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LITERATURE AND POLITICS IN THE LATER FOUCAULT

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Contents

1 Introduction

In recent years, the publication of a series of texts, which had been languishing unedited in the BnF's collection, has opened a fertile debate on the legacy of the late Foucault. My intention in this work is to revise the place that literature occupied within the work of the Frenchman. In order to do so, I will review texts from the most recent *Folie, langage, littérature*[1] [*Madness, Language, Literature*] (2019) and *La grande étrangère* (2013) [published in English as *Language, Madness, and Desire: On Literature* (2015)], which are devoted exclusively to literature, to the references Foucault makes to literature regarding other questions, as in the Louvain, Berkeley, and Collège de France lectures on Greek tragedy and modern literature, among others.

As Judith Revel has already stated in "Un héritage de Foucault. Entre fidélité et libres usages", the opening of the Foucault collection by the BnF in 2013 "reopened and revived everything that we believed we knew up until now" (Revel, 2019: 183). And it gave even more meaning to the statement that the work of Foucault was wide-ranging and that there was no one bearer of a legacy as to the final and closed meaning of his texts. Undoubtedly, Foucault's oeuvre, in the light of the diverse publications that have appeared in the 21st century, is one that has a discontinuous, resignified history that is necessarily under constant revision. And this is because, as with the scholia in Spinoza's *Ethics*, every one of Foucault's "minor" texts forms a part of his corpus – discontinuous and broken – of as much importance as the rest of his works. With the aim of clarifying some of these discontinuities, it is necessary to revise the classic readings of Foucault's work. Among texts that have caused a revision of the classic interpretations of the Foucauldian oeuvre, *Foucault(s)* (2017) is noteworthy. This is a broad collection of texts that each considers the question: what meaning does Foucault's thought hold today? To which they answer at the book's beginning, that of a space of thought that is always alive, like thought about the present.

Here I aim to review the relations between literature, subjectivity and politics in the early Foucault. In order to do so, I begin with a hypothesis: that we find in late Foucault not a *forgetting* of literature but a reformulation of the role that literature had come to occupy in his work; and that there is a trace of the texts that Foucault had devoted to the thought of literature since the sixties up until the mid-seventies in the works of his later years.

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1 Translations of this book are mine.

In "**Politics of Literature in Late Foucault**", I address the definition of the concept of democracy in the literary thought of Michel Foucault, the functions of literature in the social space and a politics of literary form. This literary writing is a critique of the principle of social partition that in modernity is associated with madness. Due to the long tradition that links literature and madness, since the classical period (as inspired poet), literature is shown as a privileged space for political criticism.

In **"Literature, Subjectivity and Veridiction"**, I set forth an analysis of the forms of veridiction, in which Foucault shows the necessary intertwining of subject and truth, through the analyses of literary texts that he made in the 1970s and the early 1980s. The writings that Foucault devotes to the work of the Marquis de Sade at the start of the seventies show the relation between writing and novel forms of being. Sade's logic provides Foucault with an alternative to the attributive logic that restricts the forms of being and that would be fundamental in the last stage of his productive output. And it therefore puts forward the connection between truth and desire as a performative truth of self, which Foucault later develops in the concept of parrhesia in the lectures of the 1980s. The concept of desire here is, as Daniele Lorenzini shows, a transhistorical constant and a theory of speech as passion. The technologies of self took up a large part of Foucault's analyses from the late 1970s until his death. The forms of self-transformation of subjects since the classical era do not make an exception of Christianity – far from it. Hence I will analyze these works from a post-secular perspective that I consider necessary for understanding the ethical and dissident value of these behaviors. Lastly, this chapter discusses the legacy of Foucault in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. His concept of subject has been debated and developed by other thinkers, such as Judith Butler and Giorgio Agamben, who both maintain a far-reaching dialogue with the Frenchman. In the case of Butler, her concept of the retroactive subject is of particular interest, as is Agamben's revision of the Heideggerian concept of the subject for death in the light of Foucault's work. As a result of these readings, I propose a concept of [being] subject to the "intemperie".

The chapter entitled "**Tragedy and Historical Event**" looks at the texts of the eighties in which Foucault makes use of the tragedies of Sophocles (*Oedipus Rex*) and Euripides (*Ion*, *The Trojan Women*, and *Orestes*), in order to study the emergence and analysis of the notion of parrhesia. In these lectures, Foucault presents literature as a place of "event", hence the time of literature is the time of *Kairos*. Foucault also analyzes the pre-democratic concept of truth as symbol, a truth that can be reconstructed from different testimonies, which is in the origin of this right to free speech in the Assembly, as *Oedipus Rex* shows. The problematization of this concept, which presents a parrhesia that is open "to anyone",

proceeds from a truth that can no longer be reconstructed into one single truth (symbol), instead it will be plural, fragmentary and, ultimately, difficult to manage. Therefore, Foucault shows that democracy is based upon an idealization of truth as symbol, a truth that could be reconstructed univocally through the testimonies of all the citizens. In its different stages, however, parrhesia demonstrates that the truth is not univocal. Thus, from Ion to Cassandra, parrhesia loses its positive attributes until it is ejected from the democracy. It is at this juncture that it is considered that in order to exercise parrhesia one needs *mathesis* or *paideia*. Then, technologies became a part of the self and not a supplement to it. It is at this moment that the truth about oneself, the truth about the world and the technologies of self are left interwoven until modernity. As a consequence, they begin to draw the outlines of a concept of power that will be coercive and productive at the same time. In Deleuze's words, "Foucault's fundamental idea is that of a dimension of subjectivity derived from power and knowledge without being dependent on them" (Deleuze, *Spinoza*, 101).

Among the different destinations of this concept, I here look at what ties it to modern literature, from tragedy, passing through Menippean satire, down to the polyphonic novel. Literature acquires from this mode the capacity to act critically in the world.

Finally, the last chapter, "**Foucault and Literary Theory in the 21st Century**", is a proposal for the dialogue of this later Foucault with the literary theory of the twenty-first century. On the one hand, I take up elements from Foucault the "reader of literature", from his texts of the sixties, to show his strategies of reading, framed in principle by a Nietzschean legacy and his plurisignificant consideration of text. I have examined the wide use of the metaphor of the eye as reader in his first texts and shown his closeness to Barthes in the early sixties. In the second part, I have set up a dialogue between Foucault and the Marxist tradition of literature, through the Althusserian concept of "Donner à voir", in particular with Lukács, Bakhtin and his circle, Althusser and Adorno. Lastly, I consider that Foucault's politics of literature most fruitfully engages with that proposal by Jacques Rancière. For this reason, the last section is devoted to analysing the similarities and differences, principally, based on their respective concepts of truth and literature.

2 Towards a Politics of Literature in Foucault

2.1 Democracy of Literature

The publication of the Collège de France lectures in 2013 have made it necessary to reconsider the question of literature in Foucault's work. We can affirm that in the early 1960s, literature principally occupied a transgressive "outside", a marginal-central corpus in relation to his work on the history of thought.[2] Literature was then an archaeology of discursive forms in a privileged relation to a non-contradictory logos (madness-truth), which enabled Foucault to construct, as Judith Revel would observe, a discourse of experience as passage to a limit that is based in the blurring of the subject (Revel, *Foucault, une pensée du discontinu*).

At the end of the 1960s, however, following the critique made by Derrida in 1967 in "Cogito and the History of Madness" and his readings of the Anglophone analytic philosophers, Foucault[3] accepted the impossibility of thinking a free and freed subject from a position of exteriority, that zero point to which Derrida had referred. As a consequence, the Foucauldian project of the search for novel forms of being would outline in his later works a genealogy that, responding to Derrida, did indeed plant its Greek roots. This was in concordance with his work from the sixties, in which he announced that "fût-il celui de la dissolution du sujet-demeure une *expérience,* et c'est probablement en cela que reside l'étrangeté de la position de Foucault" (Revel, *Foucault, une pensée du discontinu*, 143).

After this turn at the end of the 1960s, Foucault sought an alternative to the inside/outside, self/other, law/transgression dichotomy, and literature ceased to occupy that privileged and marginal place that had associated it with Unreason. Following the Buffalo lectures on Sade in 1971 – which I consider to be the threshold between the two definitions – literature is formed as an eventual historical discourse for resistance, which entails consequences for the configuration of common space.

It is therefore at the end of the 1960s and beginning of the 1970s, as Antonio Campillo states in "Foucault y Derrida: historia de un debate – sobre la historia" ["Foucault and Derrida: history of a debate – on history"] (1995), that a model of thought, Nietzschean in nature, appears: that of thought as resistance. This concept evinces the abandonment of the inside/outside dialectical structure, because

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2 Here his monographs on R. Roussel and M. Blanchot and his articles on Artaud, Bataille and Sade, among others, stand out.

3 For analysis of the debate between Foucault and Derrida in the direction proposed here, see Blanco, "Razón y Sinrazón".

it appears inseparably united to power as a *reversible* concept, in the words of Judith Revel. If power relations are established everywhere, and if there is no outside to transgress towards, resistance implies the possibility of opening new spaces of struggle. The relations of power and resistance are founded contemporaneously and reciprocally. The concept of power in Foucault is now more complex, and it cannot be judged as positive or negative: power is, simultaneously, coercive and productive.

Therefore, neither will literature be the mere production of a word outside the order of discourse; rather, it is spread as "real" discourse. Yet, Revel says, this literature would be a real "that overflows, exceeds, disorders, abandons 'nature'" (*Foucault, une pensée du discontinu*, 121), and which would be close to Deleuze's concept of plane of immanence. We now find the references to literature in Foucault's work not in the margins or at the periphery, but threaded throughout his principal works. In "The Stage of Philosophy" (1978), Foucault states that the theatre always deals with the event, but this statement can be extended to literature in general. The status of literature shifts, and it now forms part of the discourses that work on the possible as opposed to the immutable. Literature is a historical testimony of an event, which in Foucault, since *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, always has a linguistic nature.

In an interview given in 1975, "Se débarrasser de la philosophie: À propos de la littérature" ["The Functions of Literature"], Foucault refers to this step as a shift toward "bad literature". This designation is very similar to what Gilles Deleuze, in that same year, defines in *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature* as "minor literature". We must remember that in Deleuze's definition of "minor literature", in reference to Kafka, the second characteristic is that "everything in it is political", insofar as each individual problem is immediately connected with the political, and with the collective – *literature is the affair of the people*, Deleuze emphasizes in his reading of Kafka (Deleuze, *Kafka*, 17). Literature is defined by Deleuze as a collective device of utterance and as a machine of desire. "There isn't a subject; *there are only collective assemblages of enunciation*, and literature expresses these acts insofar as they're not imposed from without and insofar as they exist only as diabolical powers to come or revolutionary forces to be constructed" (18).

This evolution toward a politics of literature also has an internal connection with his contemporary works on a political ontology of the present. At the same time, it entails a distancing from his original proposal of an ontology of literature, in which the influence of Martin Heidegger had been fundamental. The relation with Heidegger is particularly interesting in this evolution. In 1947, Heidegger published his *Letter on Humanism*, in which he confronts the question

of the current state of "Humanism", and for the first time introduces the debate that would culminate in what has been called "posthumanism". Heidegger considers that the question for the human being passes through a critique of the language of logic and grammar. Philosophy and poetry, says Heidegger, would therefore be responsible for freeing language in order to make possible the happening of being in language, and to expose the truth of being as disclosure:

> Language is the house of being. In its home human beings dwell. Those who think and those who create with words are the guardians of this home. Their guardianship accomplishes the manifestation of being insofar as they bring this manifestation to language and preserve it in language through their saying. [...] The liberation of language from grammar into a more original essential framework is reserved for thought and poetic creation.
>
> (*Letter on Humanism*, 11–12)

This event or *Ereignis* is an ontology of language and is dependent on the classic concept of truth as *aletheia*. We can consider that Foucault, for his part, at first shared with Heidegger that search for alternative modes of discourse for philosophy in hand with literature, by which I refer to the pieces on literature that he published in the 1960s. But I think that Foucault, in his project of the search for novel forms of being, sets off from a definition of truth that is radically changed, no longer understood as *aletheia* – in the sense in which Heidegger defined it – but as "games of truth" or veridiction (that is, the modes in which truth is enunciated). In *Wrong-Doing, Truth-Telling*, Foucault stated:

> If critical philosophy is a philosophy that starts not from the wonderment that there is being but from the surprise that there is truth, then we can clearly see that there are two forms of critical philosophy. On the one hand, there is that which asks under what conditions – formal or transcendental – there can be true statements. And on the other, there is that which investigates the forms of veridiction, the different forms of truth-telling. In the case of a critical philosophy that investigates veridiction, the problem is that of knowing not under what conditions a statement is true, but rather what are the different games of truth and falsehood that are established, and according to what forms they are established. In the case of a critical philosophy of veridictions, the problem is not that of knowing how a subject in general may understand an object in general. The problem is that of knowing how subjects are effectively tied within and by the forms of veridiction in which they engage.
>
> (*Wrong-Doing, Truth-Telling*, 20)

This distance with respect to Heidegger is crucial, since the constitution of subjectivity will no longer depend on the being of language but on the political subject's ability to speak, which is defined by their linguistic capability – a linguistic capability that, nonetheless, both for Foucault and for Heidegger, was

dominated by rationality, or what in "The Stage of Philosophy" (1978) Foucault called "the theatre of truth".

Therefore, the concept of literature as event differs from the Heideggerian concept of an ontology of literature.

2.2 The Political Functions of *True* Literature

Although it is true that, as Foucault defined in "Langage et littérature" (1966), the concept of literature as we know it belongs to modernity, in the works in which Foucault studies the relations between law and literature, he traces a brief genealogy of the political function of the discourse denominated "literary" from the classical era until his time. In *Wrong-Doing, Truth Telling,* the Louvain lectures (1981), Foucault states:

> From the time of Greek theatre up to at least the end of the eighteenth century, one of the functions, although certainly not the sole function, of theatre in European societies was to be the place or a stage for debating the problem of the law. This was unlike the novel, but not, perhaps, unlike the epic or the American Western which, after all, also presents a problem of law, of the confrontation of rights, of the confrontation of law and vengeance, of the right of conquest.
>
> (*Wrong-Doing, Truth Telling*, 59)

The functions of discourses are not, therefore, exclusive, and, at the same time, each discourse defines its functions historically. So that if the modern concept of literature is of recent origin, we may declare that some of the functions of the classical tragedies would have occupied a new place in contemporary literature and cinema.

The uses of classical tragedy in Foucault's later works are framed in a politics of literature, mainly based on its relation to law. Classical tragedy is associated in his later works with a concept of truth which is that of *parrhesia*. In his last two seminars at the Collège de France (*The Courage of Truth* and *The Government of Self and Others*) and in his lectures given at Berkeley in 1983, Michel Foucault defines parrhesia as a concept of Greek origin that appears for the first time in the Greek tragedy of Euripides, and spreads throughout the Greek literary world of antiquity from the end of the fifth century BCE. Etymologically, parrhesia means to say everything (*pan-rhema*). It is a discourse of truth, political in character, which comes into being associated with Athenian democracy and what is possible, firstly,

by the composition of a truth, which is, at the same time, an ethical truth of the care of oneself and a democratic truth typical of the Athenian assembly where it came into being (the democratic community).

As I have expounded up to now, literature in its historical dimension is capable of creating spaces of *resistance* from the introduction of *excessive* discourse practices that interrupt the normativity of a determined historical moment (or episteme). They do this from the very inside of the system. It seems to me that this third area that Foucault had been developing since the 1960s holds a fundamental relation to the concept of parrhesia. In *Littérature et langage*, Foucault says that literature is founded on an excess of language, not on silence or the ineffable. This excess of literature inherits the political functions of the concept of parrhesia that likewise produces an *excess* as its etymological meaning is "say everything".

But how is this excess of literature a political risk? Parrhesia in literature is a mode of political performativity through which alternative modes of being and understanding occur ("Ce qui charge ce langage, ce n'est pas ce qu'il veut *dire*, mais *faire*", *Dits et ècrits, II*: 245–246). I shall refer to two examples, to be developed later: firstly, to the lectures on "Sade" that Foucault gave in Buffalo in 1970, published in *La grande étrangère. À propos de littérature* (2013); and secondly the attention he pays to Baudelaire in one of his last texts on the Kantian *Aufklärung* ("What is Enlightenment?", 1984).

In his Buffalo lectures, Foucault begins with Sade's statement "everything I am going to say is true", but, Foucault asks, what is this truth? The truth of Sade's text is not referential but parrhesiastic, such that in its repetitive telling it is capable, through the force of its writing, of denying the existence of God, the soul, nature or the law (as performative force). His writing is a "desire-passion" for writing, a writing that is capable of affirming other modes of being (denial of the attributive logic) whereas the subject-libertine is formed as self-affirmation (as long as the libertine declares himself, he denies God). Sade is thus opposed to the modes of exclusion that Foucault described in *L'ordre du discours* (10–11). This desire, says Walter Privitera "can be dated back to time in ancient Greek history when the truth of a discourse coincided with the power of whoever uttered it" (*Problems of style. Michel Foucault's Epistemology*, 67).

In his work on the *Aufklärung*, Foucault analyzes the modern roots of philosophy with a type of philosophical interrogation that problematizes, simultaneously, the relation to the present, the historical mode of being and the constitution of self

as emancipated subject. This philosophical concern for the present in modernity is also the concern of modern literature. Foucault gives Baudelairean modernity as example. This is described as "an exercise in which extreme attention to what is real is confronted with the practice of a liberty that simultaneously respects this reality and violates it". Modern literature is not the mere production of a word outside of the order of the discourse but is spread as "real" discourse. But it is a question of a real, Judith Revel says, "that overflows, exceeds, disorders, abandons 'nature'". The modernity of Baudelaire does not consist in accepting it as everlasting movement, nor as fashion, but of taking a certain voluntary attitude in relation to that movement: it consists in being capable of extracting "the poetic within history", which is defined as "something eternal that is neither beyond nor behind the present instant, but within it". It is the attitude that enables grasping what is "poetic" in the present moment; it is a will to "heroize" [*héroïser*] the present.[4] This ironic heroism entails for the modern man an invention of its own, which does not "liberate man in his own being", but which compels him to the task of creating himself. The modern project is a permanent criticism of our historical being. There it finds, in the present that it cannot be allowed to despise, that which is urgent to say.

But how does literature say that which, being in everyone's sight, we do not manage to see? Literature fulfils a parrhesiastic function in that it means an introduction of other modes of parasitic fiction that are considered *inverisimilar* in a determined moment, that is, against common sense. And it does this through the parrhesiastic function of literature as "*idiot* speak", in Gilles Deleuze's words, that is characterized by its singularity and by its capacity to be receptive to *events*, to the *events yet to come* (*Immanence: A Life*).

This definition of literature as memory and as event allows us to distinguish it from a concept of classical literary realism: literature is not a reflection of a real exterior, but in literature collective forms of expression occur, or, in the words of Deleuze, "a collective device of expression" and "a machine of desire, the most individual literary enunciation," he says, "is a particular case of collective enunciation" (Deleuze, *Kafka*, 117–121).

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4 "De l´héroïsme de la vie moderne", Baudelaire.

I consider that literature is functioning as a polyvalent concept in Foucault's work: literature is capable of gathering collective forms of expression as a linguistic space of resistance (speak/parole), while also of subjection as institution or norm (language/langage) and without omitting the chance of its own materiality (tongue/langue):

> On peut saisir maintenant la cohérence entre les modes de la fiction, les formes de la fable et le contenu des thèmes (...). Contre les vérités scientifiques et brisant leur voix glacée, les discours de la fiction remontaient sans cesse vers la plus grande improbabilité. Au-dessus de ce murmure monotone en qui s'énonçait la fin du monde, ils faisaient fuser l'ardeur asymétrique de la chance, de l'invraisemblable hasard, de la déraison impatiente. Les romans de Jules Verne, c'est la négentropie du savoir.
>
> (*Dits et écrits I*, 540)

This polyvalence not only questions the causal and dialectic logic but also makes it possible to analyze the different functions that the same concept of discourse is capable of developing on different levels (cultural, historical, related to a discipline). And, through its relationship with which a culture admits or not some experiences as verisimilar. This will have certain consequences in Foucault's concept of history and discourse. And, as "truth itself has a history" ("Truth and Juridical Forms"), it settles on the principle of Aristotelian verisimilitude: "to tell History is, ultimately, to tell a story".

Therefore, Foucault's work on literature works on at least two levels:

1. As a corpus of work on the institutional level: Foucault's reading of marginal literary texts supposes a decentring of discourses of knowledge, at the same time as deautomatizing normative fictional discourses. Indeed, the recovery of these marginal, forgotten, censured texts is to literature what infamous lives are to the discourse of history: a calling into question of the ordering of discourses.

2. With regard to the political function of literature: we can conclude that literature actualizes the historically impossible as virtuality of the present. Thus Foucault responds to the tyranny of fiction as verisimilitude that, since Aristotle, has aligned truth with coherence and left out that which was possible and true but improbable. Hence Foucault redefines the concept of literary mimesis as an *actual rendering visible*. A mimesis that, therefore, is no longer constative nor dependent on the classical truth as *veritas*, but on a saying-truth (parrhesia) as resistance, as emerging force and as problematization of the present. The political function of literature would consist, therefore, of the introduction of improbable modes of being as virtuality of the present.

It seems to me that the function of literature as a place of event of virtuals that are visible to everyone but that we are incapable of seeing holds a close connection with the immanence of Deleuze, for whom:

> A life contains only virtuals. It is made up of virtualities, events, singularities. What we call virtual is not something that lacks reality but something that is engaged in a process of actualization following the plane that gives it its particular reality. The immanent event is actualized in a state of things and of the lived that make it happen.
>
> (*Immanence: A Life*, 31)

And it is fiction that introduces an imbalance in the normative forces as a kind of event:

> What disturbs the din of language and restores it to the disequilibrium of its sovereign powers is not knowledge (always more and more probable); it is not the fable (which has its obligatory forms); it is, between the two, as if in a limbolike invisibility, *the ardent games of fiction*.
>
> (Foucault, *Aesthetics, Method and Epistemology*, 144)

2.3 Madness and Literature as Principle of Social Partition

In *Folie, langage, littérature*, the first seven texts define madness in its two senses: madness in relation to society, where it acts as a principle of partition between what a society finds reasonable and what it does not – a classification that equally affects social subjects and that distinguishes between reasonable and non-reasonable subjects. These categories of social division, however, are not stable but historical and, therefore, under constant modification. Precisely because of this, it proves difficult for us to see this partition principle, given that at present madness is associated with mental illness, being confused with it. As a consequence, two perfectly distinct regions of experience are identified: mental illness and the category of the people who are considered foolish, irrational, alienated, useless and unproductive (*Folie, langage, littérature*, 112).

In "La littérature et la folie (*La folie dans le théâtre baroque et le théâtre d'Artaud*)" ["Literature and madness. Madness in the Baroque Theatre and Artaud's theatre"], Foucault declares: "There is no culture without partition" ["Il n'y a pas de culture sans partage"] (43). Thus, all society finds itself divided and shaped, at the same time, by that which values and that which rejects and prohibits. In this way, Foucault is giving materiality to a society's negativity – what in *L'ordre du discours* he called "materialism of the incorporeal" – which is that which aims to exclude but that in any case forms part of it, because it is present. Because, according to Foucault, the limits that all culture establishes

are not only against others but in the very interior of its own dominion. Moreover, the mechanism of a society's organization (for example, to be Athenian or not in order to be a free man and be able to speak with freedom in classical Athens) lies simultaneously inside and outside society. Madness, therefore, as a dividing mechanism, both forms a part and does not form a part of the society that organizes it.

As Foucault sets forth in "Madness and Civilization", the reasons for which our civilization leaves certain behaviors and subjects "outside" do not come only from Cartesian rationalism – remember the dispute with Jacques Derrida over this – but also from an economic and political motivation typical of the mercantile politics that had just been established in the modern age: the law of work. In the face of this new change that determines exclusion, these subjects occupy a purely negative role. They are non-productive subjects: useless individuals who do not work, deviants. Given this double exclusion, the insane person becomes a "sociologically neutralized" character.

But if the word of this useless subject who is insane maintains such a singular relation with the truth of the society that excludes them – even if it be by chance or by obscure means that makes it necessary to seek this hidden truth in their words – it is because, like madness, it shapes and covers over the concept of modern man like its obverse. That is, as madness is the category of social partition that founds and excludes at the same time, the subjects considered "insane" represent the negativity of modern subjectivity (I speak/I think), subjects who will be key to understanding the redefinition of the subject as process that Foucault undertook in later years. It is with this madness that is unproductive at the same time as organizing that literature is associated. As Foucault asserts, following Mikhail Bakhtin, the defining trait of madness in the West is its proximity to the feast. For this reason, art and literature belong to this order of separation. However, this does not mean, according to Foucault, that madness and literature remain under the same regime in the future, although currently it remains that way.

In "Literature and Madness. Madness in the Work of Raymond Roussel" [*Folie, langage, littérature*, 111–126] Foucault shows the importance of the relationship between literature and madness. For if there has been literature without love and without war, there has not been without madness and without death. Above all, in the present and in the Baroque. Indeed, certain works have even been called madness. According to Foucault, when madness is associated with literature, it shows three truths: it speaks of social reality, it shows the edges/borders of the story of literature itself, the fiction of which it is made: "The role of madness is not only to show, as if by trickery, the truth of things, but also to tell the truth of literature, theatre, fiction (to manifest it in its ambiguous role as a false truth, and a true lie)" (*Folie, langage, littérature*, 112). But above all, says

Foucault, "madness makes you see the invisible [...] Don Quixote evokes the small, miserable, greedy and often grotesque world of sixteenth-century Spain; and at the same time denounces what lies in its reality of falsehoods, chivalresque romances with which Spain is enchanted" (115). But in the 19th century, says Foucault, what governs the relation between literature, madness and society is no longer representation: "It is in the heart itself of madness that one experiences what literature is" (115). Insanity, which in the nineteenth century is considered a mental illness, expresses this new relation in literature, from Mallarmé to Roussel and the Surrealists – although, as Foucault declares, it is necessary to be already a great writer in order to be a madman and a great writer.

Therefore, at this point I can conclude that, on the one hand, literature in its connection with madness is capable of making visible the invisible in two ways in accordance with its nature: namely, the material outside such as that which has been socially excluded, and, at the same time, the outside as other possible forms of partition from the real. As Etienne Balibar puts it, Foucault has superimposed two schema or topologies: "that of internal exclusion or exclusion from within, the institutional model of which is confinement and that of the excess of externality (or beyond externality) that makes it inaccessible (or 'invisible') as such" (Balibar, "Pensée du dehors?"). Furthermore, the literature of modernity establishes a new relationship with madness that, on occasion, is marked by the counter-subject, the madman. Furthermore, in accordance with this, the outside is both material negativity, those negative phenomena of exclusion, of rejection, of prohibition, of choice, that shape a society; and the same mechanism that shapes society. The outside is simultaneously inside and outside the social system, and this configuration is historical.

2.4 The Extralinguistic Outside of Literature

This ambiguous character of literature defines its nature and also affects its autonomy. The concept of the outside defines literature by its autonomy which occurred, according to Foucault, at the end of the 19th century, with Mallarmé. At the beginning of Modernity, literature, on ceasing to be subject to the code of rhetoric or that of images or ideas, becomes its own language and "a certain experience common to madness and literature" emerges (the outside). Literature thus acquires the capacity/incapacity to say everything: "in one sense it has the possibility and the right to say everything, perhaps it would even have the obligation to say everything, since nothing exists [...]. In every literary work, there is an excess" (*Folie, langage, littérature*, 230). However, this capacity to be able to say everything becomes a limit, because who is capable of saying everything? So

it is that this "being able to say everything" that modern literature gains with its autonomy also brings about its impossibility of saying everything. It is dependent on the extralinguistic because who is capable of really saying everything in a book of limited pages (as much as Borges yearned to write the infinite book)?

In "The extralinguistic and literature", Foucault introduces a variant to the concept of the outside that is of great importance for understanding concepts he develops in the last years of his output. Literature is presented here not as an outside of social partition, but rather necessarily involving the immanent extralinguistic. Foucault cites as his sources linguists such as Roman Jakobson and Noam Chomsky, although the fundamental contribution for his thought is *How to Do Things with Words* (1962), in which John L. Austin propounds his theory of the speech act. This text is a crucial contribution to understanding the later development of a political history of truth, already typical of the 1970s, as has been shown; and the renewal of the process of subjectivation as aesthetics of existence. Thus, following Austin, Foucault agrees that what introduces the extralinguistic in literature is where and who reads it.

The author here proposes taking a step from the intralinguistic outside to the extralinguistic outside. If the outside was, at the same time, the material negativity of society – all of that which, existing, was excluded by the partition of madness – and the partition that inaugurates and founds all society. The extralinguistic is defined, according to Foucault, by the situation, by real objects – present or absent – and the relation with these objects; and for the speaking subject, in accordance with the position that he/she occupies and with expository ritualization in the case of performative acts (*Folie, langage, littérature*, 225). Austin's studies allow Foucault to begin to examine statements there where they are directed and interrelate with their historical moment, which he would go on to develop fully in his studies on parrhesia in the 1980s.

However, in this study, what Foucault proposes is the analysis of the consequences of the extralinguistic for literature. Certainly literature is made up of statements but is literature related to the extralinguistic? How is literature connected to and how does it interfere with the extralinguistic outside? And, vice versa, does the extralinguistic outside interfere in literature? To the third question, Foucault answers that the extralinguistic undoubtedly interferes in the literary tradition since – as T.S. Eliot had already stated in "Tradition and the Individual Talent" – the literary tradition, what is considered literature or not, changes in history. Moreover, as Foucault says, it is vitally important in the circulation of the book in the world and for literary criticism itself:

> It is this "outside", this extralinguistic immanent to the work, which criticism, precisely, must not exclude from its purpose. Literary analysis need not mimic the work, nor repeat

> it, nor retrieve its intimacy, nor interpret it (as a sacred text). It must lodge itself precisely in that exterior that is its proper place. One can define the role of literary analysis by saying that it has transformed the extralinguistic immanent to the work's discourse into statements.
>
> (*Folie, Langage, Littérature*, 251)

Literature's interference in the historical moment is more complex. For Foucault, the extralinguistic is an insurmountable wall in the study of the relations between language and history, which affects form and content:

> In the analysis of language or statements, linguists and logicians encounter the "wall", the limit of the extralinguistic, in two ways: at the level of the content (meaning) [...], [and] at the level of the form of the statement and in the act itself that states it, the extralinguistic appears.
>
> (*Folie, Langage, Littérature,* 229)

According to Foucault, the relationship of literature with the extralinguistic has a formal nature and one of content. The former originates in a lack, an incapacity: that of not being able to say everything, for which literature constantly refers to the historical moment of the reader in order to fill out the gaps in the finitude of the work. Therefore, we can no longer declare that literature is a self-referential activity: "literature is the barbarism of the extralinguistic immanent to discourse" (226). The signs of these relations can be seen at the level of meaning: the "original" meaning disappears, as the extralinguistic is what conditions the interpretation of the text, because all text refers to its *historical outside*. But how does literature intervene in the world? For Foucault, the arrival in the 18th century of the horror novel – and he had already underlined the importance of these novels in "Language and literature" – is key, because the reader is exposed to the reading experience in order "to be afraid".[5] The reading places the text in the world and its meaning is historical/cultural. It happens: literature, in its performative capacity, exists and makes exist.

　　Therefore, literature relates with the extralinguistic as event in the margin between autonomy – "the literary text is immanent to the discourse" – and its place in the world. In other words, its activity is not self-referential but performative. This would explain the ambiguity with which in his work Foucault refers to the historical and ahistorical character of literature, an ambiguity noted by Laurent Jenny, among others, in "Foucault et la littérature: une passante"

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5 For Edgar Allan Poe the connections between the work and the reader were considered the positive foundations of the art.

(2016). We can argue that literature is historical in its action as event, but this is only possible for the autonomous character of its statements.

To this making visible the invisible corporeal, Foucault adds the ability to make visible the possible that is contingent to every historical moment. Literature establishes the extralinguistic for itself, which allows it to *not have to say everything*. Thus the very ambiguity of literature, which says too much: literature is an excess that names that part that had remained outside of the social partition, making the invisible visible, material and possible – at the same time as not being able to say everything – in its formal finitude. This making visible the "not necessary possible" is what Foucault calls verisimilitude. For him, verisimilitude has a certain affinity of nature with truth, a kinship, and was made in order to make it reality: "there is something of internal truth in discourse". Discourse creates a certain truth, in such a way that literature modifies the nature of truth not as descriptive mimesis but as performativity of the literary discourse. At the same time, it is because the work must be verisimilar that the relation between the work and the extralinguistic – which is the historical present – are related in a necessary way.

Therefore, at the same time as literature acts on history, the relationship of literature with history has an impact on literature, which is why literature is never closed nor complete, and its meaning is not finite insofar as it is historical. But this does not mean that there is a hidden, everlasting truth that literature is capable of letting us see. In literature, as Foucault reminds us in "Behind the Fable" (1966), the relationship between fable and fiction is determined by "the mythical possibilities of the culture": its writing or weaving depends on the possibilities of the language (*langue*), while its fiction is determined by the possibilities of the speech act (*parole*) (*Aesthetics, Method and Epistemology*, 48). In other words, the verisimilitude of a narrative, what a society is prepared to accept as credible, depends on a specific historical moment, and not on the structure of the narrative (which it did for Aristotle). Therefore, literature has among its functions to actualize (act) in every episteme the possibilities (potential) of speaking (parole). No era, says Foucault, simultaneously utilizes all the modes of fiction: those that are excluded in a determined historical moment are marginalized, while those that a determined era privileges are those that define a norm (Foucault, *L'ordre du discours*, 10–12). Every *episteme*, therefore, admits new modes of fiction in the literary oeuvre and it becomes possible to read again texts that, "populated by parasitic discourses", had been expelled. Literature makes visible, therefore, through its historical variations, the different possibilities that live together in the same culture, in the actualization of its "parasitic discourses".

As Judith Revel has stated in "The invention and the déjà-là of the world", the "revelatory" function of literature comes from the influence of Merleau-Ponty. For Revel, the "revelatory" use of literature must be separated from the ontology of literature. Instead, she considers the term in an almost "photographic" sense: "what enables a certain image to appear", and literature as experience that is operative of change. It is through this experience of writing that escapes the "discursive mass", as it is possible to understand literature as a practice, as a practice of speaking, that shows the outside of all language and that "denounces its internal economy and its founding divisions at the same time" (33). This concerns the models of exteriority that Foucault develops in his texts from the sixties: transgression as "inexorability of the denial of limit", indebted to the thinking of Bataille; and exteriority, having its roots in Blanchot. However, the model that accompanies Foucault's work until his last writings are those that he calls "the processes", which show that "it is the change of the world's grammar that allows the change of the world's imagination, and not the other way around". For Foucault, overcoming the influence of Blanchot, "the outside is a myth"; thus there is no outside of history. The issue, therefore, for the literature that is recurrent in Foucault, is to answer the following question: how is it possible that, from the very interior of a given epistemic and historical configuration, from the very interior of the 'weave of the real' unfolded by an economy of the discourses and practices of a specific moment – in short, from the interior of a grammar of the world historically determined – it can dismantle and replace its articulations, shift its lines, move its points, empty its meaning and reinvent its balances? (43). That is to say, Foucault's work on literature has its heart precisely in the practices of reinvention, eruption, freedom, in the very interior of the system, which he develops through "compossibility". The Foucauldian expression of "making one's life a work of art" carries with it, in turn, an involvement with others, and a style. This allows the subject to carry out practices of freedom from history itself, surpassing the present state of things. The style in Foucault makes reference to Baudelaire but also to the definition of style understood as a "coherent deformation" as Merleau-Ponty understood it in "Le langage indirect et les voix du silence" (1952). For Merleau-Ponty, these practices are about literature and painting at the same time: "Like a painting, a novel expresses tacitly," Revel quotes Merleau-Ponty. But in both, the question is how, from the very interior of history, a possibility to create arises (43).

In Merleau-Ponty, this novelty is located not from the side of extraordinarily innovative elements, but from the side of "experimentation of new structures of relation" (Revel, "The invention and the déjà-là of the world", 48), the production of the new through new relations between what is already there. Here Revel establishes the immediate antecedent of the construction of life

itself as a work of art, as a radicalization of the forces within the history of the present.

This insertion of the world into the literary work is a development of the political capacity of literature, which introduces the change towards what Foucault called "bad literature" in the mid-seventies and eighties. If literature is no longer an outside – in the more Adornian sense – if its autonomy is ambiguous, it is because literature is capable of doing things in the world. This identification between the outside and the extralinguistic revives the most political view of the Blanchodian Outside, as Foucault himself recognizes: "It is the presence of this extralinguistic inside language that Blanchot constantly invokes; it is to the absence of this presence that he has lent his voice"; and it is, at the same time, the inseparable outside of the work (228).

In *Ecrits politiques: Guerre d'Algérie, Mai 68, etc. 1958–1993*, we find references to this political character of the outside and the need for the ambiguity of literature in Maurice Blanchot. In "Refusing the established order", a response to a questionnaire on politically committed literature, Blanchot states that the political vocation of a work must always be ambiguous, otherwise "it always runs the risk, should it lose this ambiguity, of putting itself at the service of another power that subjugates it". For Blanchot, writing is what "cannot be effected, thus always in search of a nonpower, refusing mastery, order, and the established order above all, preferring silence to the speech of absolute truth, thereby contesting things and contesting them incessantly" (*Ecrits politiques*, 117). And he concludes that the political commitment of the author with the work is the commitment of the work with the other:

> maintain the immemorial memory that reminds us that we were slaves, that even liberated we remain and will remain slaves as long as others remain so, that there is thus no freedom (to put it too simply) except for others and through others: certainly, an infinite task that risks condemning the writer to a didactic, pedagogic role and in so doing, of excluding the demand he carries within him and that constrains him to lack a place, a name, a role, and an identity, that is, never yet to be a writer.
>
> (118)

This postponement of the truth of the text is, therefore, the extralinguistic other that is made manifest in the work in every historical present. The extralinguistic outside is thus what takes place in the work itself: "It's a matter of the setting up, or better still, the instauration, by discourse alone, of the extralinguistic upon what any statement articulates" (*Folie, langage, literature*, 229). In "Literature and Language" (1964), Foucault confirmed that the polysemous nature of literature depends on its historical and political nature:

> In reality, literature is polysemantic, which means that, when saying one thing alone or maybe when saying nothing at all – for there is no proof that literature has to say something – in any case, whether it says something or nothing, literature is always obligated to traverse a number of semiological layers (at a minimum, the four layers I spoke of), and, in those four layers, it identifies what it needs to constitute a figure, a figure whose property is self-signification. This means that literature is nothing other than the reconfiguration in vertical form, of the signs present in society and culture in separate layers. Literature cannot be based on silence. It is not the ineffability of silence, literature is not the effusion of that which cannot and will never be said.
>
> (*Language, Madness, and Desire*, 80–81)

In short, it is due to the formal finitude of the work (not being able to say everything) and to the autonomy gained at the beginning of modernity (being able to say everything), that the extralinguistic – as a fold of the historical outside that dwells in the work itself – constitutes the work's radical historicity. This ambiguous character of literature, between autonomy (that which it acquires in modernity thanks to its relation with madness as mechanism of partition) and dependence on the history wherein it is read (due to the necessity that its limitation, as a book of a certain number of pages, makes of the extralinguistic outside for its reading), allows literature to speak a contingent truth: that of the possibilities of being from a given historical moment. It is here, therefore, that truth and literature's capacity for resistance lie.

3 Literature, Subject and Veridiction

3.1 Raymond Roussel: The Political Subject of Literature

> The critical consciousness of literature has become infinitely close to the consciousness of the lyrical madman.
>
> *Folie, langage, littérature*, 122

As we have seen, the relationship between literature and the extralinguistic passes through the "situation" and the "subject that speaks" inside the act of writing. The latter is the core of the relationship: "the position of the subject that speaks is the core of uncertainty around which the whole discourse vibrates" (Foucault, *Folie, langage, littérature*, 227). To the extent that the position of the subject that speaks is the extralinguistic that is most immediate, closest to the language, but the most irreducible, this presence of the subject that speaks inside the discourse is crucial – it makes manifest the irreducibility of literature to the structures of language. The position of the subject that speaks, their location, the displacements they constitute, as opposed to what is said (*lekton*), the lexicon of the work. It should immediately be evident that this lexicon – as with fiction – is not so much an element of the work or discourse as ways via which literature and the extralinguistic are connected:

> Just as between the universe of the discourse and the fable a certain level has been discovered that did not belong under linguistics or the study of folklore or myths, but under literature alone (this is what was called fiction), in the same way, between the field of the word and that of the lekton (the former being the concern of philosophy and the latter stylistics), there is a strictly literary level that comes under lexis.

> Literature is a discourse whose fable is constituted by a fiction: it is a speech act the lekton of which is determined by a lexis. Lexis and fiction are privileged and singular domains of literary analysis. They fall under neither a philosophical model nor a linguistic one.
>
> (*Folie, langage, littérature*, 259)

For this reason, we need to reflect on the relationship between literature and subjectivity. As we have seen in the second chapter, madness, as a mode of social partition, entails the seclusion of a type of negative, unproductive subjectivity, which is that of the insane. At the same time, Foucault asserted that in modernity madness has been associated with literature and, in the 20th century, with mental illness as well, as the two are confused. Therefore, the issue is whether the question why modern literature is not a viable route toward the question concerning the new humane practices – that is, concerning alternative ways of being to the concept of the modern man, or in Foucault's words, the literature of

Roussel creates "forms without parentage or species" (Foucault, *Death and the Labyrinth,* 21). *Death and the Labyrinth*, the only writing devoted exclusively to the analysis of a literary work, is presented as a special place for this work: the madman, the ill person and the writer come together under the same proper name. His aim, Foucault constantly repeats, is to "show" the reader the thresholds of Roussel's work. This meticulous commentary on Roussel's work, which in turn starts with another commentary (*How I Wrote Certain of My Books*), repeating the mise-en-abyme structure that is very common in the writing of the poet and novelist, is at the basis of Foucault's thought on literature. In this early Foucault, the analysis of literature is also the politics of literary form.

As mentioned, in Foucault's early work there was already an interest in the politics of literature, in relation to the outside/extralinguistic of the text. As Foucault's studies on literature in the 1960s were a kind of *laboratory* where he was already posing some of these questions. I have shown how Foucault, in texts from the latter half of the sixties, sets forth the performative capacity of the literary text. This performative capacity, which depends on the immanent relation between literature and the extralinguistic outside, allows literature to state three types of truth: literature is able to speak of and intervene in the historical reality in which it takes place and it is also able to make visible what is invisible due to the social partition between right and wrong and between productivity and unproductivity. This capacity to say the truth is, in Foucault's terms, its capacity to say-everything, because literature, as fiction, is capable of naming the possibilities of every historical moment – heterotopia –, of "heroizing the present". This reflection on the politics of form is developed in a joint manner with his revision of structuralism, as he states in "Interview avec Michel Foucault" in 1968:

> In a positive manner, we can say that structuralism investigates above all an unconscious. It is the unconscious structures of language, of the literary work, and of knowledge that one is trying at this moment to illuminate. In the second place, I think that one can say that what one is essentially looking for are the forms, the system, that is to say that one tries to bring out the logical correlations that can exist among a great number of elements belonging to a language, to an ideology (as in the analyses of Althusser), to a society (as in Lévi-Strauss), or to different fields of knowledge; which is what I myself have studied.
>
> (*Dits et écrits I*, 654)

Foucault had found, in his interest for Structuralism and for the unusual linguistic forms of Raymond Roussel, modes of experimentation in his search for new structures of relation and novel forms of being as aesthetics of existence. As Judith Revel has stated, it is the production of the new through new relations between what is already there. Furthermore, for this rereading, it is necessary to look at two clearly recognizable traits for literary tradition. First, Foucault paints a kind of "portrait", genuinely Mannerist, in the style of the "Self-portrait in a convex mirror" by

Parmigianino, a tradition in which Roussel could also be included – as John Ashbery has already considered:

> At the moment of his death, in a gesture both cautious and illuminating, Roussel holds up to his work a mirror possessed of a bizarre magic: it pushes the central figure into the background where the lines are blurred, placing the point of revelation at the farthest distance, while bringing forward, as if for extreme myopia, whatever is farthest from the moment of its utterance. Yet as the subject approaches, the mirror deepens in secrecy.
>
> (*Death and the Labyrinth,* 4)

And, on top of this, another story, that of the death of Roussel, and that locked door that sets in motion the *How I Wrote Certain of My Books*, and which refers to the hermeneutic tradition, distancing himself from it, because it transforms into an enigma the process that he clarifies: "This door, which had been open at all times, was locked from the inside. The death, the lock, and this closed door formed, at that moment and for all time, an enigmatic triangle where Roussel's work is both offered to and withdrawn from us [...] a simple key which is marvellously ambiguous, ready in one turn either to lock in or to open up" (6). Origen, in *Philokalia*, tells this parable on the interpretation of the sacred Scriptures, referring to the origin of hermeneutics:

> Inspired Scripture taken as a whole was on account of its obscurity like many locked-up rooms in one house: Before each room he supposed a key to be placed, but not the one belonging to it; and that the keys were so dispersed all round the rooms, not fitting the locks of the several rooms before which they were placed.
>
> (Origen, *The Philocalia*, 32)

This presentation introduces the work in the Mannerist tradition and distances it from the tradition of classical hermeneutics. *Death and the Labyrinth* is not a work on how to interpret its true meaning. On the contrary, the comment that ought to clarify, "opens a space of infinite uncertainty" (Foucault, *Death and the Labyrinth*, 11). Therefore, what is the truth of which Roussel speaks as a discovery of the formal procedures with which he writes his book? This truth is not an unveiling, his "truth" is other, that of the mechanisms of self-representation of language, typical of the Mannerist tradition. Recall Deleuze's definition of Mannerism in his lecture series on the Baroque, delivered at Vincennes in 1987, as the evental logic of substance – the predicate is always event, says Deleuze. In other words, Mannerism refers to the definition of the subject by his/her ways, by which logic the being ceases to be attributive, and comes to be predicative:

> It will have to be said that Leibniz breaks with the scheme of attribution, and at the same time breaks with the essentialism of substance, of the substance constituted by an essence. To attribution it replaces predication, the predicate always being relation or event,

> and to essentialism it will substitute what? So here we can be all happy to have found a word, I say it very quickly, let's call it mannerism.
>
> (Deleuze, *Sur Leibniz*)

The evental logic of literature and its relation with the unknown processes of subjectification was fully developed by Foucault in his lectures on Sade, but in my opinion it is in *Death and the Labyrinth* that Foucault lays out an early version of evental subjectivity. The forms of being, their ways, such as event, are described through two principal processes: paradoxical statements, which the very subheadings of Foucault's book indicate ("the threshold and the key", "rhyme and reason", "the metamorphosis and the labyrinth", "the empty lens", "the enclosed sun") and the constant use of polysemic terms or phrases, which show the introduction of difference in identity and, at the same time, the same impossibility of the closure of meaning. These formal processes show us the impossibility of attributively confirming subjectivity. Good meaning, such as closed and certain meaning, is impossible. Paradox and polysemy are the affirmation of two meanings at the same time, and they affect both language and the impossibility of defining a subjectivity as fixed identity. At the same time, the extralinguistic – as the capacity of literary language to name the invisible material – also forms part of the study, as it does in all literature. In this regard, Foucault on Roussel's *La Vue*: "everything can be seen from afar, but with a stare that is so penetrating, so supreme and so neutral that even the *invisible* rises to the surface under a unique, immobile and even light" (Foucault, *Folie, langage, literature*, 279). Moreover, the descriptions of Roussel's works reveal the formal and untamed gaps of resistance to the discursive mechanisms of power. Roussel's literature, above all thanks to the reduplication of his *How I wrote certain of my books*, is an act of making see the possible non-existent. Modern literature, as opposed to what Aristotle expounded in his *Poetics*, utilizes its own negativity to "make see": "The *Nouvelles Impressions* can only be described *by what they are not*" (*Folie, langage, literature*, 123).

Finally, *Death and the Labyrinth* is an exercise in criticism, literary criticism but above all criticism of the social partition, aiming there where the identity of reason is placed face to face with the identity of Unreason. The procedures of Roussel's writing show that language and identity cross where the partition of the social mixes, indifferently, madness and literature. And this is so because Roussel's work is "one of those rare cases in which the work, the experience of madness and mental illnesses are precisely superimposed to form a single figure" (*Folie, langage, literature*, 116).

While, as Foucault declares, "we could say that there is not one single society in which it is permitted to say everything", literature – as writing of madness – is the discourse of excess that speaks beyond what a society allows in a given historical moment. A political study of form allows Foucault to show how literature thus

coincides with madness, insofar as it is a category of social organization, through fiction. In modernity, literature succeeds in *making see*: a part of reality that stays hidden (the necessary as the excluded), the processes by which literature creates (being of language: mechanism of self-representation of language) and the possible forms of subjectification that the fiction of every episteme allows (and the contingent as the historical possible non-existent). Thus, literature has a paradoxical nature for Foucault: the extralinguistic, as the limit of the autonomy of literature, is inserted like a fold in literature. This is why literature can also affect the historical extralinguistic.

I consider that this performative intervention of literature on the extralinguistic, as criticism of the partitions between reasonable-productive subjects and unreasonable-unproductive subjects, is an early development of some aspects of the critical discourse of parrhesia that Foucault elaborated in the 1980s. It establishes an underground link between madness, literature and parrhesia, in short, between literature and the political history of truth, which is of great interest both for the political studies of current literature and for the necessary revision of the Foucauldian oeuvre in the light of the unseen writings that are to be published in the coming years.

3.2 Sade: Irregular Subjects and the Politics of Desire

Daniele Lorenzini states in "Le désir comme 'transcendantal historique' de l'histoire de la sexualité" that although desire did not receive systematic attention in Foucault's work, it undoubtedly played a crucial strategic role in his oeuvre. But it is from 1981, as per Lorenzini, when the fundamental problem of the history of sexuality becomes: "quelle expérience pouvons-nous faire de nous-mêmes, quel type de subjectivité est lié au fait que nous sommes toujours en possibilité et en droit de dire: 'Oui, c'est vrai, je désire?'" (139).

For Foucault, the history of desire is interwoven with the history of the Western subject, since, as he states in the *Subjectivité et vérité* lecture series, the discourse on the truth of sexuality, in our Western societies, is organized around the practice of confession, that is to say, as obligatory discourse of the subject on themselves and their desire. This takes place from the profound transformation that the Greek practice of aphrodisia suffered in the Roman era, when sexual ethics became more and more centred on the conjugal relation. According to Foucault, in the imperial Roman period, the principle of socio-sexual isomorphism is radically called into question by an overvaluation of marriage. It is then, Foucault states, that a permanent relation is established between the subject and their own sex, under the form of their desire; and it is

because of this that the control, domination and knowledge of their desire will determine the subject that is in genesis of the modern subject. Thus the "subject of desire" is born, in which desire is in no way identified with pleasure, in the same way that interiority is not identified with intensity either (Lorenzini, "The Emergence of Desire", 460).

This subject of desire will be determined, between the first century BCE and the first century CE, in its access to the truth about itself, through sexual activity. This will be the reason for which this truth cannot be attained, and why its purification will be needed:

> Bref, c'est le christianisme (et notamment le monachisme) qui a noué "ce rapport de la subjectivité et de la vérité à propos du désir, qui est si caractéristique non seulement du christianisme mais de toute notre civilisation et de tout notre mode de pensée".
>
> <div align="right">(Lorenzini, "Le désir comme 'transcendantal historique'", 145)</div>

Therefore, desire and duty coincide in the configuration of a concept of subject that is both political and ethical. But more decisive is the consideration of the common good in this truth-telling of a free subject, because this practice is a critique and, in this sense, the subject that practises it puts his/her own life at risk. The definition of a free subject cannot, nonetheless, be configured other than in interrelation with others, and whose desire to live is, at the same time, a risk and a desire – returning to the concept of life as struggle between Freud's drive for death and life. It is central to understanding the scope of Foucault's political aesthetics. I will return to this topic in the next chapter. Before then I will analyze the lectures that Foucault gave on Sade in 1970, at the University of Buffalo. In these lectures, Foucault focuses his attention on Sade's statement, "I only tell the truth" as an emancipatory logic of discourse.

There was certainly a great deal published on Sade in the 1970s. But if there is a key debate for understanding the scope that this text had in the last phase of Foucault's oeuvre, it is the one Foucault's text held with *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, by Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, published in 1944. We can find the clues to understanding particularly in the chapter that Adorno and Horkheimer devote to "Juliette, or Enlightenment and Morality" (*Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 63–93), in which they analyze how Sade's literature aims to unblock the incapacity of Kantian thinking to undermine the order that had been made repressive, insofar as it is linked, ultimately, to the mode of dominant production (73). According to their perspective, the work of Sade, along with that of Nietzsche, was an intransigent critique of practical reason, which exposes a disturbing truth: "the indissoluble alliance of reason and atrocity" (92). Adorno and Horkheimer conclude that Sade's work elevated the scientific principle to the destructive principle, or what they called the *amor intellectualis diaboli,* the

joy of defeating civilization with its own weapons. For the authors, and particularly for the Adorno of *Negative Dialectics* (1970), the anti-Hegelian logic of Sade's writings produces a truth: "the identity of power and reason" (93).

Foucault, for his part, who also begins with the critique and revision of Kant's proposal of Enlightenment, adds to the consequences of this anti-philosophy of the Enlightenment, to the power of the negativity of Sade's logic described by the Frankfurt theorists, the analysis of the performative powers of identity that are also found in this logic. Foucault analyzes how the modes of veridiction of Sade's characters not only embody the powers of science but also, in their "truth-telling", put forward modes of emancipation from the subjectivities in what we can call a *performative negativity* or material negativity.[6] In other words, it would now not only be a thought of enlightened negativity but also of the performativity of the truth-telling of irregular subjects, crucial in Foucauldian thought of the 1970s and 1980s (infamous subjects). This concept of performative negativity, that which evolves out of the non-attributive logic of Sade, supposes an overcoming of the opposition between truth and desire, as will be seen.

In the second of the two lectures that he gave in Buffalo, Foucault tackles the subject matter of the character of the libertine as irregular form of being, as "irregular existence". Unlike in the first lecture, in which the texts that form its basis are predominantly literary, in the second he undertakes a fundamental shift towards Sade's theoretical discourse with *Idées sur le roman*, in his global proposal to analyze the ten volumes of *Justine and Juliette*. Here Foucault states that Sade's procedure for writing does not entail a transgression of rational thought (law of alternation of discourses). On the contrary, for Foucault Sade's discourse proposes an alternative to rational thought but from within the same rational logic, in accordance with the reading already made by Adorno and Horkheimer. However, the works of Sade were not, for Foucault, the negative development of the other of reason. For him, we find a kind of resistance in these irregular characters – characters that represent a logic of thought that is also a model of resistance, just as he describes it in the second lecture.

Adorno and Horkheimer's interpretation, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, had already stressed that the objective of the "Enlightenment" in a broad sense, common to Sade and Nietzsche, was to take away the fear of men, a liberation that, however, "copes with fear by defecting to the agencies that inspire it [...]. What is infernal about wrong laughter is that it compellingly parodies what is best, reconciliation" (112). In contrast, for Foucault, Sade's work, as *deconstructor* of

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6 For a development of this question, see Section 2 of Chapter 5, "Donner à voir: politics of form and the Marxist tradition of literature".

instrumental reason through the reversal of its effects in his novels, showed, in this *ironic* reversal, the possibility of emancipation of the subject faced with the imposed modes of "normalization". Foucault therefore argues against Adorno and Horkheimer and attributes to Sade's discourse a radically historical emancipatory force that was not contemplated in the rational reversal of *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. Foucault maintains that the non-existence of God is not a theoretical thesis, confirmed once and for all as a truth that could be deduced from reasoning. The inexistence of God is anything that is carried out at *each moment* as evil of God, as "evil of God *in action*", within the person and the conduct of the libertine. It could be said that Sade's logic carries out a similar function in Foucault's work as the logic of Leibniz in Gilles Deleuze's *The Fold*. Both non-attributive logics formulate a subjectivity at every moment, as historical radical of *Da-sein*.

In its working, Sade's logic is anti-Russellian: if the logic of Russell bases the existence of the subject independently to its relation with the predicate, the logic of Sade is the inverse: the judgement of the inexistence of the attribution is supported upon the subject of the attribution. It is a logic that is equally foreign to Cartesian logic. In effect, Descartes's logic is made using an attributive judgement and reaches an existential judgement. Conversely, Sade begins with an attributive judgement of attribution not to reach an existential judgement but rather one of nonexistence. With Foucault, one can say that Sade's logic is rigorously *monstrous*, since between the "intuitionist" logic of Descartes, that necessarily rests on the idea of the existence of the idea and, therefore, on a possibility, and the formalist logic of Russell, Sade has come to construct a form of logic that is absolutely nonviable in terms of logic and from a judgement of attribution, "he reaches a judgement of the nonexistence of the very thing about which the attribution is made" (*Language, Madness, and Desire*, 134). Therefore, this logic is a logic of the emancipation of the subject that is supported upon the subject of desire. Knowing and desiring coincide in Sade's proposal, overcoming the classical dialectic between the two.

As Judith Butler explains in *Subjects of Desire* (1987),

> when philosophers have not dismissed or subdued human desire in their effort to become philosophical, they have tended to discover philosophical truth as the very essence of desire. [...] To desire the world and to know its meaning and structure have seemed conflicting enterprises, for desire has signified an engagement of limited vision, an appropriation for use, while philosophy in its theoretical purity has presented itself as not needing the world it seeks to know.
>
> (1)

In the lecture that Foucault gives on Sade, the relation between desire and truth is neither a rational desire nor does it establish a causal relation between

the two. It enables the subject to act in relation to the truth of the desire itself, a real "art of living", as he shows in *The History of Sexuality*. For example, in the statement "God does not exist", truth and desire are united in a complex relation: it is because God is evil that libertines exist and the crueller the desires of the libertines, the truer it is that God does not exist. The truth of the non-existence of God and the multiplication of signs are thus connected to each other in a kind of unending process. The libertine annuls the laws of logic and of modern thought through desire. This is the desire of Sade's texts, desire as *liberation-domination*, desire as force that opposes, denies and destroys, in a system of power relations equally introduced in itself, folded upon itself: "God's nonexistence is fulfilled at every moment in Sadean discourse and desire" (*Language, Madness, and Desire*, 136).

Power and desire are the two faces of this tension of forces. As Walter Privitera states in *Problems of Style: Michel Foucault's Epistemology* (1995), "Foucault distinguishes between the 'will to knowledge', which characterizes the dominant form of power since Plato, and 'power' or 'desire' which can be dated back to time in ancient Greek history when the truth of a discourse coincided with the power of whoever uttered it" (Privitera, *Problems of style*, 67).

Nevertheless, these non-existent monstrosities that are God, others, crimes, laws, nature, etcetera, are not illusions in the understanding of the eighteenth century. That is to say, they are not illusions that once discovered we will feel free of. In response, Sade makes them "chimeras". The chimera is defined by Foucault not as something that does not exist but as something that possesses another type of existence. That is to say, it is the mode in which "performative negativity" acts as a way of overcoming the "desire/truth" dialectic. The chimera moves thus to Sade's logic that removes that barrier of time and establishes a repetitive world. Sade's logic guarantees that desire will always be true and nothing can ever invalidate it. It can be said that Sade's discourse does not suppose, as might be believed, the object of desire, but that desire and discourse are effectively the same object. Sade's writing introduces desire in the order of veridiction. The chimera sheds light on the same order of action in that which Foucault's definition of fiction made it. They show that the time of the fiction is historical but not teleological or progressive. And it is in this order that veridiction acts equally.

Foucault observes that these discourses vary according to different factors and depending on the situations. That is, there is no general system, there is no philosophy of Sade. Instead, there is a plurality of systems that are juxtaposed and that do not communicate with the others except through the network of the four fundamental theses (God, the soul, nature, law). Consequently, this discourse will have another function that consists of distinguishing in the very interior of the libertines that "the individuals cannot be reduced to one another", as

the systems vary from individual to individual. There is thus no general system, as I have said, but one for each libertine, and this defines their singularity, what Sade calls "the irregularity of individuals". Every individual is irregular and their own irregularity is manifested, is symbolized, in their system, in what we can call their *style* or their *manner*, as defined by Marielle Macé (*Styles: critique de nos formes de vie*, 2016) and Giorgio Agamben (*The Fire and the Tale*, 2017), respectively.

Because of this, the true interlocutors to whom Sade's discourse is directed cannot be the victims. The true interlocutor, Foucault says, is the libertine other, is the one who is already emancipated by the work carried out on himself/herself. The discourse is directed from libertine to libertine, it does not aim to seduce. Therefore, the truth of Sade's text fulfils another of the key traits of parrhesia: it confronts persuasive rhetoric. In its repetitive telling it is capable of negating the existence – through the force of its writing – of God, the soul, nature or law. His writing is a "desire-passion" for writing, a writing that is capable of affirming other modes of being such that the libertine-subject is constituted as self-affirmation (when the libertine affirms herself, God is negated).

In this way, Sade frees the desire within the great Platonic edifice, where desire is adapted to the sovereignty of truth. In fact, more than freeing, for Sade, Foucault says, "desire and truth were neither subordinate to each other nor separable from each other. [...] 'Desire is unlimited only in truth, and truth is active only in desire'," and this does not at all mean that, in the form of now recovered happiness or peace, "desire and truth will merge into an authoritative figure in the form of happiness or a newly rediscovered peace. Rather, desire and truth are endlessly multiplied in the unfolding, the scintillation, the infinite continuation of desire" (*Language, Madness, and Desire*, 146). Ultimately, we can answer that the truth imperative that Sade attributes to his work, "I only tell the truth," coincides with the other "I desire". The truth of writing is desire as performative force that transgresses the order of discourses, on the one hand, and the opening of subjectivity to new forms of being as irregular forms that had not formed part of political positivity or presence.

Foucault's analysis of Sade in these lectures thus completes the brief attention he gives to him in *The Will to Know*. In the first volume of *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault presents Sade as a transgression while also a continuation of the Christian confessional practice of "telling all". Although, in these Buffalo lectures, his work entails, on the one hand, an advance of what in the last years of his research, particularly after 1981 as Daniele Lorenzini (2016) has shown, was the crucial problem of the Foucauldian history of sexuality, to tackle those experiences that might make us and that enable us to say, "yes, it's true, I desire". And, on the other hand, the literary experience of Sade is analyzed here as an example of the *negative* modern experience of aphrodisia,

as a set of actions that mark relations with oneself and with others. It may be said that, in the same way that criticism lingers "darkly" in Sade's madness, classical *aphrodisia* – that is, desire as principle of action – is taken up anew in the marquis's writing. In this way Sade gives fiction, in terms of desire, a critical and emancipatory capacity of the subject as creative subject of self.

One should make note here of a correlation not mentioned by Foucault, but which is fundamental: the similarity between Sade's logic of desire, Foucault's ethic of care for oneself, and Spinoza's ethic of desire, because in all of them, freedom is connected with desire. That is to say, there is not a determination through action but a transformation of subjectivity through desire itself. For Spinoza, desire is the essence of man – a desire that compels Spinoza's conatus to be dynamic, as the maintenance of being requires a force/strength, "a striving for perseverance". Furthermore, in his definition of freedom at the beginning of the *Ethics*, Spinoza had already related truth with emancipation when he considered that the true idea is so because of its independence (*Spinoza: Practical Philosophy,* 1981). In Spinoza, freedom is not tied to will but to desire. The ethics of will to be is likewise problematized by Spinoza. As opposed to the dominion of the passions by the conscience, Spinoza's philosophy ceases to be a must-be and the soul is necessarily conscious of itself by means of the ideas of the affections of the body and is, therefore, conscious of its effort (*conatus*).

However, Foucault's study of Sade's work, as well as his examinations of other irregular or other infamous subjectivities, enables him to analyze the experience of the negativity of "mal faire", in contrast to the aesthetic of the "cura sui" typical of the classical era and Christian pastoral. This experience of infamous subjects, therefore, shows the other expelled from enlightened discourse. Desire and truth are not opposed in Sade's logic, in the same way that they are not in the classical concept of parrhesia as expounded by Foucault. Nevertheless, the status of literature, particularly of what Foucault calls "bad literature", that which compressed the definition of the literary institution, is capable of saying what does not want to be seen or heard and puts its epistemological status at risk. In short, literature, in its historical dimension, is capable of creating spaces of *resistance* through the introduction of *excessive* discursive practices that interrupt the normativity of a particular historical moment (or episteme). And they do so from the very interior of this system.

Literature, therefore, places at its centre the current debate for the search for alternative forms of narration in the crisis of the end of History. These narrative forms would belong to History itself and not to an outside: they are, using Giorgio Agamben's expression, "close at hand" (*The Fire and the Tale,* 22).

Ultimately, as a result, we can draw consequences in two directions. Firstly, revising the place that literature occupies in Foucault's work gives it a political force that enables the development of a *fictional* capacity as alternative narrative

and a *critical* capacity as "making see/revealing", in his particular revision of the concept of the gaze in Western thought. Secondly, Sade's logic gives Foucault an alternative to the attributive logic that restrict the forms of being and that would be fundamental in the last stage of his philosophical production. And he advances, therefore, the link between truth and desire as performative truth in the subject, that subsequently develops in the concept of parrhesia in the lectures of the 1980s.

It is from this perspective that the consequences that the concept of fiction has in Foucault's work can be understood. Fiction, like desire, would function as a force that is no longer the power of the negative but the revealing of being at every instant as subject of self. Foucault's aesthetics are thus an ethics and a *tekné* of self. Hence, politics and ethics are at the basis of this concept. But more decisive is the consideration of the common good in this truth-telling of a free subject (parrhesia), because this practice is a critique and, in this sense, the subject that practises it puts his/her own life at risk. The definition of a free subject who cannot, as I have said, be configured other than in interrelation with others, and whose desire to live is a risk and a desire at the same time, is one of the core elements to understanding the scope of the political aesthetics of Foucault.

3.3 Aesthetics of Existence: Technologies of Emancipation in Later Foucault

As I have stated, Foucault's subject of desire traces its genealogy through the era of ancient Rome and up until our time. If Sade shows us the inverse way of the rational logic of "speaking truth" that ties our desire, in this section I wish to examine more deeply the "technologies of the self" as emancipation/subjection of the subject. The analysis of these technologies is directly related to the aesthetic of existence that Foucault worked on in the last years of his life.

To this end, I will focus on analysing Foucault's 1982 Vermont lectures. The intermediate position of these lectures in Foucault's philosophical trajectory enables us to see how he links the question of the care of self, belonging to hermeneutics, to the concept of speaking-truth from his later texts.

From the analysis of this genealogy of the care of self that Foucault traces, I will put forward some questions on the definition of a subject that, in their subjective care, is at the same time undertaking a care for the community. Foucault thus responded to his own critique on the concept of man that he made in the 1960s, proposing a concept of subject in constant process, a subject as action. Lastly, I will conclude with how these technologies allow the subject not to free but to *resist* the processes of domination.

The later Foucault's proposal enables us to confront the challenge of an ethical subject who finds their model in Graeco-Roman technologies, wherein they care for the self in their retreat, whether through self writing, through meditation as recollection of self or of the subsequent technologies that Foucault describes in these lectures. This would enable us to consider retreat and its treatment in art and literature, not only from a modernist perspective (the ivory tower of the poet) or that of a community of recluses as a desire to flee (as Pascal Quignard shows in *Sur l'idée d'une communauté de solitaires*). In Foucault, solitude and the contemplation of death are the way to understanding a subject whose negativity is radically productive, because desire is traversed with this negativity.

Foucault bases the ethical and political origin of communities in the care and process of subjectivation. We should remember that it is the care of self that is at the basis of Greek democracy, in the figure of the parrhesiast. Two years later, Foucault would find the legacy of this subject in the ironic hero of Baudelaire:

> Cette héroïsation ironique du présent, ce jeu de la liberté avec le réel pour sa transfiguration, cette élaboration ascétique de soi, Baudelaire ne conçoit pas qu'ils puissent avoir leur lieu dans la société elle-même ou dans le corps politique. Ils ne peuvent se produire que dans un lieu autre que Baudelaire appelle l'art.
>
> (*Dits et écrits I*, 1390)

There the technologies of the self are in conjunction with lifestyle and the art of living – art in the sense of technique – of which Foucault would go on to speak in other lectures, those he gave at Berkeley in 1984. In this chapter, we will not get as far as the twentieth century, so as to concentrate on the origins of the technologies of the self, but this will help us to understand the framework of thought of the later Foucault in which these proposals are developed.

Regarding this genealogy of the technologies of the subject, Foucault is reconsidering his question concerning the possible emancipation of the subject. In his historical ontology of ourselves, Foucault says: "the aim is: the creation of freedom". And he adds:

> Maybe the target nowadays is not to discover what we are but to refuse what we are. We have to imagine and to build up what we could be to get rid of this kind of political "double bind", which is the simultaneous individualization and totalization of modern power structures. The conclusion would be that the political, ethical, social, philosophical problem of our days is not to try to liberate the individual from the state and from the state's institutions but to liberate us both from the state and from the type of individualization which is linked to the state. We have to promote new forms of subjectivity through the refusal of this kind of individuality which has been imposed on us for several centuries.
>
> (*Technologies of the Self*, 785)

3.3.1 Technologies of the Self. Introduction

The Vermont lectures took place in 1982. In other words, between the Collège de France lectures on *The Hermeneutics of the Subject* (that concluded in March 1982) and his lecture series on *The Government of Self and Others* (which began in January 1983). Therefore, Foucault is focused on the study of the classical texts (from the period of Classical Greece until early Christianity) that go from the care of the subject by the subject up to reflecting upon the relations between subjectivity and government of the community, which led into his work on parrhesia in 1984 (his lecture series *The Courage of Truth* and the Berkeley lectures collected in *Discourse and Truth*). Thus ended the path that Foucault had set forth upon with the publication of the first volume of the *History of Sexuality* – in 1976 –, the fourth volume of which, *The History of Sexuality: 4: Confessions of the Flesh*, was only published in French in 2018.

Foucault differentiates between the hermeneutics of the self and the theologies of the soul. And he points out the difficulty of this study because these technologies are integrated into our culture in various types of activities and experiences ("Technologies of the Self", 47). The analysis of these technologies and their relation with the truth, as "games of truth", are the methodologies that men utilize in order to understand themselves ("Technologies of the Self", 48). Foucault thus defines the technologies of the self: they consist of a "number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality" (48). Shortly I will look at the different methodologies entailed by the proposal of a genealogy that helps to answer the Foucauldian question, "how have we become what we are?" The question that Foucault keeps on the horizon is a question for the present ("What is Enlightenment?").

According to Foucault, the development of the technologies of the self had two phases: 1) Graeco-Roman philosophy in the first two centuries C.E. of the early Roman Empire; and 2) Christian spirituality and the monastic principles developed in the fourth and fifth centuries of the late Roman Empire. He discerns a notable difference between the technologies employed in the two periods. The main difference is based on the consequences that these technologies have in the shaping of the subject. In the Greek and Roman classics, subjectivity is a process, a continual dynamics of the soul; whereas the technologies of early Christianity consititute extreme attention to contemplation and obedience to the master. The subject is then constituted as passivity and vigilance over what might waken desire. Therefore, desire, as force of action in the former technologies – that "concern for self" – is set aside and placed under vigilance as the secret that must be shown and punished.

Foucault describes in his lectures four types of technologies that participate in what he calls governability: technologies of production, technologies of sign systems, technologies of power and technologies of the self. For Foucault, the technologies of subjectivation and those of governability of others are closely related. He explains in this way the relations between the process of subjectivation and subjection – a concept of the contradictory subject that Judith Butler has developed extensively in her work –, and between power and resistance in the configuration of subjectivity.

3.3.2 Technologies of the Self in Graeco-Roman Culture

"The precept 'to be concerned with oneself' was, for the Greeks, one of the main principles of cities, one of the main rules for social and personal conduct and for the art of life" (50) and more so than the Delphic principle "know yourself". As Foucault said of Socrates: "in teaching people to occupy themselves with themselves, he teaches them to *occupy themselves with the city*" (52). Which is why Foucault revises the origin of ethics as technology and not as epistemology – which completely modifies the modern perspective of the predicative subject as opposed to the dynamic concept that Foucault presents here. The subject is continual movement, a dynamic concept. I quote: "As there are different forms of care, there are different forms of self" (53).

In *Alcibiades* we find the first appearance of the phrase, *epimelesthai sautou*. *Epimelesthai* is more than paying attention: it is a real activity, not just an attitude. In the *Alcibiades*, two questions are raised: "What is this self of which one has to take care, and of what does that care consist?" (58). The pseudo-Platonic dialogue once more places a dynamic and political approach in the centre: "What is the plateau on which I shall find my identity?" Alcibiades tries to find this self in a dialectical movement and decides that care of the self is the care for the soul. But what matters is not the soul as substance but the care of the activity. The soul is also defined as an activity, therefore. And for this work, the soul can only know itself by contemplating itself in a similar element, a mirror. Thus it must contemplate the divine element:

> In 127d of the *Alcibiades* we find the first appearance of the phrase, *epimelesthai sautou*. Concern for the self always refers to an active political and erotic state.
>
> (58)

> In this divine contemplation, the soul will be able to discover rules serve as a basis for behavior and political action. The effort of the soul to know itself is the principle on

> which just political action can be founded, and Alcibiades will be a good politician inso-far as he contemplates his soul in the divine element.
>
> (59)

Therefore, in the origin of the technologies of the self, occupation with oneself (the examination of one's soul) and political activities are mutually involved:

> The care of self poses four main problems that have endured throughout history: its rela-tionship with political activity, its relationship with teaching (an obligation that lasts throughout life), its relationship with knowing yourself (which characterizes all Platonists), and its relationship with philosophical love or the relation to a master.
>
> (60–1)

The Stoics declared: "retire into the self and stay there," and it is still a central theme in philosophy. It was an active leisure: meditation and preparation. In this exercise, writing played an important role. Seneca's letters are an example of this exercise of self. The self is something that must be written about, it becomes the object of literary activity. The new concern with self entailed a new experience of self, in the first and second centuries, when introspection became more and more detailed (62). Thus a relationship between self, writing and vigilance was developed. Writing and care of the self opened up a new field of experience that had been absent until then: the subject is then configurated as liberation and repression, at the same time.

Moreover, this first self-writing was also occupied with the body. By way of example, Foucault quotes the letter that Marcus Aurelius wrote to his tutor Fronto, in which Marcus Aurelius describes his day in detail, with references to his health and body, and the theme of which is *ars erotica*.[7] Furthermore, this letter alludes to the examination of conscience at day's end, which is prefigured in this letter writing, as well as in the Christian confession, and later in diary writing – although, Foucault explains, the diary more strictly originates in the Christian era and is focused on the notion of the struggle of the soul (66).

Further on, an extension of the care of the self comes about that is no longer only associated with political activity, but as a permanent activity that enables the subject "to get prepared for a certain complete achievement of life. This achievement is complete at the moment just prior to death – of old age as com-pletion – is an inversion of the traditional Greek values on youth." Foucault thus associates an activity of political preparation with the realization of life up until the moment of death. This combination of ethics, aesthetics and politics is un-doubtedly one of the distinguishing features of this later Foucault.

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7 Homosexual love, which, according to Foucault, is behind the origin of Christian monasticism.

Cura sui is, at its origin, a verbal and dialectical activity, in which the subject is shaped through norms learned by memory. In *Alcibiades*, the soul maintains a dialogue with itself through memory as a method for discovering the truth in the soul. This relationship with memory and truth, however, would vary later. Firstly, the dialogue as *pedagogical* method disappears, and silence becomes more and more important (Foucault says that, in Pythagoran culture, the disciples had to stay silent for five years, as a pedagogical rule). From dialectic culture we move on to the culture of silence and the art of listening attains greater importance. It is the change between the Platonic dialogues and the imperial period: in the latter the dialectical structure disappears.

3.3.3 Technologies of the Self in the Stoics

In this transformation, the Stoics were responsible for some of the fundamental changes of direction of these techniques of training politicians in techniques of self-care in order to attain the happiness of everyone in all areas of life. The writings of the Stoic, Seneca, introduce a further change in the figurative use of language,[8] which seems to situate the care of the self alongside administrative practices, as "self-examination is taking stock" (71). Seneca is a stock-taking administrator, not a judge of his past. For Seneca, the technologies of self do not try to discover truth in the subject, but to remember the truth, to recover a truth that has been forgotten (what he should have done). Moreover, Foucault says, the recalling of mistakes made during the day makes it possible to measure the distinction between what has been done and what ought to have been done:

> the subject is not the operating ground for the process of deciphering but is the point where rules of conduct come together in memory. The subject constitutes the intersection between acts which have to be regulated and rules for what ought to be done. This is quite different from the Platonic conception and from the Christian conception of conscience.
>
> (72)

Similarly, the Stoics spiritualized the notion of *anachoresis* as retreat. The origin of the term had a broader meaning as the retreat of an army, the hiding of a slave who escapes from his master, or withdrawal into the country to escape the city. With the Stoics, the retreat into the country becomes a spiritual retreat into oneself (a mnemotechnical formula) (72).

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8 He seems to use juridical language, and it appears that the self is judge and accused at the same time. Seneca is the judge and prosecutes the self in such a way that the examination is a kind of trial. But in reality it is closer to administrative practices.

As well as the letters to friends as revelation of the self, the examination of self and conscience, including a recollection of what has been done, of what ought to have been done and of the comparison between the two, Foucault also points out another technique of self in the Stoics: *askēsis*. Yet askesis does not have a revelation of the secret of the self in its origin either, but a remembering. The Stoics founded their technologies of the self in remembrance, in the re-counting of experiences as a taking stock (alluding to Seneca's administrative language). For Plato, one should discover truth within oneself. For the Stoics, the truth is not in oneself but in the *logoi*, in the rules, in the teaching of the masters. One memorizes what one has listened to, converting the statements one has heard into rules of conduct. The Stoics recollect in order to review what they have done and what they should have done, with regard to the rule.

3.3.4 Technologies of the Self in Early Christianity

In early Christianity,[9] ascetism refers to a certain renunciation of the self and of real-ity because most of the time your self is a part of that reality you have to renounce in order to get access to another level of reality. This desire to attain the renunciation of the self distinguishes Christian asceticism (73). While in the tradition inherited from Stoicism, *askesis* does not mean renunciation, but the progressive consider-ation of self, or mastery over oneself, obtained not through the renunciation of real-ity but through the acquisition and assimilation of truth, its goal is access to the reality of this world. The Greek term is *paraskeuazõ* (to get prepared), and it refers to a set of practices through which one can acquire, assimilate, and transform truth into a permanent principle of action. It is a process toward a greater degree of sub-jectivity. Thus, *aletheia* becomes *ethos* (or acts of truth as *alethurgia*).

The main characteristics of Greek askesis include two types of exercises that test preparedness for the event itself: *melete* and *gymnasia*. *Melete* means medita-tion (it has the same root as *epimelesthai*), and consists of practicing a series of memorized responses and reactivating those responses, by placing oneself in a situation where one can imagine how one would react ("suppose that ..."): "imagining the articulation of possible events to test how you would react – that's meditation" (75). At the other extreme is *gymnasia* (to train oneself): while *meditatio* is an experience of imagination, *gymnasia* is training in a real situation, even though it may have been artificially induced (sexual abstinence, physical

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9 Foucault finds the the origin of biopolitics and of our governability in early Christianity. Our government is based on an intrinsic relation between government and truth.

privation, as well as other rituals of purification). In the culture of the Stoics, it comprises carrying out an examination of the independence of the individual with respect to the external world (very tough sports activities, mortification of the flesh to convince oneself that poverty is not an evil, and so on). Between the two extremes, *melete* and *gymnasia*, there is a whole series of intermediate possibilities, the purpose of which is the "control of representations, not the deciphering of truth" (78). Foucault find examples of these exercises in authors such as Epictetus and Cassian, for whom meditation is a type of permanent self-examination, in which everyone must be their own censor. Here, "the meditation on death is the culmination of all these exercises" (78).

To letters, the examination of conscience and *askesis*, Foucault added the interpretation of dreams.[10] But of all the technologies of the self that Christianity adapts from the Graeco-Roman era, the principal one is a type of *game of truth*. These techniques come about in the transition from pagan to Christian culture, in order to understand the continuities and discontinuities.

Christianity is a religion of salvation, which should lead the individual from one reality to another, for which a transformation of the self should occur in order to access the truth. And this access to the truth cannot be conceived of without self-knowledge. For Christianity, this entails the need to accept another form of truth different from that of faith: each person must know who they are – to try to know what is happening inside themselves, and to allow private or public witness against themselves. The relation between the obligations of faith and with oneself enable the purification of the soul. I quote: "Purity of the soul is the consequence of self-knowledge and a condition for understanding the text; in Augustine: Quis facit vertatem (to make truth in oneself, to get access to the light)" (80).

The early Christians had other technologies to discover and decipher the truth about the self, before penitence and confession. The modes of recognizing the truth about oneself were *exomologesis* and *exagoreusis*.

On the one hand, "recognition of fact", *exomologesis*, for Christians meant to publicly recognize their Christian faith was a ritual of recognition of themselves

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10 It was a very popular practice, but the only surviving texts are *The Interpretation of Dreams* by Artidemidorus (2nd century C.E.) and two other documents: that by Synesius of Cyrene, from the fourth century, who believed that everyone should interpret their own dreams, for which "one had to record what happened every day, both the life of the day and the life of the night" (79); and the *Sacred Discourses* by Aelius Aristides, written in the second century, who believed that in the interpretation of dreams we receive advice from the gods about remedies for illness: the care of the body (79). The matrix of these discourses is the ritual inscription of praises to the gods that have healed one.

as sinner and penitent. The individual was thus marked forever and could neither marry nor be ordained as a priest. *Exomologesis* is not a verbal behavior but the "dramatic recognition of one's status as a penitent". Quote: "To prove suffering, to show shame, to make visible humility and exhibit modesty – these are the main features of punishment" (84). Thus a shift is produced from the forms of verbalization to the forms of dramatization of the self, it is the beginning of what Foucault called "the theatre of truth".[11] Furthermore, this dramatization, which lasted until the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, means a transformation of the nominal relation with the truth to one that was dramatic and public; whereas for the Stoics, as we have seen with Seneca, this whole process was private.[12]

Their function was a form of erasing the sin and restoring the purity acquired by baptism. This was the paradox: it erases the sin and it reveals the sinner. *Exposé* is the heart of *exomologesis*. Three models were used in order to explain the paradox of erasing and disclosing: the medical model (one must show one's wounds in order to be cured); the tribunal model of judgement (confession will help in the penance); but the most used was the model of death, martyrdom and torture. The theories and practices of penance were elaborated around the problem of the person who prefers to die rather than to compromise or abandon the faith: the martyr is the penitent (85). And penitence is precisely the consequence of the change, of the break with oneself, with the past and the world:

> It's a way to show that you are able to renounce life and self, to show that you can face and accept death. Penitence of sin doesn't have as its target the establishing of an identity but serves instead to mark the refusal of the self, the breaking away from self: Ego non sum, ego. This formula is at the heart of publicatio sui. It represents a break with one's past identity. [...] Self-revelation is at the same time self-destruction.
>
> (43)

As early as the fourth century we find a very different technology for discovering the self: *exagoreusis*, reminiscent of the verbalizing exercises related to a teacher/ master of the pagan philosophical schools. Here Foucault points out how various Stoic technologies of the self have been transferred to Christian spiritual techniques.

In John Chrysostom, we find an example of self-examination with the same form and the same administrative nature as that described by Seneca in *De Ira*.

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11 "The subject is not the operating ground for the process of deciphering but is the point where rules of conduct come together in memory. The subject constitutes the intersection between acts which have to be regulated and rules for what ought to be done. This is quite different from the Platonic conception and from the Christian conception of conscience" (72).

12 The relation with disciplinary power is evident, and its theatrical nature recalls even the panopticon.

But this self-examination with administrative language is scarce in Christian literature. The practice of self-examination in Seneca is based on the capacity of the master to guide the disciple toward a happy and autonomous life through good advice, and it was carried out for a limited period. But Christian obedience differs from Graeco-Roman obedience: it is total and permanent obedience. John Cassian wrote: "Everything the monk does without the permission of his master constitutes a theft." The master's control is an end in itself and not a final state of autonomy. "It is a sacrifice of the self, of the subject's own will. This is the new technology of the self" (88). The monk must have the permission of his master to do anything, even to die. There is not a single moment when the monk can be autonomous. The self must construct itself through obedience. This technology is not based on the remembrance of the past but on the continuous vigilance of the present. This examination of the present is based on contemplation as opposed to mobility of spirit, a mobility that is considered as weakness: "The scrutiny of conscience consists of trying to immobilize consciousness, to eliminate movements of the spirit that divert one from God", and passes through the suppression of desire, which distances from God. "The scrutiny is based on the idea of a secret concupiscence" (90). That desire that must be controlled is action itself as double force, which interrelates life drive and death drive. Here, however, a strict death drive is developed.[13]

Exagoreusis was practised until the seventeenth century and the inauguration of penance in the thirteenth century was an important step in its rise. According to Foucault, the latter becomes more important. From the eighteenth century to the present, the techniques of verbalization have been reinserted without renunciation of the self but to constitute, positively, a new self. To use these techniques without renouncing oneself constitutes, for Foucault, a decisive break (94).

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13 There are, therefore, three principal types of self-examination: that which refers to thoughts (Cartesian), that which deals with the relation between thoughts and rules (Senecan), and that which establishes a relation between the hidden thought and interior impurity. At this moment hermeneutical Christianity of the self begins, with its deciphering of hidden thoughts and the establishment of confession: we can only discriminate between good and evil thoughts through the confession, giving ourselves over to being counselled by the master. However, the evil is hidden and unstated, which is why its verbalization will not be easy: confession is a mark of truth, even though the price of verbal expression was to turn everything that could not be expressed into a sin (93). The first is *exomologesis*, or dramatic expression of the situation of the penitent as sinner (martyrdom, "In the Penal Colony"). Second is what has been called *exagoreusis*, an analytical and continual verbalization of the thoughts carried out in the relation of complete and utter obedience to another. "This relation is modelled on the renunciation of one's own will and of one's own self" (93).

Lastly, we can reach the following conclusions. First, the foremost Greek technologies of self did not entail a rejection of subjectivity itself but, rather, the care of self had political ends, more specifically democratic, for the training of young politicians who needed to care for themselves in order to be capable, subsequently, of the care of others. The government of self and the government of others went hand in hand. Those first technologies of *cura sui* took on a care for the soul and the body, proof of which are the letters that the disciples addressed to their masters.

On the other hand, the care of self showed subjectivity as a dynamic process and not as a hermeneutics of the hidden, as would later occur in early Christianity. The relation between subject and truth is constituted in opposite ways in Graeco-Roman culture and in early Christianity: I have not been able to develop here the relations between truth as concealment/disclosure in Christianity and truth as action, as parrhesia. But it is undoubtedly one of the fundamental areas on which Foucault worked a few months after the Vermont lectures. Yet the continuity between parrhesia and Greek *cura sui* is evident, both being at the basis of the development of Athenian democracy, and upon which Foucault elaborated on numerous occasions.

Regarding the relation between desire and the death drive, one of the most important features of the definition of the subject in Foucault, as Judith Butler has so convincingly shown in her recent work, is that the subject cannot be radically freed from the mechanisms of power. The subject is constituted as subjection and liberation, at the same time. There is an active negativity at the basis of Foucauldian ethics: it is due to the death drive of the parrhesiast that he/she is capable of truth-telling, of confronting power. Like Freud, Foucault thinks of desire traversed by the death drive. But Foucault's most interesting contribution is that, precisely through action, the subject takes on the death drive as ethical and communal production (from negativity to virtuality). The most evident model, which Foucault turned to many times, is that of Socrates, who, as parrhesiast, produces a verbal truth (*truth-telling*) that combines criticism and construction for the government of others. Let us remember that criticism is, in itself, described by Foucault as a secondary and negative activity that is applied upon other discourse, whether political, literary, philosophical, etcetera ("What is Critique?"). The will in Foucault combines desire and the negativity of parrhesia. The action of speaking the truth concerns an awareness of putting oneself in danger, like running the risk of getting lost. But this is, at the same time, the only option that the ethical subject has of recognizing himself/herself as a political being: action as criticism (the logic of Sade).

Conversely, in his last lectures Foucault examines the figure of the parrhesiast who manages, in his/her subjective decision-making, in his/her ethical action, to

make the death drive the production of a communal, ethical and political event. It is, indubitably, the basis of the concept of resistance that Foucault formulated in the 1970s. We witness the opposition between a "fascination for the death drive" that the reciprocal tangle of Law and desire entails in early Christianity. In the words of Žižek, "in which the 'dead' letter of the Law perverts my very life-enjoyment, turning it into a fascination with death; [...] is what [Saint] Paul considers 'the way of the flesh' (as opposed to 'the way of the Spirit'). 'Flesh' includes both what is against the Law and the excessive self-torturing, self-mortifying, morbid fascination with the flesh that is *begotten by the Law*"[14] (Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject: The Absent Centre of Political Ontology,* 150).

3.4 Subject to the "*in*temperie". Readings of Foucault in the 21st Century

For Foucault, modernity is associated, on the one hand, with a concept of teleological history that is detached from the weight of tradition, and, on the other hand, with a concept of an autonomous and sovereign subject. This is why, if one wishes to analyze the critique of the concept of the modern subject in Foucault, one cannot avoid the discourse on history and vice versa. In 1971, Foucault declared as much in *Nietzsche, Genealogy, History*:

> History becomes "effective" to the degree that it introduces discontinuity into our very being-as it divides our emotions, dramatizes our instincts, multiplies our body and sets it against itself. "Effective" history deprives the self of the reassuring stability of life and nature, and it will not permit itself to be transported by a voiceless obstinacy toward a millennial ending.
>
> (88)

With this, Foucault underlines the dialogue between what were to be two of the most important issues in his work: the critique of the concept of the modern subject and his proposal of a genealogy of history as an alternative to teleological history. Modern subjectivity, which Foucault confronted in his early "death of man", stressed the need for a positive deconstruction of the concept of subject. He proposed thinking of the hidden face of the modern subject as a subject of desire, for which he traced a genealogy of *irregular subjects*, namely, of those subjects who had remained outside modern universality. These subjects, who make up the outside of the modern subject, are characterized at the same time by modes of narrating that are very different from those of the story as *bios* (it "deprives the self of the reassuring stability of life and nature"). We see the most

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14 We can find an example in the torture device in Kafka's "A Hunger Artist".

evident example in the chapter devoted to the "Sade Lectures" that Foucault gave at the University of Buffalo, in which Foucault sets forth a non-attributive and discontinuous mode of being that reveals the relationship between the death of man and the death of God, and that new, non-teleological concept of history.

In recent years, the work of Wendy Brown has continued the critique of modernity from the Foucauldian perspective. In *Politics Out of History* (2001), she attempts "an understanding of liberal universalism as not simply containing a history of excluded others but as having a specific normative content – heterosexual and patriarchal families, capital, and 'property in whiteness'" (9). According to Brown, liberalism therefore presupposes sovereign individuals and states to be a unit of analysis and as subjects of action. Sovereign individuals are considered based on their autonomy to define and satisfy their needs, and, principally, based on whether they are capable of taking charge of their acts, so that a "power conceived as generated and directed from within the entity itself" (10) can be ensured. But Foucauldian analyses of power bring into question whether the conviction that we are the ones who plan and pursue our ends can be maintained when we are so clearly, in part, the effects of those powers:

> How the disruption of the status of the universal in liberalism undermines the progress narrative is captured in a general questioning (if not outright rejection) of assimilationist and integrationist formulations of social change and the adoption of identity-based justice claims and local nationalisms.
>
> (9)

For Brown, as for Foucault, the nexus between subjectivity and history is narrative, stories. Thus the questioning of this supposed modern universality erodes the reliability of its classic narrative about what its legitimization is based upon. This tale that liberalism tells defines an "outside". And this outside, which legitimized liberalism, is represented by opposing social systems such as feudalism – understood as its past – or Communism in the twentieth century. Yet, Brown argues, recent years have shown that feudalism remains in the subject: the little independence between state and market, the disappearance of the Communist models, but above all, the bourgeois character of the "universals".

From this perspective, a new story of subjectivity has become necessary, one that overcomes the narrative limits of modernity – a narrative model that overcomes the limits of the *bios*: those of the life of nature (birth) and death as end. Apparently, this story of a subject that spreads out from before their very birth and beyond their very death, that breaks the attribution of a body, a life and a story, would lack verisimilitude. This is because, from Aristotle on, the story that was told had to be a living organism. Similarly, the work of Jacques Rancière has come to show the importance that the studies on fiction have for the analysis of

contemporary societies. Rancière's thought complements Foucault's on fiction where it positions itself facing the challenge of thinking fiction as opposed to the "real", because, since Guy Debord by way of Althusser, "ideology has spread its dominion massively over all the real. The real is largely confused with ideology" (Althusser, *Machiavelli and Us,* 17). Fiction is defined by both thinkers not in terms of invention but as a material negativity that makes it possible to see/hear a virtual *being there*, as an opening to a past that extends its consequences onto the present and a future that likewise entails its demands. Fiction, thus defined, is the model of resistance that Brown appeals to for the new narrativity.

In order to consider the proposal of a story of self that shifts the limits of modern rationality, I will analyze two models passed down from the Foucauldian project: the impossible models of Judith Butler in *Senses of the Subject* (2015) and Giorgio Agamben in *Language and Death* (2006 [1982]) and *The Fire and the Tale* (2017 [2014]). These propositions are a break from the classical organic model, as both challenge the limits of the story as *bios* and question the principle of the tale's rationality, from a hermeneutics of the subject that is enunciated to itself and to others.

In the basis of the hermeneutics of the subject that Butler propounds in *Senses of the Subject*, we can find a *retroactive* hermeneutics of the literary text. Butler states that the comprehension of the subject (subjected subjectivity) is based on the literary models that present their characters telling of their own birth, such as the "I Am Born" of *David Copperfield*. This is an "impossible" perspective, alien to the discourse that is governed by the cause-effect dialectic. The other impossible literary perspective is that of a subject of enunciation who speaks from death itself, such as in Julio Cortázar's "Las babas del diablo". This is the process of composition of a subject not "for-death" but that takes an undefined plural voice.

For this deconstruction of the liberal subject and its story, it is necessary to begin with Foucault's concept of fiction. As has already been seen, in "L'Arrière-Fable" (1966), Foucault gives *fiction* a fundamental character as the mode of articulation of all discourse, the nature of which is historical, which I have referred to as the "social-fictional pact". The concept of truth-telling, therefore, shifted to being historical and cultural, as that which a society is willing to accept as credible and not structural. And the modes of truth-telling, or veridiction, in this early text already had a historical and fictional nature. He would develop this approach in the later years of his research. In the Louvain lectures, "Wrong-Doing, Truth-Telling" (1981), he fully confronts the question of how a mode of veridiction (Wahrsagen) could come about in history, and under what conditions. It is a question of defining the modes of veridiction in their plurality, exploring the forms of obligation by which each one of these modes links to the subject of truthful speech, specifying the areas they are applied to and the domains of objects that they reveal, and,

lastly, the relations, connections and interferences that are established between them. In short, it is a historical politics of truth or a political history of veridictions.

3.4.1 *Before their Own Birth*: The Hermeneutics of the Subject

In *The Psychic Life of Power*, Butler reinterpreted Foucault's processes of subjectivation with regard to power and resistance through a subject that is constituted in origin as a *fold*, a turning on itself. Here Butler defined the subject as a consciousness that is determined by a relation of power, dependence, or subjugation. But, according to the author, this origin is supressed. Thus subjectivity is defined as a process in which otherness affects and precedes the enunciation of the "self". Therefore, in the definition of subject that she makes in this work, otherness, as the drive of the power that subjects, forms the origin itself of subjectivity as psychic reality. Hence the self is already, as of always, also the other of the community that founds it, in its ethical dimension: the subject is constituted, therefore, as a fold, and its nature is relational:

> The form this power takes is relentlessly marked by a figure of turning, a turning back upon oneself or even a turning *on* oneself. (...) The turn appears to function as a tropological inauguration of the subject, a founding moment whose ontological status remains permanently uncertain.
>
> (Butler, *The psychic life of power*, 4)

According to Butler, this tropological dilemma of the subject is that of the trope as a fold, in its original Greek definition.[15] Continuing with the question of the forming of the subject, this relation of the subject with its foundational dependence would be thoroughly repressed – that is, the subject emerges at the same time as the unconscious. This would mean that the subordination and formation of the subject in Foucault would take on psychoanalytic value in Butler's reading: in order for the subject to emerge, the primary forms of this bond must arise and at the same time be denied. In other words, "the 'I' as predicated upon that

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15 There is not enough space here to go into detail on this subject, but it is worth noting about this tropological configuration of the subject the paradox or turn that lies at the very origin of the modern novel. Several authors have highlighted this relation, including Julia Kristeva, who considers it a diagnostic trait of the modern novel that was already evident in Bakhtinian dialogism. More recently, we can find it in Jacques Rancière's definition of the politics of literature as contradiction (*The Politics of Literature*, 2011). Similarly, in *Poéticas de la enfermedad en la novela moderna* [*Poetics of Illness in the Modern Novel*] (2015), María Victoria Utrera analyses and gives many examples of the key role that the turn/fold occupies in the modern novel, including Dostoevsky, Maupassant, Poe and Hoffman.

foreclosure, grounded in" the love-subordination that founded it.[16] Therefore, both for Foucault and for Butler, an analysis of power is inseparable from a history of subjectivities as resistance,[17] and this through the discursive constitution of subjectivity. For Butler,[18] whether through interpellation in Althusser's sense, or through discursive productivity, as per Foucault, "'subjection' signifies the process of becoming subordinated by power as well as the process of becoming a subject" (2). So according to Butler, the production of the discursive subject of Foucault has as a precedent Althusser's theory of interpellation.

Foucault's last lectures and seminars were published from 2004 to 2015. Following the new ideas from this previously unpublished work, Butler, in *Giving an Account of Oneself*, corrects the rigidity of the Nietzschean model of the configuration of the subject by power. The "rigidity" refers to what Butler calls the "punitive scene of inauguration for the subject" (*Giving an Account of Oneself*, 15), which Foucault had stated in the first volume of *History of Sexuality* but which he himself had corrected in his later lectures. Fundamentally, however, he returns to an issue that he had discussed there, of knowing whether we are somehow determined before being born by that other that precedes us and which is precisely what makes our configuration as subjects possible – and tying it in with Brown's concern in *Politcs Out of History*: how do we talk about ethical responsibility? That is to say, referring to Butler's book title, how can a subject give an account of oneself? For Butler, the subject is not constructed *ex nihilo* but neither does the dispossession of the self mean that the subjective foundation of ethics has been lost. On the contrary, "it may well be the condition for moral inquiry, the condition under which morality itself emerges" (8). Therefore, ethics will be inseparably bound up with the subject and the social configuration that precedes it and constitutes it at the same time.

The concept of ethics upon which she bases her argument also follows Adorno and other recent authors such as Rancière, for whom the collective *ethos* cannot be homogeneous and unitary. When the collective *ethos* is not shared by the whole and yet is shown under the appearance of a false unity, it instrumentalizes violence to maintain the appearance of its collective nature. The *ethos* is violent when it becomes an anachronism and denies the rights of the individual (Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself*, 5). At the same time, ethics

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16 What Butler calls passionate attachments (6), and which owes a debt to *amor fati* as Nietzsche defined it in Aphorism 276 of *The Gay Science*: simultaneously subjection and desire.

17 Thinking of the lives of infamous men as modes of dissident forms of being.

18 Butler's concept also functions with a similar logic as the Freudian concept of *Umheimlich*: that of the disturbing that has been repressed which coexists with the familiar. Because it is the repression that enables the superposition of opposites, and their coexistence.

cannot be so for the individual external to the collective. Ultimately, for Butler, the very constitution of the subject is social, dialogic and ethical:

> Yet there is no "I" that can fully stand apart from the social conditions of its emergence, no "I" that is not implicated in a set of conditioning moral norms, which, being norms, have a social character that exceeds a purely personal or idiosyncratic meaning.
>
> The "I" does not stand apart from the prevailing matrix of ethical norms and conflicting moral frameworks. In an important sense, this matrix is also the condition for the emergence of the "I," even though the "I" is not causally induced by those norms.
>
> (*Giving an Account of Oneself*, 7)

According to Butler, Foucault distances himself from his view in the first volume of *The History of Sexuality* and alters his theory of discursive construction.

> The subject is no simple effect or function of a prior form of rationality, but neither does reflexivity assume a single structure. Moreover, when the subject becomes an object for itself, it also misses something of itself; this occlusion is constitutive of the process of reflexivity. [...] Something is sacrificed, lost, or at least spent or given up at the moment in which the subject makes himself into an object of possible knowledge.
>
> (*Giving an Account of Oneself*, 120)

For this reason, Foucault asks the question: "How much does it cost the subject to be able to tell the truth about itself?" When the human subject applies forms of rationality to itself, this self-application is costly. To which Butler adds a new problem: how can the subject overcome this vicious circle between power and subordination?

For Butler it is the story that enables us to overcome this impasse. She considers that the subject always gives an account of itself insofar as it is interpellated by another to do so. Every one of us gives an account of ourselves when interpellated and interrogated about our actions. The giving an account then acquires narrative form. Hence, the mode by which it is established whether the self was or not the cause of the suffering of another has a dialogic narrative structure. The story provides a persuasive medium by virtue of which the causal agency of the self can be understood. In this sense, writes Butler, "narrative capacity constitutes a precondition for giving an account of oneself and assuming responsibility for one's actions through that means" (12). But what would the story be like of a subject that has to take on what has formed it but in which it has not participated voluntarily?

The ethical subject that tries to give an account of itself is therefore faced with two limits. On one hand, it cannot give an account of what precedes it and what, nevertheless, forms it, because "this self is already implicated in a social temporality that exceeds its own capacities for narration" (8). And, on the other

hand, the modes in which the subject gives an account of itself have a *cost*, insofar as the narrative is subjected to some forms of historical rationality:[19]

> There will be a reflexive action of a subject, and this action will be occasioned by the very rationality to which it attempts to conform or, at least, with which it negotiates. This form of rationality will foreclose others, so that one will become knowable to oneself only within the terms of a given rationality, historically conditioned, leaving open and unaddressed what other ways there may have been, or may well yet be, in the course of history.
>
> (120)

Both limits, thus stated, would come imposed by a narrativity determined by a temporality, which is a rationality, in which the subject is formed and gives an account of itself. They would appear, therefore, as structural limits or a priori the discursive nature that would determine not only the subject in its daily events, but also in its ethical dimension. Butler thus proposes confronting the forms of historical rationality that have conditioned and subjected the narrative of the self since Aristotle (because, as I have explained, to tell the story of the self is at the same time making history itself). For this, Butler applies the Foucauldian concept of fiction and fable to the configuration of the story of the self – which is, remember, the ethical subject's mode of giving an account of itself. Butler shows that both limits depend on the same classical causal logic. Faced with the temporal limit, as an impasse between the story of the self and the formation of the subject, she now proposes not succumbing to silence but to "accept this belatedness and proceed in a narrative fashion that marks the paradoxical condition of trying to relate something about my formation that is prior to my own narrative capacity and that, in fact, brings that narrative capacity about" (*Giving an Account of Oneself*, 2). In other words, Butler proposes accepting a narrative model that enables us to tell and take authorship of the story that precedes us, before our own birth: the retrospective story.

3.4.2 The Retroactive Hermeneutics of the Subject that Narrates Itself

In *Senses of the Subject*, published in 2015, ten years after *Giving an Account of Oneself*, Butler's aim was to expand her work on the formation process of the

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19 It could be said, following Judith Revel's hermeneutics of discontinuity (2014), that Foucault had already answered this question in the 1970s, particularly in his 1973 study, *I, Pierre Riviere, having slaughtered my mother, my sister, and my brother: A Case of Parricide in the 19th Century*, which involves an "impossible" mode of narration, one that resists the framework of modern rationality.

subject and its capacity to give an account of itself. The great novelty of this book, however, is the text that precedes it, Foucault's only unpublished work, and which would have been Butler's motivation in her new study. Here, she herself *gives an account* of a constant concern in her work: that which deals with the formation of the subject. But this same text introduces something new in that it aims to reformulate the two limits of the narrativity of the ethical subject that are not found in her earlier texts: the temporal limit and that of the discursive modes of rationality.

Butler states that both limits, however, depend on the same classical causal logic. Concerning the temporal limit, an impasse between the story of self and the formation of the subject, she now proposes that we do not succumb to the silence but "accept this belatedness and proceed in a narrative fashion that marks the paradoxical condition of trying to relate something about my formation that is prior to my own narrative capacity and that, in fact, brings that narrative capacity about" (*Senses of the subject*, 2). In other words, Butler proposes accepting a narrative model that enables us to narrate ourselves before our own emergence. For a subject to give an account of itself, it needs to position itself retrospectively, but this "casts doubt on whether or not I can describe this situation at all, since strictly speaking I was not present for the process, and I myself seem to be one of its various effects" (2).

This belatedness in the story of oneself is, according to Butler, what Freud calls *Nachträglichkeit* (deferred action or retroaction). In "Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety" (1926), Freud defines it as those mnemic impressions or traces that might not acquire all their meaning, all their effect, until a time subsequent to their initial recording. This is therefore a concept of retrospective temporality, which combines the narration with historical perspective. The Freudian deferred action also has a fundamental hermeneutic value that Butler uses for her critique of this temporal limit of discourse, insofar as *rereading* and the capacity of reading as resignification and appropriation of the past.[20] As Eickhoff ("On *Nachträglichkeit*", 2006) explains, *Nachträglichkeit* is a circular hermeneutic concept that makes it possible to make complementary readings in both directions: from the present to the past and vice versa. So an event in the present would have an influence on certain contents of the memory, modifying them and giving them new significance. These contents of the memory would at the same time become newly activated and have new repercussions on the present and the future. The reading model that Butler puts forward also keeps a close relation with the modes of Foucault's archival reading (1970) and with what Judith Revel

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20 Butler removes the concept of traumatic content that Freud gives this belated and traumatic understanding.

(2010) has called "discontinuity". These models of reading put an emphasis on a discursivity that is neither linear nor causal. These authors defend a model of discontinuous discourse that escapes the principle of causality[21] and whose reading can be, as Judith Revel puts it, "reversible".[22]

The discursive model that allows Butler to think against this belatedness is literature, because, as Foucault states in "Literature and Language" (1966), literature is founded on an excess of language, not on silence or the ineffable. Butler reflects on that narrative sequence of an "I" that emerges at the time that it is enunciated, starting with a literary model that gives an account of that scenario that she notes as impossible. This is the opening of Dickens's *David Copperfield*, a novel in which the narrator speaks with extraordinary precision about the details of the ordinary life that preceded and included his own birth. Although the story begins by mentioning that the history has been told to him and that he believes it to have been thus, the way in which the story continues, it seems that he himself is the only one who has the authority to tell of his own birth. Moreover, it is as if he had been present in this "impossible scene". Butler warns that narrative authority does not need to be at the scene. It only requires one to be able to reconstruct the scene from a position of non-presence in a *believable* way, or that an unbelievable narration be convincing for its own reasons.

With this statement, Butler alludes directly to the Aristotelian concepts of verisimilitude, mimesis and fable, because they are at the basis of the limits of the narration of a subject who has to give an account of itself as an ethical and responsible subject. The limits of giving an account of oneself are limits of a specific type of narration, as defined Aristotle. That Aristotle admitted the capacity of knowledge to the *Poetics* meant placing limits on it that were those of metaphysics. Therefore, the concepts that he defines in *Poetics*, and also in part in *Rhetoric*, are founded on the principles of this metaphysics, insofar as mimesis is of reality and for the comprehension of reality it is necessary, according to Aristotle, to obey the laws of causality. And this, in turn, determines what is admitted as true. In the literary text, this causal organization defines the fable, which determines what is truthful in the text. But remember that what is truthful was identified with what is probable, due to that status of *poiesis* being closer to the philosophy that speaks of what might happen than to history, which speaks of what has happened. Therefore, Aristotle concluded, poiesis, like philosophy, was more universal. In this way, the limits of narration were

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21 As in Nietzsche's discontinuous chain: discourses are susceptible to changing their meanings and can take on others for which they were not at first thought.
22 Revel bases her reading of the revolutionary possibility of history on this.

determined by a progressive temporality that established a structure determined by a causal logic of events (beginning, middle, end).

Having called into question the limits of classical narration, Butler confronts progressive temporality, the retroactive temporality of Freud, and causal logic, the belatedness between the formation process of the subject and their enunciation as "I speak". This narrativity from an impossible position, says Butler, helps us to understand the theory of subject formation:

> Could it be that the narrative dimension of the theory of subject formation is impossible, yet necessary, inevitably belated, especially when the task is to discern how the subject is initially animated by what affects it and how these transitive processes are reiterated in the animated life that follows? If we want to talk about these matters, we have to agree to occupy an impossible position, one that, perhaps, repeats the impossibility of the condition we seek to describe.
>
> (*Senses of the subject*, 4)

Thus, the author takes Aristotle's concept of verisimilitude one step further, to the concept of virtuality, which combines in itself what is real and what is possible. For Butler, as also for Foucault and Deleuze, a narration contains a series of virtuals or possibles, which are updated following each historical moment (Foucault) or each plane of the particular reality (Deleuze). The virtual is realized in a state of things and of what is lived that makes it possible. This means, according to Butler, that these impossible models of narration offer the possibility for the subject to take control of his story, even of the part that preceded their linguistic consciousness:

> What he relates may or may not be true, but it hardly matters, once we understand that the story he reaches for says something about his authorial ambitions and desires, clearly meant to counter and displace the infant's passivity and the lack of motor control, a resistance perhaps to needing to be in the hands of those he never chose.
>
> (4)

Butler interprets this scene of extraordinary self-understanding in terms of a *narrative resistance*: the subject resists the power relations that formed him through an unbelievable but verisimilar narration. Beyond the logic of the Aristotelian fable, Deleuzian virtuality (2007) and Butler's analysis, they are anchored in the logic of the event.

One of the fundamental aspects of this theory is that Butler does not assert that what happens in literary works such as these has a parallel in the theory of subject formation. Rather, she says that narrative gestures such as these find their place close to any theory of subject formation (5). This narrative dimension of Butler's theory of subject formation is based on a hermeneutics of the subject that is a hermeneutics of narration, inextricably tied to literature. This hermeneutics of

the virtual and belatedness is necessary, above all when the task is to discern, Butler says, how the subject is initially animated by what affects it and how "the contours of an ethical relationship emerge from this ongoing paradox of subject formation" (6). If we wish to talk about it, Butler says, we must accept occupying the impossible position. To say that this is impossible does not mean that it cannot be done, only that we cannot find a way back from the constraints of adult life, except by asking how those incipient passages remain with us, recurring again and again. To say that I am affected before even becoming "I" means confounding both temporalities through language. And Dickens's impossible model allows Butler to enunciate an affective resistance that the literary text realizes in its letting see what had habitually belonged to the unconscious.

3.4.3 An Aesthetics of Existence as Ethics of the Understanding of Self

We return to the question that Butler asked in *Giving an Account of Oneself*: how can a subject that has already been conditioned before its own birth make itself responsible for its own acts? Ten years later, she has placed at the centre of the debate the role that literature occupies in the narration the subject itself gives. As we have seen, in *Senses of the Subject* Butler proposes a retroactive hermeneutics of the subject that narrates to the self. When the omniscient narrator of *David Copperfield* recounts his own birth, he "takes authorship" of what had preceded him and formed him. The opening chapter of Dickens's novel, under the title "I Am Born", uses a narrative strategy that Butler interprets as a double irony ("will this narrator be authored, or will he author himself?"), for the narrator is a construction of the author and so counts on his authorship even as he poses that question, "suggesting that he might be able to leap out of the text that supports his fictional existence" (3).

The narrator, from a position of non-presence in a verisimilar way, "takes authorship" of their own story, giving it a significance in that they recount their particular understanding of themselves (3). In this "taking authorship" of their own story, the narrator intervenes, takes on and transforms the passivity of their story, which could not be deleted but could be retroactively reinterpreted. The subject thus assumes what forms it collectively and affectively, which is ultimately the ethical configuration that gives birth to it as a subject. But this "taking authorship" does not entail a determinism of the subject but rather that, as Butler says, the capacity of transformation of the subject – the creation of oneself (*poiesis*) – cannot be undertaken outside of a mode of subjectivation or subjection (*assujettissement*). Consequently, self-realization cannot take place in the absence of the norms that configure the possible forms a subject can adopt (*Giving an account of oneself*, 17).

For this reason, Butler explains, the shift from a hermeneutics of the subject, which is given in the context of a set of norms that precede and exceed the subject, to an aesthetics of subjectivity must be made through critique. Following the arguments that Foucault made in his lecture, "What is Critique?", Butler states that the practice of critique would thus "expose the limits of the historical scheme of things, the epistemological and ontological horizon within which subjects come to be at all. To make oneself in such a way that one exposes those limits is precisely to engage in an aesthetics of the self that maintains a critical relation to existing norms" (17). This critique, she says, would provide the desubjugation of the subject within what Foucault called a "politics of truth".

Undoubtedly, the literary modes through which a subject can give an account of itself and include this tradition of a "politics of truth" are those that are formulated in the first person as omniscient narrator, as a confession, narrating their memories, in a diary, in letters, and so on. Such discursive strategies form part of the technologies of self, as *technē* of oneself or *poiesis*. But the truth of these texts, as Butler reminds us in *Senses of the Subject*, concerns less the reference than the use of discursive strategies that enable us to give an account of what forms us and precedes us, that is, of our birth as ethical and social beings. These are narrative strategies that, as has been explained, enable the subject to overcome the impasse between their conscious and discursive birth, and in which subjectivity was formed in a receptive way. It is therefore through the hermeneutics of the literary text that Butler definitively overcomes the discursive limits of the hermeneutics of the subject, which she had described in *The Psychic Life of Power*, and which impeded the subject from giving an account of itself and taking authorship of its own story: "Subjection consists precisely in this fundamental dependency on a discourse we never chose but that, paradoxically, initiates and sustains our agency" (*The psychic life of power*, 2).

As Butler explained, one gives an account of oneself insofar as one is interpellated and, in one's story, adopts the gesture that precedes and founds it. With this gesture, Butler assumes Walter Benjamin's thesis by which the subject makes an experience with the past that is unique. One takes responsibility for oneself when assuming and taking authorship of one's story in the narration of the self. Ultimately, these necessary narrative modes, although fantastical, make it possible to alter the status of truth of literature, which is not with a causal mimesis but with an ethical truth.

3.4.4 From the Outside to the Post-mortem Virtual Subject

a. The fold and the vortex: the relational subject

The legacy of the hermeneutics of the subject and its relation with literature in later Foucault finds one of its most productive readings of the 21st century in Butler, and entails an overhaul of the interpretation made by Gilles Deleuze in his 1986 lectures on Foucault. In turn, the reading Deleuze made of Foucault's concept of subject finds another fundamental echo that is simultaneously conflicting and complementary, in Giorgio Agamben.

It is worth noting that Deleuze, Butler and Agamben all choose literary models to address the hermeneutics of the subject inherited from Foucault. It is precisely using Foucault's readings of literary texts that Butler's *impossible literary model* contrasts with Deleuze's *oceanic literary model*, given in his lectures on subjectivity in Foucault (*La subjetivación. Curso sobre Foucault*, 2015), out of which Agamben would develop his metaphorical concept of the subject as "vortex" (*The fire and the tale*, 2017). All three also make use of the concept of the subject as a fold, but taking different directions. If for Butler subjectivity is a fold of the other understood as the social (Levinas, Laplanche), in Deleuze, subjectivity is a fold of an impersonal exteriority, while in the case of Agamben, closer to the Deleuzian reading, it is an aquatic fold of the linguistic being, in the modes (mannerism) in which the substance relates with the modes in the historical future of language (*The fire and the tale*, 53).

In order to understand the different directions these readings take, we need to look at the contrast between the spatiality in which Deleuze's concept is developed, whereas in Butler it is developed around two temporalities: the belated, *Nachträglichkeit*-retroactive temporality, and another in which the subject distances itself, denies its attachment and projects itself in an *autopoiesis*. In Deleuze, the line[23] of subjectivity breaks with the line of power toward the absolute outside as *deterritorialized geography*. The unconscious is similarly defined in both authors in a contrary way: for Butler, in the formation of subjectivity, the unconscious is formed out of an affective otherness, which is, at the same time, the origin of an ethics; in Deleuze's reading of Foucault, the unconscious is neutral because it only knows impersonals, indefinite articles, third persons, in other

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23 Deleuze distinguishes three lines in Foucault: knowledge, power and subjectivity. Deleuze says that we must understand line of flight understood as an attempt to free and deterritorialize thought, but like all lines of flight it can be revolutionary or generate oppressive thought; the line of flight can produce insane, schizophrenic or paranoid geniuses. Thus the need for prudence, in order to avoid as much as possible setbacks and destruction (Deleuze, *Subjetividad*, 28).

words, non-persons (Deleuze, *Subjetividad*, 11) and would be heir to Blanchot's idea of the impersonal. In Blanchot, furthermore, this third line would be the "one dies" which must be passed through, although the movement that pulls it from death is produced:

> But that moment through which it has passed is not deleted, that moment remains. The line of the outside will always be marked by this deadly nature: the only way of escaping power is to cross the shallow stream... the shallow stream of death.
>
> (28)

But what is this death that one can return from? Death in Blanchot is something very dangerous, it is to confront the void, "there, reason is lost" (29). That radical outside, the third line, as Deleuze calls it, is thus *Unreason*. The outside that forms the interiority (subjectivity as fold of the outside) confronts, according to Deleuze, a break line that is the radical outside – that is, death, madness, Unreason. Thus, Deleuze argues, the fold is necessary; otherwise one cannot live (29). In contrast, for Butler this confrontation is already there in the moment prior to the formation of all subjects, one step before (no more) the subject's beginning. Thus Butler overcomes Blanchot's Heideggerianism, which is the precedent to this concept (the outside as the neutral). It is not being for death, but the Freudian configuration of the subject as a deferral of understanding.

The literary model that Deleuze uses of the fold as a condition for life breaking with death is the oceanographic model: *Moby Dick*. Captain Ahab confronts the line of the outside, he passes from the other side, Deleuze says, but he has not made a fold, his vessel is broken. On all levels this, says Deleuze, concerns the river, the ship, the sea, and so on. Nevertheless, we find another literary text where the formation of the fold of the outside reaches a good harbour. This is the novel by Blanchot, *Thomas the Obscure* (1941), which shows this question in an almost explanatory way. I am particularly referring to the first chapter, where the process of the formation of the fold of the outside is described step by step.

1. The opening paragraph of the novel describes the formation of the line of the outside:

> Thomas sat down and looked at the sea. He remained motionless for a time, as if he had come there to follow the movements of the other swimmers and, although the fog prevented him from seeing very far, he stayed there, obstinately, his eyes fixed on the bodies floating with difficulty. [...] The conviction that there was, in fact, no water at all made even his effort to swim into a frivolous exercise from which he drew nothing but discouragement. Perhaps he should only have had to get control of himself to drive away such thoughts, but his eye found nothing to cling to, and it seemed to him that he was staring into the void with the intention of finding help there.
>
> (Blanchot, *Thomas the Obscure*, 7)

2. The exit to the impersonal outside, or what Deleuze calls "confronting the one dies":

> [...] As he swam, he pursued a sort of revery in which he confused himself with the sea. The intoxication of leaving himself, of slipping into the void, of dispersing himself in the thought of water, made him forget every discomfort.

> (8)

3. The fold as the interiority of the outside:

> [...] The illusion did not last. He was forced to roll from one side to the other, like a **boat** adrift, in the water which gave him a body to swim [...] he went on swimming as if, deep within the restored core of his **being**, he had discovered a new possibility [...] it was like an imaginary **hollow** which he entered because, before he was there, his imprint was there already. And so he made a last effort to fit completely inside. It was easy; he encountered no obstacles; he rejoined himself; he blended with himself, entering into this place which no one else could penetrate.

> (8–9)

As has been seen, both in Deleuze and Butler the interpretation of Foucault's legacy of the process of subjectivation as a fold of the outside is undertaken through literary models. But although Deleuze explains that line of the outside as the "one dies" or the threat of Unreason, through what he comes to call "literary experiences" such as those of Hölderlin or Artaud, Butler meanwhile proposes a literary model that belongs to an ethics of discourses that precede and form ethical subjectivity. Agamben's reading, also formulated on the line of "one dies", is in dialogue with the concerns of Butler and Deleuze that I have expressed here. But I will particularly look at the reconfiguration of the relations between subjectivity and historical time, which could be seen as a mode of complementing that of Butler's.

b. The "*in-temperie*" virtual subject

Giorgio Agamben describes a subjectivity marked by the margin of the outside that forms the fold as "one dies", also concerned by the modes of legibility in the face of a lost origin, that is, in the face of the irremediable loss of an original meaning that could be re-established. Thus it can be argued that in the subject formation process not only does the story that precedes its own birth have an effect, determining in the subject a dialogic structure, but also as a subject conditioned by that other fictitious story that is the anticipation of death itself. Therefore, the process of subjectivation is supported on a double fictional base that enables it to give an account of itself insofar as the process of subjectivation is configured as transsubjective plurality in both directions. In other words, for Agamben the fold of the outside that frames the subject is neither the death nor the disappearance of the

subject but rather its potentiality, since the inoperative time of certain death introduces a hiatus in the present as negativity and possibility.

Let us say, moreover, that both form part of the same hermeneutic gesture. As Eickhoff explains, *Nachträglichkeit* is a circular hermeneutic concept that makes it possible to make complementary readings in both directions: from the present to the past and vice versa. So a reading from the present would have an effect on certain contents of the memory, altering them and giving them new significance. These memory contents, in turn, would be newly activated and would have new repercussions in the present and the future.

But how can the relationship of literature with death be constituent action of the subject? To answer this question, let us look at two texts by Agamben: *Language and Death. The Place of Negativity* (2006 [1982]) and the more recent *The Fire and the Tale* (2017 [2014]). In the former, the Italian author tackles the relation that Western thought establishes between the subject, death and language from an ethical perspective but still immersed in a metaphysical discourse:

> Both the "faculty" for language and the "faculty" for death, inasmuch as they open for humanity the most proper dwelling place, reveal and disclose this same dwelling place as always already permeated by and founded in negativity. Inasmuch as he is speaking and mortal, man is, in Hegel's words, the negative being who "is that which he is not and not that which he is" or, according to Heidegger, the "placeholder (*platzhalter*) of nothingness". (Agamben, *Language and death*, xii)

The negativity of the subject, what it is and is not, proceeds from the *fictitious* experience of death as *anticipation* of its possibility: "This negativity is the basis for the possibility of the negativity of *in*authentic Dasein in its falling (*Verfallen*); and as falling, every inauthentic Dasein factically is. *Care itself, in its very essence, is permeated with negativity through and through [durch und liurch von Nichtigkeit durchsetzt]*" (*Language and death,* 2). Let us consider, therefore, the political capacity of negativity that Agamben shows in *Language and Death*. In order to do so, we must turn to *The Fire and the Tale*. More than thirty years separate the two works (1982–2014), and Agamben's thinking on negativity acquires the political dimension I have referred to with Rancière and Foucault, which Agamben calls a "poetics – or politics – of inoperativity" (*The Fire and the Tale*, 50).

Agamben's question revolves around negativity as a "forgetting" of meaning, and as inoperativity of the work – always in potentiality as potentiality of no, Bartleby's "I would prefer not to" – the time of which is that of virtuality. This time is what permits the work to speak and be silent at the same time:

> The genuinely philosophical element contained by a work – be it an artistic, scientific, or theoretical work – is its capacity to be developed; something that has remained – or has

willingly been left – unspoken and that needs to be found and seized.

(*The Fire and the Tale*, 34)

As in Deleuze and Blanchot, this development of potentiality, Agamben writes, enables attaining an "impersonal zone of indifference". However, this impersonal and neutral zone has a genuinely political nature, insofar as in it "every proper name, every copyright, and every claim to originality fades away" (34). In this way, the pre-individual conditions that form subjectivity formed the interrelational and ethical nature of the subject; this negativity is, at the same time, the opening to the possibility of the subject and of a democracy of reading founded on a hermeneutics of the unfinished text.[24] It is here that Agamben positions the Foucauldian project of the care of the self as "the way in which the individual constitutes himself as the moral subject of his own actions" (130), or "aesthetics of existence". Following Foucault, the subject is that ethical relation in itself and the creation of the self. Because the subject is by nature unfinished, only its total absence of substance enables the subject to be the object of its own work, in the same way that only the pre-individual determination of the subject makes it susceptible to modification by itself and by others, through an activity and a technē. This is the true sense of the aesthetics of existence in Foucault, Agamben says: "Happiness – the ethical task par excellence, at which every work on oneself aims – is 'attached' to writing, that is, becomes possible only through a creative practice. The care of the self necessarily passes through an *opus*" (134). Thus the art of the self, the work on life itself, becomes the most removed from a superficial dandyism and goes on to be the necessary condition for the subject's resistance to the pre-subjective forces of domination. This is how we should understand the epitaph on the gravestone of the painter Paul Klee that Agamben quotes: "a being whose abode is 'just as much with the dead as with the unborn' and who is, for this, 'closer than usual to creation'" (135). And literature becomes, insofar as it is the work of the care of the self, a supplement sine qua non for the ethical configuration of the subject. Or, equally, the ethical subject is, simultaneously and inseparably, an aesthetic subject and a historical subject.

Lastly, we can conclude that between the two fictional times – retrospective and anticipatory – the *decentred life* is developed as virtual story of the subject that becomes a work of the self. This is because its time is the time of the virtuality that comes from the negative potentiality, that is, from the unfinished nature of the subject. The subject is, therefore, indefinitely open to the outside: the others of the community but also those that have remained outside of history.

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24 Agamben again here turns to the mannerist onto-aesthetics of Deleuze in *The Fold*, already mentioned in the chapter on Sade's irregular subjects.

The unfinished, open nature of the subject means that, for Agamben, literature is a supplement of being as technology of the work of the self. Literature, as language from death, has the capacity to speak for those that cannot because they have no access. Literature is an opening to the outside, whose time is always deferred by the hermeneutic circle of *Nachträglichkeit*.

3.4.5 Subject and History to the "In-*temperie*"

Returning to the question left open at the start of this chapter, how does the study of the concept of the subject make it possible to rethink a concept of history, both in crisis? Foucault's proposal of introducing the discontinuity of history in the subject ("History becomes 'effective' to the degree that it introduces discontinuity into our very being") can equally be read in reverse: thinking history from its concept of subject, which would decentre the temporal limits of its own story: telling our story is to make history.

And, in line with Brown, the critique of the modern subject is also a critique of the liberalism that presupposes sovereign individuals and states as units of analysis and as subjects of action. On the contrary, the subjects we have defined are neither autonomous nor supported upon their autonomy, but are clearly interrelational and only capable of assuming their acts through their non-autonomy.

As Foucault stated in "Utopian Body", the body is presented as a place that roots us in history "now" through death (the corpse) and love. The arguments of Butler and Agamben, based on Foucault, break from the classic concept of a teleological history and make "time now" lead in two contrary directions: the past that precedes and forms us (archaeology) and the future as unfinished potentiality of subjects (*care of the self*). Two temporalities converge, therefore, in the instant now and make it susceptible to a resignification as resistance to disciplinary powers. In the time of *Nachträglichkeit* (retroactivity), we are able to rewrite our story contained up until that instant; while in the unfinished moment, we are able to introduce an interruption to the present time, since the mannerist subject or unfinished subject is made responsible for its actions in every moment.

Undoubtedly, this temporality entails a critique of Heidegger's concept of man as "thrown to time", and positions itself closer to Walter Benjamin's consciousness of time, which also introduces discontinuity in the concept of "now" or "now-time" (*Jetztzeit*).

As Habermas explains in *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, this discontinuous temporality establishes the possibility of an eruption, an "authentic instant", of an innovative present-day that interrupts the continuum of history and eludes a homogeneous history. And, as for Benjamin, this reading enables

us to direct the time of modernity, traditionally joined to the future, toward the past. Hence, only if the subject attends to its past, to memory, can it attend to its present and its future. In this way, an overcoming of the hiatus between experience and expectations of the future is proposed, which, as Reinhart Koselleck showed, in modernity, modern consciousness of time is characterized by the growing distance between "space of experience" and "horizon of expectation", "a permanent global quality of utopian tone" that is, precisely, the breakdown that we currently find ourselves facing. For the first time, principally as a result of studies of ecology and environment, we are confronting a time that does not envisage a better future. The future is once again a source of unease that the time of modernity had neutralized. The subject is faced with a classical time, time as inclemency, time as climatic threat, which brings back the tradition of older times that was characteristic of peasant and artisanal life. However, only if the subject looks to its unfinished nature can it project itself into an open future as a "revolutionary chance in the fight for the oppressed past" (Benjamin, *On the Concept of History*, Thesis 17). The time of the subject now is not teleological, because, paradoxically, this time as progress had eliminated any possibility of interruption of events, that is, of time as transit. Taking charge of the past is, therefore, for the here-subject, the opening that permits the lack of definition of the time of the subject that dies. The subject that takes charge of its own past thus assumes its ethical responsibility and its freedom. The time of the subject, returned toward its past and projecting toward an unfinished future, creates the possibility of freedom and, at the same time, danger.

4 Tragedy and Historical Event

4.1 Literature as Historical Event

Literature occupies a variable place in its relation to history and reality, and to its own autonomy. On the one hand, the concept of literature has been defined, in the tradition that originates in Benjamin, as historical event. And, on the other hand, as Derek Attridge explains in *The Singularity of Literature* (2004), today we also "still talk about 'structure' and 'meaning', and ask what a work is 'about', in a manner that suggests a static object, transcending time, permanently available for our inspection" (Attridge, *The Singularity of Literature,* 59).

As I have shown, Foucault attributes the evental capacity of literature precisely to its formal and material character – we could say, indeed to the very traits that had declared its autonomy. As we have seen, literature refers to reality through a formal incapacity: it is not capable of speaking of everything, and this shows that we can no longer declare that literature is a self-referential and ahistorical activity. This shift in Foucault's literary thought towards a politics of literature has its most visible consequences in his later years. Therefore, the literary thought of the later Foucault lies closer to the Benjaminian tradition, which he had begun to develop in his work, "L'extralinguistique et la littérature", dating from 1967 and 1968. We thus accentuate two conditions of literature: first, as per T.S. Eliot, that the corpus of literature is historical and variable; and second, with Terry Eagleton, that in the course of history, works can go from being seen as fiction to non-fiction, and vice versa.

Along these same lines, Attridge asserts that literature refers "potential possessed by a body of texts for a certain effectivity, a potential realized differently – or not at all – in different times and places. (Since the literariness of any given text may always emerge in the future if it has not done so in the past, this is a body with no determined limits)" (59). However, for Attridge, literature seems to be outside of history, in a paradoxical way, since it awards all its capacity for effectivity to its reading. Therefore, we cannot think the event of literature, its *literariness*, as being on the margin of reading and all reading is historical. The potentiality of literature is, for Attridge, therefore, ahistorical, whereas its realization in reading is historical.

Foucault, however, considers that the marginality of literary discourse is what allows it to echo events not assimilated by the discourses of power. So Foucault stops considering literature as a transgression of limit, and considers it the place where certain epistemic transformations of the history of thought take place. According to Foucault, all discourses cohabit in history, there is never an

"outside of history", because these margins of discourse cohabit and define the history of what does not want to be seen. But he grants literature, moreover, another capacity: that of participating itself as discursive event, being the place that gives an account, for the first time, of certain historical events.

In this chapter, I will focus on three moments in which literature is discursive event, all related to classical tragedy, in Foucault's analyses of the 1970s and 1980s. These are found in his different analyses of *Oedipus Rex*[25] and attention to the tragedies of Euripides in his genealogy of the concept of parrhesia in the classical era, mainly in *Discourse and Truth* (1983).

4.2 Parrhesia: Between Emancipation and Danger

Foucault devoted his last three lecture series at the Collège de France to the study of the interweaving of life and truth through parrhesia: *Subjectivité et vérité* [*Subjectivity and Truth*] (1980–1981, published 2014 in French), *Le gouvernement de soi et des autres* [*The Government of Self and Others*] (1982–1983, here quoted from the 2010 English edition) and *Le courage de la vérité* [*The Courage of the Truth*] (1983–1984, here quoted from the 2011 English edition). In the first of these, Foucault focuses on the study of the relations between truth, subjectivity and others, giving particular attention to questions related to desire (*aphrodisia*) and the law. This work is in constant dialogue with the *History of Sexuality* (I–IV). However, the last two lecture series evolve toward an aesthetics of existence in which the care of the self has direct consequences in the care of others. We could say that Foucault shifts from an ethical concern, the care of the self (*epimeleia heautou*), toward a political question, "the government of others". The most immediate consequence of this shift is that Foucault considers that the path toward politics should always be guided by a concern of the citizen as subject of self, along similar lines as the ethical and political thought of Hannah Arendt in *The Human Condition* (1958). The subject, therefore, must attain their emancipation in order to freely exercise the use of their word as citizen in dialogue, and always mediated by the other. In fact, Foucault states in *The Courage of the Truth*, "in ancient culture, and therefore well before Christianity, telling the truth about oneself was an activity involving several people, an activity with

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25 These analyses are carried out in the second of the Río de Janeiro lectures collected in "The truth and the Juridical Forms", in "The Knowledge of Oedipus", the lecture delivered in Buffalo in 1972, in the lesson of 28 April given in Brussels and collected in *Wrong-Doing, Truth-Telling* (1981), and finally in the lessons of the 1982–1983 course in the Collège de France titled *The Government of Self and Others*, particularly in the lesson from 19 January 1983.

other people, and even more precisely an activity with one other person, a practice for two" (5).

In this way, Foucault responds to his own concern for the problem of the social subject's freedom conditioned by the relations of power, with an opening from ethics and the emancipation of the care of oneself. This is to say, it will no longer be a figure of authority who determines the emancipation of subject citizens, but the subject in the framework of a relation of trust who will make their emancipation possible.

This shift and the affirmation that it is the ethics of the care of self which makes the subject a free and emancipated citizen are to be found in the path that Foucault traces from his works on *Oedipus* to the tragedies of Euripides, as will be seen. Thus the classical tragedies are not only the stage on which he gives an account of a series of new ideas regarding classical judicial systems and their transformation in the texts of Sophocles and Euripides along the lines of the politics of literature that we have been defining; they are also the stage where Foucault formulates the traits of a political subject.

In the framework of his work, Foucault locates his writing on the genealogy of parrhesia as part of his concern for the coercive modes of truth-telling of the modern subject in his same work, as it derives through the concern that the coercive obligation of the subject's speaking truth through institutions had marked in modernity. And he also shows the political origin of the term. Thus parrhesia is a vehicle for articulating his concerns about the dominated subject in modernity and, in turn, a mode of analysing modes of interpellation, of production of subjectivities, through the emancipation of the subject. It is not for nothing that the concept of parrhesia is translated to Latin, not without problems, as "libertas".

In my study, it is particularly relevant that this concept appears for the first time in the Greek literature of Euripides, proceeding to spread throughout the Greek literary world of antiquity from the end of the fifth century BCE. Etymologically, parrhesia means "to say everything" (*pan-rhema*), and it referred to the capacity to speak frankly and freely. This speech-oriented concept emerged in association with Athenian democracy and links truth with belief or trust.[26] Foucault's works follow the historical development of parrhesia from its first usages in Athenian democracy through its transformation under autarchy, its use in the classical philosophy of Plato, Aristotle and the Cynics, up to its

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[26] Consider here the difference between the parrhesia that emerges linking the concept of citizen and the concept of subject, regarding the subject of modernity, for which, as per Descartes, knowledge is a mental activity which is accessed through evidentiary doubt.

use in primitive Christianity and Christian pastorals. This word runs through the foundations of Western civilization. Foucault summarizes the characteristics of parrhesia thus:

> parrhesia is a kind of verbal activity where the speaker has a specific relation to truth through frankness, a certain relationship to his own life through danger, a certain type of relation to himself or other people through criticism (self-criticism or criticism of other people), and a specific relation to moral law through freedom and duty. More precisely, parrhesia is a verbal activity in which a speaker expresses his personal relationship to truth, and risks his life because he recognizes truth-telling as a duty to improve or help other people (as well as himself). In parrhesia, the speaker uses his freedom and chooses frankness instead of persuasion, truth instead of falsehood or silence, the risk of death instead of life and security, criticism instead of flattery, and moral duty instead of self-interest and moral apathy.
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> (*Fearless speech*, 19)

Parrhesia is thus for Foucault the expression of the potentiality of language and, therefore, it creates an *effect* that relates it to performative utterances and moves it closer to criticism – or what, in Michael Hardt's interpretation of parrhesia, is *militancy* ("The Militancy of Theory") – insofar as it has effects outside of language itself.

> What makes a statement characteristic of parrhesia is precisely that it opens itself to risk. Similarly, in the performative utterance, the subject of enunciation is important. Status is indispensable for the execution of a performative utterance, although it might matter little whether there is any personal relationship between the speaker and the utterance itself, that is, a relation of sincerity between the performative utterance and the one who utters it. In parrhesia, by contrast, and in what it does, not only is such indifference not possible, but there is always a formulation of the truth occurring on two levels. A first level is that of the statement of the truth itself (at this point, as in the performative, one says the thing, and that's that). The second level of the parrhesiastic act, the parrhesiastic enunciation is the affirmation that in fact one genuinely thinks, judges and considers the truth one is saying to be genuinely true (parrhesiastic act, affirmation of the affirmation).
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> (Foucault, *The Government of Self and Others*, 64)

However, as Foucault explains, the discourse of parrhesia, unlike performative utterances, takes place outside of a context that guarantees that the saying effectuates what is said, and carries with it a risk and an opening of the situation that has nothing to do with the institutionalization of performative utterances. Thus, while in the performative utterance the status of the person speaking is important, in the parrhesiastic act, what endorses the utterance is that the person speaking asserts their own freedom as a linguistic-political individual (65). Foucault says, "it is not the subject's social, institutional status that we find at the heart of parrhesia; it is his courage" (66). The effects of the potentiality of language that democratic parrhesia represents have a political function that for

Foucault entails a transformation of the social-political order in a given community: *Veridiction* that produces a hiatus, an interruption and a transformation. And this use of the action of language, of a language that is the language of everyone, is a political practice that also causes an unknown and dangerous reaction for the person who utters it.

Yet the description of the historical uses of parrhesia enables us to trace two lines of continuity: one that is introduced through parrhesia as a political concept tied to the citizen-subject who utters it; and the second that follows the "other parrhesia", which refers to a bad use of the freedom to say everything and that, for us, will trace the status of a series of discourses in modernity, which is where literature and madness coincide.

According to Foucault, the term parrhesia can also be used in a pejorative sense. It is the comic playwright Aristophanes, who had ridiculed Euridipes in *The Frogs*, that makes us aware of this: "we find it used in a pejorative sense, first in Aristophanes, and afterwards very commonly, even in Christian literature" (Foucault, *The Courage of the Truth*, 9). It is important to consider that this pejorative use is precisely saying everything, but as "saying anything (anything that comes to mind)". Hence the other possible face of the parrhesiast appears, that of the "impenitent chatterbox, someone who cannot restrain himself or, at any rate, someone who cannot index-link his discourse to a principle of rationality and truth" (10). In texts from the 4th century BCE, says Foucault, the place of parrhesia as free and excessive saying with ambiguous effects seems to be reversed, and democracy comes to present itself as the place where parrhesia (truth-telling, the right to express one's opinion, and the courage to go against the opinions of others) will become increasingly impossible and in any case dangerous (35–36). Thus distrust is created around parrhesia.

Foucault finds one of the key examples of this distrust of parrhesia in Isocrates, at the beginning of the speech *On the Peace* (355 BCE, paragraph 13). Here he alludes to orators and poets who say everything about the gods, and whom the Athenians listen to with complacency. But, according to Isocrates, those who stand up to speak are in reality nothing more than drunks, people who act without reason, fools, in short. In this free speech of democracy, there are true discourses, false discourses, useful opinions and pernicious, harmful opinions; men dedicated to the city, foolish men, the good and the bad, all juxtaposed and intermingled in the game of democracy. And this is, he warns, when parrhesia is a danger for the city (36). True discourse does not overcome false discourse in democracy. What Isocrates is indicating is the principle of quantitative opposition or principle of scansion of the unity of the city, upon which moral, ontological and political inequality is founded.

In order to exemplify this lack of separation and confusion that parrhesia causes in democracy, Foucault takes up the text that is falsely attributed to Xenophon:[27] *Constitution of the Athenians*, a parody of the democracy that has descended from aristocracy. This text is a defence of the principle of political inequality (against *Isegoria*), namely, as Aristotle argues in his *Politics*: that by nature there are slaves for whom being governed by an authority is an advantage, given that not all people share of reason in the same way (principle of cognitive inequality) and, in the case of Pseudo-Xenophon, this lack of reason coincides with wickedness.[28] The Pseudo-Xenophon distinguishes two types of government: on the one hand, the government of the most sensible and honest, in which the madmen (those who lack sense) are not allowed to speak, participate in the assembly or give their opinion, and what reigns in the cities is *eunomia* (good constitution, good governance). On the other hand, the great merit of Athens, says Pseudo-Xenophon with irony, is precisely that they have not given themselves the luxury of *eunomia* and have not prevented the madmen from entering the assembly. The merit of democracy is not having accepted such restrictions. The problem is that if the best citizens make the decisions, then they will only serve their own interests, whereas in democracy, those who make the decisions are the more numerous, not the best. And therefore they want what is bad, for them and for the city (Foucault, *The Courage of the Truth*, 42).

It is not only in Aristophanes and Isocrates that bad parrhesia and its relation with literature appears; we also find a discussion of bad democracy in Book VIII of the *Republic*. As Foucault explains, Plato describes this bad democracy as "all motley, fragmented, and dispersed between different interests, passions, and individuals who do not agree with each other. This bad democratic city practices parrhesia: anyone can say anything" (*The Courage of the Truth*, 10). We can find this same Platonic criticism in the famous dialogue, *Ion*.[29] Recall that Ion was a rhapsodist committed precisely to being able to talk on any subject. Ion represents the midpoint between oral culture and the arrival of written culture.

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27 Attributed to Xenophon, "Minor texts".

28 On the later relation between unreason and depravity, we find other texts by the author that abound in what would be the "dangerous subject". See *The Lives of Infamous Men*, among others.

29 One of Plato's first dialogues, it is dated to around 401 BCE, separated by only a few years from Aristophanes' *The Frogs*, which is dated to around 405 BCE. The two works coincide with a historical moment in which the confidence in democracy that was enjoyed in previous years was lacking. Plato cites Euripides as inventor of the adjective "magnetic", which would have appeared in the tragedy *Oeneus*, of which only fragments have been preserved. Some years before, Euripides created the homonymous tragedy *Ion* (413–412 BCE), a work that Foucault recognized as being entirely dedicated to the problem of parrhesia.

The themes of Plato's dialogue, one of the founding texts of Western literary thought, mark the difference between good and bad literature, between inspired literature and doxa, but above all between rational knowledge, the knowledge of philosophers, and irrational knowledge, enthusiasm or rapture, which corresponds with inspired poetry. From this is derived the hermeneutic incapacity of the rhapsodists, because they were mere transmitters of a knowledge that they themselves did not understand.[30] But there is another striking trait of this truth that is transmitted, which is not a technique (*technē*) but rather corresponds to a "divine force" (533d-c) and is incorporated into a metaphor by Plato. This is the metaphor of the "magnetic stone", in the explanation of which Plato cites Euripides himself:

> [...] a divine power which moves you like the stone which Euripides called Magnet, but most people call Heraclean. In fact, this stone not only attracts iron rings but also puts power in the rings so that they also have power to do the same thing the stone does and attract other rings. Sometimes quite a long chain of iron rings hangs suspended one from another; but they're all suspended by the power derived from that stone. So too the Muse herself causes men to be inspired, and through these inspired men a chain of others are possessed and suspended. For all our good epic poets [...] are inspired and possessed, and so similarly our good lyric poets too. [...] [they] do not dance in their right minds. [...] And they tell the truth. For a poet is [...] unable to create until he becomes inspired and frenzied, his mind no longer in him.
>
> (*Ion*, 534 a-b)

The traits of this poetic truth are, on the one hand, unreason, as has been made evident; but in a less evident way this truth is necessarily the truth of the many that make up the "chain" of all those rings. The metaphor of the magnetic stone is also the metaphor of a democratic community. The Platonic metaphor therefore succeeds in unifying the features of a truth that, from this point forward, will be separated from the capacity of all citizens to speak freely without social division between reason and unreason, remaining linked first to poetics and then, in modernity, to literature, as one of the founding works of modern literature, *Don Quixote*, demonstrates. Modern literature thus carries forward a part of the parrhesia that had been expelled from the political space in general and from democracy in particular. This parrhesia is that which permits one to speak to everyone about everything, upon which the democratic principle of equality of the word is thus founded.

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30 In *Phaedrus*, Plato directs this same hermeneutic critique at writing itself, which lacks a "father" which would establish its proper sense.

4.3 Tragedy and Democracy: Oedipus, Ion and Cassandra

There are those who have read in Foucault's recourse to the tragedy of Sophocles an outline of the changes that Foucault's own work underwent during this time. One such is José L. Moreno Pestaña, who, in *Retorno a Atenas* [*Return to Athens*] (2019), argues that although Foucault makes use of *Oedipus Rex* at both the start and the close of the sixties, his different interpretations are symptoms of his ideological shift (56). Sforzini, however, considers that, although we can observe a change in the points of interest in Foucault's reading of Oedipus, the interpretative outline remains the same. According to Sforzini, "Oedipus Rex is the expression of a symbolic process of revealing the truth, sealing both the assertion of a new 'human', secular knowledge (the investigation) and the elimination of tyrannical excess (the utopia of unity in the exercise of power and knowledge) of the political and cultural space of the fifth-century Athenian polis" (*Scènes de la vérité*, 223).

My objective here is to demonstrate, on the one hand, the evental capacity of tragedy, as I stated at the start of this chapter. On the other hand, I aim to show how the different readings of *Oedipus Rex* are in dialogue with and stand in opposition to those that Foucault provides of the tragedies of Euripides – who, remember, was defined as one of the most "progressive" figures of the so-called Athenian Enlightenment. From Sophocles to Euripides, Foucault manages to show the different accounts that are given of Athenian democracy and the evolution of some of its fundamental values, principally that which consisted of being able to speak freely, or parrhesia. Lastly, I aim to establish a continuity between the veridiction of classical tragedy and modern literature through the principle of parrhesia as a veridiction of literature at the margin of reason.

As Foucault explains in *Wrong-Doing, Truth-Telling*, literature is event not because it is mimesis of a real action but because it represents the practice of truth-telling:

> So this is how Oedipus Rex may serve not, once again, as a direct testimony of Athenian judicial procedure, nor as a direct testimony of its true history, but rather as the first dramatic representation of this relatively new judicial practice (relatively new at the time) that made avowal and all other regular procedures of avowal an essential piece of the judicial system.
>
> (*Wrong-Doing, Truth-Telling*, 81)

4.3.1 Oedipus and Symbol

Oedipus has become a great social and historical myth thanks to the impact of Freudian theory. Oedipus is, for Freudian psychoanalysis, the basis for explaining the structure of the subject. The updated reading of Lacan, and even Passolini's homonymous film from 1967, confirmed this reading of the Western subject. Hence the Foucauldian reading of *Oedipus* was simultaneously a critique of a way of interpreting the tragedy of Sophocles and a critique of the concept of the subject in psychoanalysis.

In 1972, the work of Sophocles had already attained new prominence following the publication of *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, in which Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari show that Oedipus is not the secret content of our unconscious but the form of coercion that psychoanalysis attempts to impose in its cure of our unconscious. Oedipus is, therefore, an instrument of power, a certain mode of psychoanalytical and medical power that is exercized over desire and the unconscious. This argument is also developed in Foucault's work, but his interest in this tragedy has particular characteristics and a continuity with his work. On the one hand, Foucault focuses on separating desire from this "bourgeois family drama", as we have seen in his lectures on Sade and in *The History of Sexuality*. On the other hand, Foucault takes apart the modern myth of Oedipus, returning to the text of the tragedy in order to undertake a reading, through the text itself, that lifts literature out of its political *impasse*, as he himself had advocated, along the lines of his work on "bad literature".

To do this, Foucault takes up a line of research that reveals the relation between Greek tragedy and politics, and which had attained renewed prominence since the 1950s.[31] Cornelius Castoriadis also worked extensively on these relations in his 1982–1983 university seminars, entitled *La cité et les lois* ["The City and Laws"], in which he states that the genre of tragedy depicts the ontological foundations of democracy, given that in democracy "there is no global view of the reality upon which correct politics can be founded, at best only partial views"[32] (138–147). This definition of democracy can be recognized in the work of Foucault himself, which enables us to characterize his concept of "politics of literature". Arianna Sforzini, who has analyzed in depth all the dramatic forms that appear in Foucault's work and their modes of performance in *Les scènes de la vérité: Michel Foucault et le théâtre* (2015), states that Foucault "will always

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31 See the works of D. M. Carter in this regard: "Society and politics in post-fifth century tragedy" (2018) and "Tragic parrhesia" (2018).
32 My translation.

strive to transform the power of the tragic as a constitutive rending of history in a modality of historical analysis capable of making a political theatre emerge at the roots of all forms of truth and existence"[33] (47).

The first work in which Foucault focuses on *Oedipus Rex* is the lecture series that he gave at the State University of New York in March 1972, two years on from his lectures on Sade. The 1972 lectures, entitled "The Knowledge of Oedipus", are rooted in the relations between knowledge and power. The basis of the analysis and textual interpretation that he carries out are focused on the knowledge that converges there: the rhetorical and philosophical mechanism of the symbol, or "law of two halves". Foucault carries out a reading of the dramatic text for the purpose of determining how a discursive strategy gives an account of the change in the judicial procedure of inquiry, as opposed to divinatory procedure which was introduced in the sixth and fifth centuries.

Foucault also develops his second work devoted to Oedipus along similar lines. This work appears in the collection of lectures entitled *Truth and Juridical Forms* (1978), in which he studies the emergence of new forms of subjectivity associated with historical ways of establishing and telling the truth. In one lecture devoted to the topic of "Oedipus and Truth", Foucault analyzes tragedy as a discourse that is capable of depicting a historical event in all its complexity, both formally, through its dramatic structuring ("the power relations that permeate the whole fabric (*plot*) of our existence" [Foucault, *Power*, 17]), and thematically. Foucault is still interested in the relations between power and knowledge, and wishes to study the tragedy of Sophocles as representative "and in a sense the founding instance of a definite type of relation between power and knowledge [*savoir*], between political power and knowledge [*connaissance*], from which our civilization is not yet emancipated" (17). But he introduces something new to his interest in literature when he considers it, as I have mentioned, as a historical event:

> The tragedy of Oedipus is, fundamentally, the first testimony that we have of Greek judicial practices. [...] The tragedy of Oedipus is therefore the history of an investigation into truth: it is a procedure of inquiry into truth that exactly obeys the Greek judicial practices of the period.
>
> (Foucault, "The Stage of Philosophy")

The psychoanalytical myth of Oedipus, says Foucault, collapses in the face of a complex that is "collective and not individual". Oedipus is the route Foucault takes to attain the analysis of the first forms of democracy in the Athens of Pericles. And his chosen place for analysing these relations comes from the

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33 My translation.

character of Oedipus, which is the first testimony we have of judicial practices. He uses a series of techniques which allow for discovery of the truth that questions the power of the sovereign, or sovereignty. "The tragedy of Oedipus is therefore the history of an investigation into truth." We even find in his reading a philological perfectionism, a returning to the meaning of the text in its historical context. This is why the nature of Foucault's work differs from Deleuze's: one is historical and the other theoretical.

According to Foucault, the procedure that governs the tragedy "exactly obeys the Greek judicial practices of the period". Thus, it needs to be established "what the judicial investigation of truth in archaic Greece consisted of", and for this reason Foucault also refers to the *Iliad* as "the first testimony" we have of the investigation of truth in Greek judicial procedure, both in the lecture "Oedipus and Truth" (Rio de Janeiro, May 1973) and in the Louvain lectures of 1981, gathered under the title *Wrong-Doing, Truth-Telling*.

In these texts, Foucault focuses on two elements. One is philosophical: *anagnorisis*, or the recognition through which the person who believed that they were ignorant realizes that they already knew, and the person who is ignorant becomes someone who knows. According to Foucault, in Oedipus this has two traits. First, it is a "reflexive" anagnorisis: he who searches is the object of the search. Second, anagnorisis is attained by confronting different types of knowledge: it goes from the knowledge of hearing to the knowledge of seeing; from the knowledge that questions the gods to the knowledge that is asked from right here while hearing what other have also seen (the witnesses); from the knowledge that proceeds from prediction to knowledge as testimony; from the knowledge that proceeds from the enigma of the knowledge that the gods conceal to the knowledge that makes appear the person who wants to be hidden. Oedipus is the bearer of the knowledge of the tyrant and, finally, Oedipus also represents the power-knowledge transgressor. Already in *Wrong-Doing, Truth-Telling*, Foucault had revealed the existence of this character. In the *Iliad*, a character appears whose task is to ensure that the chariot race between Antilochus and Menelaus is fair. This individual is called "witness" (ιστορ, root of "history"), which we could translate as "he who informs", but which Foucault translates as "one who is there to see". Although the existence of the witness is recorded in Homer's work, he is not made use of because there is no appeal to testify, only to a test by oath. Thus, if Antilochus had sworn falsely, it would have been Zeus who, punishing the false oath, "would have manifested the truth with his thunderbolt". This test of truth is a feature of archaic Greek society, Foucault explains, which is prior to the story. The memories of this procedure also reach *Oedipus Rex*, and later in the early Middle Ages. The truth of the oath passes for the truth of the subject, an exterior

truth and, on occasions, it involves others who make guarantees of the trust in their word or who involve their adversaries in the challenge.

Along with historical investigations, Foucault adds another element of analysis of a narrative nature, which entails a deconstruction of the traditional concept of *symbol*. Thus, in Sophocles's tragedy, in order to pass from divine to human knowledge, one must achieve this knowledge through fragmentary reports that each witness provides and which complete the truth. Foucault's description and analysis of the symbol in Greek tragedy convert it into a mechanism of *fragmentation* as a tropological mechanism associated with democracy.

Foucault calls the method of investigating truth by way of the symbol in *Oedipus Rex* the "Law of Halves", because "the discovery of the truth is carried out in Oedipus by halves that fit and link together". In Apollo's response to Oedipus's consultation, the god only answers half of the question concerning the curse and its cause, as he tells him that the cause is the murder of Laius, the former king, but does not say who the murderer is. To discover the name of the murderer, Oedipus appeals to the human double of Apollo on Earth, the prophet Tiresias, who replies in the form of a prophecy, "You're the one who killed Laius", but the dimension of the present is absent. In short, Foucault says, the "witness" to what really happened is missing. This second half of the story in the present is also told in the form of a game of halves. Jocasta is the first witness when she mentions that Laius died at the crossing of three roads, to which Oedipus responds with a recognition of the facts. Thus is the game of the two halves of the truth that almost complete the story of the murder of Laius. The story is completed when it is discovered that it was Oedipus who killed his father and married his mother. This second half of the story is completed by means of the joining together of several different testimonies: those of a slave who reveals to him that Polybus was not his true father, and a shepherd who tells him that Jocasta is his true mother.

In this way, Foucault undertakes a critique of the concept of symbol that Walter Benjamin developed in *Origin of the German Trauerspiel*. We can consider Benjamin's doctoral thesis to be a precedent of particular interest for Foucault's research, especially in these first studies of Greek tragedy.

In 1916, Walter Benjamin had developed the ideas for his work on German baroque drama, though it would not be published until 1928. In this work, he establishes the relations between tragedy and the art of governing. For Benjamin, however, tragedy showed this relation before the start of history and spoke of myth, whereas the baroque *trauerspiel*, through a discourse of history, had also shown the drama of all, not only of kings: "'whoever wants to write tragedies [...] must understand the art of government as intimately as he does his mother tongue.' [...] The sovereign represents history. He holds historical happenings in his hand like a scepter" (Benjamin, *Origin of the German Trauerspiel*, 46–48). This

comes from ideas based on constitutional law. That is to say, the content of *trauer-spiel*, its true object, is historical life as it was conceived in that period. As per Benjamin, this would distinguish it from tragedy, as the object of tragedy is not history but myth, and what gives tragic stature to the *dramatis personae* is not their rank (absolute monarchy) but the era, before history, in which their existence takes place: the heroic past.

Benjamin, with his interest in baroque allegory, was confronting the conceptualization of the symbol that had been developed by Germanists around the beginning of Nazi Germany. In this moment, the symbol represented unity and occupied a privileged place. For Foucault, on the contrary, modernity sank its roots in Greek tradition, which was part of history, but without recovering a lost unity. In order to take apart Benjamin's reading of the symbol as a mythological element, Foucault introduces the Greek symbol as emblem of his political reading of the text of Sophocles. For this he attends to the textuality of the work and its relation with history following Benjamin's proposals, but, conversely, he attributes to the symbol in Oedipus' tragedy an excess and quality of fragmentation by which it is no longer possible to attain a unity, as there the voices of all are mixed, not only those of emperors and heroes but also those of slaves and women. The reading of *Oedipus Rex* in these terms enables him to assert, from a narrative, tropological and political perspective, that literature and politics are interlinked from their origin:

> What occurred at the origin of Greek society, at the origin of the Greek age of the fifth century, at the origin of our civilization, was the dismantling of that great unity of a political power that was, at the same time, a knowledge [...] We witness that long decomposition during the five or six centuries of archaic Greece. And when classical Greece appeared – Sophocles represents its starting date, its sunrise – what had to disappear for this society to exist was the union of power and knowledge.
>
> (Foucault, *Power*, 31–32)

Therefore, the symbol also represents resistance to divine power, which according to Foucault is shown in the distrust of the knowledge of the diviner both in his formulation of the prophecy and in his attempt to escape fate. Upon hearing the oracle, Oedipus undertakes an investigation that confirms that the oracle was correct, and that this truth and the one to which a slave was witness are the same. The slave is the only one who knows as much as the god and his seer. For this reason, the proliferation of the tragedy's voices are reassembled in an asymmetrical mix in which Foucault considers, "Can we say that the slave's silent gaze and the all-seeing sovereign's word 'symbolize' each other?" (Foucault, *Lectures on the Will to Know*, 238).

As opposed to mythological knowledge, here the oracular truth must be completed by human truth. Truth is split into two halves that, in turn, fragment into others. But what makes it possible to unite all the fragments of this truth is

the coinciding of both truths, the human and the divine, which coincide in a single, same truth, whether formulated as an enigma by the gods and seers, or as the testimony of a slave. There is a hierarchy among those that speak, but there is also a shift in the modes of knowledge: from the ear of the gods and the seer to the eyes of the witnesses, and in the middle, Jocasta, who tells what she heard from what the messenger had seen. Oedipus himself is a symbol, made up of "excessive" halves (the son is also the murderer of the father, he is the son of Laius and also of Polybus, both husband and son, and so on). But he also reveals duplications in his speech, as when he says two things at the same time. He is the figure of the double.[34]

The story responds to a fragmentation of halves, in terms of form and plot, as a puzzle of halves that have to be put back together in order to "form the whole pattern of the story" (Foucault, *Power*, 22). Thus the technique of the *Greek symbol* is redefined by Foucault:

> an instrument of power and its exercise whereby a person who holds some secret or power breaks some ceramic object in half, keeping one part and entrusting the other to an individual who is to carry the message or certify its authenticity. By fitting these two parts together it is possible to verify the authenticity of the message, that the continuity of the power exercised. Power manifests itself, completes its cycle, maintains its unity by means of this little game of separate fragments of the same whole, a unique object whose overall configuration is the manifest form of power. The Oedipus story is the fragmentation of that token, the possession of which, complete and reunified, authenticates the holding of power and the orders given by it.
>
> (22)

Sophocles's tragedy is, therefore, a rhetorical instrument as well as a political and religious one. And the achievement of this triple structure is that it functions, in turn, as a strategy for the formation of power. This structure entails, moreover, a series of consequences in its functioning: the shift in the assembling of the halves, first the level of the god and his representative, the seer, then leaving in the centre the testimonies of Oedipus and Jocasta, and, lastly, the testimonies of the slave and the shepherd are, however, those responsible for "pronouncing the final truth and providing the final piece of evidence" (23).

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34 Foucault has paid special attention to the double in his pieces on literary thought in the 1960s. The double is a verbal form that acts as a figure of thought and as a political figure at the same time, which opposes dialectical synthesis as unity. In the book that Deleuze devotes to Foucault, he echoes this figure of thought that, according to Deleuze, obsessed Foucault. For a deeper examination of the literary thought of early Foucault, see Azucena G. Blanco *El logos doble* [*The Double Logos*, 2006].

In this analysis, Foucault also examines the different "mechanisms of truth-telling and the form in which truth is told" depending on who does it. Thus, when the truth is stated by the god and the seer, it is done in a time belonging to prophecy and a magical religious gaze, "the eternal and omnipotent gaze of the sun god and the gaze of the soothsayer who, though blind, sees past, present, and future" (23). But the gaze is also possible at a lower level; since the two slaves testify to what "they have seen", it is the "gaze of the witness". This gaze, which was ignored in the *Iliad*, here takes centre stage, history and gaze coming together as in the etymological meaning of *istor* (history, and he who sees, the witness). Thus we move from the future discourse of the prophecy to the retrospective discourse of history: "we can say that the entire *Oedipus* play is a way of shifting the enunciation of the truth from a prophetic and prescriptive type of discourse to a retrospective one that is no longer characterized by prophecy but, rather, by evidence" (23).

4.3.2 Alethurgy and Parrhesia: From Oedipus to Ion

In the 1980s, Foucault develops his work on truth-telling, or veridiction. The relation between tragedy and law was, at this point, a common place, as Foucault himself states ("everyone knows that in Greek tragedy, the theme of representing law – of the foundational representation of law – is essential" (Foucault, *Wrong-Doing, Truth-Telling*, 58)); and theatre itself, says Foucault, from its origin until the eighteenth century, also had the function of giving space to the debate on law. Thus all of his work of the period on theatre deals directly with this relation, but added to his previous interest in what he called "theatre of truth". Remember that in "The Stage of Philosophy" (1972), the author had already spoken of his interest in "describing the way in which Western men have seen things without ever considering the question of whether it was true or not; trying to describe the way in which they themselves have organized, through the game of their gaze, the spectacle of the world" (150). Therefore, it is evident that his interest in the vagueness of the "gaze" of theatre directly concerns his critique of phenomenology, but years later, his words acquire another added meaning, which involves the theatre and its forms directly in his philosophical project on truth-telling and classical parrhesia. Hence in these years the shift takes place from his interest in knowledge-power relations to the forms of veridiction. This change is similarly

evident in his lectures on Oedipus, and which in the 1980s was in contrast to the lectures he gave on the tragedies of Euripides in the last years of his life.[35]

In 1981, Foucault gave the lecture series at the Catholic University of Louvain that has been published under the title *Wrong-Doing, Truth-Telling*. In these lectures Foucault proposes analysing the relations and the mutual implication between the true word and the just word. Foucault shows how the forms of expression of truth or of access to truth are transformed into three historical moments: in the Greek prelaw, in which the archaic forms are established, a mode of relation between the true (*alethes*) and the just (*dikaion*) based on the oath, going as far as the confession. He takes up the reading of the stage of the *Iliad* and *Oedipus Rex* to show the problem that encloses the title of the lectures, namely: that the accused is, at the same time, the guilty and the bearer of truth who has to confess in a liturgy of truth or *alethurgy* – the confession. Oedipus, Foucault says, is also a scene of judicial confession of agonistic structure, in which there is an accused and that accused is the bearer of the truth, the same truth that will end up condemning him and freeing him at the same time.

Thus are the instruments themselves of inquiry organized. And this inquiry is also carried out in a way that is juridically very recognizable. In *Oedipus Rex*, the chorus is the jury. After Tiresias, who appears as a witness, Creon makes a declaration. Creon is not a witness, but rather comes to complain because Oedipus has accused him slanderously. Oedipus then accuses him of "witness bribery", and in effect it is this that Oedipus reproaches him for. He reproaches him for having bribed the witness who should be the oracle and whose meaning he has falsified in transmitting it. The last scene, in which the truth emerges, is a scene of judicial testimony, of inquiry: questioning, obtaining confession through threat, with the threat of torture until it is achieved. The general framework of the play is, therefore, a perfectly recognizable procedural framework.

The importance of Oedipus is underlined again in its nature as historical event, insofar as *Oedipus* is the first foundational representation of law that directly shows the issue of the truth-telling of the accused, of this contradiction that means that the accused must at the same time be the bearer of the truth of his own crime. In the tragedy, this aspect appears represented by the fact that Oedipus is the judge and the accused at the same time. Foucault shifts his interest in the relation between law and the Oedipal tragedy from the fragmentary symbol – not

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35 In particular, in lectures he gave at Grenoble (1982) and Berkeley (1983), collected in *Discourse and Truth*, and in the Collège de France lecture series (1982–1983), *The Goverment of Self and Others*.

unitary as it had been read traditionally – that represented Athenian democracy as voices that converge on a truth enunciated by many, to a concept of archaic power that would be the same that explains the double function that the enunciation of truth fulfils in our culture. Furthermore, Foucault says, the reading of *Oedipus Rex* is the opportunity to analyze a crime under its double aspect of "infraction of fundamental law and a religious sullying – two aspects that are inseparable in ancient Greek thought and culture" (Foucault, *Wrong-Doing, Truth-Telling*, 59). A problem of how to give room to family law within the law of the city, how one confronts the other and how to coordinate them.

Hence Foucault analyzes the tragedy using elements from Aristotle's *Poetics*. Recall that, as we have already seen, Foucault had made a critique of the concept of classical fable and verisimilitude in "L'arrière-fable" [1966, "Behind the Fable"]. He concluded that the relation between the fable and verisimilitude is determined by the "mythical possibilities" of culture – that is, that the verisimilitude of a narrative depends on what a society is prepared to accept as credible, and therefore this relation is historical and does not belong to the structure of the narrative. It thus opens the way to a relation of literature with the world, and completes its interrelational character with history, through its defect or finitude, and its need to refer to the world to be completed. Literature thus developed its extralinguistic nature, given its verbal limitation and a cultural definition of the concept of verisimilitude. Foucault also responds to the, once again, Aristotelian distinction between poetry and history.

Here Foucault examines two other concepts that structure the tragic fable, both elements directed at achieving catharsis. These are peripeteia and recognition or agnition, which, according to Aristotle, "should grow naturally out of the plot of the story, so that they come about, with necessity or probability, from the preceding events. There is a great difference between something happening after certain events and happening because of those events" (1452a 20). Two of the elements on which, as per Aristotle, tragedy is based, are *peripeteia* and *recognition*. *Peripeteia* is the narrative strategy that inverts the fortune of the characters and changes happiness into unhappiness, or luck into misfortune; and *recognition* consists of the revelation of the real identity of a character previously unknown or ignored, which is the change from ignorance to knowledge.

Aristotle explains the concepts of *peripeteia* (reversal), *agnition* (discovery) and *pathos* (suffering) with the example of Oedipus: "in *Oedipus*, a messenger comes to bring Oedipus good news and rid him of his fears about his mother; but by revealing his true identity he produces the opposite effect" (1452a 25), and "discovery [agnition] takes its finest form when it coincides with reversal [peripeteia], as in the *Oedipus*" (1452a 30).

These processes structure the "fate" of Oedipus, which he himself confronts with the instruments of inquiry. This inquiry is juridically recognizable as part of a trial in which the chorus is the jury while the different characters make their declarations. And the last scene is, then, that of the appearance of the truth – anagnorisis – a scene of a real interrogation, in which a confession is obtained through the threat of torture.

However, according to Foucault, in *Oedipus Rex*, there were two types of anagnorisis, two recognitions. There is an individual *anagnorisis*, through which Oedipus learns his own truth, and the other axis, the establishing of the truth, before the eyes of the chorus, which acts as jury. Although the two are related, if Oedipus seeks the truth it is so the chorus may recognize it: that is to say, so that the citizens, the assembly of the people who constitute themselves as the judicial authority, may discover and establish the truth and, ultimately, validate it (Foucault, *Wrong-Doing, Truth-Telling*, 63).

This manifestation of the truth, or alethurgy, is spoken through the dialogue of the characters. According to Foucault, this truth, so difficult to learn for Oedipus, is nevertheless said fully at least three times. The first time it is spoken by two characters who, when speaking together, produce the truth, namely Apollo and Tiresias. Apollo states why there is a plague and Tiresias says who is guilty. This is the first manifestation of the truth, the first veridiction, which is neither accepted nor legitimized. The second production of the truth is also the work of two characters who make the truth complete between them: Jocasta and Oedipus, who between each other name the totality of things that make it possible to recognize the latter as the husband of his mother and the murderer of his father. This second alethurgy is also left pending resolution and is not accepted, because an element of uncertainty remains. Finally it is the third time the truth is spoken, with a new pair of characters, that it is accepted at last, is validated and brings about the judicial and dramatic effects that are expected of it. This third pair to produce alethurgy are the messenger from Corinth and a slave, the shepherd from Cithaeron. They too will produce the truth through the combination of elements in their knowledge. Hence we have: Apollo and Tiresias at the divine level; Oedipus and Jocasta at the level of kings and chiefs; and the messenger and the shepherd at the level of slaves and servants. And it is this last pair who produce the alethurgy that neither the kings nor the gods had been able to produce because they had not been recognized by the judicial institution. First, the truth of Apollo and Tiresias is not accepted, because both are independent of the judicial order and their knowledge comes from vision (Apollo sees all, and the seer has timeless vision), it would not have been possible to obtain a confession or testimony, and so the judicial machinery does not work. Their knowledge is outside of the law, it cannot provide proof and is outside of history.

The second *alethurgy* is produced between Jocasta and Oedipus but also lacks judicial validity. Because Jocasta does not know truthful testimonies, she only knows public rumours, she is made to think that several people killed Laius, and for this reason Oedipus believes that he has been able to escape the fate of the gods (Foucault, *Wrong-Doing, Truth-Telling*, 70). Foucault finds the key to understanding why Oedipus did not understand the truth that was shown to him in the chorus, which gives a warning on tyranny. The chorus begins in a fairly strange way with a curse against tyranny and excess, the arrogance of tyrants who play at the height of their fortune and subsequently fall to the lowest depths (71). The problem is that the truth and the knowledge of Oedipus come from the tyrannical powers that he possesses: power, sovereignty, and the crown. The negative criticisms of Oedipus from the mouths of other characters outline the traits of tyranny: "You're wrong; you identify with this city where you were not born, you imagine that you belong to this city and that it belongs to you; I belong to this city as well, it's not yours alone" (Foucault, *Power*, 28). Oedipus shows some of the traits of historical tyrants, such as Cypselus of Corinth, who also considered himself owner of the city and used to say that Zeus had awarded it to him. And like Cypselus, Oedipus did not attribute importance to the laws either and replaced them with his orders, with his will. When Oedipus substitutes the law for his will, his fall from power begins. Oedipus, says Foucault, is "a figure that is clearly defined, highlighted, catalogued, characterized by Greek thought of the fifth century – the tyrant" (28). This tyrant is characterized, moreover, by a type of knowledge because his power is associated with a superior knowledge: Oedipus is *sophos*, and he is also *heuriskein*, he who finds. He also uses the verb *oida*, which means both to know and to see. Oedipus is the man of the gaze until the end, he is the man who wants to see with his own eyes, by himself, without depending on anyone: it is the autocratic knowledge of the tyrant who by himself can and is able to govern the city. Oedipus is the man of excess, who knows too much and is too able. "He is the man of excess", he is the tyrant. Oedipus has accumulated too much power and knowledge, it is an excess in the form of authoritarianism and reaches the sexual sphere as excess too. His excess is, finally, an atrocity, a monstrousness of power-knowledge.

Besides, this *techne technes*, supreme art and supreme knowledge, is according to Foucault a question concerning power as technical knowledge, a crucial question in the debates of the Sophists, Socrates and Plato. The question is whether the knowledge of power is learned or not. The expression is also used in Christian pastoral to designate the way – the art, the technique – that makes it possible to govern souls and lead them to salvation. In tragedy, power appears represented in its two facets: *dynasteia*, which is the capacity to exercise power, and *tyrannis*, tyranny, as the personal exercise of power. Oedipus

represents this exercise of power, and his technē is *inquiry*,[36] the art of discovery that makes it possible to go from the past to the present. And this art of governing in the tragedy of Sophocles is associated with tyranny, in its ambiguous meaning of the era: tyranny is in part the exercise of personal power by someone who has the status of hero, someone who, moreover, has a privileged relationship with the gods that enables him to give his laws to the city; but the tyrant is also the man of excess, the man of abuse, someone whose use of power goes beyond moderation and rule.

The third alethurgy, Foucault explains, is what makes it possible for everyone to learn the truth, and it is the representation of a "true judicial interrogation according to the rules". Two characters come face to face: the messenger, who appears spontaneously to announce the death of Polybus, and the shepherd from Cithaeron, who had been summoned by Oedipus. And from this confrontation the truth will emerge. This interrogation makes it possible to confirm identity (first anagnorisis), by which the shepherd who took the child recognizes Oedipus (Foucault, *Wrong-Doing, Truth-Telling*, 77). He is then interrogated about what he did with the child and what happened. And although he is reluctant to answer, the servant is compelled to speak (unlike the god and the seer). Oedipus even goes as far as to threaten torture. The answer of the servant is marked, from the grammatical point of view, by acceptance through the *autos*: it is no longer second-hand testimony (second alethurgy). And it is uttered with oneself speaking truth: "Yes, I am the one, *autos* ...". And the confession: it was I who did not kill him – *autos* (79). This is where the juridical acceptance of the confession is produced, when the chorus accepts it as indisputable truth. And it is an indisputable truth because it is pronounced with the *autos* (I say, I saw, I did) (79). Only then does Oedipus know and recognise himself as the one he did these things. Although the truth had been said before, he only recognizes it when a confession, an avowal, is made, and someone utters "I" in relation to all his crimes (79–80).

Thus we find, at the origin of democracy and Western law, the connection of the truth with the subject. And it arises as a critique of a truth that remains at the margin of the community (represented by divine truth) and of an imprecise truth. The truth of the person that speaks must be implicated in the enunciation of the truth of the facts. It is the precedent of the "I confess". The Greek judicial system only admits a truth formulated by a citizen, free or slave, who

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36 According to Foucault, this technique is related, in turn, with two others: medicine and the art of navigation. This trilogy: the art of ruling, the art of healing, and the art of navigating, will be fundamental in all thought, all the subject matter of political thought, practically until the 17th and 18th centuries in the West (75).

keeps within the limits of justice and law. For this reason, a *sophron* power is also necessary, a wise power that is capable of listening to one's people.

Foucault interprets the figure of Oedipus in this way. Oedipus is the tyrant who investigates to find a truth in a narrative (fable) and judicial (representation of a trial) structure, based on the two techniques that Aristotle describes in his *Poetics*: recognition and change of fate. The first technique corresponds to alethurgy, which, as Foucault explains, manifests in three instances, but the only one that is valid is that which makes use of the testimony of a witness in first person. The manifestation of the truth of the gods and what was not founded on reliable testimony are left aside. But Oedipus is also the representation of an excessive power that is incompatible with democracy; he is the tyrant. Oedipus believes that he will be able to escape human law and the decrees of the gods, and it is there, in that excess, that his government presents itself as an abuse of tyrannical power. The confession is therefore established as judicial practice in classical Athens: "it seems to me that it is interesting to see how avowal introduced itself with such solemnity into something as culturally and politically important as this ritual representation of law that the city of Athens gave itself" (Foucault, *Wrong-Doing, Truth-Telling*, 80). It is the legitimate production of truth that is juridically acceptable and that is accepted by the chorus, not as prophecy nor as deduction from circumstantial evidence, but truth constructed in the form of the interrogation of eyewitnesses who end up compelled to testify what they themselves saw, said and did. But as Foucault had previously explained regarding the tragedy of Sophocles, in accordance with the theory of the symbol, there is still a correspondence between divine and human knowledge, between the truth of the god and the truth of the shepherd. "They say the same thing, they see the same thing, but not with same language or with the same eyes" (Foucault, *Power*, 24). This correspondence is what defines the tragedy and establishes "a symbolic world in which the memory and the discourse of men are like an empirical margin around the great prophecy of the gods" (24).

Foucault had already argued, in the Brazil lectures, "Truth and Juridical Forms", with the theory of the correspondence of halves and symbol, that Oedipus is the man of knowledge who has seen and not the man of the unconscious who does not know (*oida* means knowing and having seen at the same time) and who is concerned with power. For Oedipus, says Foucault, power is what is important, he fears losing his own power. However, Oedipus will represent the figure of the good tyrant because, even though he wanted to run from his fate – and thus to achieve nothing except to condemn himself – he rejects the prophetic and oracular form of alethurgy. And it is even thanks to him that the city will be able to save itself in an auto-immune act. In this sense, Oedipus was necessary for the truth to appear, for the regular form of the judicial machinery

that is capable of producing truth to be established. But now the judicial machinery that he himself has introduced eliminates him as though he were superfluous – as would be done to the Officer of the machine in Kafka's story, "In the Penal Colony", which carved the law into the skin of the condemned, and, finally, into the Officer's own. And that truth that saves the city is the same that condemns Oedipus. In one single speech, Oedipus saves and condemns, and lays the base upon which Christian *alethurgy* would be developed.

Lastly, we will look at the last analysis of the tragedy of Sophocles, which appeared once more in his Collège de France lecture, *The Government of Self and Others*.[37] However, here it appears in contrast to another group of tragedies, by Euripides, particularly *Ion*. Euripides is the great tragedian of Athenian democracy, and in his writing we can see the evolution of the concept of parrhesia, from its positive meaning tied to the birth of democracy, to the criticisms it received in democracy's crisis.[38] In *The Courage of Truth*, the last lecture series he gave at the Collège de France, in the lecture of 19th January 1983, Foucault made a structural comparison between *Oedipus Rex* and *Ion*. The contrast between the two tragedies was important for Foucault to make a wide representation of the ethical development of a concept of political origin, as parrhesia is, and its relation with the different stages of Athenian democracy.

We have seen that Oedipus represents the figure of the good tyrant because, in some way, he is capable of sacrificing himself for the common good in an exercise that I have considered autoimmunity. Foucault analyzed *Oedipus Rex* in *Wrong-Doing, Truth-Telling* and showed the result of the confession of the truth that was a forced truth – because the slaves who declare in the trial are compelled to confess, even under threat of torture.

Foucault returns to the question of the tyrant in the 1982–1983 Collège de France lecture series. But this time he does so to demonstrate the other side of Greek veridiction, parrhesia. The tragedy of *Oedipus Rex* showed a judicial process in which alethurgy was the result of a human and testimonial truth, which did not contradict the oracular truth but was independent of it. However, there is a moment in which the use of another veridiction, parrhesia, is necessary. Foucault refers, in the Lecture of 12th January 1983, to the scene in which Creon, Oedipus's brother-in-law, wants to tell him the truth, but Oedipus the

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37 There is one last reference in his Collège de France lectures, 1984, in which he refers to the criticism that Diogenes makes of Oedipus as one who is not capable of correctly interpreting the signs because he is not capable of understanding the nature of his acts as something natural and not reprehensible, in accordance with the principles of nature of the Cynics.

38 I referred to this problematization at the beginning of this chapter. The crisis of democracy is associated with the problematization of the use of the free word, or parrhesia.

tyrant does not want to listen to him because he is suspicious of his intentions. Creon states that he has no intention of taking his throne and that he only wants to tell him the truth of the oracle. According to Foucault, we will find this scene repeated – the scene in which the tyrant who exercises power, who is blinded by the exercise of power, and by whose side there is someone who dares to tell him the truth. This scene is, therefore, a scene of parrhesia. This first definition of parrhesia, along the lines that the other lectures will follow, is defined by textual identification, through textual examples of classical parrhesia, and differentiation, that is, comparing parrhesia with those modes of speaking that cannot be identified with it. Parrhesia, says Foucault, is differentiated from four other modes: demonstration, teaching, debating and persuasion (Foucault, *The Government of Self*, 52). To elucidate this first approach to parrhesia, Foucault compares this Oedipal scene with another from the "Life of Dion" in Plutarch's *Parallel Lives*. Parrhesia uses resources of these forms of truth-telling but is not the same as them. For example, Foucault says, it uses aphoristic utterances typical of demonstration, but dispensing with the rational structure that characterizes demonstration (53). It also uses resources of rhetoric, or in itself is defined as a figure of thought very contradictory in style because it has an element that is foreign to persuasion, which is conditioned by the purpose of convincing. In contrast, Quintilian would say that parrhesia is "the plainest of all figures of thought" because it is true *libertas*, he states in *Institutio Oratoria*. Foucault qualifies that when it is defined as a figure, "it is like the most basic form of rhetoric, where the figure of thought consists in not using any figure" (53). For this reason, parrhesia is not pedagogical either, and is located at the opposite pole of Platonic irony. "As if it were a veritable anti-irony," says Foucault, parrhesia is hurled straight at the interlocutor and thus it is closer to the methods of debate and argument. But there is a remarkable difference: there is no possibility for triumph in its structure. Creon does not confront Oedipus, he does not wish to convince or indoctrinate him. Parrhesia creates an effect in the interlocutor, but it can't be identified with the performative utterance either, as we have already seen. Therefore, although parrhesia shares enunciative modes that are typical of other discourses, it cannot be identified with them mainly because parrhesia is aimed at uttering a truth. Regarding discourse capable of speaking the truth, it will also be differentiated from other forms of saying the truth belonging to the classical period. Foucault again takes up the parallelism between the two tragedies – *Oedipus Rex* and *Ion*, which represent two different moments of the relation between parrhesia and democracy – in order to differentiate between the three forms of truth-telling: the oracle, the confession and the political discourse.

Foucault analyzes the structures of both tragedies and finds elements of inverted symmetry. To begin with, both characters live in the house of their father without knowing it. Ion lives in the temple of Apollo, unaware that the god is

his father; and Oedipus lives in the house of his mother without knowing it. Similarly, Ion tries to kill his mother at a certain moment, without knowing who she is; while Oedipus commits patricide without knowing it. Furthermore, there is a more important analogy for Foucault, which concerns the mechanism of the search for truth. In both tragedies, the truth is tied directly to the question of who Oedipus is and who Ion is. And in both, the truth advances in halves – symbol as dramatic construction – until being reconstructed. There is, however, an opposition between the drama of truth-telling in *Oedipus Rex* and in *Ion*: "In Oedipus, in fact, first of all it is Oedipus himself who brings truth-telling into play. It is Oedipus who wants to know the truth. As sovereign, and in order to restore peace and happiness in his town, he needs to know the truth" (Foucault, *The Government of Self*, 84); whereas in *Ion*, it is not he who seeks the truth but his parents. And both truths are also of a contrary nature: the truth of Oedipus is that he killed his father, thus leaving a hole in the sovereignty of the city that he himself has occupied, and it has led him to banishment from the city. In contrast, the truth of Ion is that he has two fathers: Xuthus and Apollo, and it is precisely this paternity that guarantees Ion the chance of living in the city as a full citizen and the free use of speech or parrhesia that it entails.

All in all, the fates of Oedipus and Ion are opposites: Oedipus, who is in power, had attained it through a series of adventures that converts him from the most wretched (abandoned child) to the most powerful.[39] Oedipus is the one who, having been a hero becomes a king. He is the one who had healed the city, who had "raised it up"[40] (Foucault, *Power*, 27). Ion, in contrast, returns to his city to exercise a power given and legitimized by his revealed birth. Therefore, these processes of alethurgy in the two tragedies will have obverse consequences.

But not only do we find these obverse parallelisms between these two tragedies, to which Foucault devotes the most attention and analysis. According to Foucault, *Ion* is the Greek drama of truth-telling based on *isegoria*.[41] This text

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39 As Foucault had already explained, "This alternation of destiny is a characteristic trait of two types of figure: the legendary figure of the epic hero who has lost his citizenship and his country but who regains his glory after a certain number of trials; and the historical figure of the Greek tyrant from the end of the sixth to the beginning of the fifth century. The tyrant being the one who, after having several adventures and having reached the apex of power, was always under the threat of losing it." (Foucault, *Power*, 27).

40 Foucault explains that the expression "heal the city", associated with tyrants, refers to "lifting the cities up by means of a just economic distribution" (27).

41 In the Berkeley/Grenoble lectures, Foucault points out the antecedents in other plays by Euripides, which I can briefly summarize: *The Phoenician Women*, without parrhesia no power can be exercised; *Hippolytus*, without parrhesia there is no freedom (slavery); *Bacchae*, the parrhesiastic contract; *Electra*, the betrayal of the parrhesiastic contract; *Ion*, the truth is

maintains a double relation with the truth. On the one hand, the dialogic truth appears as counterpart to the oracular truth, which was habitually expressed in an enigmatic language for men, being the language of the gods. Yet in this play, it stays silent, lies or gives a half-truth. Faced with the enigmatic truth of the oracle, the dialogic structure proposes a search for the truth through dialogue between the characters: between Xuthus and Ion, Creusa and the old man, and Creusa and Ion. This tragedy stages the search for a truth that belongs to men and that is constructed in the common dialogue of all the members of a community, even by those who do not have the right to speak in the assembly, such as the chorus of female slaves or the old man. Indeed, Ion wants to know who his mother is, but what we see in the dialogues is a search based on mechanisms of trial and error, a search for the truth by human means. And the reality of the facts is reached, namely, that Ion is the son of Creusa, through a composition of the truth that everyone had possessed a fragment of. What the play depicts is three forms of truth-telling: the oracle, the confession and the political discourse. The oracle cannot say what it really wants to keep silent: it is reticence to confess. However, Creusa confesses, in a clearly parrhesiastic speech, the rape by the god Apollo and the abandonment of her son in the same place where the facts took place. It is, therefore, men who must practise truth-telling.

On the other hand, we find the characteristics of a political truth, parrhesia, described. It depends on the right of everyone to speak in the assembly (or *isegoria*). Ion attains this political truth by means of that first truth made up of all the fragments of speech of the community. Only when Ion learns his genealogy can he claim his right to speak freely in the assembly, since in Athenian democracy this right to parrhesia depended on a right of blood. Thus a direct relation between the truth of the community and the expression of the truth itself of the political subjects is established. In parrhesia, as Foucault shows in his last lectures (*The Government of Self and Others* and *The Courage of the Truth*), the subject of the enunciation and the *enunciandum* concur, which is to say: "I am the one who thinks this and that" and takes on the risk (41). And, therefore, that truth-telling takes place in the "game" of life and death (43).

Foucault sums up the characteristics of parrhesia as "a kind of verbal activity where the speaker has a specific relation to truth through frankness ..." (Foucault, *Fearless Speech*, 19–20).

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sought by human means; *Orestes*, political crisis in Athens. In a pejorative sense: "ignorant outspokenness/shameless". Foucault here refers to the criticism of parrhesia as speech that stirs up the audience (it forms a part of exaltatio in rhetoric, the figure without figures): "putting his confidence in bluster and ignorant outspokenness, and still persuasive enough to lead his hearers into trouble" (170).

However, as Foucault explains, the discourse of parrhesia, unlike performative utterances, takes place outside of a context that guarantees that the saying effectuates what is said, and carries with it a risk and an opening of the situation that has nothing to do with the institutionalization of performative utterances. Thus, while in the performative utterance the status of the person speaking is important, in the parrhesiastic act, what endorses the utterance is that the person speaking asserts their own freedom as a linguistic-political individual (Foucault, *The Government of Self and Others*, 65). Foucault says, "it is not the subject's social, institutional status that we find at the heart of parrhesia; it is his courage" (66). The effects of the potentiality of language that democratic parrhesia represents have a political function that for Foucault entails a transformation of the social-political order in a given community, very similar to the proposal that Jacques Rancière makes in *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible*. It is veridiction that produces a hiatus, an interruption and a transformation. And this use of the action of language, of a language that is the language of everyone, is a political practice that also causes an unknown and dangerous reaction for the person who utters it. As Foucault states, rather than performativity, parrhesia stages a "drama" of the discourse, the analysis of which is the analysis of the discursive facts that show in what way "the event of the utterance affects the subject's mode of being" (68).

This double condition, of freedom and the danger of death,[42] is represented in the tragedy of *Ion* by a classical metaphor: the double power of speech as poison and cure. Here we read this metaphor following the definition that Rancière gives in *Mute Speech*, that the metaphor joins and separates contradictory poetics, running a risky path between its own myth (book of hieroglyphs of spiritual life where the alliterations of things are inscribed) and its literal reality (Rancière, *Mute Speech*, 171).

As a free citizen of Athens, Creusa shares with her son Ion the double inheritance of parrhesia: Creusa possesses the two drops of blood of the Gorgon that Athena gave her father. Each of these two drops of blood, Creusa explains, has a power, one healing and the other deadly (Euripides, *Ion*, 78). These two drops

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42 "In parrhesia, in one way or another both the statement and the act of enunciation affect the subject's mode of being and, taking things in their most general and neutral form, quite simply mean that the person who said something has actually said it, and by a more or less explicit act binds himself to the fact that he said it" (68). An analysis could be carried out of the different forms of dramatics of the truthful discourse: the prophet, the seer, the philosopher, the scientist. From the councillor, the minister, the critic and the revolutionary: I speak the truth in the name of the revolution that I am going to make and that we are going to make together.

of blood function in the text as the same inheritance as parrhesia, which, in turn, remember, is a right of blood. With the poisonous drop, Creusa tries to murder Ion. But having been discovered in her attempt, it is through the dialogue caused by this failed attempt that Ion and Creusa learn the truth. Therefore, the line that develops the critique of parrhesia as dangerous speech is already in *Ion*, and it culminates in the separation of parrhesia from politics, as Foucault shows.

Due to this distrust, parrhesia and politics become separated, and the parrhesiastes is transformed in what Jacques Derrida calls the *pharmakeus*. In the analysis that Derrida applies to the Platonic dialogue *Phaedrus* in "Plato's Pharmacy", the *pharmakon* reconciles two opposing meanings: that of the cure and the poison at the same time (and no longer separated, as happened in Euripides's *Ion*: where Creusa could choose which word to use, because the drops were separate and each one had its function, as Creusa explicitly answered the old man's question).

In this text, Derrida shows that Socrates often takes the role of the *pharmakeus* in Plato's dialogues. In several dialogues, such as in the *Symposium*, they talk of power as an enchantment that Socrates wields through words. The Socratic *pharmakon* also acts as the most terrible poison, for its footprint invades the soul, transforming it (*performativity*). This demonic speech leads to philosophical madness and Dionysian raptures. On other occasions, it causes a kind of narcosis, as in *Meno*. Due to this duality contained in opposites, the use of the pharmakon can even turn against the person who uses it. And Socrates is first expelled to the limits of the city, and later sacrificed as a form of autoimmune protection of the city, in an attempt to recover the unity of the political body.

4.3.3 Cassandra and the Herald: From Parrhesiastes to Pharmakeus

In Euripides's tragedy *Ion*, we have seen a type of parrhesia that, in Athenian democracy, was tied to birthright, so the parrhesiastes was a free subject who was able to make use of his right to speak, equally free. Nevertheless, as we have seen, Euripides himself echoes the transformations and later criticism of this form of veridiction that was born with democracy. Thus I have considered that it is possible to read a sense of the concept of the parrhesiastes in *pharmakeus*, which alludes to the power that Socrates exercises through words, in its dangerous similarity to the persuasion of the Sophists and its power of transformation and performativity, typical of performative parrhesia. This speech is capable of leading to Dionysian madness, and even turns against the person who uses it. For those who use it, therefore, it is dangerous speech like parrhesia itself.

But how is the transformation of parrheisa into pharmakea possible? This is only possible through the problematization of the concept, as Foucault shows. This problematization of parrhesia will entail its separation from democracy and, at the same time, its terminological appearance outside of tragedy, as Foucault shows in the *Discourse and Truth* lectures: "The word parrhesia is to be found throughout Greek literature from the end of the fifth century BCE, and you find it also in the patristic texts from the end of the fourth century, and from the fifth century CE. The word parrhesia appears for the first time in Greek literature in Euripides, and you find it still, dozens and dozens of times, in John Chrysostom, for instance, in the Christian literature at the end of the fourth century" (Foucault, *Folie, langage, littérature*, 39).

Ion, which dates from 418 BCE, presented a parrhesia that was tied to the citizens' birthright. However, from *The Trojans* onwards, we find a problematization of the concept through different means. On the one hand, a contrast is established between characters who represent the good use of the right to speak and others who abuse it. This leads to a new structure of dialectic opposition typical of the antilogy, which represents a criticism of the unitary composition of the symbol that we have seen in the tragedy of *Oedipus Rex*. Simon Critchley, in *Tragedy, the Greeks and Us* (2019), attributes this to the connection with Sophistry. And, on the other hand, in *Orestes*, one of Euripides's last tragedies, the term is used as an adjective and in a pejorative sense.

Regarding this last line of analysis, in the Berkeley lecture of 7th November, 1983, Foucault refers to the pejorative uses of the word parrhesia from *Orestes* onwards. This play was written, or at least performed, in 408 BCE, barely two years before the death of Euripides and in a moment of political crisis in which the democratic institutions and regime were under debate in Athens. The word parrhesia goes from usage as a noun to an adjective. The doubts about parrhesia and its use in democracy coincide with inappropriate uses of it, in particular, people who use it for persuasive purposes.

However, with regard to the analysis of the characters who make bad use of parrhesia, the parrhesiastes confronts two character types: the tyrant and the herald. We have seen that Foucault distinguishes two types of tyranny: the tyrant who lets himself be counselled, as is the case of Oedipus; and the tyrant who punishes the parrhesiastes, revealing the danger of this truth-telling. But it is in Foucault's last analyses of the tragedies of Euripides, in which this other character, who holds no power at all, a character who depends on others – the herald.

The portrait of the herald in Euripides's *Orestes* (408 BCE) is clear: the herald makes use of a double discourse that wishes to wrap "malign words in beautiful phrases", a dishonest use: *elexe dichomytha*. The herald is described in *Orestes* as a person who uses rhetoric to disguise and who is "always leaping

over to join those in prosperity". He is the friend of whoever dominates the city and is of high rank. The herald is not a slave, but he does not speak with freedom, he does not use parrhesia because he is "subservient to whoever is in power", he is a servant.

> The herald tribe is like that – they're always jumping over to the side of the successful. Any man who has ruling power in the city is a friend of theirs. [...] a man stood up who can't keep his mouth shut, whose strength comes from his boldness – an Argive, but not from Argos – and forced himself on us, relying on bluster, ignorant free speech, persuasive enough to get them involved in some bad scheme or other.
>
> (Euripides, *Orestes*, lines 884–931)

Foucault analyzes this tragedy, which represents the procedure of the trial for matricide of Orestes,[43] told by the messenger. The figure of the herald is described by several characters in the tragedies of Euripides. All these characters share a common trait: their conditional freedom. They are characterized as subjects who are not completely free: "of course, he is not a slave, but he is not independent, he is dependent on people more powerful than he is. The Greek text says he is *hupo tois dunamenois ōn* (under the power of powerful people)" (Foucault, *Discourse and Truth and Parresia*, 101–102). This character is always in opposition to others who represent traits of a correct use of parrhesia. In *Orestes*, the herald opposes the parrhesiastes as a figure who works his own land with his own hands:

> No dainty presence, but a manful man,
> In town and market-circle seldom found,
> A yeoman [*autourgos*] – such as are the land's one stay –
> Yet shrewd in grapple of words, when this he would;
> A stainless man, who lived a blameless life.
>
> (Foucault, *Discourse and Truth and Parrhesia*, 101)

Foucault also refers to other tragedies by Euripides, *The Suppliants* and *The Trojan Women*. In the former, the scene contrasts the figure of the herald with that of the free city, without a tyrant: "'Who is the king in Athens?' Theseus replies, 'Well, you will not be able to find any king, because there is no *turannos* in this city, this city is free, that means that in this city, wealthy and poor people are equal'" (102).

Then begins a digression on the question of which is the best form of government, tyranny or democracy. The herald praises the tyrannical regime or, at

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43 As in *Oedipus*, in *Orestes* it is a separation between the interests of the city and the right of family.

least, makes a very harsh and detailed criticism of the democratic regime. Theseus's reply is a eulogy of Athenian democracy, in which he explains first that the laws are written down, second, that the rich and the poor have equal rights, and that in the assembly (*ekklesia*), every man is free to speak if he so desires. Those who speak in the assembly earn a good reputation and become the first among the citizens; the rest stay silent. And Theseus concludes: "Is there anything more egalitarian than that? Can equality go any further?" (*Discourse and Truth and Parrhesia*, 103). As can be seen, this democracy is characterized by equality and by the fact that everyone is able to speak. That is the objection that Theseus brings against the herald as a representative of tyrannical power. Then two other social types appear that correspond with the previous mythological figures. The first, as Talthybius, represents the bad orator, described as *athuroglōssos*, someone whose mouth is always open and who talks without stopping. As we can see, this is another type that is opposite to the parrhesiastes. The reply to the critics of parrhesia proceeds through the comparison of opposites, the didactic use of characters: between a good use of free speech or parrhesia, and a negative use of freedom of speech in the assembly. The notion of *athurostōmia* is very close to the notion of parrhesia, but it is the negative version of this because the *athuroglōssoi* "cannot make any distinction between good thoughts and bad thoughts, and [...] they indiscreetly intervene in other people's lives" (105). But it is Plutarch's criticism that points out the real danger of this talking without stopping, incapable of biting their tongue – to use the metaphor of the mouth that is always open. The problem, Plutarch says, is that those who are *athuroglōssoi* do not give any value to *logos*, that is "to discourse, to reason, or to the reasonable discourse through which you can get access to truth" (105). Therefore, Foucault says, the *athuroglōssos* is the opposite to parrhesia and, in turn, is very close to it. Because the parrhesiastes shows wisdom, his discourse is *sophos* when he distinguishes what should be said and what not. The difference between parrhesia and *athuroglōssos* comes, moreover, from the content of their discourse. If the discourse ridicules[44] and does not have content of a political or social nature, it is not considered parrhesia.

On the other hand, the direct emotional relations between the voice of the orator and its effect on the assembly is what is characterized by *thorubos*. *Thorubos* is a discourse that moves emotions and that is opposed to the reasonable meaning of an articulate discourse. But it is characterized more as an

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44 Here we see a precedent of the brazen speech of the buffoon, for example, which is connected with parrhesia but cannot be confused with it.

inarticulate noise that has a certain emotional effect on the assembly than as a discourse, strictly speaking. Then there is the last characteristic of this bad orator: confidence in the shameless freedom of speech, in *amathei parrhesia*. Here we find that this expression, which contains parrhesia as an adjective, is a repetition of the expression *athuroglōssos*. This citizen, this orator, in his role of assembly participant, "has parrhesia, but he does not use parrhesia as he is supposed to. His parrhesia is only a formal civic right" but he does not use this right well and in this case, lacks what is necessary to constitute good parrhesia, useful, politically positive parrhesia (107).

This figure contrasts with that of the good orator in *Orestes*. This man is described as *morphē ouk euōpos*, which means, as Foucault explains, that he has no physical presence – in other words, that not only is he distinguished discursively from the other orator but that even this is reflected in his physical appearance, because he does not use force to impose himself. But he is an *andreios anēr*, a courageous man, who is restrained, because he does not live from politics; he only participates in the assembly at important moments and for the taking of important decisions.

The fourth characteristic is that he is *autourgos*, a word that is translated as "yeoman", but which means that he is someone who does things by himself, he works by himself. He is not only a landowner but a landowner who works, not a poor peasant. The *autourgos*, Foucault says, appear represented as landowners who are concerned about the defence and protection of their country, but they are also good with the use of speech because they have to manage their properties and the people who work for them. In a political reading of the tragedy, Foucault explains that the *autourgos* would represent the conservative party, whereas the first represent the interests of the democrats.

For the first time, a matter is introduced that had not appeared before, which is the matter of *mathesis*, that is, education and knowledge. Parrhesia appears here as something that cannot solely be the pure liberty of speech given to any citizen, but that in order to make good use of this speaking freely in favour of the city, it is necessary to have a good education, intellectual and moral instruction, a *paideia* or a *mathēsis*, and only by occurring in this way will he be anything other than mere noise, a *thorubos*, and be able to have positive effects for the city. It is interesting to analyze that this need to care for oneself is represented in the character of the yeoman, the *autourgos*, who is characterized as the person who cultivates the land for himself, with his own hands, and it can be read as the person who cultivates himself.

The principle of inequality is thus introduced. As a consequence, if parrhesia was the right to speak of any Athenian citizen, and we have already seen that in the tragedy of *Ion* the truth of the slave, the chorus and Ion corresponded, this

truth is remade with fragments of the discourses of all the citizens, regardless of their social class or access to education. It is a truth that still corresponds to the symbolic truth, that is, a single truth common to all. However, here a change is introduced that will dismantle the very concept of parrhesia. Because, as we have seen, parrhesia emerges associated with *isegoria* and *isonomia* through the person who speaks, through their identity (who is Oedipus, who is Ion). But now there is a distinction between good and bad parrhesia. The latter corresponds to formal parrhesia, exercized by those people who make use of this right without a suitable education (*mathēsis*). The use of parrhesia therefore introduces disagreement and debate. Parrhesia does not respond to the discursive strategy capable of reaching one sole truth that is common to everyone, but, quite the opposite, it seems to introduce disparity and plural fragmentation of a truth that will no longer be symbolic.

The complexity increases when, moreover, the violence of the discourse that is exercized through force – defined as an extreme opinion that causes unanimity – is in contrast to the restraint of the yeoman parrhesiast, who argues from the conviction of reasoning and yet can be less effective: "you can see that if the bad parrhesia is associated with violence and passion, then the good one is linked with *mathēsis*" (108).

Lastly, this problematization culminates in a difficulty in giving a voice to all citizens, and the distinction between good and bad parrhesia corresponds with the social division between those that should govern and those that, not having the appropriate education, should be governed.

From the point of view of the history of parrhesia, Foucault says, *Orestes* represents the shift from the golden age of political parrhesia, that ten years earlier had been represented in *Ion* (418 BCE), to the problematization of parrhesia. The parrhesia in *Ion* had a clearly positive value: it was a freedom or privilege that any citizen who wished could enjoy, and when they needed it. It was a question of the type of right that some citizens, the first citizens, could make use of; and when they made use of that parrhesia, they said what they thought and, at the same time, this was true, because they were well born and maintained a certain type of relation with the city, the law, and the truth. Thus there was no problematization of the relation with the truth in this first description of parrhesia, but for the metaphor of the drop of Gorgon blood. But *Orestes* represents the problematization of parrhesia, and the question of who is fit for government due to their status or their personal qualities. The first problem calls into question the correlation between parrhesia and isegoria:

> There is a discrepancy between an egalitarian system which enables everyone to use parrhesia, and the necessity of choosing among the citizenry those who are able (because of their social or personal qualities) to use parrhesia in such a way that it truly benefits the city.
>
> (113)

And the second problem is the problem of education, of *mathēsis* as education and knowledge. This means that at the moment in which *Orestes* is staged, parrhesia was being questioned as an activity capable of revealing the truth by itself. In order to exercise parrhesia suitably, some form of education is needed, nor merely the courage to speak frankly. But, more specifically, it requires personal training.

Therefore, *Orestes* shows how, at the end of the fifth century BCE, Athens was undergoing this problematization of parrhesia, that "frank speech" could no longer be granted to all citizens. We can see that here we find a key moment in the relations between freedom, power and knowledge/truth in the origin of democracy, a beginning of social and epistemological separation, which distinguishes between those who make good use of speech and those who are not capable because their discourse is confused with uproar. Therefore, the problematization refers to two aspects that had formed the first parrhesia in an undifferentiated way: equality and the relation with the truth.

In the other play that Foucault uses to refer to the heralds, *The Trojan Women*, this character is in contrast to another figure of veridiction, the inspired and barely believable Cassandra. The tragedy shows us one more trait of the herald: in their relation with veridiction, the are incapable of distinguishing what is true. In the scene, Cassandra foresees the death of Agamemnon, and the herald, Talthybius, does not believe her, and declares that she is mad: "Ouk artias echeis phrenas (your mind is not in the right place)" (102). Cassandra replies: "Keen-witted varlet this! Why such fair name have heralds, common loathing of mankind, who are but menials of kings and cities." She goes on and explains: "you have said that my mother will become Odysseus' slave, but in fact the gods have said that she will die here," and it is the truth. Thus the herald is someone who cannot know the truth, who is incapable of saying the truth, of recognizing it, insofar as he is dependent on another, on his master. As the herald of Agamemnon, Talthybius does not believe in the words of Cassandra, because he must say what his master has told him to say. This means that he speaks under a certain coercion: "You see, the herald is one who cannot know the truth, who is unable to tell the truth, or to recognize the truth, insofar as he is dependent on someone else, that is, on his master" (102). The same thing happened in *Orestes*, in which the yeoman (*autourgos*), despite speaking with parrhesia, does not manage to convince the crowd. This is, undoubtedly, a critique of the persuasive use of discourse compared to the frank speech of parrhesia.

This same game of oppositions can be found in the case of Cassandra in *The Trojan Women*, a character who, for Critchley, represents the impossibility of affective communication: "Cassandra sees the truth clearly and accurately but cannot persuade anyone to believe her. There seems to be a persistent, performative gap between truth and persuasion" (Critchley, *Tragedy, the Greeks, and Us*, 116).

But Euripides's Cassandra is already a problematic character. The evolution of Cassandra as a mythological character from Aeschylus to Euripides sets us on the trail of this problematization and its relation with parrhesia. Because, although in Aeschylus's *Agamemnon* Cassandra is described as a prophet, in Euripides she represents the loss of communication with the world of the gods. As Nietzsche warned in *The Birth of Tragedy*, Euripides brings a distant mythological world closer to daily reality: "Through him the common man found his way from the auditorium onto the stage. That mirror, which previously had shown only the great and bold features, now took on the kind of accuracy that reflects also the paltry traits of nature [...] People themselves learned to *speak* from Euripides" (Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, 211).

Cassandra is a controversial character because in her are brought together traits of the parrhesiastes and another form of veridiction typical of seers, but whose relationship with the gods is not direct. On the one hand, Cassandra possesses traits of "prophetic madness", as per the classification that Plato makes in *Phaedrus*. But Talthybius, Agamemnon's herald, describes her as a maenad, priestess of Dionysus, and not as a seer or mantis, as she is called in Aeschylus's *Agamemnon*. Eric Robertson Dodds explains in his classic work, *The Greeks and the Irrational* (1951), that the Greeks already distinguished between inspired or divine madness and madness as illness. Talthybius describes Cassandra as driven mad, that she is no longer of sane mind. Thus the scene between Cassandra – parrhesiastic figure who combines inspiration and human veridiction – and Talthybius, the herald, represents the confusion between divine, inspired madness and madness as mental illness.

As a parrhesiastic figure, Cassandra shows another trait of classical truth: the confusion of her truth with mental illness and, in addition, the loss of the unitary truth of the gods. This is because, remember, the character of Cassandra tells the truth, but the keys to comprehending her truth-telling have been lost because she is no longer connected to the divine, insomuch as she has resisted submitting to the god Apollo. Her continuation to tell the truth is proof, therefore, of her resistance. But, in turn, this disconnection from the truth of divine authority has the consequence that Apollo inflicts the punishment on her of not being understood, that her truth will no longer be shared among her own people. Because Cassandra does not speak as a priestess enlightened by a god and,

therefore, the truth of Cassandra no longer forms part of that magnetic chain described by Plato in *Ion*. She has broken the chain and tells a truth that does not connect, and the sense that it is not seductive, it does not persuade. And because of this, she represents a speech that is wholly opposite to the speech of Helen. Therefore, in Foucault's focus on the truth pronounced by Cassandra, he again stresses that the truth is not concerned with persuasion, but with an emancipatory speech with performative consequences.

Furthermore, Foucault again emphasises that parrhesia involves an emancipatory speech that projects its consequences onto specific historical moments. Parrhesia enables Foucault to move a step ahead of the ethics of the care of self to the radically political origin of the constitution of subjectivity. It is by going to the origin of Greek democracy that Foucault finds the story of the self as the political configuration of the demos. As he stated in 1977 in the Collège de France lecture, "Security, Territory, Population", the dimension of what must be made can only be manifested in a "field of real forces" that "cannot be created by a speaking subject alone".

And Talthybius the herald does not believe Cassandra's predictions because "as a herald, [he] must say what his master tells him to say" (Foucault, *Discourse and Truth and Parrhesia*, 102). Indeed, the herald is incapable of speaking and recognizing the truth, insofar as he is not a free person, he is a citizen chained to his lord and is restricted to repeat what his master has told him to say. Hence, Foucault explains, he believes that Cassandra is mad. The herald is an unemancipated character, subjected on a political level to epistemological consequences.

After the crisis of parrhesia described through the analysis of these characters, we see an immediate consequence: equality is conditioned by *paideia* or *mathēsis*, according to the term used in *Orestes* by Euripides. And, in this way, a correlation between parrhesia and the care of the self is established, the ethical foundation of political freedom. In order to develop equality and the government of others, one must cultivate oneself, as the road to emancipation and to the exercise of critical thought necessary for democracy.

Christoph Menke has developed this argument in *Force: A Fundamental Concept of Aesthetic Anthropology*. He considers that for the citizen to develop an equality, which it only is in potential, a *paideia* is needed, and that this transformation is possible as an exercise of the aesthetics of self. In Rancière, however, equality is an a priori in order to think the distribution of the sensible. And Foucault problematizes the concept of democracy by associating its birth with the problematization of the very concepts that sustain it: isegoria and isonomia.

In the lecture held on 2nd February 1983, of the series *The Government of Self and Others*, Foucault stated that parrhesia was born with democracy; but what he also says is that it is separated from democracy after its historical problematization. Parrhesia was already a problematic concept from its formation, due to the contradiction between the elements that form it or the four corners of a square of parrhesia: democracy as freedom (formal condition), the government of a few (condition of fact), speaking the rational truth (condition of truth), and courage, struggle (condition of morality). Therefore, there is already a principle of division between those who make good use of speech and those who do not. It is the arduous problem concerning who should govern. And Foucault says that Euripides (conservative and realist) does not problematize the concept while he who makes use of it is privileged, like Ion; but *Orestes* is a different case, which shows how someone who is not autochthonous and who represents the interests of the democrats, as opposed to the aristocrats, seems to utter only shouts and not arguments, parrhesia is not recognized for him. So we see how the use of rhetoric in Euripides articulates a criticism of parrhesia, and more fundamentally, of isegoria. Against the criticism of those who appear to utter only shouts and not arguments, Foucault argues that what he wanted to reply is that nobody, even though they are *athuroglōssos*, speaks in order to not say anything. Verbal activity is always a response to a certain situation. But parrhesia seems to become a double-edged weapon, given that it can be used as "bad parrhesia" against democracy itself, because it can be used by dangerous citizens who can lead democracy into crisis or tyranny: "And, on the other side, since *parrēsia* is given even to the worst citizens, isn't it a fact that this parrhesia becomes a danger for the city and for democracy itself, since the overwhelming influence of bad orators leads necessarily to tyranny?" (Foucault, *Discourse and Truth and Parrhesia*, 124). In this way, the parrhesiastes is no longer appreciated as a necessary character for democracy and the assembly government, but rather as a danger or a double truth. It is, in short, the step from parrhesia to the pharmacy.

Subsequently, parrhesia, as frank speech that determines both the care of others (government) and the care of oneself, is inserted into the tradition of Christianity. As Werner Jaeger explains in *Early Christianity and Greek Paideia* (1961), "with the Greek language a whole world of concepts, categories of thought, inherited metaphors, and subtle connotations of meaning enters Christian thought" (6). Therefore, after the disappearance of the term in tragedy, parrhesia reappears in the texts of John Chrysostom.

4.4 From Ancient Tragedy to Modern Narrative: Literature as Critique

As we have seen, the problematization of parrhesia entails fundamental consequences. On the one hand, parrhesia ceases to be tied to democracy and undergoes a broad and varied development in different movements from Greek thought through to Christianity. On the other hand, the critique of parrhesia at the heart of democracy leads to the negation of isegoria and isonomia, and to the resulting social division that is associated, in turn, with the division of rational discourse – the insane are banned from Assemblies – as well as all those who make use of discourse lacking in reason because it resembles shouting – which are, ultimately, those who make it impossible to agree on *a* truth. And, lastly, this crisis of democracy demands a replacement: *mathēsis* or *paideia*, which Foucault analyzes through the technologies of the self, which are developed in the West from the classical era and whose consequences reach the present day, above all through the legacy of the Cynics.

These three dimensions of the problematization of parrhesia find a clear echo in the work of Foucault as critique. On the one hand, the studies on madness are a constant and at the end of his work, they come together in his project of seeking "potential modes of existence for possible subjects" (Foucault, *The Government of Self and Others*, 3). Madness is therefore considered a matrix of knowledge on the phenomena of deviation within a society. And the social partitioning of madness means the introduction of technologies by means of which it is aimed to drive the behaviour of others (3–4). However, these strategies of domination of subjectivities emphasize the possibility itself of the transformation of the subject and, consequently, they in their turn make possible technologies of resistance and of the constitution of subjects.[45]

This leads Foucault to recognize in the Kantian *Aufklärung* the legacy of classical parrhesia in modernity. Foucault's interest in Kant's "Was ist Aufklärung?" appears repeatedly from 1978 ("What is Critique?") until the end of his life.[46] And

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[45] Along these lines, we can understand the reading that Diogenes makes of *Oedipus Rex*. According to Diogenes, the problem of Oedipus is not that his fate is marked by the gods, but that he is of human origin: Oedipus errs in the interpretation of the signs of the oracle, just as his father Laius also does. But in the case of Oedipus, says Diogenes, the gravest error was not doing things himself but to delegate to others (*The Courage of the Truth*). The process of emancipation of the subject begins with one's work on oneself, as had already been represented in the figure of the yeoman in the *Orestes*.

[46] The same meeting between J. Habermas and M. Foucault in UC Berkeley, that did not happen due to Foucault's death in 1984, was due to be a reflection on Kant's text.

the ethical-political shift in Foucault's work can be read in line with Kant's proposal. In Kant, we find a new relation between morality and politics,[47] between will and the common state of well-being, which coincides with Foucault's approach.

The *Aufklärung* is defined by Kant as "man's emergence from his self-incurred immaturity", understanding this immaturity as "inability to use one's own understanding without the guidance of another" because "its cause is not lack of understanding, but lack of resolution and courage to use it without the guidance of another". Therefore, the *Sapere aude!* describes the parrhesiastic interpellation of "dare to be wise", the "courage to use your own understanding". In short, the distinction between governed and governors is not natural, it is not attributed to the capacities of citizens and, for this reason, we can conclude, every person is responsible for their own emancipation and resistance.

The common forms of resistance belong, therefore, to the experience and the tradition that begins with the parrhesia of the Cynics, and they are expressed in the modes of life as resistance, that is, in "the art of life" as "militantism". This aesthetics of existence to which Foucault devotes much of his investigation in *History of Sexuality*, and his Collège de France lectures, in particular, *The Courage of the Truth*. Life is, therefore, a stage for revolutionary activity, "or revolutionary activity as life". Foucault recognizes three forms of militantism of experience: the secret society, trade unions or political organizations with revolutionary ends, and, third, which Foucault gives special attention, "militancy as bearing witness by one's life", which should break with the conventions, habits and values of society, which highlights the possibility of living in another way to the socially admitted as scandalous life, "the scandal of the revolutionary life" as true life and which, in general terms, Foucault points out in the mid-nineteenth century (Foucault, *The Courage of the Truth*, 185–6).

Along with this vehicle of Cynicism or the theme of the mode of life as scandal of the truth, Foucault points out a third way – art. Not only as a form that gives an account of this aesthetic of life, as is Russian nihilism in the literature of Dostoyevsky,[48] but as Cynical literature, habitual in the satire and comedy of

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47 Politics concerns itself in the action of a state, of a group, whereas morality concerns itself with personal decisions, with free will, to act in a certain way.

48 By way of example, in Dosteyevsky's *The Idiot* the relation with parrhesia is established, firstly, in the character of Prince Myshkin, who is also inserted into the tradition of the parrhesiastes: a character with an education between autodidacticism and pedagogical experimentation, he is catalogued throughout the novel as: ill, artist, philosopher, mad, idiot, and democrat. Myshkin is the character who is not afraid to say everything and who is identified with his speech. Secondly, parrhesia is presented in the structure of the novel itself. As

medieval and Christian Europe and in the carnivalesque literature Bakhtin mentions:

> The fabliaux would no doubt belong to this domain, as well as the literature studied by Bakhtin, who relates it particularly to the festival and carnival, but which I think also certainly falls under this manifestation of the Cynic life: the problem of the relations between the festival and the Cynic life (naked, violent life, the life which scandalously manifests the truth). We would again come across many of the themes concerning the carnival and carnivalesque practice.
>
> (Foucault, *The Courage of the Truth*, 187)

However, the question of Cynicism reaches even modern art, where it is of singular importance, according to Foucault. This legacy of Cynicism of the aesthetic of existence (the bond between life and truth), reaches us in two ways: its appearance in Europe at the beginning of modernity, of "the life of the artist", which was not completely new, but that acquires original importance:

> the modern idea that the artist's life, in the very form it takes, should constitute some kind of testimony of what art is in its truth. The artist's life must not only be sufficiently singular for him to be able to create his work, but it must in some way be a manifestation of art itself in its truth.
>
> (187)

This modern idea of the artist's life is based on two principles: art is capable of giving existence to a form that breaks, a breaking as the truth of life; and life is the guarantee that every work that takes root in this life and begins from it, belongs to art. This is to say, it is the life of the artist that makes it possible for the work itself to be manifested as truth, a truth, as we have said, that is scandalous, that breaks from the past and is revolutionary. And it is what, as per Foucault, leads us to the second reason why art is the vehicle of the Cynical aesthetic of existence. This is the idea that the relation of literature with the real is one of laying bare, of unmasking. We find this idea, Foucault says, in the literature of Baudelaire and Flaubert, as the place of the event of what is elemental of life. This violent gesture that modern literature exercises upon reality is anti-Platonic and anti-Aristotelian at the same time, because it is "the endless movement by

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Bakhtin described in *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, it is a polyphonic novel that breaks from the organic structure of the body of unitary text. Myshkin himself is criticized for his "unbalanced" dialogue, as critique of the anti-Aristotelian composition of the work: "A plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousnesses, a genuine polyphony of fully valid voices is in fact the chief characteristic of Dostoyevsky's novels. What unfolds in his works is not a multitude of characters and fates in a single objective world, illuminated by a single authorial consciousness" (6).

which every rule laid down, deduced, induced, or inferred from preceding actions is rejected and refused by the following action" (188). Literature has, therefore, a function of criticism through its anti-cultural nature, because, faced with the consensus of culture, art confronts the courage of "its barbaric truth", which is, remember, the possibility of dissent. Modern art, Foucault says, above all has the courage to run the risk of "offending". And its capacity to criticise is inherited from Cynicism, which comes to literature via the Sceptic style and nihilism of the nineteenth century (189). For Foucault, the "question of nihilism is not: if God does not exist, everything is permitted. Its formula is rather a question: how to live if I must face up to the fact that 'nothing is true'?" (190).[49]

In the Western history of truth, in which there have been different and diverse truths, Foucault says:

> In this West, which has invented many different truths and fashioned so many arts of existence, Cynicism constantly reminds us that very little truth is indispensable for whoever wishes to live truly and that very little life is needed when one truly holds to the truth.
>
> (190)

Lastly, I would like to go back to the question of the legacy of parrhesia in modern literature. I consider that, as well as the development of the aesthetic of existence as a central theme of the modern literary opus, parrhesia has reached modern literature in its status of discourse and in its anti-Aristotelian and anti-Platonic form. Parrhesia had traced a discontinuous line in relation to unreason, Euripidean tragedy and modern literature, projecting its political dimension upon it. Thus this language, as deviation from the language of instrumental reason, is also the language of unreason. It takes up, in a different way, the relation between literature and madness.

Parrhesia reaches literary forms through the Cynical legacy of the genres of comedy and carnivalesque literature, until arriving at the modern novel. We can consider that the relation between parrhesia and the modern polyphonic novel is a broad one. The basis of this hypothesis lies, on the one hand, in Menippean satire's derivation from Socratic dialogue; and, on the other hand, it is found in the transformation of parrhesia in Cynic philosophy as a way of life, as I have already described. Bakhtin himself had already highlighted Menippean satire from among the tragi-comic genres of classical antiquity that would prepare the way for the carnivalesque view of the world and of the modern dialogic novel in *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*. However, the modern novel had also inherited elements from classical Euripidean tragedy, as

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49 Here we can see the work that Foucault did on Sade, to which I have referred in Chapter 3.

democratic speech.[50] If, as Christoph Menke states, the content of experience of tragedy is "tragic irony", that is, the tragic experience of action is that in which an action aimed at achieving an objective fails, then we can declare that, beyond modern theatre, we find elements inherited from classical tragedy in the modern polyphonic novel. That configuration using an accumulation of partial views is, also, one of the fundamental traits described by Bakhtin and Rancière in their description of the polyphonic novel and democratic novel, respectively.

As Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri remind us in their definition of "multitude", dialogic novels are presented as democratic models that overcome the modern alternative between sovereignty and anarchy:

> For him [Bakhtin] these limits directly betray the fact that it is impossible to construct a world in which each subject is not based on its recognition of others. This is where it becomes clear why Bakhtin conducts this polemic with reference to Dostoyevsky's novels, because in Dostoyevsky, he explains, narration is always dialogical, even between the protagonist and his cat. [...] Dostoyevsky's novels are thus great polyphonic apparatuses that create a world in which an open, expansive set of subjects internet and seek happiness.
>
> (Hardt & Negri, *Multitude*, 208)

Therefore, the legacy of the tradition of literature and parrhesia, and Bakhtin's conception of modern literature, coincide in that they oppose the norms of representative poetics, the indifference of form with regard to its content. And they oppose the idea of fiction-poetry, that of poetry as proper mode of language. Both principles oppose the mimesis of the word in act, a specific art of writing. The concept of writing in Foucault is particularly close to Rancière's. For Rancière and Foucault, writing and literature share their contradictory character, "it can be orphaned speech lacking a body that might accompany it and attest to it, or, on the contrary, it can be a hieroglyph that bears its idea upon its body" (Rancière, *Mute Speech*, 36). To this contradictory character of writing, Foucault adds a performative dimension that we find in his concept of literature, and which is another of the fundamental traits of parrhesia.

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50 For the development of this issue, I refer to the first part of Nietzsche's classic text, "Socrates and Greek Tragedy". Here, Nietzsche underlined that with Euripides the spectator attended theatre to see man in the reality of daily life – the spectator saw his own double. Thus the people learned to speak and language was made understandable and understood by all. "His heroes really *are* as they talk. But they also express all that they are, while the Aeschylean and Sophoclean characters are more profound and complete than their words: they only babble about themselves."

The multitude of democracy, as in its Greek origins, is founded on the lack of distinction between the masses and the group of the few, in the opening of all the discourses in the assembly, in the beginning of equality. Literature as the text of historical becoming, as event, is a truth-telling as excess, as parrhesiastic speech, which puts the seriousness of the genre itself in danger.[51] Literature dares to "say everything".

Finally, polyphonic literature, as a form of evental veridiction of a community, offers a space of resistance against police power, characterized by determining the behavior and freedom of other men. Literature inherited from parrhesia its capacity to say everything, and to resist the forms of political rationalization. Thus, the modern novel has inherited its political consequences from parrhesia, from its excessive and undifferentiated speech. Modern literature entails the end of representative order, not its apex, precisely due to the excessive speech of the modern novel. The excess in the modern novel's speech is the opposition of an *everything* to another. It marks the ruin of an *everything* that was in harmony with the stability of the social body. Because of this, parrhesia is critical discourse that is inserted into modern literature. Recalling the text quoted from *Constitution of the Athenians*, parrhesia is founded on the lack of distinction between the masses and the group of the few, in the opening of all the discourses in the assembly, or the principle of equality.

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[51] In binary opposition with philosophy, literature traditionally occupies the place of what is not serious.

5 Foucault and Literary Theory in the 21st Century

5.1 How to Read Literature with Foucault?

According to Cristina de Peretti in "Foucault: The Twofold Games of Language" (1994), "Foucauldian archaeology is resolutely based upon the privilege of reading" (35). It could be considered that the trait that runs through every one of his methodologies, both genealogy and archaeology, is based on the act of reading. But reading, as Foucault explains in *L'ordre du discours* (1971), is not a mode of grasping the text in a "true, correct and unique reading". On the contrary, his reading care – as he clearly expounds in "Nietzsche, Marx, Freud" (Foucault, *Dits et écrits I*, 592–608) – is synonymous of a historically plurisignificant text.

At the same time, like the frame inside the painting, reading in Foucault refers to the act itself in which the gaze confronts the materiality of the letters of the volume. Hence the characterization of our culture as Library or Foucault's interest in the archive. For the author, historiography is not a chapter objective of knowledge, but in its confrontation with the written word of the texts, with reading, language surpasses any possibility of transparent representation of the story. This same materiality is what enables Foucault to reconsider the concept of history in relation to the concept of writing and, in particular, with the concept of archive – a spatial model of history in contrast to the temporal, as linear development that allows the surmounting of layers. In archaeology, therefore, he attends to the materiality of the story through the materiality of the archive, as Walter Benjamin had already done in his "archaeology of maternity",[52] for whom there is no future utopia either, but, rather, every present dissolves the past and, at the same time, is capable of renewing it. In this putting oneself in front of the writing, the metaphor of the eye of the reader is essential in Foucault's thought, which, in his debate with dialectic, confronts the abstract perception of the mind, supposedly superior to the eye and the ear, according to Hegel (2018) – and here Hegel uses the eye in a non-figurative sense – the impossibility of *leaping* to the very act of reading. And the development of the hermeneutics is linked to this metaphor of the eye of the reader in Foucault. A metaphor that, as Martin Jay shows in his book, *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought* (1993), has enjoyed a long tradition and successive transformations. Jay shows the existence of a large

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[52] The image used by Benjamin is the "ruins of the past" in "The Task of the Translator" (1923).

number of metaphors of vision that speak of a profound relation between perception and language itself: according to him, the epistemology of this metaphor approaches the "representativity" of language.

This metaphor, recurrent in Foucault's work, is therefore contextualized in the panorama of the contemporaneous philosophy but also as critique of the privilege given the organ of the eye in Phenomenology, principally Merleau-Ponty.[53] Foucault condemns this mode of ethnocentrism present in this privilege, which makes it impossible to think the Other. Cristina Micieli has highlighted it thus in *Foucault y la fenomenología* [*Foucault and Phenomenology*] (2003), on speaking of:

> His attempt to escape the monarchy of the empirical-transcendental double, given that the anthropological paradigm is, in the historical mode of the analysis of thought, the same form of a type of rationality complicit with ethnocentrism – that is, with the same impossibility of thinking the Other.[54]

(29)

As a precedent of this use of the image of the eye, Benjamin had also developed it in relation with the materiality of historical discourse. As Sagnol shows in "La méthode archéologique de Walter Benjamin" (1983), *Theses on the Philosophy of History*, which represents the theoretical framework of his study on the *Arcades*, begins with a series of critiques aimed principally at the ideology of progress. Both Benjamin and Foucault shared Nietzsche's legacy that criticized the concept of teleological history because it forgets small events. Foucault and Benjamin had taken up the Nietzschean metaphor of the eye – in turn of Leibnizian origin, as Sarah Kofman shows in *Nietzsche et la métaphore* – which is that of perspectivism. And with it they had confronted history as "effective history" and not as *continuum*. Thus Sagnol states in "La méthode archéologique de Walter Benjamin":

> Il n'est pas certainement pas exagéré de dire que l'archéologie de Foucault est fille du matérialisme historique et de la généalogie nietzschéenne, et qu'en cela elle n'est pas totalement étrangère à l'archéologie de Benjamin, qui, s'il proclame haut et fort le matérialisme historique, n'est pas moins également influencé par Nietzsche.

(143)

Hence these authors faced up to the classical trend that since Plato has considered the eye to be the privileged organ for representing spiritual vision ("natural way to the soul"), the intuition, given its elevated and removed situation

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53 *Phénoménólogie de la perception*, 1945; *Le visible et l'invisible*, 1964; *Le primat de la perception et ses conséquences philosophiques*, 1966.
54 My translation.

from contact with what is material, as opposed to smell and taste, as Jay explains. With this, Foucault is *making visible/letting see* the symbol of the eye by making it essential in the perception of matter through the act of reading, compared to the transparency of the image that returns the eye from what it perceives. The eye no longer looks at an "objective reality", no longer faithfully perceives what reality is: they eye is the eye of the reader, the eye that attends to the signs of reading.

However, it must be said that I consider that the gaze acts in this regard not as a privileged sense in epistemological work as Martin Jay considers in *Downcast Eyes* (1993), nor only as mere image-word discontinuity, but that it would be a technique founded on the event of "making see" as critical exercise. In "Visual Parrhesia?: Foucault and the Truth of the Gaze" (2009), Jay revises his 1993 study and states that the gaze in Foucault acquires a deconstructive value of the pure gaze of the speculative subject and, moreover, of the panoptic gaze, which he called "the limitless empire of the gaze" (*The Birth of the Clinic*, 39). However, he concludes that one could not speak of a visual parrhesia. On the contrary, Shapiro states in "Shutters and Mirrors: Manet Closes the Panopticon Window" (*Archaeologies of Vision*, 2003): "In the Panopticon the gaze is mobilized and fixed on each individual; it is a floating or functional gaze that need not appear as the look of anyone in particular. In Manet looks meet no object, no person, even though we see their source. What we see, then, is an eye disconnected from a content of vision" (310). Indeed, we cannot really speak of a visual parrhesia, but we can of the traits that parrhesia, as the verbal technique of telling the truth, shares with a trying to see what, being in the same *present*, has not been seen.

In one of Foucault's last reflections on literature, he describes the modernity of Baudelaire as "an exercise in which the extreme attention placed in the real (the present) is faced with the practice of a freedom that, simultaneously, respects and violates the real" ("What is Enlightenment?", 32–50). Modern literature is not the mere production of a word outside of the order of the discourse but is extended as "real" discourse. The modernity of Baudelaire does not lie in accepting it as an everlasting movement but in being capable of extracting "the poetical from history" that is defined as "something eternal that is neither beyond nor behind the present instant, but in it itself".

I therefore define the political capacity of literature, the politics of literature in Foucault, as a making see or revealing modes of speech that, existing, had not been considered. It is the attitude that enables one to grasp what is "poetic" in the present moment; it is a will to heroize the present ("*De l'héroïsme de la vie moderne*", Baudelaire). This ironic heroism entails for the modern man an invention of himself that does not "free man in his own self" but compels him/her to the constant task of creating himself. Along these lines, Raymond Bellour stated: "fiction understood in this sense possesses a virtue in comparison with the

history which it is, without being so. It does not bring to the fore that which is in the past in order that the effect of it should return to the present. What it brings to the fore is that which is in the process of happening. Thus it is most true for the time in which it is practised because it incorporates the shift between times in the very way in which it is constructed, and converts this into space (which is both visible and readable)" ("Towards Fiction", 153).

In *Death and the Labyrith*, reading opens the possibility of seeing but it is not what is seen itself, such as the lens of *la Vue* or the doubles that in the work of Roussel definitely hide more than they replicate – "a radiance in which nothing is visible" (*Death and the Labyrith*, 54) – it is the excess that does not make it possible to see. Or, as occurs in the work that Foucault devotes to René Magritte, *This is not a pipe* (1973), the impossibility of reconciling image and words undoes the classic illusion of continuity between what is seen and what is said.

However, in the new critique it would be the eye that enables, through images, relating thought with what is visible. Foucault puts it in this way in "Le Mallarmé de Jean-Pierre Richard"[55] (*Dits et écrits I*, 1964), in which he states that the reading of the literary text *lets one see* a "poetic thought" in the image and not a reference point. Yet this metaphor is a clear reference to Georges Bataille, who in *Story of the Eye* (1928) breaks down the opposition between the low and the high upon considering that the eye is always and at the same time a sex and an eye, without it being possible for these opposites to be brought together in a third term. Foucault also takes up this metaphor as a metaphor of transgression. In "Préface à la transgression" (1963), for Foucault the metaphor of the eye is the transgression of the self, the "eye returned":

> Its globe has the expansive quality of a marvellous seed – like an egg imploding towards the center of night and extreme light, which it is and which it has just ceased to be. It is the figure of being in the act of transgressing its own limit.
>
> (45)

The metaphor of the blind, upturned eye, "the most open and the most impenetrable eye", continues the play of limit and of being in Bataille's work (46). The upturned eye is more than a metaphor in which Bataille brings together what he has

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55 A particularly interesting text due to the *mise en abyme* structure: it is what could be called a text that is no longer secondary but third language, insofar as it is language (Foucault's text), on language (Jean-Pierre Richard's text) on language (Mallarmé's text). "Le Mallarmé de Jean-Pierre Richard" is a review of the book *L'Univers imaginaire de Mallarmé* by Jean-Pierre Richard (1961), a review in which Foucault (*Dits et écrits I,* 455–465) defends the *nouvelle critique* and, in particular, the reading made by Richard of Mallarmé's work, against the readings that had been made principally from the standpoint of psychoanalysis.

called *inner experience*, *the extreme limit of the possible*, *comic operation* or simply *meditation* (*L'Expérience de l'intérieur*, 1943); of which Descartes' clear gaze or that acuteness of mind that he calls *acies mentis* is not a metaphor. According to Foucault, it is precisely this metaphor that marks the limit of Bataille's thought:

> In point of fact, the upturned eye has no meaning in Bataille's language, can have no meaning since it marks its limit. It indicates the moment when language, arriving at its confines, overleaps itself [...] the overturned eyes of ecstasy, the mute and exorbitated horror of sacrifice, and where it remains fixed in this way at the limit of its void, [...] The enucleated or upturned eye marks the zone of Bataille's philosophical language, the void into which it pours and loses itself, but in which it never stops talking – somewhat like the interior, diaphanous, and illuminated eye of mystics and spiritualists that marks the point at which the secret language of prayer is embedded and choked by a marvellous communication which silences it. Similarly, but in an inverted manner, the eye in Bataille delineates the zone shared by language and death, the place where language discovers its being in the crossing of its limits: the nondialectical form of philosophical language.
>
> (48)

From there is from where the "being of extreme limit" is observed. Foucault develops this image in his own work, bringing in a book by Leiris and that of Bataille: "In any event, it is on the white beach of an arena (a gigantic eye) where Bataille experienced the fact [...]" (51). According to Arne Klawitter,[56] the function of this metaphor fulfils a fundamental role in the ontological hermeneutics of literature that Foucault propounds. For Klawitter, the upturned eye is a self-sufficient "linguistic monument", "a significant (*Signifikat*) *gap*" with a double function: referring to the being of language, at the same time as absolute signifier for "referring to the empty place of the sovereign subject" (131). In order to indicate the function of the upturned eye, Foucault differentiated, at least implicitly, between seeing (*Sehen*) and looking (*Blicken*). Klawitter relates this differentiation to M.H. Abrams's romantic distinction of the mirror and the lamp. In the former case, the eye appears either as a mirror or as a lamp. As a mirror, it refers to the self-reflective function (when one sees oneself coming); as a lamp, the eye appears as what gathers the light of the world and converts it into an individual and subjective image. In contrast, on seeing, Foucault characterized – according to Klawitter – the eye that looks as a lamp as well, albeit as a nightlamp "whose strange light does not illumine the world but rather demonstrates its own emptiness" (Klawitter, 130). The eye of the reader alternately finds the image of the eye that observes itself reading and the particular reading that it carries out on writing.

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56 All references to Arne Klawitter (2003) that appear in this book are my own translations.

The concept of reading in Foucault is also inseparably connected to another equally decisive concept in his overall project: the concept of *experience*. The sense in which Foucault uses the term is clarified when he states on several occasions that his books must be seen as "experiences that drive change". It is experience, therefore, as testing oneself, but also as testing the reader. And it is also from here whence it is possible to discern a new consideration of the notion of reader, since, as for Blanchot,[57] the reader is the one who relates with the word and is transformed by it without imposing *itself*. As opposed to the author, who recognizes and imposes the work's unity, the figure of the reader who diversifies and disperses possible readings that are always multiple. And this is as negation of the beginning, that is, as the impossibility of revealing a first identity and of reaching that "truth" veiled by time.

Yet this reading is also a mode of approaching texts, of confronting texts directly, as a "letting see" the text, and has been used frequently by Foucault both in his critical analyzes of literature and in his archaeological "descriptions".

This reading would attend to the singularity of events, as an opening of the possibility and archaeological and erudite treatment of the subject. For this genealogical hermeneutics is the same for texts and events as archaeology is to monuments – that is to say, it attends to their materiality as opposed to the metaphysical approach and, given his work on events, it therefore also surpasses Structuralism. This is how Foucault himself explains it in "Nietzsche, Marx, Freud" (1964). Like the authors of suspicion, Foucault believes that language does not say exactly what it says. Language surpasses the use that it has traditionally been given, "it is no longer the house of the subject". That is, the words themselves would but be interpretations. Throughout their history, "they interpret before being signs, and ultimately they signify only because they are essentially nothing but interpretations", such that:

> There is nothing absolutely primary to interpret, for after all everything is already interpretation, each sign is in itself not the thing that offers itself to interpretation, but an interpretation of other signs.
>
> ("Nietzsche, Marx, Freud", 275)

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57 In his novel, *Thomas l'obscur* (Nouvelle Version. Gallimard, Paris, 1950), Blanchot developed the allegory of the reader as a new type of reader who does not impose his being onto what is read, who does not set out to expose himself in the reading, but to let *himself* be transformed by the *being of language* (Blanco, 2007).

In this sense, in *On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense*, Nietzsche questioned the concept itself of truth:

> What, then, is truth? A mobile army of metaphors, metonyms, and anthropomorphisms- in short, a sum of human relations, which have been enhanced, transposed, and embellished poetically and rhetorically, and which after long use seem firm, canonical, and obligatory to a people: truths are illusions about which one has forgotten that this is what they are.
>
> (46–7)

The idea that interpretation precedes the sign entails that words are already interpretations; they do not indicate a meaning but impose an interpretation. For this reason, Foucault says, the decisive value of modern interpretation consists of revealing this fact. Literary interpretation is marked, in turn, by the polysemantic nature of literature. Literary hermeneutics would therefore be the analysis of literature as signifier and signifying itself. And literature would therefore be

> polysemantic, but in a unique way, not in the way that a message is said to have several meanings or that it's ambiguous. In reality, literature is polysemantic, which means that, when saying one thing alone or maybe when saying nothing at all – for there is no proof that literature has to say something – in any case, whether it says something or nothing, literature is always obligated to traverse a number a semiological layers [...] This means that literature is nothing other than the reconfiguration, in vertical form, of the signs present in society and culture in separate layers. Literature cannot be based on silence. It is not the ineffability of silence, literature is not the effusion of that which cannot and will never be said. [Literature is incessant murmur.].
>
> (Foucault, "Literature and Language",[58] 94)

The literary analyses of Foucault, like his other studies, were developed through discursive practice, even in his most evidently theoretical texts, such as "Langage et littérature" (1964). Foucault's hermeneutics is thus not far from the immanentism of New Criticism, but with the influence of psychoanalysis, structuralism and, above all, of his archaeology.

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58 The French edition of the lecture, "Littérature et langage" (Facultés universitaires Saint-Louis, Brussels, 1964) was published in 2013, later than the Spanish translation by Ángel Gabilondo of 1996. There are some differences between the two editions. In this case, the quotation has been completed with a phrase that only appears in the Spanish edition (it does not appear in the 2015 English translation either), which I put within brackets.

As with other contemporaneous theorists and critics, connected to what was called *Nouvelle critique*[59] and the Structuralist movement,[60] Foucault opposes traditional criticism in this way, although in his case this mode of reading is also based on his concept of language. For if language is defined in its signifying capacity not only by its referential nature but above all for its perlocutionary (insofar as creative) character and for its capacity to apprehend itself, to signify itself, in its ontological nature (because ludic), what happens to literary criticism that had been defined as a secondary language capable of re-establishing the link between the text and the author, or between the text and the referent? It would seem obvious that the status and nature of this discourse will be redefined.

In this redefinition of criticism and hermeneutics of the literary text as secondary text, Foucault distances himself from the radical nature of some contemporaneous proposals. In the lecture given in 1970 at the Collège de France, *L'ordre du discours*, to mark the elevation of Jean Hippolite to the professorship of history of the systems of thought, Foucault specifies the status that he gives the secondary text or commentary. Regarding hermeneutics as secondary text, or "commentary", which is shown as a discourse control procedure that, nevertheless, cannot be disregarded, says Foucault:

> I suppose, though I am not altogether sure, there is barely a society without its major narratives, told, retold and varied; formulae, texts, ritualised texts to be spoken in well-defined circumstances; things said once, and conserved because people suspect some hidden secret or wealth lies buried within. In short, I suspect one could find a kind of gradation between different types of discourse within most societies: discourse 'uttered' in the course of the day and in casual meetings, and which disappears with the very act which gave rise to it; and those forms of discourse that lie at the origins of a certain number of new verbal acts, which are reiterated, transformed or discussed; in short, discourse which is spoken and remains spoken, indefinitely, beyond its formulation, and which remains to be spoken. We know them in our own cultural system: religious or juridical

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59 As Manuel Asensi has indicated in *Historia de la teoría de la literatura, vol. II*, "nouvelle critique" is a broad and heterogeneous designation which encompasses new theoretical and critical trends that were developed in France in particular, and in Europe in general, in the 1960s, of which some had already been emerging since the 1930s: "Movements such as Marxist-leaning Genetic Structuralism (whose principal representative was Lucien Goldmann), psychocriticism (Charles Mauron), the later criticism of consciousness (Jean-Pierre Richard, Jean Rousset), and that of negative consciousness (Maurice Blanchot), form part of the *nouvelle critique*, a type of theoretical and critical discourse that carried out a renewal of literary studies in the France and Europe of those years" (Asensi, 341) [My translation].

60 Foucault defends these "new trends", a defence that can be found in various texts, of which the following stand out: "Le Mallarmé de J.P. Richard" (1964), "Langage et littérature" (1964), "Le Structuralisme et l'analyse littéraire", and "Proposition de création d'une chaire intitulée Sémiologie littéraire" for Roland Barthes (1975).

texts, as well as some curious texts, from the point of view of their status, which we term 'literary'; to a certain extent, scientific texts also.

(Foucault, *L'ordre du discours*, 220)

As can be seen, here it is not a question of the radical lack of distinction between first and secondary discourse that other authors asserted in these years. Among these authors, in *Criticism and Truth* (1966) Roland Barthes stated: "the same language tends to circulate everywhere in literature and even behind itself [...] there are no longer either poets or novelists: there is no longer anything but writing" (23). According to Barthes, the definition itself of objectivity that was demanded of criticism was subjected to a historically variable notion: "exteriority" – defined as reason, nature, taste, the life of the author, the rules of the genre or the story – which would equally have altered critical veracity. Likewise, Deconstruction, and mainly Paul de Man, also denied that there was any radical difference between first or original language and secondary language.

The difference lies in that, although for Foucault neither category is closed due to its historicity, there are secondary texts or commentaries that sometimes occupy the place of the primary texts, and other primary or creative texts that disappear. Nevertheless, the "radical denial of this gradation can never be anything but play, utopia or anguish"; and he refers to the irony in Borges's *Pierre Menard* and the anguish in Roussel.

> Anguish, such as that of Janet when sick, for whom the least utterance sounded as the 'word of the Evangelist', concealing an inexhaustible wealth of meaning, worthy to be broadcast, rebegun, commented upon indefinitely: 'When I think', he said on reading or listening; 'When I think of this phrase, continuing its journey through eternity, while I, perhaps, have only incompletely understood it.
>
> (Foucault, *Death and the Labyrinth,* 220–221)

Hence, as for Barthes, for Foucault the status of texts varies according to the historical moment. The difference lies in that for Foucault, nonetheless, the distinction in itself does not disappear. According to Foucault, the first text is repeated in many ways. "A single work of literature can give rise, simultaneously, to several distinct types of discourse. The *Odyssey*, as a primary text, is repeated in the same epoch, in Berand's translation, in infinite textual explanations and in Joyce's *Ulysses*" (*Death and the Labyrinth*, 221). The relation between these two types of text is therefore open and 'solidary':

> in what we generally refer to as commentary, the difference between primary text and secondary text plays two interdependent roles. On the one hand, it permits us to create new discourses ad infinitum: the top-heaviness of the original text, its permanence, its status as discourse ever capable of being brought up to date, the multiple or hidden meanings with which it is credited, the reticence and wealth it is believed to contain, all this creates an open

possibility for discussion. On the other hand, whatever the techniques employed, commentary's only role is to say *finally*, what has silently been articulated *deep down*. It must – and the paradox is ever-changing yet inescapable – say, for the first time, what has already been said, and repeat tirelessly what was, nevertheless, never said.

(*Death and the Labyrinth*, 221)

Thus we can see a shift in his works on literature in texts published after 1970, which we have already seen, and that also entails the defence and need for a new critical discourse: precisely the problem of French criticism of his time and that Roland Barthes described in "Voies nouvelles de la critique littéraire en France" (*Œuvres complètes, I*, 145–148). In "La folie, l'absence d'œuvre" (*Dits et écrits I*, 440–449), meanwhile, Foucault showed that these *secondary* languages would not function as languages "exterior" to literature. Criticism, he says, forms part of the heart of literature, of the "void" that that literature establishes inside its own language. These texts, says Foucault, are the necessary movement, but *necessarily unfinished*, given their relation with literature, and literature's nature. Criticism is *writing*, in the same way that it is possible to find criticism within literature itself.

This conception of criticism as writing, which is fuelled by the same language as literature itself or as the language of thought, is the central theme of the second part of "Langage et littérature" (1964). Foucault here delves into the nature of the being of language in its relation with criticism, its "recent change", and its contrast with the multiplication of the discourse of what Foucault ironically calls "homo criticus", a figure that likewise emerged from the beginning of modernity in the nineteenth century. In this study, Foucault states that the true acts of criticism should be sought in literature itself, in poems by René Char or in fragments of Blanchot, in the texts by Francis Ponge, in those that criticism converts into writing: "We could say that criticism has become a general function of language in general but without an institution, without its own subject" (Foucault, "What is the Language of Literature?", 46). And from here, in a text also from 1964, "Le Mallarmé de J.-P. Richard", Foucault writes that a book is not important because of the things it brings up, but when the language around it is disrupted, making a void that becomes its place of residence (Foucault, "Langage et littérature").

Thus, according to Foucault, it is not possible to make the primary indistinguishable from the secondary discourse. Nevertheless, given that such a status is historical, we already find in every text the possibility of its transformation. This is due to the double nature and the being of language, which extend the powers of language to all the discourses that make up a society.

In *Teoría hermenéutica y literatura* [*Hermeneutic Theory and Literature*] (1991), J. M. Cuesta Abad states that hermeneutics starts with the idea that "beneath 'common sense' there is a hidden and more profound meaning". If we accept this starting hypothesis, then Foucault's 1963 analysis of the work of

Raymond Roussel starts from a genuinely hermeneutic supposition. When Roussel published *Comment j'ai écrit certaines de mes livres* in 1935, this text seemed to have as its only purpose to clarify *once and for all* the keys to interpreting his own work. However, Foucault considered that the key there described was not a purpose but rather a threshold, a re-beginning of reading that multiplies the meanings. And this is one of the traits already described of Foucauldian hermeneutics: the recognition of the plural nature of the text.

Foucault's interest in literature is constant, but *Death and the Labyrinth* is his only writing devoted exclusively to the analysis and interpretation of a literary work. His purpose, he repeats successively, is to "show" the reader the thresholds of Roussel's work. And here, undoubtedly, this "making visible" is loaded with the reference to the Marxist thought of "donner à voir" and it is, at the same time, an appeal to the Foucauldian idea that literature is thought in images – that is (and according to what has already been shown) that the reading of the literary text *makes visible* a "poetic thought" in the image, ahead of a referent (mimesis) ("Le Mallarmé de Jean-Pierre Richard", 1964).

This ability of reading to "show the invisible" is shown incessantly throughout all his work. Reading is thus susceptible to showing a truth that had previously been kept silent (*Histoire de la folie*, *Histoire de la sexualité*). This enables us to connect this first stage of Foucault's production with those ideas that I developed in the previous chapter. In contrast to *aletheia*, which is the truth-being of logos, in the Berkeley lectures Foucault took on the classic concept of *parrhesia* as "saying everything" for his reading methodologies. *Aletheia* is to show being "clearly", not to hide it. In Aristotle's rhetoric, this was related to showing the truth to everyone in a clear way, avoiding enigmas, which was based on "common sense", the sense that is shown most clearly to the majority. The saying-everything of parrhesia, however, is related precisely to saying the opposite of what the majority think, to go against opinion; it is a way of speaking that belongs to criticism that reveals a "difficult" truth. And in Foucault it is directly related to the double being of language, the paradox and the *enigma*.

> Language is that space by which a being and its duplicate are united and separated; it's a relation of that hidden shadow which shows things by hiding their being. It's always more or less a rebus .
>
> (Foucault, *Death and the Labyrinth*, 121)

In this way, when Foucault warns us that the procedure expounded by Roussel gives us the key and at the same time redoubles the work itself of meaning, he tells us that another meaning has to be looked for that is not the evident, the habitual, that rereading is always necessary. Thus a "space of infinite uncertainty" opens, put forward from the fact that "it is impossible to know whether there is a

secret or none, or several, and what they are" (Foucault, *Death and the Labyrinth*, 11–12). And this is because the identity of words is an experience of two faces: in the word the place of an unforeseen meeting is revealed between the most distant beings in the world ("it is distance abolished; at the point of contact, differences are brought together in a unique form: dual, ambiguous, Minotaur-like", 16). It could therefore be said that there is already a metaphorical power in language that is inherent to it, but above all, that there is a paradoxical being that gives language its double potentiality and, ultimately, its wealth contained in a finite and even reduced materiality (like a Borgesian library). Therefore, in the metaphorical proposition, as in paradox, two realities completely removed from each other come together. That having been said, the metaphor has been given an epistemological capacity (that of knowing through similarities), while the paradox has been criticized for its logical (criticism of irrationalism: literature and madness) and ontological (*being* A and not A at the same time) consequences. Roussel's machines, according to Foucault, adopt these two fundamental functions: to join two distant realities, superimposing them in a non-dialectic juxtaposition in the way of the metaphor (such as the worm-musician, the cockerel-writer, the breadcrumb and marble), or like the paradox, uniting incompatibilities (the thread of water and the thread of cloth, chance and rule, inability and virtuosity) or uniting realities without a possible relation of size (scenes composed in the interior of embryonic grape seeds; musical mechanisms hidden in the thickness of decks of tarot cards).

Therefore, given the self-consciousness of his writing, which is the antipode of automatic writing, it is in Roussel's writing that this double being of language can be appreciated. Roussel's writing is able to show, through the various procedures, "the duality of language which starts from a simple core, divides itself in two, and produces new figures" (16). Roussel thus shows a movement inherent to language with ontological consequences: the signifier-signified connection can "undergo a metamorphosis", multiplying the possibilities of each word, that is to say, their "meanings" (17).

In short, for Foucault as for Nietzsche or Dumarsais, language has a tropological origin with political consequences that, according to Foucault, have nothing to do with "figures of style", that is, with saying the same thing in another way. On the contrary, "all of Roussel's language, in its reversal of style, surreptitiously tries to say two things with the same words". It is precisely in this tropological space where Roussel's writing is placed:

> In the space created by this displacement, all the forms of rhetoric come to life – the twists and turns, as Dumarsais would put it: catachresis, metonymy, hypallage, and many other hieroglyphs drawn by the rotation of words into the voluminous mass of language.

Roussel's experiment is located in what could be called the "tropological space" of vocabulary.

(Foucault, *Death and the Labyrinth*, 17–18)

5.2 *Donner à voir*: Politics of Form and the Marxist Tradition of Literature

For Foucault, literature, with its power to make visible "novel forms of being", offers modes of liberation from society's models of normalization. Language gains Independence and autonomy in its materiality, but it is precisely through this from where language *says everything* because, as he expounded in "L'extralinguistique et la littérature", it cannot say everything.

In this sense, the politics of literary form that Foucault propounds comes close, critically, to classical Marxist literary theory, to the early Lukács of *Theory of the Novel*, and to the later Althusser of aleatory materialism in "Le courant souterrain du matérialisme de la rencontre" ["The Underground Current of the Materialism of the Encounter"] (1982).

It was Mikhail Bakhtin, Valentin Voloshinov and Pavel Medvedev (the Bakhtin Circle) who developed the importance of linguistic form and placed language in the centre. For these authors, language is an ideological phenomenon par excellence. It also concerns what up until now has been called "internal experience". For these authors, the mental contents of individuals only exist as signic expression and, therefore, belong to the ideology of a period. For Lukács as well as for Bakhtin and his circle, the heterogeneity and conflictedness of language is an indicator of social transformations. But language is not a mere reflection of what is real; in Voloshinov's words, "existence reflected in sign is not merely reflected but *refracted*" (Voloshinov, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, 23). With Lukács, Foucault shares this idea of form as a sociological question. However, for Lukács one can observe in the analysis of form "the vital temporal and historical elements", and this analysis of form allows him to explain how the appearance of a new historical subject matter produces new formal laws. Yet Foucault introduces the performative capacity of literary form, because the analysis of the form allows us to perceive not only changes or events but that the form itself produces effects on history.

Without a doubt, the dialogue between Foucault and Althusser is more complex. Recall that for Althusser, society is formed by structural hierarchies and subjectivity is an effect of these. The subject is not subject until invoked in the discourse, and then is made present. It is what he calls interpellation: "the interpellation of human individuals as ideological subjects produces a specific effect

in them, the unconscious-effect, which enables these human individuals to assume the function of ideological subjects" ("Three Notes on the Theory of Discourse", 56). Therefore, subjects are actively conditioned – ideology is performative, in the ideological system, through repressive apparatus (tribunals, prisons, bureaucracy) and ideological apparatus (family, school, religion). Ideology, according to Althusser, has an illusory effect that makes one accept as natural a relation with the world that in reality is a representation, or what, in Guy Debord's words, we know as spectacle (*The Society of the Spectacle*). So, if for Althusser literature is a superstructural phenomenon, this means that it is ideological. Literature forms part of the reproduction which the system of production induces for its continuity. Hence, art and literature form part of these illusory media. And, although in "Se débarrasser de la philosophie" ("The Functions of Literature", 1975) Foucault argues for a sociology of literature that demystifies the functions of the discourses that are called literature at a particular historical moment,[61] there is never a straight identification between literature and ideology. Althusser, however, seems to distinguish, in a Platonic mode, between a "true art" and "art as simulacrum. This true art is what "makes us see" something of reality, that is, the very ideology of what it comes from (Althusser, "A Letter on Art in Reply to Andre Daspre", 8), because although art cannot exit from ideology, it can show it. The nature of "making visible" in Foucault is certainly of a different nature, as I have already shown. But both give a principal place to literature's potential to show.

In order to understand this difference between the Althusserian "making visible" and Foucault's "donner à voir", we need to think about the influence that the Frankfurt School had in their idea of politics of literature. The excess of literature that Foucault speaks of, that "untameable" materiality, maintains a complex dialogue with the thought of the Frankfurt School. Remember that in the latter, the influence of psychoanalysis is what led them to consider reality not only as objective reality but also that which comes from desire, denial and oneiric freedom. From this we can understand how these authors reverse the classic Marxist approach and value art for its *negativity*, that is, for its capacity to move away from the evident real to the other "real". The revolutionary role of negative dialectic consists of attributing in the dialectic process an autonomy to negation/denial that it had been denied. If dialectics results in a synthesis of identity, says Adorno, the revolutionary value of negation/denial is eliminated. Moreover, this revolutionary art, mainly avant-gardist, also confronts the

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61 "What is really that activity that consists of putting into circulation fiction, poems, stories... in a society. It should also be analysed [...] what is it that makes some sacred and come to function as 'literature'?" (Foucault, "Utopian Body", 64). [My translation].

objectualization of art massified as commerce ("loss of aura"). Because of this, it is no surprise that Adorno defends poetry, in his lecture "On Lyric Poetry and Society" (*Notes to Literature*, 37–54), which is without doubt the least massified literary genre and that pays most attention to form. What the Frankfurt School achieve is to separate the autonomy of art from Kantian lack of interest, and give that autonomy a reflection not of the objective real but of the desire for a reality to come (utopia). In *Aesthetic Theory*, Adorno says:

> Art becomes social by its opposition to society, and it occupies this position only as autonomous art. By crystallizing in itself as something unique to itself, rather than complying with existing social norms and qualifying as "socially useful", it criticizes society by merely existing.
>
> (308)

From this perspective, we will better understand that literary analyses do not focus on standard works of realism but on the avant-garde or on authors like Kafka, Magritte, Baudelaire, etc. In their studies on the literary avant-garde, they find a concept of radical freedom that calls into question the capitalist order. Therefore, language will no longer be a mere vehicle of ideology, as has happened in classical Marxist realism, but a resistance that is borne out of its autonomy. This autonomy of literature is what we can recognize in the material autonomy of the literary text, which we have been able to analyze in *Death and the Labyrinth*, a book that also belongs to the avant-garde tradition.

But we cannot forget a fundamental aspect that Foucault still shares with the Althusser who argues for freedom in the face of necessity and the introduction of the aleatory, although we find in Foucault a broader development of his politics of literature: the aleatory comes in through literary language itself. For Althusser, however, the non-irreducibility of literature, as he puts it in "Letter on the Knowledge of Art", is a "making visible the ideology" ["Donner a voir l'ideologie"], which in Foucault represents only one of the constants of premodern literature. Foucault had found, in his interest for Structuralism and for the unusual linguistic forms of Raymond Roussel, modes of experimentation in his search for new structures of relation and novel forms of being as aesthetics of existence. As Judith Revel has stated, it is the production of the new through new relations between what is already there.

The difference that the collaborators and students of Althusser, Etienne Balibar and Pierre Macherey, introduce in "On Literature as an Ideological Form", is that the work is a place of conflict between different ideologies and a practice with effects on society, what the authors call "production of literary effects", that is, an ideological effect or that which we call *real*. But it would be J. Rancière, another former follower of Althusser, who marks a radical about-

turn to the proposals of French Marxism and with whom we can establish a dialogue of greater current interest.

5.3 Politics of Literature: A Dialogue with Jacques Rancière

Jacques Rancière starts with a question that the late Althusser and his aleatory logic as critique of dialectic leave open. It concerns the question for the "potential/power of the negative". According to Negri in the introduction to *Machiavelli and Us*, Althusser's theory of aleatory materialism is developed as suitable practice when Althusser focuses on the study of the "power of the negative" in a moment in which all resistance "like in great mysticism, all contact and, with greater reason, all commitment with the world, with power, are here definitively abolished"[62] (*Machiavelli and Us*, 23). This new practice is, therefore, materialist and aleatory. Althusser asked, in the 1980s, "how to set into motion a thought of the practice, resolutely materialist, having this negativity as its basis? How can power emerge in a practical way out of negativity?" (24). The answer of both authors to the same problem marks the insuperable distance between them. Althusser approaches the theology of liberation[63] in order to give an answer and considers that the place for maximum possibilities, the place of power itself, is in the poverty of Christian origin as the place that shows the urgency of the action of the post-metaphysical and post-bourgeois subject. From this place, which is the place of power, the nation of the poor can be freed with a revolutionary practice. This interpretation of aleatory materialism and its practice is, nevertheless, what marks the definitive distance with the proposals of Foucault and Rancière.[64]

Rancière puts forward a concept of equality based on the limits of this power of the negative. This is how we can understand how his principle of equality is sustained upon the paradox of the *passive politics of equality*. But what really goes against the Althusserian proposals is that a large part of the weight of Rancière's politics of equality falls on fiction and, in particular, on

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62 My translation.

63 A. Negri quotes the unpublished text: "Sur la théologie de la libération. Suite à un entretien avec le P. Breton", 28 March 1985 (handwritten pages, IMEC Archive).

64 The dialogue here would be more fruitful with the proposals of Agamben, who responds to the Althusserian challenge from the legacy of Foucault. For a development of these questions, see *The Highest Poverty: Monastic Rules and Form-of-Life* (2011), in which Agamben replies to this potentiality of poverty through the aesthetic of existence and the government of self that Foucault expounds in his Collège de France lectures.

his concept of mimesis and of distribution of the sensible. Rancière makes this a priori principle of equality a principle of performativity at the same time.

On the other hand, the theoretical principles of Foucault's politics of literature, as I have laid out in the first chapter, consider a principle of social distribution determined by the distinction between rational and irrational, a principle of social verisimilitude, or what I have called a "social-fictional pact", and, lastly, an evental capacity of literature that enables it to make visible a reality that forms the margins of that social verisimilitude, and which, as we have seen, had a direct relation with Deleuze's concept of virtuality. The dialogue between these concepts allows us to observe how Foucault and Rancière set forth an updating of the political power of literature.

First, remember, the concept of madness as a principle of social division described by Foucault refers to a principle of distribution that is historical and movable, which in modernity is based on the principle of rationality and which, in turn, is determined by a socio-economic principle: the distinction in society between those that produce wealth and those who do not.

For his part, Rancière defines what he calls *the distribution of the sensible* (*le partage du sensible*) as "the system of self-evident facts of sense perception that simultaneously discloses the existence of something in common and the delimitations that define the respective parts and positions within it" (Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, 12). Rancière thus denounces that the political division is concomitant with the imposition of a separation according to the use of the word that is determined by the exercise of one or other *technē*. Since Plato, ontological-political determination depends on action as rational principle. That is to say, we cannot *think* two things at the same time because we cannot *do* two things at the same time, because we do not have the time to do them simultaneously. According to Rancière, these borders between the discursive modes are at the basis of our democracy and precede the division between those who govern and those who are governed. The anthropological foundation is also built upon it, which coincides with the political distribution of the sensible and with an aesthetic, which is a political aesthetic. Such a definition is what was stated by Aristotle in *Politics* of man as a political animal. That is to say, what separated those who have the right to speak and those who do not, between those who have the word and those who do not.[65] As a consequence of

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[65] This criticism of the unequal foundation of democracy is very similar to the concept of *bounded democracy* that Etienne Balibar formulates in *Les frontières de la démocratie* (2005), for whom the border and partition are found in the origin of democracy and, at the same time, they contradict it. As Rancière speaks of grievance, Balabar speaks of the "legitimate violence" of our societies in the north.

this co-foundation of the political-linguistic, aesthetic and anthropological distribution, politics for Rancière refers to "what is seen and what can be said about it, around who has the ability to see and the talent to speak, around the properties of spaces and the possibilities of time" (13).

Therefore, we find that both authors define the social distribution in terms of discrimination based on the force of work, that is, those who work and those who do not, in Foucault's terms, and on the time conceded to "take the word", in Rancière's terms. In both cases, this social discrimination entails making these subjects invisible and a discrimination of the subjects who are not given the principle of reasoning.

In both, this social discrimination leads them to revise the Aristotelian-Platonic tradition that connects art and politics. Let us not forget that *poiesis* in the classical era was seen as a category of technē, which means that art, in its premodern foundation, participates in this separation. For this reason, the aesthetic that is at the basis of politics determines that the artistic practices participate in the common as *ways of doing and making* that take part in the general distribution of the forms of being and the forms of visibility (13). Thus, says Rancière, the problem of literature, the reason why Plato banished the poets, emerges precisely because it situates the citizens *outside of their place*. This is to say, the problem of *poiesis* is, for Plato, that the theatre is founded "on the impossibility of doing two things at once" (13) and because "it disturbs the clear partition of identities, activities and spaces" (13). Hence Plato and Aristotle had made an ontological, anthropological and political hierarchy coincide with an aesthetic hierarchy in what Aristotle calls *fable*. For Rancière, therefore, the question of fiction is a question of distribution of places, and literature in modernity would come to deregularize the structure or hierarchy of political beings. This is

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Balibar propounded a key question for the comprehension of the concept of border. His work makes it possible to trace a genealogy from the Latin word *limes* in its different definitions throughout history. Although it is true, says Balibar, that there are identities (active and passive, desired and suffered, individual and collective) in different degrees. And, like walls, their multiplicity, their character of constructions or fictions, does not make them less violent (the legitimate violence of our societies of the north). Ultimately, he stresses the relation between identity and border, and in his most spectacular formulation, between identity and wall: since States are constituted by subjects, whose precedents are in the national-imperial States as subjects. This shows that "in the historical complexity of the concept of border, which presents itself to us again and at the same time evolves and has new forms, takes in the problem of the *institution*" (Balibar, *Les frontières de la démocratie*, 85) [My translation]. In other words, the border presents itself as a condition of possibility for a multiplicity of institutions that may or may not be democratic, even though the wall is, in itself, anti-democratic. It is what Balibar calls "bounded democracy", as I've already considered.

because, in Rancière's opinion, modern literature is fundamentally democratic and unbalances the structures and rules of representation of the sense of community. But how does it do this? How does it confront the structuring of the perceptive space, what Rancière calls the police? According to his explanation in an interview with Eric Alliez in 2000, published as "Biopolitics or politics?", literature confronts the structure of the whole, "the set of acts that effectuate a supplementary 'property', a property that is biologically and anthropologically unlocatable, the equality of speaking beings". Literature thus acts as a device of equality, as a fiction of equality (Rancière, *Dissensus*, 92).

Foucault, for his part, critiques the Aristotelian concept of fable, as we have seen in Chapter Two. His aim was to underline the fundamental nature of fiction that had remained in a subordinate place in Aristotle's *Poetics* compared to the fable. Foucault recalls the Aristotelian definition of the fable as configuration of the work based on elements placed in a certain order and of fiction as the plot of the relations established, through the discourse itself, between who speaks and what is spoken about. But although fiction for Foucault is an "aspect" of fable, nevertheless, and this is crucial, causal logic is a mode of fiction and not a basic structure of the story, as it had been since Aristotle. Fiction, therefore, affects the modes of articulation of all discourse. And he adds that the modes of fiction are, moreover, historical when he states that the relation between fable and fiction is determined by "the *mythical* possibilities of culture": its writing or plot depends on the possibilities of the language (*langue*), while its fiction is determined by the possibilities of the act of speaking (*parole*): "In that analagon of discourse that the work constitutes, this relation can only be established within the very act of speaking; what is recounted must indicate, by itself, who is speaking, and at what distance, and according to what perspective, and using what mode of discourse. The work is defined less by the elements of the fable or their ordering than by the modes of fiction, indicated as if obliquely by the very wording [*énoncé*] of the fable. A narrative's fable resides in the mythical possibilities of the culture; its writing resides in the possibilities of the language; its fiction, in the possibilities of the speech act" (*Aesthetics, Method and Epistemology*, 137–138).

This makes it possible to consider that the verisimilitude of a narrative, what a society is prepared to accept as credible, depends on a specific historical moment and not on the logical structure of the narrative. But, as well as affecting the modes of historical narration, what a society accepts as fictional, that is to say a *social-fictional pact*, would also affect veridiction, or that which a society accepts as modes of telling the truth. And what allows this overlapping between fiction and veridiction in Foucault's work is the gaze.

In a text from 1963, "Distance, Aspect, Origin", Foucault defines fiction as "the flight of the arrow that hits us between the eyes and offers up *everything*

that appears" and as "the verbal nervure of what does not exist, *just as it is*" (*Aesthetics, Method and Epistemology*, 103–104). And, years later, in "The Stage of Philosophy" (1978), he declared that his interest was then in the description of the mode in which the West had organized its games of veridiction through the gaze, "the spectacle of the world":

> It is indeed the theatre of truth that I would like to describe. How the West has built itself a theatre of the truth, a stage of the truth, a stage for this rationality that has now become one of occidental imperialism's distinctive features, because its economy, the Western economy, may have reached its summit, the essential forms of the Western way of life and the political predominance of the West are undoubtedly coming to a close. But something has remained, something that the West is undoubtedly passing on to the rest of the world, namely a certain form of rationality. It concerns a certain kind of perception of truth and error, a certain theatre of truth and falsehood.
>
> ("The Stage of Philosophy", 150)

He also developed this focus in the last years of his research. In the Louvain lectures, *Wrong-Doing, Truth-Telling* (1981), he fully confronts the question of how and in what conditions a mode of veridiction could appear in history, following Nietzsche's "Wahrsagen". It is a question of defining the modes of veridiction in their plurality, to explore the forms of obligation by which each one of these modes links to the subject of truth-telling, to specify the regions to which they apply and the domains of objects that are made evident, and lastly the relations, connections and interferences that are established between them. In short, it is a question of a historical politics of the truth or of a political history of veridictions. Therefore, I believe it to be of particular interest to undertake a reading of the genealogy of veridiction and literary fiction, in order to understand the modes in which the subject is emancipated through a political aesthetics of self.

According to Rancière, therefore, literature would counter the division that is at the basis of politics with the transparent fact of *Ut Pictura Poiesis*. But not as a mere return to classical dictate but, very much to the contrary, removing the concept of truth as *veritas* that is found at the basis of the Horatian motto, and introducing here a political revision of *aletheia*. Rancière introduces, as opposed to the traditional *veritas* in which the word and the thing coincide, an *aletheia* that here separates truth from reason. In contrast to Plato and Aristotle, truth is no longer adaptation to the idea, and neither will perception be *to look at the idea* as in the Platonic myth either. Whereas the truth of *veritas* is identified with the rectitude of enunciative representation, *aletheia* functions as a fictional mode of emancipation insofar as it transcends the political distribution of the sensible.

The concept of *aletheia* had already been revised in the twentieth century by Sigmund Freud and Martin Heidegger, among others. In both, the concept of

Unheimlich plays an essential role.[66] For Freud, *the uncanny* is a phenomenon in which what was familiar is transformed into something disturbing and what should remain hidden has appeared. In the case of Heidegger, in "The Origin of the Work of Art"[67] (1935), in the literary word truth happens (*Ereignis*) as *aletheia*, and the work acquires a status very close to that of the monument in Rancière, "that which preserves memory through its very being" (Rancière, *Figures of History*, 22):

> To be sure, the sculptor uses stone just as the mason uses it, in his own way. But he does not use it up. That happens in a certain way only where the work miscarries. To be sure, the painter also uses pigment, but in such a way that color is not used up but rather only now comes to shine forth. To be sure, the poet also uses the word – not, however, like ordinary speakers and writers who have to use them up, but rather in such a way that the word only now becomes and remains truly a word.
>
> (Heidegger, *Basic Writings,* 173)

The concept of truth in Heidegger as *aletheia* entails an 'unconcealing' of what the object is in itself. Thus the truth of the labourer's boot is its usefulness for working in the field, its call by the soil. The oblivion of being is the oblivion of the genuine definition of being, it is *automatization*. This is why, as for the Formalists, art is the path for truth, because it unconceals it and deautomatizes it and reopens the combat between story and world, says Heidegger, "so that the strife may remain a strife" (Heidegger, *Basic Writings*, 175). Therefore, the truth of the work of art occurs as "making visible" (*aletheia*) through the estrangement of the familiar (*Unheimlich*). Literature estranges language and presents it to us in another way. In terms of classic literary theory, the function of literature coincides with Shklovsky's concept of *defamiliarization* (*ostranénie*) that involves the deautomatization of perception of the alienation of language that we relate with. According to the Russian theorist:

> The goal of art is to create the sensation of seeing, and not merely recognizing, things; the device of art is the "defamiliarization" of things and the complication of the form, which increases the duration and complexity of perception, as the process of perception is, in art, an end in itself and must be prolonged. Art is the means to live through the making of a thing; what has been made does not matter in art.
>
> (Shklovsky, "Art, as Device", 162)

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[66] In this regard, Lacan's concept of anguish can also be read here, which defines it as a mode of conception of the real.

[67] However, note that the difference that strikes one at the beginning of Heidegger's text regarding Rancière's proposal is that Heidegger makes it very clear that what he is talking about is what he considered "the great art". We do not find this concept in Rancière, who worked on both literature and cinema under equal conditions. His concept of equality is transversal and also includes the artistic genres.

Rancière, however, defines literature and art as the place in which "their own truth happens" in the indifference of the theme and the necessity of the work. Literature is, therefore, "the pure making visible" in the state of perplexity or muteness (*Unheimlich*) that modern literature produces as contradictory poetics, which the author calls "mute letter" (Rancière, *Mute Speech*). In this mute speech, the concept of writing unfolds and is, at the same time, *speech orphaned* of all its body that can lead it or bear witness to it. And it is also *hieroglyph* that bears the idea of writing in its own body (Rancière, *Mute Speech*, 17). The contradiction of literature could well be defined as the tension between these two beings of writing.

Thus, the concept of *aletheia* in Rancière, like this making visible, is a profound critique of the mimesis that Aristotle defined as "imitation of human actions". And it is very close to the definition of the concept that Auerbach described in his book of the same name in 1942:

> In modern literature, the technique of imitation can evolve a serious, problematic, and tragic conception of any character regardless of type and social standing, of any occurrence regardless of whether it be legendary, broadly political, or narrowly domestic; and in most cases it actually does so. Precisely that is completely impossible in antiquity. There are, it is true, some transitional forms in bucolic and amatory poetry, but on the whole the rule of the separation of styles [...] remains inviolate. Everything commonly realistic, everything pertaining to everyday life, must not be treated on any level except the comic, which admits no problematic probing.
>
> (Auerbach, *Mimesis*, 31)

And this, Rancière asserts, due to its lack of historical consciousness. Rancière thinks, therefore, along with Auerbach and opposing Aristotle, that literature is closer to history than to philosophy, questioning the principle of verisimilitude that governs the classical forms of poiesis. For Rancière, as for Agamben, telling the history is ultimately *telling a story*:

> A story, *une histoire*, is an arrangement of actions according to which there has not simply been this and then that, but a configuration that fits the facts together and allows them to be presented as a whole: what Aristotle calls a *muthos* – a storyline, or plot, in the sense in which we speak of the plot of a play.
>
> (Rancière, *Figures of History*, 7–8)

But the story does not coincide with the Aristotelian proposal because, for Rancière, on the contrary there is no tie of causality that orders the plot and legitimates the established order. Rancière thus makes a critique of the narrative nature of the story using the resources of literary analysis. And so the politics of the literary text in particular, and the role of literature and art in their relation with the story, is to reorder the official history in another way. Thus art and literature "quietly assert their aptitude for all kinds of learning" (Rancière, *Figures of*

History, 17). History, therefore, is reordered and "is that time in which those who have no right to occupy the same place can occupy the same image" (Rancière, *Figures of History*, 13). Literature and the arts are capable of this mode of telling in another way, and they do so, says Rancière, "consciously or unconsciously. Intentionally and beyond what was intended"[68] (17). And this is because literature enables "suspension between two different regimes of explanation". In this suspension, *truth as memory* takes place, or what Rancière describes thus:

> unfold the fullness nestled in its simple presence. By cutting the thread of any reason, you leave the scene, the attitude, the face, with a muteness that gives them double the power: stopping the gaze on this evidence of an existence linked to the very lack of a reason, and unfolding that evidence as a potentiality belonging to another sensory world.
>
> (18–19)

Another possible world that, nevertheless, already is, only we have not seen it, we have not given it presence. Literature therefore actualizes a virtuality of the present *close at hand*, to utilise the expression with which Agamben responds to the metaphysics of presence.

In this way, Rancière responds to the decision that links action and rational thought. The virtuality of another present thus enables:

1. Thinking of two things simultaneously, *at the same time* and so opposing the action-reason determining that has been at the basis of the distribution of the sensible since Plato and Aristotle, which attributed a situation and a time to each citizen in accordance with the *technē* they developed.

2. Proposing a mode of thinking the time of the *new mythologies* as virtuality of the present. Already far from the future of utopias, and in line with other work that has been undertaken since Deleuze and more recently with Agamben.

Therefore, the truth of literature moves closer to Foucault's definition of it as a *virtuality of the present*: in plain sight but, at the same time, hidden. Thus Rancière gives back to literature its deautomatizing – as contradictory – character (this was the essential thesis of *Mute Speech*) and gives *aletheia* a radically political value.

The difference that mediates between them is, however, that the demand for the political and cognitive equality of all operates at the basis of Rancière's

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68 A parenthesis to refer to this 'unconsciously': the ontological dimension of the literary text as Blanchot and Foucault had described it in their texts from the sixties would here be reinterpreted as a political ontology of the text. The ludic dimension of this unconscious speech (recall Foucault's text on Raymond Roussel) is reinterpreted by Rancière as the pure making visible of the literary text. Thus for Rancière the nature of the literary text is radically political.

thought. He describes equality as a predialectic potentiality, which in literature is the pure "making visible" as indetermination:

> To write is to see, to become an eye, to put things into the pure medium of their vision, *that is*, in the pure medium of their idea. It is moreover an 'absolute' manner of seeing.
>
> (Rancière, *Mute Speech*, 116)

In a similar way, Foucault takes on the Nietzschean project of a critique and, therefore, of opening to a new, common thought that, says Nietzsche in *Ecce Homo*, is based on "the art of separating without creating hostility; to refrain from confounding things; to keep from reconciling things; to possess enormous multifariousness and yet to be the reverse of chaos" (Nietzsche, *The Essential Nietzsche*, 164). This description also summarizes the proposal of a non-dialectical, differential and plural thought. Thus, simplifying a good deal, Foucault's thought is based upon political-linguistic *action*[69] and Rancière's thought on the *suspension* of the division between those that know and the ignorant, between those adept at government and those who are passive and must be governed.

Let us remember that, for Rancière, the politics of literature "is indissolubly both a science of society and the creation of a new mythology" (Rancière, *The Politics of Literature*, 20). This is in such a way that in Rancière the statement "politics of fiction" also functions in a second sense: namely, the proposal of an aesthetics of equality would be functioning as a new mythology in which equality is put forward as *historically a priori* of all thought. Because, we could simplify, emancipation is possible if we first think it is possible. Thus the logic of equality is traced against the logic of distribution that is also the logic of non-contradictory thought (according to Aristotle, the possibility of thought cannot escape the principle of identity).

With Christoph Menke's *Force* (2013), we are able to delimit the reach of this *historical a priori* and what defines that political equality as an aesthetic. In this book, Menke considers that Arendt's statement that man is neither free nor equal by nature refers to a pre-political state of nature. For Menke, this means accepting that we acquire our capacities through education, training and practice. Therefore, for Menke, equality is an equality of potentiality, an equality of force (*kraft*), not something given.

It is hence necessary to attain equality not as something given but as a *fiction*. And I utilize the term fiction in the same way that it has been described in this

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69 Furthermore, in the struggle, the roles are susceptible to being interchangeable: think, for example, of Kafka's story *In the Penal Colony*, in which the condemned happily takes up the role of his torturer when the situation allows it.

work. But, unlike Menke, Rancière's aesthetic of equality can only be formulated in radical *inactivity*: equality must be thought far from the logic of action, because this has been what, from its origin, has determined the division of bodies as stagers of a technē, of capacities. As Rancière underlines, action "is a mode of thought, a structure of rationality that defines both a norm of legitimate social behaviours and a norm of composition of fictions" (Rancière, *The Lost Thread*, 101).

Thus the politics of fiction/the fiction of politics is defined in Rancière through his definition of the concept of equality as an *a priori*. This is an *a priori* that at the same time functions as a virtual present, and therefore as an *historical a priori*: an *as if* that succeeds in bringing an actualization of equality without falling into the logic of action that is, lastly (or firstly) that which begins the division (distribution of the sensible). In this way, from this virtuality, the impossible becomes real.

Thus does Rancière respond to the tyranny of the plot as logical verisimilitude that, since Aristotle, has approximated truth to coherence and left out what is possible and true but implausible. And, at the same time, the principle of equality is also a performative *a priori*. It is action for the enunciated other: the world is enunciated *as though it were other*. The possibility of this contradictory formulation belongs to the very nature of literature, that is, it is a fictional and non-rational logic.

We can, therefore, summarize that we find a dialogue between the "making visible" of the political mimesis of Jacques Rancière and Michel Foucault. Rancière builds a materialization of the invisible that, in turn, is sustained upon the discussion of Althusser's concept of "donner à voir" in literature. For Rancière, literature is no longer a mere ideological object capable of showing, in its best versions, the ideological tale in which we live, being confused with the real. Literature is a "making visible" of a part of the real that had been hidden under the ideological story – or what he calls "the distribution of the sensible" – but that, nevertheless, is found right there. Foucault, in turn, also gives central place to the visualizing capacity of literature, in close connection with his concept of "social partition", as we have seen in the section devoted to the politics of literature and, in particular, to madness as principle of social partition.[70] If the politics of literature of these thinkers is in dialogue with the Marxist tradition of literature, as it has been described, it is not surprising that both authors undertake a revision of the Aristotelian concept of mimesis in order to redefine the concept of "realism" of literature. The attention Foucault

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70 See Chapter 2.3 Madness and literature as principal of social partition.

gives to the literature of Sade, Roussel and Baudelaire, might seem to distance him from this realist interest but, as we have seen in Chapter 3, on the veridiction of literature, literature is conditioned by its "veridiction" both in the writing of Sade ("I only tell the truth") and Roussel and his resolution to "tell the truth" of how he constructed his literary texts.

6 Conclusions

The main purpose of this study has been the analysis of the contributions of the later Foucault in the framework of a politics of literature. I have therefore begun with the hypothesis of a politics of literature in Foucault established in his later publications, following chronological order, beginning with the recently published *Folie, langage, littérature* (2019), which brings together previously unpublished pieces from the 1960s and 1970s. In these, we find a new approach to the relations of literature with politics, from the year 1967, with the publication of "L'extralinguistique et la littérature", where Foucault shows the relations of literature with the historical world through the limits of language and its deictic "necessity", indicating what it cannot speak of, such as the richness of the work that is introduced into the world as a fold of language.

But literature is also political because it is critique as well. The truth of literature is performative, not mimetic, and its truth is parrhesiastic. Literature is capable of opposing a normalization of the behaviors or forms of lives thanks to its *militancy* of Cynical inheritance. Literature attains this critical sense by two routes: through the lives of its authors, who propound novel forms of being out of experience or "style of life", and, secondly, from an immanent perspective. Thanks to its parrhesiastic nature, literature has the potentiality of dissenting in its dialogic and polyphonic structure, to use the Bakhtinian terms, whom Foucault cites. Literature is, therefore, a critical discourse that makes it possible to think dissension through its very structure.

First, literature develops its political potential on a discursive level, which is possible for three reasons:

1. Literary practice manages to produce novelty, to inaugurate a meaning as *excess*.
2. The fable is conditioned by the verisimilitude of an episteme, which I have called the social-fictional pact, or what a society is prepared to accept as credible. This comes from the limited nature of literature. Literature does not cease referring to the world deictically.
3. The structure of modern literature is capable of accommodating different voices without consensus, fragments without reconcilable unity.

Similarly, Foucault described the literary experience of modernity as an exercise of radical mimesis, as "extreme attention to what is real", while also being a practice of a freedom that simultaneously "respects this reality and violates it", or what he calls "extracting the poetic within history". That is to say, literature is a polyvalent concept: literature is capable of gathering collective forms

of expression as a linguistic space of resistance (speak/parole), while also of subjection as institution or norm (language/langage) and without omitting the chance of its own materiality (tongue/langue).

Thus Foucault is asserting that literature is a fold of the outside and is event, which means that the extralinguistic happens in the language. Because literature, Foucault says, is not a self-referential art. And this is because the extralinguistic is what surrounds performative acts, so that the extralinguistic has been presented under the prism of the real capable of being modified. The extralinguistic, in its most simple definition, is what is exterior to language, susceptible to interrelate and be modified by language, as the performative acts of language demonstrate. And this is where the interaction between linguistic and extralinguistic is established, in action, in language's possibility of action upon the other that is not language but the world. And, of course, this connects literature with its parrhesiastic capacity.

Therefore, the constitution of subjectivity will depend on the subject's ability to speak, on the subject's linguistic capacity. A linguistic capacity that, nonetheless, both for Foucault and for Heidegger, has been dominated by rationality, or what in 1978 he called "the theatre of truth".

Secondly, literature develops its political capacity in its relation with a subject capable of creating new experiences or styles of life. From the introduction of *paideia* as a path of education of subjects that was necessary for exercising citizenship. The subject must face the forms of normalization at the same time as being able to constitute themselves into object of transformation. We have seen this argument in the chapter I devoted to Sade and the classical and Christian technologies of the self. One of the most controversial aspects is what makes that constitution of man possible as object of his technology, of an aesthetic of existence. According to Foucault, "desire" is that force or motor that drives the subject to exercise their will of resistance or of self-transformation. This work of the later Foucault on the strategies of resistance and of constitution of the subject is widely developed today. It is what I have called the legacy of Foucault to think the present, and which I have analyzed through the contributions of Judith Butler and Giorgio Agamben.

Lastly, I have examined the texts from the 1980s that reflect upon the politicity of Greek tragedy. Foucault admits that Greek tragedy still has much to say to us, not only about the organization of the first Western democracy, its laws and its difficulties; that is something we have known for a long time, and it was already commonplace in the 1980s, when Foucault was writing and investigating them. What Foucault comes to tell us of novelty here is that Greek tragedy still has much to tell us about ourselves, as modern subjects. Along this line of debate on the

relevance of tragedy, we find the study by Christoph Menke, *Die Gegenwart der Tragödie: Versuch über Urteil und Spiel* (2005) [*Tragic Play. Irony and Theater from Sophocles to Beckett*], and the more recent *Retorno a Atenas. La democracia como principio antioligárquico* (2019) [*Return to Athens: Democracy as anti-oligarchic principle*], by José L. Moreno Pestaña, and Simon Critchley's *Tragedy, the Greeks and Us* (2019), to mention only some of the works that have been discussed here.

From tragedy to the modern novel, the inheritance of parrhesia comes to us from the Cynics, along with a structure of non-unitary work of the symbol, which was typical of the plays of Sophocles and the early Euripides. But this is problematized at the same time that the concept of parrhesia and the egalitarian right to speak is problematized. Benjamin stated, with regard to the allegory, that baroque drama had discovered the fragmentary nature of the world as opposed to the totality aimed at by the symbol. Allegory breaks with the univocal relation between image and signification. Foucault, in his reading of the problematization of parrhesia in Greek tragedy shows us, however, that the fragmentary nature of the symbol had already appeared in the last tragedies of Euripides and that its reading must be political.

All of this also entails the social division between the governors and the governed, between those who have the right to speak and those who do not. Madness as a principle of social partition was already presented and represented in the last plays of Euripides. This is the case of the figure of Cassandra, who is representative of this shift from prophetess (as she was presented by Aeschylus) to lunatic (as happens in *The Trojan Women*). Social fragmentation, therefore, coincides with the fragmentation of the truth in the work. Moreover, as Vernant stated, "through the debate that the drama sets up, it is the very status of man that becomes the problem" (Vernant, 214), thus, as Foucault says in *The Government of Self and Others*, "one cannot take care of oneself without knowing oneself" (44).

In the last chapter, I propound an introduction of Foucault's politics of literature in the theoretical tradition of literary Marxism. It proposes an analysis of Foucault's strategies of reading, from structuralism, passing briefly through an ontology of literature with roots in Heidegger, from which it is quickly separated, until reaching this proposal of "releasing" the politicity of the literary work.

There are several consequences of this shift since Foucault asked the question, "what is literature?" in "Language and literature". Although it is accepted that in the 1960s he defines the birth of modern literature in the eighteenth century – coinciding with its concern as independent literary discourse, closer

to the literary theory of the beginning of the twentieth century, Formalism and Structuralism – from the end of the 1960s but, above all, from the 1970s, Foucault develops a genealogy of modern literature brings it back to Greek tragedy – when he proposes a politics of literature similar to Deleuze, and sociological, close to Said and Bourdieu.

It is from there that Foucault establishes that literature itself is history and belongs to it, and that it is event, capable of doing things in the world. Not only because it shows unseen aspects (the critique of Merleau-Ponty) of ideology (Althusser), but because it shows the partition of the social and strategies of resistance. The "donner à voir" of Merleau-Ponty and Althusser, finds here a performative development as parrhesia. Lastly, I give particular attention to the relation of Foucault's politics with Rancière's politics of literature, and the question regarding that which literature makes visible and which is habitually not shown being, nevertheless, "already there". Foucault, like Rancière, considers that nobody in democracy speaks to not say anything, even those who are described as athuroglōssos in the classical era. Dialogue, moreover, wishes to analyze the question of a material invisibility or of a material negativity in both authors that would, at the same time, be a critique.

In short, from all I have shown, we can draw conclusions in two directions. On the one hand, the revision of the place that literature occupies in Foucault's work gives it a political force that makes it possible to develop from it a *fictional* capacity as alternative narrative and a *critical* capacity as "making visible", in his particular revision of the concept of the gaze in Western thought.

It is through this perspective that the consequences that the concept of fiction has in Foucault's work can be understood. Fiction, as desire, functions as a force that is no longer the power of the negative, but rather the making visible of being at every instant as subject of self.

On the other hand, the aesthetics of Foucault is an ethics and a *technē* of self. Hence politics and ethics are at the basis of this concept, because the consideration of the common good in this truth-telling of a free subject (parrhesia) is a critical practice and, in this sense, the subject who practices it puts their own life at risk. The definition of a free subject who cannot be configured except in interrelation with others, and whose desire to live is, at the same time, a risk and a desire, is one of the keys to understanding the reach of the political aesthetic of Foucault that also comes from the legacy of Cynicism – Cynicism as choice of the theatre of life in the body itself, which certain forms of Christianity had inherited. And it was also derived from the revolutionary movements in the nineteenth century that took aspects from the different forms of

Christian spirituality (*The Courage of the Truth*, 171). Cynicism, the idea of a mode of life that is the scandalous, violent and disruptive manifestation of truth, forms and has formed part of the revolutionary practice and of the forms assumed by the revolutionary movements throughout the nineteenth century. Revolution in the modern European world was not merely a political project; it was also a form of life.

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