more humane, practices of penal reform emerged new bodies of knowledge relating to the subjects of the carceral system. The introduction of discourses into the criminal trial and prison management provided an opportunity to categorize, observe, and reconstitute the prisoner's soul. Psychiatric (from ψυχη, the Greek term for the soul) examination is just one among the many disciplinary mechanisms that were central to the fashioning of the soul. Invested with an inductive character, these discourses effectively gave rise to the social sciences. Thus, scientific discourse engendered "disciplines"—methods and techniques that made possible the meticulous control and constant subjection of the operations of the body and its forces.³ The specialized knowledge produced by the exercise of power enabled it (power) to extend itself from the penal institution to the entire social body. The surveillance of prisoners that replaced physical torture was subsequently applied to

³ Ibid., 137.

schoolchildren, factory workers, and other population groups as a whole.

The normalized individual is the goal of disciplinary practices. The apparatus of disciplinarity explores and studies the body, breaks it down, and rearranges it according to its discursively constructed soul. The resulting new body is a docile, properly trained one, and with the improved economy and efficiency of its movements, a more useful body. Life and its processes are thus effectively regulated. Foucault later introduced the term “governmentality” to refer to the state’s employment of the apparatuses of security to maintain its authority and control over entire populations.⁴ Needless to say, this discipline-based existence requires the individual to surrender his will to the workings of power whereby his conduct is directed and his actions and reactions are constrained. Therefore, the modern subject, as constituted by the requirements of power and knowledge relations, has no real autonomy at all.

Foucault explores further these ideas on disciplinarity in relation to sex in *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction*, published a year later. His stated goal therein is “to define the regime of power-knowledge-pleasure that sustains the discourse on human sexuality.”⁵ Sexuality emerged

⁴ Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1977-1978*, trans. Graham Burchell (Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 108.

⁵ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), 11.

as an effect of the mechanism of power, constituting individuals not so much in terms of their acts but their dispositions. So just as the offender became a delinquent, the sexual agent acquired a forced identity, like that of a pervert: an individual whose very existence was defined by the sexual acts that he desired or performed, and whose being was subsequently constituted as an object of scientific knowledge. By associating specific sexual acts with the essential beings of individuals, sexual identities were created. Thus, the discourse on sexuality effectively gave rise to pedophiles, rapists, and other such sexual identities. Heterosexuality is simply the sexual identity to which we cling as to who we are.⁶

It is Foucault's thesis that the idea of characterizing individuals through their sexual behavior or desire was rarely found before the nineteenth century. Prior to the Victorian era, a certain frankness about sex was still widespread as there was little need for secrecy regarding sexual practices. Afterwards, talk about sex seemingly disappeared; sexuality was confined to the conjugal family and absorbed into the function of reproduction. This led to the hypothesis that Victorianism was puritanical and therefore repressive with respect to sexuality. But it is the contention of Foucault that instead of being repressed, discourses on sexuality actually

⁶ Chloe Taylor, "Foucault, Feminism, and Sex Crimes," *Hypatia* 24, no. 4 (Fall 2009): 13.

proliferated during the nineteenth century.⁷ That being the case, it can indeed be said that sexuality itself was invented during the Victorian era. In fact, there was an institutional incitement to speak about sex. The subject's confession, to the priests, and then to the doctors and psychiatrists, satisfied his or her need to tell the truth about sexuality in its most minute details. The transformation of sex into discourse was made into a rule for everyone. Indeed, being a dense and omnipresent network for relations of power, sexuality came to involve everyone: men and women, young and old people, parents and offspring, teachers and students, priests and laity, an administration and a population.⁸

Of course, for many, if not most, sex does not have a social history, for it is a mere biological fact. But sexuality is arguably a cultural effect: it represents an appropriation of the human body and of its physiological capacities by discourse.⁹ Desire itself is specially targeted by the discourse of sexuality to normalize and discipline individuals in terms of some ideal type. The displacement, intensification, reorientation, and modification of desire entail the classification of sexual irregularity as (mental) illness. So the field of medicine was co-opted to manage sexual deviance. Consequently, more analysis, classification, specification,

⁷ Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 18.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 103.

⁹ David M. Halperin, "Is There a History of Sexuality?" *History and Theory* 28, no. 3 (October 1989): 257.

quantification, and causal study of sexuality became necessary, giving rise to a *scientia sexualis*.

With the explosion of discourses on sexuality, sex itself became increasingly implicated in every aspect of existence. Consequently, the question of who we are easily became a question about sex. Entire populations came under the discipline of sexuality; sex became a thing to be administered, incorporated into systems of utility, optimized, and regulated for the greater good of all. Indeed, sex became the explanation of everything.¹⁰

Paradoxically enough, Foucault took sex itself to be the product of the apparatus of sexuality. Indeed, sex need not be a given, since the discourse of sexuality ultimately applies, not to sex, but to the body and the sexual organs, to pleasures and to relations of alliance.¹¹ Sexuality comes to permeate the body of the subject through the encroachment of power upon bodies and their pleasures. The technologies of sex thus represented the total expansion of a ubiquitous disciplinary apparatus of power which was without a definite point of origin or locus.¹²

Disciplinarity involves a notion of power that is relational. Power in the substantive sense does not exist.¹³ It exists only

¹⁰ Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 78.

¹¹ David Macey, *The Lives of Michel Foucault* (London: Vintage, 1994), 355.

¹² Carolyn J. Dean, "The Productive Hypothesis: Foucault, Gender, and the History of Sexuality," *History and Theory* 33, no. 3 (October 1994): 278.

¹³ Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977*, ed. Colin Gordon (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), 198.

in action. Power is above all an organized, interwoven, and diffused network of relations that intersect, converge, or, in a contrary movement, come into conflict and strive to negate one another. It is produced from one moment to the next, in every relation from one point to another. Thus, power cannot be anchored, located, or contained: it infuses, occupies, and produces everything. In this way, the micro-politics of power can never come to be under anyone's control.

Clearly, the notion of power that Foucault employs in the power-knowledge equation is not that of a singular overarching power system that emanates from a state or a sovereign, a power that impinges massively from the outside, with a continuous violence that some exercise over others. It definitely is not the sort of triumphant power operative in Louis XIV's declaration *L'état, c'est moi*. Foucauldian power represents an inversion, from sovereignty's old right to "take life or let live" to the new right to "make live and let die."¹⁴ Crucially, disciplinary power is exercised within the social body rather than above it. Indeed, every individual has this sort of power at his disposal, and can therefore act as a medium for its transmission. Power is present in every human relationship. It exists in a capillary form, and is thus capable of reaching

¹⁴ Michel Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975-1976*, trans. David Macey (New York: Picador, 2003), 241.

and inserting itself into the very microscopic cells of individuals, touching their bodies and incorporating itself into their actions and attitudes, their discourses, learning processes, and everyday lives.¹⁵ Thus, power is everywhere and comes from everywhere, explaining the immediate hold of power relations on the body and its pleasures.

The exercise of power requires the deployment of discourses. There can be no power relation without the corresponding constitution of a field of knowledge, nor can there be any knowledge that does not presuppose the operation of power relations.¹⁶ Thus, power and knowledge directly imply each other in discourse. Obviously, the production of knowledge is necessary for people to govern themselves and others. And as knowledge is produced, further effects of power are induced. For this reason, the social sciences have the greatest power and the most productive discourses, which is why Foucault singled them out for the most severe critique.

II. The Evolving Deployment of Sexuality: From Hysterization to Glamorization

The equation between power and knowledge can be illustrated in terms of the various forms that power takes in the different deployments (*dispositifs*) of sexuality. *Dispositif*

¹⁵ Foucault, *Power/Knowledge*, 39.

¹⁶ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 27.

refers to a strategic network of discourses, propositions, statements, institutions, and laws, which is dominant at a given historical moment. In the deployment of sexuality, there is no single, all-encompassing strategy. Nonetheless, Foucault identifies four great strategic totalities of discourses and practices that formed specific mechanisms of power-knowledge centering on sex: a hysterization of women's bodies, a pedagogization of children's sex, a socialization of procreative behavior, and a psychiatrization of perverse pleasure. Four figures emerged from these deployments of sexuality—four privileged objects of knowledge: the hysterical woman, the masturbating child, the Malthusian couple, and the perverse adult.¹⁷

The first of these deployments, the hysterization of women's bodies, illustrates perfectly the constitution of feminine subjects. The feminine body is analyzed as being thoroughly saturated with sexuality, integrated into the sphere of medical practices, and placed in organic communication with the social body through the family space. The mother, with her negative image of "nervous woman," exemplifies this process of hysterization. In hysteria, we also come to have a vivid picture of how the feminine subject is constituted as a mad subject.¹⁸

¹⁷ Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 104-5.

¹⁸ Michel Foucault, *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, ed. Paul Rabinow, trans. Robert Hurley et al. (New York: The New Press, 1997), 291.

Foucault himself did not discuss these deployments in detail and left them for others to flesh out. In “The Sexual Politics of Sickness,” Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English superbly portrayed the hysterization of women. They described how the medical profession, made up mostly of men, produced a discourse whereby women were conceived as weak, dependent, and diseased. A woman’s essential nature “was not to be a strong, competent helper, but to be a *patient*.”¹⁹ Her normal state therefore was to be sick. Specifically, it is the woman’s ovary that dictated her condition and personality. Her brain and intellect were not essential to her being; it was believed that education will only be wasted on her. Ovariectomy, the removal of the ovaries and a form of “female castration,” became the most common form of surgical intervention in the female personality.²⁰ Consequently, a woman who was relieved of a diseased ovary would be a better, saner woman. As soon as her child-bearing days were over, undergoing hysterectomy would supposedly do her a lot of good.

On the other hand, the assertive, “oversexed” woman was seen as “a sperm-draining vampire who would leave men weak, spent, and effeminate.”²¹ This sort of woman

¹⁹ Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English, *For Her Own Good: Two Centuries of the Experts’ Advice to Women* (New York: Anchor Books, 1978), 103.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 123.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 127.

exhibited an abnormality and was therefore to be treated and controlled. The doctor's prescription: a therapy that effectively rendered women docile and obedient. Thus, the mechanisms of power-knowledge constituted women as inferior; they should be modest and passive, obedient to their husbands and solicitous about their children. Women were to view marriage as a "sexuo-economic relation" in which they performed sexual and reproductive duties for financial support. Indeed, the end result of this deployment of sexuality could only be the "nervous woman."

One may argue that a lot of things have changed since the nineteenth century. The exercise of power also entails resistance, which in the case of the sexualization of women as hysterical has given rise to alternative discourses. Nowadays, the modern woman is no longer thought of as weak and dependent; rather she is in control of her own destiny and does not even need a man to be successful. She can be a mother even without carrying a child in her womb, through surrogacy. In a way, the tables have since been somewhat turned. It is now the woman who is seen, biologically, as the stronger sex, for evolution demands that the sturdier, hardier sex bear the species' progeny to increase its likelihood of survival. The Y-chromosome that distinguishes males from females is likewise viewed as a degenerate variant of the healthier X-chromosome, which

partly explains why women generally outlive men. Indeed, biology seems to prove that man is actually the second sex.²²

Moreover, the economic progress responsible for the vast improvement in the material conditions of life during our time is seemingly in conflict with the hysterization of women. The need to exploit labor capacity, to unleash women's potential, is incompatible with their enfeeblement and oppression. Women must enter the work force and strive for equality with men to ensure the sustainability of economic development.

But the economic imperative does not require the attenuation of sexuality. On the contrary, the deployment of sexuality entails a continual extension of areas and forms of control. Such a deployment can evolve as the capillaries of power-knowledge seek new channels through which they can work more efficiently. Indeed, among the categories for social classification and organization, sexuality has proven to be most effective, since it is invested with "the greatest instrumentality: useful for the greatest number of maneuvers and capable of serving as a point of support, as a linchpin, for the most varied strategies."²³ Perhaps, this ultimately has something to do with the tremendous and irresistible power of the drive to reproduce. The mating instinct in animals is

²² See Steve Jones, *Y: The Descent of Men* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2005).

²³ Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 103.

relentless. Much energy is devoted just to overcome any obstacle to sexual consummation, or simply to advertise one's sexual fitness.

The principle of the conservation of energy dictates that force, and therefore power, is conserved and never extinguished; it could only be transmuted or redirected. So if some mechanisms of sexuality were eschewed, it was merely to redirect the energies of individuals to their proper, more economically acceptable activities. As power seeks the path of least resistance a lot of misdirection is going on too, for the success of power also depends on its ability to hide its own mechanisms.²⁴

In this regard, there are clear similarities between the transition from torture to disciplinarity, and the transition from the hysterization of women to the beautification or glamorization of modern women's bodies. Both the carceral system and sexuality are forms of the disciplinary or surveillance system, which is at the same time productive of a social scientific discourse that enables normalization and social control. Their respective evolutions are therefore expected to mirror each other.

The general view regarding disciplinarity is that it represented a more humane treatment of criminals: prison is kinder, less painful, and less cruel than torture. Torture was a bad economy of power due to its inefficiencies, not to

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 86.

mention its tendency to incite unrest among the population. Punishment had to be rationalized. With the new system of disciplinary rules, the effects were more regular, more effective, more constant, and more detailed. The economic cost was also diminished. In the end, the new system was not really designed to be more humane, but to punish better, to insert the power to punish more deeply into the social body through the surveillance of not just the criminals but of the entire society itself. We need to disabuse ourselves of the illusion that penalty is primarily intended to reduce crime. So if the law is now more humane, it is not because of the recognition of some humanity in the criminal, but only because of “a necessary regulation of the effects of power.”²⁵

Similarly, the deployment of sexuality with respect to women had to change since it lost some of its efficacy as economic processes and political structures can no longer rely on it for support. It too suffered from a bad economy of power. The deployment of sexuality had to evolve as dictated by economic and political exigencies. The disciplinary system interrogated by Foucault in his social historical works transformed itself over time, the result of the play of anonymous, ever-changing, omnipresent forces.²⁶

²⁵ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 92.

²⁶ Eric Paras, *Foucault 2.0: Beyond Power and Knowledge* (New York: Other Press, 2006), 154.

For one, the scope of the hysterization of women was not as great; it covered only the higher echelons of society. The vast majority of women were unaffected as the economic structures could not uphold the hysterization of all women. Poorer women needed to be productive, doctors were few, and treatment was expensive. In the consumption-driven economy that now prevails, women take on a dual role as producers and consumers. Old assumptions about gender, such as innate differences in abilities, have become intellectually and practically untenable. There is now more equality for women than ever before as female empowerment has greatly benefited society in a variety of ways.

A more effective deployment of sexuality focused on women must be capable of reaching out to all women and recognizing their equal status and vital economic role, while constituting women as docile and obedient subjects at the same time. The beautification or glamorization of women's bodies fulfills that role. In the movement from the "nervous woman" to the "glamorous woman," we find an evolution towards a more efficient economy of disciplinary practices in the deployment of sexuality. In addition, this new form of the deployment of sexuality dovetails with penalty through its promotion of prostitution, an instance of illegality usually associated with the delinquents and habitual offenders of the prison system.

The glamorization of women's bodies introduces an ideal of beauty that is essentially sexual. A feminine body that highlights a woman's sexuality is socially constructed through cosmetic products and procedures, dieting, and incitement to sex. A woman is thus normalized in terms of her cosmetic, dietary, and sexual practices. The beautiful woman is a sexy woman, an object of sex, a docile and obedient body that society creates. We thus witness the functioning of the dialectic: from the hysterization of women as thesis and the glamorization of women as antithesis. Hysterization is oppressive, but glamorization is liberating and empowering. Under the former regime women are viewed negatively as being helpless, while under the latter regime they are viewed positively as empowered. Ultimately, it is this asymmetry that accounts for the superiority of the latter.

With respect to penalty, Foucault identifies three instruments of disciplinary power: 1) hierarchical observation or the ability to oversee all the subjects controlled with a single gaze, 2) the ability to make normalizing judgments and to punish those who violate the norm, and 3) the use of examination to observe subjects and to make normalizing judgments about people.²⁷ These modes of domination and subjugation that exact obedience and docility from its subjects are likewise central to the deployment of sexuality.

²⁷ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 170.

The paragon of hierarchical observation is Jeremy Bentham's Panopticon, a structure designed to allow prison officials a complete observation of criminals. It is a tremendous source of power because it affords the possibility of total surveillance. The mere existence of the structure constrains criminals; the officials need not always be present. Eventually, the prisoners come to control themselves for fear of being seen. In this way, the Panopticon captures the essence of the disciplinary society.

While women do not reside in prisons, a panoptical gaze nevertheless follows them everywhere they go, subjecting them to its perpetual observation and judgment. It often takes the form of a "male connoisseur" that resides within the very consciousness of women.²⁸ But with the proliferation of sexy images in billboards, magazines, movies, television, and other media as the Internet, the normalizing gaze is also feminine, inasmuch as women themselves are consumers. Hence, the disciplinary power that inscribes femininity in the female body is everywhere and it is nowhere; the disciplinarian is everyone and yet no one in particular.

Successful fashioning of the docile body relies ultimately on internalization of standards, rules, and norms. In other

²⁸ Sandra Lee Bartky, "Foucault, Femininity, and the Modernization of Patriarchal Power," in *Feminism and Foucault: Reflections on Resistance*, eds. Irene Diamond and Lee Quinby (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1988), 72.

words, even as women's active cultivation of femininity may be promoted by images in magazines or other media and reinforced by means of rewards and punishments via any number of social institutions, the real mark of disciplinary power is its deployment by the target individual subjects themselves, directing this power inward, applying it to their own bodies, their own selves.²⁹ Truly, every woman becomes to herself her own jailer. The panopticism that prevails in the glamorization of women's bodies is total. It reaches out to all women, rich and poor, young and old, and therefore sexualizes all of them. Even a prepubescent child, dolled up à la Barbie, already feels the omnipresent gaze that sexualizes her.

Normalization commences with the panoptic gaze. Everyone is measured up and located in a spectrum from homely to beautiful, from plain to glamorous. Rank in itself may serve as a reward or punishment.³⁰ For some, reward comes in the form of improved social status or a successful career. But often the reward is simply being able to retain whatever status one already enjoys—a seemingly Sisyphean task. Just keeping one's place is a difficult enough challenge. Many eventually develop some form of inferiority complex from not measuring up to the ideal.

²⁹ Ellen K. Feder, "The Dangerous Individual(s) Mother: Biopower, Family, and the Production of Race," *Hypatia* 22, no. 2 (Spring 2007): 61.

³⁰ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 181.

Normalization is somewhat complicated by the lack of a single ideal for the feminine body, or even a singular incarnation for it. Even within the confines of a particular culture and a particular historical period, there is no one static ideal of the feminine body. The female body of fashion varies over time and across cultures. But the plasticity of the ideal of beauty actually makes it a more powerful instrument of disciplinarity. Women are held captive by a web of feminine ideals. No one woman can satisfy every possible ideal; therefore, every woman is found wanting by some measure. Women will always be viewed negatively simply because there will always be some ideal of femininity against which they fail. Mass media advertising constantly reminds women that their bodies are deficient and inferior, hence the need for make-up, cosmetic surgery, fashion accessories, diet, exercise, et cetera. Indeed, as with the hysterization of women, the feminine body is constituted and experienced as the enemy of the woman.³¹

Unwittingly, every woman undergoes constant examination. She need not literally sit in for a test; her every move is already a response that can be analyzed and graded, by others and by herself. Talent scouts are always on the lookout for the models of femininity. And with the ubiquity of the Internet, everyone who is wired has become a talent

³¹ Ann J. Cahill, "Foucault, Rape, and the Construction of the Feminine Body," *Hypatia* 15, no. 1 (Winter 2000): 52.

scout. Every woman is therefore potentially a beauty pageant contestant even if she has no desire to participate in one. Nevertheless, every woman internalizes a disciplinary project of bodily perfection. Even if unattainable, a woman tries to come as close to it as possible to reap whatever little reward (even just a fleeting compliment) she can get. The wish to outshine her peers in beauty constantly drives a woman's competitive spirit. Some form of benchmarking is *de rigueur*. Thus, as an instrument of disciplinary power, examination routinely places the subject within a statistical distribution, which at the same time generates a generalized, scientific knowledge that enables a continuous and more effective exercise of power.

The effectiveness of this mode of deployment of sexuality can be measured in terms of its economic impact. As in pedagogical systems, obedience and docility are exacted from the general populace in exchange for skills and attitudes that contribute to economic production. The regimen of glamorization stimulates the manufacture of products and services for the economy. It gives rise to a multitude of industries satisfying manufactured demands, that is, needs that did not exist before, at least not at present levels. For instance, the cultivation of a woman's body as an ornamented surface requires specialized knowledge and skill. Time and money are spent on a vast array of treatments: acupuncture, aromatherapy, bleaching, botox, bust treatments, cathiodermie, collagen facial, diamond peel,

electrolysis, eyebrow shaping, galvanic, glutathione, health farms, hot-oil, infra-red, jacuzzi, lash and brow tinting, liposuction, make-up, manicure, massage, mind detox, mud treatments, panthermal, paraffin wax, pedicure, placenta, radio frequency therapy, rebonding, reflexology, sauna, Slendertone, spa, steam cabinet, stem-cell, sunbeds, tanning, thread vein treatment, vacuum suction, warts removal, and waxing. The list goes on ad nauseam. The glamorization of women therefore answers the need of consumer capitalism to maintain high levels of consumption.

All the systems of discipline imposed upon the body by a web of ideal (beautiful) body types, like the regimens of dieting, exercise, and cosmetics, require self-discipline, controlled appetites, and the circumscription of appropriate feminine behavior and appearance. A woman must tread carefully in performing her regimen and strike a very fine balance: her every movement or gesture is expected to exhibit not only constriction, but grace and an eroticism restrained by modesty.³² With sex, women need to learn the subtle distinction between a permissible performance of enjoying sex acts men want and an impermissible display of liking them too much.³³ This is the rationale for the never-ending stream of sex advice to young women on how to

³² Bartky, 67.

³³ Adrian Howe, *Sex, Violence and Crime: Foucault and the 'Man' Question* (Oxon: Routledge-Cavendish, 2008), 38.

meet certain performance requirements to please their man. The perfect heterosexual orgasmic performance requires a delicate balancing act: a woman should not be too eager (her man does not want a slut), but she should not hold back either (he does not want a prude).³⁴ Such is the razor's edge that women must tread.

Disciplinary practices often impose seemingly contradictory movements. After all, the virtue cultivated is perfect obedience, not critical reflection or engagement; and contradictory commands or expectations are the best means for ensuring obedient and docile subjects. In this manner, the sexual drive is readily transmuted into an economic drive for production and consumption. Indeed, a consumer economy thrives on contrasting drives. As producers of goods and services subjects must sublimate, delay and repress desires for immediate gratification, and cultivate the work ethic. On the other hand, as consumers, the same subjects must capitulate to desires and indulge on impulse. It is therefore not difficult to see why the economy prefers a deployment of sexuality that treats women both negatively and positively, and that is simultaneously oppressive and liberating.

Another important aspect of the discourse of glamorization is its total reach. It is not merely a regime of domination for women; it likewise affects men and

³⁴ Ibid., 47.

constitutes them in new ways. The panoptic gaze that constitutes women reflects back on the men, constituting them as sexual as well. A beautiful, sexy woman, with looks improved by cosmetics and wearing skimpy clothing, is presented by advertising as an image to be envied by women and desired above all by men. The “glamorous woman” is an ideal that demands a specific setting, one that is opulent, cultured, and sophisticated. This setting is a space inhabited by her counterpart: the “metrosexual” or the “playboy gentleman.” These male types compete against each other to gain alpha male rank or status. Men are ultimately measured against the “beautiful” or “glamorous woman.” Possessing her requires exuding an analogous sexual sophistication, requiring a lifestyle that is centered on the acquisition of material things produced by the economy—from exquisite fountain pens to flashy sports cars and yachts. The glamorous woman, as a trophy wife or mistress, is just perhaps the flashiest acquisition.

The “glamorous woman” thus reveals herself as a paragon of the deployment of sexuality, a constituted subject that, according to the dynamics of Foucauldian power-knowledge relations, constitutes others at the same time. But as a woman is empowered, discourse also produces a desire for her to appear vulnerable, expressed, for example, by showing a lot of skin and posing seductively, and therefore running the risk of being labeled a “loose woman.” But it is precisely this vulnerability that exposes her to the threat of

rape, which is also a constitutive moment in the production of the feminine body.³⁵ Why would a woman suffer all these threats to the integrity of her person?

The intensification of power relations brings along with it the increase of capabilities that are often interpreted by a liberal political tradition in terms of increased autonomy.³⁶ A woman therefore sees the regimens of beautification as fundamentally liberating, as exercises of her freedom. She dwells on the illusion that she is in complete control. A sense of mastery as well as a secure sense of identity are afforded the subject of the new deployments of sexuality. A beautiful woman is very much aware of the effect her desired body has upon the male population, and revels in it. She comes under the sway of a very alluring picture: an image of herself living in a paradise of sensual delights, opulence, luxury, and fame. Is that not a life worthy of the Faustian pact? To exchange life in its entirety for sex itself, for the truth and sovereignty of sex: that is the dream. Sex, as Foucault observed, is indeed worth dying for.³⁷

But what exactly is this thing called “sex”? The truth about sex is supposed to be disclosed by science as *scientia sexualis*. Hence, the control and mastery of sex, and therefore of its deployments, would not be possible without

³⁵ Cahill, 56.

³⁶ Cressida J. Heyes, *Self-Transformations: Foucault, Ethics, and Normalized Bodies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 77.

³⁷ Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 156.

the scientific discourse on sexuality. Power relations constituted sexuality as a subject of empirical investigation only by establishing it as a possible object. And as sexuality was invested with the mechanisms of knowledge and discourse, it became an anchor for power to latch on to. Therefore, it is only through the operations of power-knowledge relations that sexuality itself came about. Consequently, sexuality is not a kind of natural given that power attempts merely to regulate or that knowledge gradually uncovers. Nobody is really born with it. Sexuality is an artifice, a historical construct, “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 controls and resistances, are linked to one another, in accordance with a few major strategies of knowledge and power.”³⁸

As a set of effects produced in bodies, behaviors, and social relations by a certain deployment of a complex political technology, sexuality endows everyone with a sexual essence, and therefore, a sexual identity. Entire societies are atomized or individualized in terms of its conventional, and to a certain extent arbitrary, categories. It was not the Almighty who created the woman around a uterus; it was man who so created woman. An ontology of persons

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 105-6.

emerged from the normalization of a whole population, an ontology that was then internalized by those persons as fixed and determined identities.³⁹ The effectiveness and productivity of the social apparatus of sexuality convinced individuals of the naturalness and necessity of the sexual identities culturally created. Women (and men) therefore became resigned with what they mistakenly perceived to be their fate or destiny. Yet nobody was really born *this* way!

Eventually, the fictive categories of sexuality serve to establish and maintain a social grid or practices of social partitioning, whereby individuals are identified, located in the social order, related to other individuals, and normalized or graded. More importantly, the grid produces knowledge and defines the channels through which power flows. Through knowledge of sexuality, society is able to exercise more power over life itself. Indeed, the health of the social body (public health) is one of the essential objectives of political power. Through sexuality, medicine has become a vital discipline of social control, producing medico-administrative knowledge that prescribes general forms of existence and behavior, and transforming the doctor into the great advisor and expert. Consequently, the institution of socio-economic relations through the sexualization of society leads to the repression of some activities and the

³⁹ Heyes, 76.

encouragement of others, all to ensure the greater efficiency and utility of the social apparatus. Arguably, the glamorization of women's bodies contributes more effectively towards the "bio-politics of population" whose object is to control and regulate population growth, health, and life expectancy, among others.

Ultimately, the deployment of sexuality created the imaginary element that is "sex": a fictitious unity posited as a causal principle that made it possible to group together diverse components, from anatomical elements to biological functions, conducts, sensations, and pleasures.⁴⁰ Its immense power derives from its constitution as a secret to be discovered everywhere. Indeed, its internal operating principle reflects the drive for disclosure: "the desire for sex—the desire to have it, to have access to it, to discover it, to liberate it, to articulate it in discourse, to formulate it in truth."⁴¹ This fabricated desire for sex is the fundamental guiding principle for the glamorization of women's bodies, culminating in an aesthetic that is essentially sexual. As the deployment of sexuality evolves, the composition of this fictitious unity we call "sex" likewise does, in accordance with whichever adaptable mechanism of power-knowledge better guarantees the effective constitution of the subject as docile and obedient.

⁴⁰ Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 154.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 156.

III. Ethics and the Technologies of the Self

Thus we learn from Foucault that our very subjectivity, together with the truth about ourselves, is produced through techniques and relations of power. The self, to the degree that it is disciplined and normalized, is a fabrication of power and knowledge relations. Modern man is, indeed, an invention of power-knowledge. But power-knowledge relations tend to capture our freedom and freeze it to certain forms. To be held captive by a picture entails an inability to change one's way of thinking and behaving. One such powerful picture is of a glamorous feminine body, one endlessly binding, deodorizing, dieting, painting, and waxing, while seemingly enjoying her beauty regimen and not thinking of it as tiresome, believing it to be empowering, and not realizing it is actually a forced and subliminally imposed identity. So individuals constituted by discipline are not free, even if they sometimes feel a sense of empowerment. They are instead lulled into docility and submission.

To take back the self, we need to recover our freedom. No progress towards reclaiming freedom is made with the transition from brutish regimes of power-knowledge to more humane ones. There is as much human suffering, if not more, caused by the glamorization of women's bodies than the earlier hysterization of women due to the greater reach of the former and the unattainable ideal it imposes. Both are simply different facets of the politics of the human body, whose goal is to discipline the human body and its

sexuality. The evolution of the deployments of sexuality could only lead to new and more efficient capacities for understanding and controlling human beings. Generally, the evolution of mechanisms of power follows a dialectical progression, transitioning from one knowledge-based system of domination to another—from brutishness to humaneness, oppression to empowerment, less efficiency to more—but definitely not from less freedom to more.

How does one escape the clutches of this unrelenting dialectic? Feminists seek ways of undoing the power men everywhere wield over women, power that for them has become a model for every other form of exploitation and illegitimate control. But the power under which women are subjected does not emanate from men only. Power relationships are extremely widespread in human relationships; power comes from all directions. Even women themselves exercise power over everyone. A beautiful, glamorous woman holds more than enough power over the rest. (Wasn't it a woman's face that launched a thousand ships?) Feminists rile against the more complex, abstract exercises of power, like patriarchy, whose provenance may be hard to pin down, while ignoring the simplest expression of naked power: that which is exercised by women over the rest. We learned to cede our freedoms within the family. And it is usually the mother who has the greatest formative influence in the family. "Mothers know best" is the simplest truth of power-knowledge relations. Indeed, the family is the

original prison. The sexual freedom promised by feminists is far from liberating. As the expression of power comes to be increasingly cloaked in humanism and humanitarianism, the conditions of oppression actually become worse. The benevolent appearance of modern power only makes it that much more difficult to resist and overcome.

The path to freedom does not lie in simply rejecting hegemonic images of femininity and developing a new female aesthetic. Chances are, the new aesthetic would be just another disciplinary image like that of the glamorous woman. Neither can the sciences of sexuality set us on the path to liberation as they are thoroughly implicated in our existing regime of truth. There is a need to take differences seriously, but not by simply affirming conceptual formations that promote recognition and domination based on conventional linguistic categories. Such categories can have a homogenizing effect: suppressing, dislocating, and silencing the differences among things, and legitimizing their perceived similarities. It is only through some form of genealogical or archaeological thought, in which events stand out in their uniqueness, that differences can be liberated and the dominance of identity disarmed.⁴² Otherwise, we will never be able to overcome the dubious idea that there exists a human nature that has been alienated

⁴² Charles E. Scott, "Ethics at the Boundary: Beginning with Foucault," *Journal of Speculative Philosophy* 25, no. 2 (2011): 204.

or concealed by mechanisms of repression as a result of certain historical, economic, and social processes.⁴³

Foucault's general prescription is quite clear: "It is the agency of sex that we must break away from, if we aim—through a tactical reversal of the various mechanisms of sexuality—to counter the grips of power with the claims of bodies, pleasures, and knowledges, in their multiplicity and their possibility of resistance. The rallying point of the counterattack against the deployment of sexuality ought not to be sex-desire, but bodies and pleasures."⁴⁴

What we should thus aim for is a different economy of bodies and pleasures. The modern subject is the result of a unification of elements under the idea of sex. But this way of looking at the subject is not necessary. Foucault believes that we can learn from the ancient Greeks and Romans about alternative modes of conceiving the subject. Classical antiquity calls into question the assumption that sexual behavior reflects or expresses an individual's sexuality. Human beings, for the ancients, differ from one another in their sexual tastes in a great variety of ways, including sexual object-choice. But we moderns have come to associate sexual object-choice with a fixed sexual nature. And yet, as one commentator has pointed out, "it would never occur to us to refer to a person's dietary preference to some innate,

⁴³ Foucault, *Ethics*, 282.

⁴⁴ Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 157.

characterological disposition, to see in his or her strongly expressed and even unvarying preference for the white meat of chicken the symptom of a profound psychophysical orientation, leading us to identify him or her in contexts quite removed from that of the eating of food as, say, a 'pectoriphage' or a 'stethovore'."⁴⁵

Sexual tastes cannot therefore be a fundamental basis for the determination of personalities. The inevitability of such tastes is really a cultural effect. Human beings can be constituted in a variety of ways. Free Greek males proved their manhood not through love or sex, but through war and other agonistic contests. It is not therefore correct to characterize the Greek *ethos* involving sex as a sexuality at all but rather as a more generalized *ethos* of penetration and domination.⁴⁶ Undoubtedly, penetration with a phallic-like instrument was a successful strategy in war for the Greeks, whether it be in using the ram of an Athenian trireme to penetrate the opposing galley's hull, or the long spears of Macedonian phalangites to penetrate the enemy formations. What we find in this overarching discourse is an *ethos* for both love and war.

Foucault's analysis has been questioned in part because of his supposedly selective account of Greek women as eternal minors, destined to live in a private, domestic sphere

⁴⁵ Halperin, 270.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 266.

excluded from public life, and treated merely as means to produce legitimate heirs.⁴⁷ This myopia was perceived as perpetuating the patriarchal view of women. But Foucault himself believed that sexual liberation is not the answer for women. He even kept himself aloof from movements of sexual liberation.⁴⁸ And he did suspect that the term “gay” could be as oppressive a label as any other.⁴⁹ Foucault simply refuses to consider sexual difference as a relevant category for political and ethical individuality. There is therefore a need to de-sexualize certain acts. For instance, Foucault controversially suggested in a round-table discussion in 1977 that rapists should be punished only for a crime of violence, and not for a sex crime.⁵⁰ In another time, rape was considered as an act of passion arising from a particular context rather than from a type of individual.

Foucault’s interest in unearthing the sexual practices of the ancients lies in exploring alternative ways of relating to the self. In *ars erotica*, as found in some ancient societies, truth is drawn from pleasure itself. Pleasure is not viewed under an absolute law of the permitted and forbidden or a regime of truth; it is considered primarily in relation to

⁴⁷ Josée Néron, “Foucault, l’Histoire de la Sexualité et l’occultation de l’oppression de femmes,” *Nouvelles Questions Féministes* 17, no. 4 (November 1996): 87.

⁴⁸ Paras, 147.

⁴⁹ Macey, 319.

⁵⁰ Taylor, 1.

itself.⁵¹ Being related only to itself, pleasure does not represent sexual identities as classified by *scientia sexualis*. Various pleasures do not entail specific orientations at all. Consequently, the only possible liberation is the liberation of pleasures from the regime of sexuality and sexual identities. Pleasure had to be freed from the imperative to have a “true sex.”

In this connection, Foucault amended his earlier critique of (Christian) confession as an essential component in the exercise of modern power by which sexual truth was extracted from the subject. He subsequently argued that the ancient Greeks (Pythagoreans, Stoics, and Epicureans) deployed confessional practices that were not complicit with the functioning of power and whose object was to enable the subject to live differently, better, and more happily.⁵² These practices are rules of conduct that enabled men to develop and transform themselves through intentional and voluntary actions; as “arts of existence” their collective aim is to cultivate one’s life into an *oeuvre*.⁵³ They are thus veritable technologies of the self (*tekhne peri ton bion*), ascetic practices (*askesis*) that defined philosophical activity in times past.⁵⁴

⁵¹ Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 57.

⁵² Dave Tell, “Rhetoric and Power: An Inquiry into Foucault’s Critique of Confession,” *Philosophy & Rhetoric* 43, no. 2 (2010): 95.

⁵³ Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), 10.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 9.

Hence, through an exercise of oneself in the activity of thought, the self commences on its path towards reinvention.

Foucault's notion of the constitution of the self accords with an understanding of ethics he developed in his courses at the Collège de France. Ethics, for him, is the conscious practice of freedom, the condition of possibility of human beings.⁵⁵ Through a set of practices, as a "rapport à soi," ethics creates or transforms subjectivities.⁵⁶ Among the Greeks, the care of the self was essential for right conduct and the proper practice of freedom. One's *ethos* is a way of being and behavior that manifests itself, not only in one's dealings with others, but also in one's appearance, gait, and in the calm with which one responds to every event. Interestingly enough, the vast self-help industry that plays an important role in the glamorization of women's bodies appears to capitalize on our primeval need to care for the self. Beautification, dieting, and exercise involve practices that seem, at first blush, to exemplify Foucault's technologies of the self. But contemporary self-help movements are not compatible with the notion of care of the self as a practice of freedom. For one the perfection of subjects through beautification can proceed mechanically, in compliance with a set of norms, rather than as exercises that

⁵⁵ Foucault, *Ethics*, 284.

⁵⁶ Joseph J. Tanke, "The Care of the Self and Environmental Politics: Towards a Foucaultian Account of Dietary Practice," *Ethics and the Environment* 12, no. 1 (Spring 2007): 89.

foster subjectivities. It is therefore ethically empty, even as it vaguely mirrors the practices of the care of the self.

The care of the self is not a process of discovering who one truly is but of inventing and improvising who one can be. Any self to be unearthed is a socially constructed entity that serves the disciplinary purposes of society; it is a self that is not of itself. The subject must take the initiative in constituting himself and not cede control to the agency of power-knowledge, even as he finds himself situated within a web of constraints and never completely autonomous of power relations. Through the practice of freedom, the subject transcends his constitution as a mere effect of power relations, an artifact. Subjectivity is an endless capacity for self-transformation. In the end, the subject always maintains a difference and is never fully settled.⁵⁷

With respect to sexuality, the challenge is not so much to liberate our sexuality but to define practices of freedom towards determining “what is sexual pleasure and erotic, amorous and passionate relationships with others.”⁵⁸ Sexuality is a matter of one’s way of living, and must therefore give way to the techniques of the self. However, this does not imply the eventual disappearance of the categories of gender. After all, sexual pleasures are

⁵⁷ Neve Gordon, “Foucault’s Subject: An Ontological Reading,” *Polity* 31, no. 3 (Spring 1999): 413.

⁵⁸ Foucault, *Ethics*, 283.

engendered and experienced by specifically sexed bodies.⁵⁹ We only need to be reminded that although sexuality is a part of our subjectivity, it is ultimately our own creation and does not define our identity. It is not even the individual's fundamental or primitive desire. Sex is not fate; rather, it is a possibility for creative life.⁶⁰

Hence, sexuality is not a defining feature of entire subjects, but of pleasures, if they are to be properly understood and regulated. It is in this light that *aphrodisia*, the works of Aphrodite, are best understood. In classical antiquity, the virtuous man is defined by the moderation of his pleasures, not their nullification. Ascetic practices therefore seek the regulation of pleasure, not their repression.⁶¹ But moderation is not realizable by way of simple obedience to a system of laws or a code of behavior. For one, mastering erotic pleasures requires intense training of bodily functions and a great strength of will. And this mastery cannot involve disciplinary strategies if pleasures were to be points of resistance to the mechanisms of sexuality.⁶² To know and surpass oneself, and master the appetites that threaten to

⁵⁹ Howe, 52.

⁶⁰ Foucault, *Ethics*, 163.

⁶¹ Alexander Nehamas, *The Art of Living: Socratic Reflections from Plato to Foucault* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 179.

⁶² Philipp Haueis, "Apollonian *Scientia Sexualis* and Dionysian *Ars Erotica*? On the Relation between Michel Foucault's *History of Sexuality* and Friedrich Nietzsche's *Birth of Tragedy*," *Journal of Nietzsche Studies* 43, no. 2 (Autumn 2012): 267.

overwhelm one, a concern with the self that resists mechanisms of power is indispensable. If subjects are to escape the power-knowledge relations that constantly threaten to take over their lives, they must understand and constitute themselves in terms of the technologies of the self. Indeed, moderation is an art, a practice of self-limitation that at the same time recognizes the prudent use of pleasures based on need.⁶³

In the domain of pleasures, virtue is a relationship of domination. To be immoderate in one's pleasures is to be enslaved by them. One must strive to be free in relation to pleasures and learn to master them instead. Hence, a tyrant who is a slave to his appetites cannot care for himself, much less others. The care of the self countenances the centrality of the will; the self must take hold of itself. But this leads to an apparent paradox.

With the centrality of will, obedience to oneself becomes the basic virtue of the self-made self. Lest a vicious circle develops, it has been argued that Foucault posited a free subject prior to any "technical elaboration," a subject that is free to choose and transform itself according to its own set of practices.⁶⁴ But this subject is, minimally, none other than the locus of freedom. Other than that, there are only diverse things, like bodies, pleasures and desires, gathered together,

⁶³ Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, 57.

⁶⁴ Paras, 123.

characterized and analyzed in such a way as to dominate and master these diverse elements themselves. So the self itself is a product of power relations, even if these only involve the subject's relation to his or her own actions.⁶⁵ The individual is an effect of power. But it is at the same time the element of its articulation, its vehicle, albeit a focal point of its resistance too.

Foucault's notion of power is not incompatible with the possibility of a (free) subject. For power is not evil; it is simply "games of strategy."⁶⁶ Power involves actions affecting other actions. It creates opportunities for further action and limits their scope. Thus, it impinges on other people and affects their future actions. There is domination, which minimizes personal freedom and sometimes leaves only self-destructive forms of resistance, but also creativity, which maximizes freedom by providing possible avenues for realizing one's wishes and ethos.

Parallels have been noted between Foucault and the late Roman and early medieval philosopher Saint Augustine of Hippo. For Augustine, the inexorable hazards of our social environment are rooted ultimately in the dynamics of relational desires.⁶⁷ At the very heart of each person is the

⁶⁵ Laura Hengehold, "Between Intuition and Genealogy: A Problematic 'Life,'" *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy* 29, no. 3 (2015): 379.

⁶⁶ Foucault, *Ethics*, 298.

⁶⁷ J. Joyce Schuld, *Foucault and Augustine: Reconsidering Power and Love* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2003), 8.

capacity to love, which, once directed toward oneself, gives rise to a *libido dominandi*, a lust for power. This self-love seeks to attain for the individual not simply freedom from vexing restrictions, but also control of others. The lust for power is so expansive it strives to put all other human beings under one's personal dominion. In their fallen state, men are self-absorbed and thus disoriented from their proper end. They view their own selfish interests as being more important than those of their neighbors; and to gain advantage, they form continually changing alliances.⁶⁸ Human relations, as a result, acquire a certain fragility that makes it imperative to order and manage large numbers of people, purportedly guided by the ideal of social justice.

But owing to the ubiquity of power relations, every attempt to rectify injustice becomes inherently ambiguous: there is always the possibility of causing greater harms.⁶⁹ Also, one's pursuit of moral integrity and perfection could come at a great cost to others. Consequently, the model of the Christian life Augustine himself exemplified and commended is not one of perfection, which sets the individual apart from everyone else, but one of shared suffering, which demands constant attentive care for one another.⁷⁰ At any rate, no one will be wholly perfected in

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 161.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 207.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 84-85.

this life. For Augustine, man's nature is "a life varied and manifold and mightily surpassing measurement."⁷¹ And just about the only things preventing him from reaching his goal are "[his] lovers of old, trifles of trifles and vanities of vanities."⁷² Minus his theology, Augustine's analysis of the person buffeted by relations of power comes very close to Foucault's own analytics of power and the subject.

The basic ethical problem for Foucault appears to be how to avoid the misuse of power.⁷³ In relating with others, the self comes to realize the symmetry of power relations. And it is only with this logical understanding that one can begin to treat others as oneself, and therefore as equals. The ethical subject respects the autonomy of individuals and plays the games of power with as little domination as possible. With such an *ethos*, one definitely cannot abuse his power over others. Thus, Foucault's ethics is not prescriptive. It refrains from substantive claims because it is precisely the governmentalization of subjects that limits freedom and ethical life.

Fundamentally, ethics concerns itself with the way a human being transforms himself into a subject. This is accomplished through the practice of self-cultivation. The

⁷¹ Augustine, *The Confessions*, trans. John K. Ryan (New York: Image Books, 1960), 10.17.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 8.11.

⁷³ Miri Rozmarin, "Power, Freedom, and Individuality: Foucault and Sexual Difference," *Human Studies* 28, no. 1 (2005): 9.

subject strives to re-create himself, to become something new. Yet, with the proper care of the self, one begins to understand oneself, his abilities and limits; with the proper care of the self, one learns what it means to be a citizen of the city, the master of a household, or a lover. Hence, the last two volumes of Foucault's *History of Sexuality*, viz., *The Use of Pleasure* and *The Care of the Self*, are historical analyses, reflections on past ethical ways of being. Indeed, the techniques of the self are likewise a fundamental and necessary political task, since resistance to political power can only be through the relationship one has to oneself.

The emergent self is not a discursively constituted bundle of identities. What we normally think to be an identity does not itself guarantee the subject's continuity. The self is always something discontinuous. By disclosing the subject's identity as an empty synthesis, the techniques of the self make possible an aesthetics of existence. They make it possible for the self to reorganize both life and body, not according to universals like "sexuality," but by means of a set of voluntary decisions. In this way, the technologies of the self allow the self to describe his body however he may choose.⁷⁴

Ultimately, Foucault's paradigm for the care of the self is the creation of art.⁷⁵ It is through art that we are able to

⁷⁴ Tell, 111.

⁷⁵ Nehamas, 178.

regain our freedom from the determination of nature. In surrendering our will to external forces, we affirm our biological, animal nature. Only by recovering our autonomy can we constitute ourselves as moral beings and therefore subject to a higher law than those of nature and power-knowledge. The subject, in making himself a work of art, could effectively counter the prevailing modes by which subjects are fabricated, and enter politics and history less constrained by disciplinary practices and their concomitant regimes of truth.

True to art, the art of living has no canons. There is no such thing as *the* art of living; there are only arts of living.⁷⁶ The philosophical care of the self is never fully achieved or finished; it is ongoing and experimental.⁷⁷ It allows for the endless capacity of the mind to create and beautify. The creation of the self is not the deduction of concrete phenomena from universals. It takes as its starting point the Foucauldian theoretical and methodological decision: "Let's suppose that universals do not exist."⁷⁸

Subjectivity is always a question of aesthetic creation; it is not the expressive liberation of some personal essence. Like a great painter, the subject transforms a humdrum world

⁷⁶ Ibid., 184.

⁷⁷ Edward F. McGushin, *Foucault's Askēsis: An Introduction to the Philosophical Life* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2007), 288.

⁷⁸ Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978-1979*, trans. Graham Burchell (Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 3.

with an interplay between the truth of what is real and the exercise of freedom. With expert brushstrokes, he endows dull scenes with an enchantment seemingly precluded by their utter insignificance.⁷⁹ This is why a life of pain and suffering is infinitely preferable to a manufactured non-autonomous, and perhaps vegetative, existence. The former nonetheless retains among its possibilities true beauty and sublimity. This may be disappointing for those who seek the true nature of humanity. But we must be *parrhesiastes*, truth-tellers, unto ourselves in declaring, against the politics of power-knowledge, the real truth about our being. Perhaps, like Friedrich Nietzsche's Zarathustra, we need to announce the coming of the superior man (*der Uebermensch*) who, by transcending his animal and social determination, gained mastery of himself. We would understand then that what Nietzsche's Zarathustra announces is not so much the death of God, but of his murderer: (modern) man. Foucault's last works then fulfill a prophecy made in his early work *Les mots et les choses*: "L'homme est une invention dont l'archéologie de notre pensée montre aisément la date récente. Et peut-être la fin prochaine. [. . .] alors on peut bien parier que l'homme s'effacerait, comme à la limite de la mer un visage de sable."⁸⁰ Yes, man is an invention, but an invention of

⁷⁹ Corey McCall, "The Art of Life: Foucault's Reading of Baudelaire's 'The Painter of Modern Life,'" *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy* 24, no. 2 (2010): 149.

⁸⁰ Michel Foucault, *Les mots et les choses* (Paris: Gallimard, 1966), 398.

each and every one of us, which, like any drawing in the sand at the water's edge, must be drawn anew, without being constrained by any previous markings.

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