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The Aesthetic Subject

Exploring the Usefulness of Foucauldian tools in Feminism

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IT'S ALL DIFFERENT WITH PENGUINS

On their migration across the glaciers
the last penguins will be the first,
 and, like the Nazarene,
they allow the children to come to them
and let all of them be themselves, even those
 whom marriage does not suit.
No one needs to be a mate of darkness and carry
 an iceberg the size of the national bank,

 for the heavy and the light are equitably shared.

Thus, dear readers, if you are penguins,
thank your lucky stars and bless this
 freezing outpost.

(Blesséd be the ice under our feet! Benedictus!)

Helena Sinervo, *Ihmisen kaltainen*, 2000, trans. Anselm Hollo

Abstract

This study explores the usefulness of Michel Foucault's theoretical tools in feminism, especially in questions concerning the aesthetic subject. The overriding emphasis in my investigation is on a question: How does Foucault's analyses of the subject, together with some contemporary feminist insights, offer explanations of how individuals may escape the homogenizing tendencies of power in modern societies through the assertion of their aesthetic constitution of their selves?

In addressing this issue, I on the one hand seek to investigate how the problem of the aesthetic constitution of the subject (or the self) relates to questions of the politics of identity and representation, of the body, and of power, and on the other hand, how aesthetic (re)formation of the subject could function as a source of critical action and resistance. My basic thesis is that even though there are some gender problems in Foucault's theorizations, his insights nevertheless offer a set of useful tools for critical analysis of the current problems suffered by women, and even provides some interesting practical suggestions that might help in the re-creation of our ideas concerning the formation of our female subjectivities and selves.

With this in mind, I also suggest that Foucault's theorizations of the aesthetic subject might create more space for a truly heterogeneous society – a society in which individuals, women and men alike, are better allowed to do their self-transforming work on the grounds of their own choices, pleasures and desires. As I argue, in this respect Foucault's aesthetic theory attempts to fulfil the same utopian task as both Kant's and Baudelaire's critical modernity did in their own time, although in somewhat different terms. It works to set individuals free from the normative and oppressing structures of everyday life and to create space for a more autonomous and creative culture. Such a culture would, through the concrete experimental aesthetic practices of our selves, allow us more space to study the critical questions both Kant and Baudelaire addressed to critical modernity: What is our own era and how are we to constitute ourselves as subjects under its conditions?

Acknowledgements

This dissertation is the outcome of a long journey, which has taught me the bizarre pleasure of wondering and proceeding through false steps. Although some of those who have motivated my writing are already dead or otherwise hard to contact, there are many persons to whom I wish to offer my warmest thanks.

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I would like to express my personal gratitude to the Marx Circle – Susanna Partio, Erkki Hulkki and Julius Elo – for their companionship and many motivating meetings. I have shared many enjoyable lunch hours discussing with my friend, a feminist Foucault scholar, Johanna Oksala. I also wish to thank Eeva Maria Korsisaari, Phil.Lic., for lending me material on Foucault and Sappho's poetry.

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Abbreviations for works by Foucault

Books and collections in English:

AK *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, translated by A. M. Sheridan Smith. London: Routledge, 1989/1969.

AME *Michel Foucault. Aesthetics, Method and Epistemology, Vol 2*, ed. by James Faubion, translated by R. Hurley and others. UK: The Penguin Press, 1999/1998.

BC *The Birth of the Clinic: An Archaeology of Medical Perception*, translated by A. M. Sheridan. London: Tavistock Press, 1963/1976.

CS *The Care of the Self, The History of Sexuality, Vol 3*, translated by Robert Hurley. New York: Pantheon Books, 1986/1984.

DP *Discipline and Punish: the Birth of the Prison*, translated by Alan Sheridan. London: Penguin Books, 1977/1975.

HS *The History of Sexuality, Vol 1, An Introduction*, translated by Robert Hurley. New York: Vintage Books, 1980/1976.

OT *The Order of Things. An Archaeology of Human Sciences*. London: Routledge, 1994/1966.

PPC *Politics, Philosophy, Culture. Interviews and Other Writings 1977-1984*, ed. by Lawrence D. Kritzman, translated by Alan Sheridan and others. New York and London: Routledge, 1988.

PK *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*, ed. by Colin Gordon, translated by Colin Gordon, Leo Marshall, John Mepham and Kate Soper. New York: Pantheon Books, 1980.

TFR *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow. New York: Pantheon Books, 1984.

UP *The Use of Pleasure, The History of Sexuality, Vol 2*, translated by Robert Hurley. New York: Pantheon Books, 1985/1984.

Essays, articles and interviews in English:

- BP** “Body/Power” 1975, interview, in Colin Gordon (ed.) *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*, translated by Colin Gordon, Leo Marshall, John Mepham, Kate Soper. New York: Pantheon books, 1980.
- CT** “The Concern for Truth” 1984, interview, in Lawrence D. Kritzman (ed.) *Politics, Philosophy and Culture: Interviews and other writings*, translated by Alan Sheridan and others. New York and London: Routledge, 1988.
- GE** “On the Genealogy of Ethics: An Overview of Work in Progress” 1983, interview, in Hubert L. Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow (eds.) *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983.
- ECP** “The Ethics of Care of the Self as a Practice of Freedom” 1984, interview, in James Bernauer and David Rasmussen (eds.) *The Final Foucault*. Cambridge: M.I.T. Press, 1988.
- EP** “The Eye of Power” 1977, interview, in Colin Gordon (ed.) *Power and Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*, translated by Colin Gordon, Leo Marshall, John Mepham and Kate Soper. New York: Pantheon Books, 1988.
- FI** “Final Interview” 1984, interview, *Raritan* 5, I, Summer 1985.
- FWL** “Friendship as a Way of Life” 1981, interview, in Sylvere Lotringer (ed.) *Foucault Live*, translated by John Johnston. New York: Semiotext(e), 1989.
- HMD** “How Much Does It Cost for Reason to Tell the Truth?” 1983, interview, in Sylvere Lotringer (ed.) *Foucault Live*, translated by John Johnston. New York: Semiotext(e), 1989.
- MS** “The Minimalist Self” 1983, interview, in Lawrence D. Kritzman (ed.) *Politics, Philosophy, Culture. Interviews and Other Writings 1977-1984*, translated by Alan Sheridan and others. New York and London: Routledge, 1988.
- NGH** “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History” 1971, essay, in Paul Rabinow (ed.) *The Foucault Reader*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1984.
- PT** “A Preface to Transgression” 1963, essay, in James Faubion (ed.) *Michel Foucault. Aesthetics, Method and Epistemology, Vol 2*, translated by R. Hurley and others. UK: The Penguin Press, 1999/1998.
- ROM** “The Return of Morality” 1984, in Lawrence D. Kritzman (ed.) *Politics, Philosophy, Culture. Interviews and Other Writings 1977-*

1984, translated by Alan Sheridan and others. New York and London: Routledge, 1988.

SC “Sexual Choice, Sexual Act: Foucault and Homosexuality” 1982, interview, in Lawrence D. Kritzman, translated by Alan Sheridan and others (eds.) *Politics, Philosophy, Culture. Interviews and Other Writings 1977-1984*. New York and London: Routledge, 1988.

SKP “Space, Knowledge, Power” 1982, interview, in Paul Rabinow (ed.) *The Foucault Reader*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1984.

SP “The Subject and Power” 1982, afterword to Huber L. Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow (eds.) *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983/1982.

SPPI “Sex, Power, and the Politics of Identity” 1982, interview, in Paul Rabinow (ed.) *Michel Foucault. Ethics, Subjectivity and Truth. Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984*, translated by Robert Hurley and others. New York: The New Press 1997/1984.

SPS “Structuralism and Post-structuralism” 1983, interview, in James Faubion (ed.) *Michel Foucault. Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology*, vol. 2, translated by R. Hurley and others. UK: The Penguin Press. 1998/1994.

SS “Sexuality and Solitude” 1981, in David Rieff (ed.) *Humanities in Review 1*. New York: Cambridge University Press 1982.

TO “The Thought of the Outside” 1966, essay, in James Faubion (ed.) *Michel Foucault. Aesthetics, Method and Epistemology, Vol 2*, translated by R. Hurley and others. UK: The Penguin Press, 1999/1998.

TP “Truth and Power” 1976, interview, in Colin Gordon (ed.) *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*, translated by Colin Gordon, Leo Marshall, John Mepham, Kate Soper. New York: Pantheon books, 1980.

TS “Technologies of the Self” 1982, a seminar, in Luther H. Martin, Huck Gutman and Patrick H. Hutton (eds.) *Technologies of the Self: A Seminar with Michel Foucault*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988.

WA “What is an Author” 1969, article, in Donald F. Bouchard (ed.) *Michel Foucault: Language, Counter-Memory, Practice. Selected Essays and Interviews*, translated by Bouchard and Sherry Simon. New York, Ithaca: Cornell University Press 1977.

WE “What is Enlightenment?” 1984, translated by Catherine Porter from an unpublished French original, in Paul Rabinow (ed.) *The Foucault Reader*, New York: Pantheon, 1985.

Books in French:

- AS** *L'Archéologie du savoir*. Gallimard 1969/2001.
- MC** *Les mots et les choses. Une archéologie des sciences humaines*. Paris: Gallimard, 1966/1996.
- SPU** *Surveiller et punir: naissance de la prison*. Paris: Gallimard, 1969/2001.
- RR** *Raymond Roussel*. Paris: Gallimard, 1963.
- VS** *La volonté de savoir, Histoire de la sexualité 1*. Paris: Gallimard, 1976.
- UPL** *L'usage des plaisirs, Histoire de la sexualité 2*. Paris: Gallimard 1984.
- SDS** *Le souci de soi, Histoire de la sexualité 3*. Paris: Gallimard 1984.

Essays, articles and interviews in French:

- AC** “De l'amitié comme mode de vie” 1981, interview, in *Dits et écrits* 1954-1988, IV 1980-1988, ed. by Daniel Defert and François Ewald. Paris: Gallimard, 1984/1994.
- CS** “Choix sexuel, acte sexuel” 1982, interview, in *Dits et écrits* 1954-1988, IV 1980-1988, ed. by Daniel Defert and François Ewald. Paris: Gallimard, 1984/1994.
- GEA** “À propos de la généalogie de l'éthique: un aperçu du travail en cours” 1983, interview, in *Dits et écrits* 1954-1988, IV 1980-1988, ed. by Daniel Defert and François Ewald. Paris: Gallimard, 1984/1994.
- EE** “Une esthétique de l'existence” 1984, interview, in *Dits et écrits* 1954-1988, IV 1980-1988, ed. by Daniel Defert and François Ewald. Paris: Gallimard, 1984/1994.
- EPL** “L'éthique du souci de soi comme pratique de la liberté” 1984, interview with R. Fornet-Betancourt, H. Becker, and A. Gomez-Müller, 1984. In *Dits et écrits* 1954-1988, IV 1980-1988, ed. by Daniel Defert and François Ewald. Paris: Gallimard, 1984/1994.

- ESP** "Espace, savoir et pouvoir" 1982, interview, in *Dits et écrits* 1954-1988, IV 1980-1988, ed. by Daniel Defert and François Ewald. Paris: Gallimard, 1984/1994.
- LS** "L'écriture de soi" 1983, in *Dits et écrits* 1954-1988, IV 1980-1988, ed. by Daniel Defert and François Ewald. Paris: Gallimard, 1984/1994.
- MFSR** "Une interview de Michel Foucault par Stephen Riggins" 1983 ["The Minimalist Self"], in *Dits et écrits* 1954-1988, IV 1980-1988, ed. by Daniel Defert and François Ewald. Paris: Gallimard, 1984/1994.
- NGLH** "Nietzsche, la généalogie, l'histoire" 1971, in *Dits et écrits* 1954-1988, II 1970-1975, ed. by Daniel Defert and François Ewald. Paris: Gallimard, 1984/1994.
- OP** "L'oeil du pouvoir" 1977, interview, in *Dits et écrits* 1954-1988, III 1976-1979, ed. by Daniel Defert and François Ewald. Paris: Gallimard, 1984/1994.
- PE** "Politique et éthique" 1984, interview, in *Dits et écrits* 1954-1988, IV 1980-1988, ed. by Daniel Defert and François Ewald. Paris: Gallimard, 1984/1994.
- PTR** "Préface à la transgression" 1963, in *Dits et écrits* 1954-1988, I 1954-1969, ed. by Daniel Defert and François Ewald. Paris: Gallimard, 1984/1994.
- RM** "Le retour de la morale" 1984, interview, in *Dits et écrits* 1954-1988, IV 1980-1988, ed. by Daniel Defert and François Ewald. Paris: Gallimard, 1984/1994.
- SPP** "Sexe, pouvoir, et la politique de l'identité" 1984, interview in *Dits et écrits* 1954-1988, IV 1980-1988, ed. by Daniel Defert and François Ewald. Paris: Gallimard, 1984/1994.
- SPO** "Le sujet et le pouvoir" 1982, in *Dits et écrits* 1954-1988, IV 1980-1988, ed. by Daniel Defert and François Ewald. Paris: Gallimard, 1984/1994.
- STPS** "Structuralisme et poststructuralisme" 1983, interview, in *Dits et écrits* 1954-1988, IV 1980-1988, ed. by Daniel Defert and François Ewald. Paris: Gallimard, 1984/1994.
- SV** "Le souci de la vérité" 1984, interview, in *Dits et écrits* 1954-1988, IV 1980-1988, ed. by Daniel Defert and François Ewald. Paris: Gallimard, 1984/1994.
- QA** "Qu'est-ce qu'un auteur?" 1969, article, in *Dits et écrits* 1954-1988, I 1954-1969, ed. by Daniel Defert and François Ewald. Paris: Gallimard, 1984/1994.

BEGINNINGS

Study Questions

The question of the aesthetic formation of the subject, its past development and current manifestations, has reappeared as a fundamental problem in aesthetics at the turn of the twenty-first century, whether this problem is discussed in terms of aesthetics of the self, individual style, the politics of identity, or the aestheticization process.¹ The connections between the aesthetic problematization of the subject and the emergence of modern culture have long been recognized.² Yet in the present day, not only do these connections seem more problematic and complex than was previously realized, but we see that a rethinking of them in the present age must go hand in hand with a reworking of the basic premises of aesthetic analysis itself.

This new complexity in issues concerning the aesthetic formation of the subject – or, alternatively, the self, by which I, like Foucault, refer to the relation of oneself to oneself – arises from some more extensive changes in Western cultures that have opened up new perspectives on the heterogeneity of subjects (the women’s liberation movement and movements promoting sexual and ethnic minorities, for example), but also from changes in philosophical aesthetics itself. During the 1980s and 1990s, the perspective of philosophical aesthetics (meaning here, mainly, analytical aesthetics) came to include new aspects of thought along the development of critical post-modern theory, post-structuralism, deconstruction, phenomenology, psychoanalysis, neo-Marxism, cultural theory, and feminist thinking. As a result, issues such as the body, sexuality, otherness, difference, power and ideology were brought to the forefront of aesthetic research.

This change was so remarkable that it can be described, following Thomas Kuhn’s renowned analysis of the development of scientific research, as a paradigmatic shift inside the tradition of philosophical aesthetics. Earlier views on the “purity” of aesthetic discipline were largely replaced by the new idea of aesthetics as intrinsically connected with questions of ethics, the environment, society, sex(uality) and politics. Alternatively put, the analytical viewpoint and the tendency to sort out and classify specifically aesthetic phenomena were

replaced by a more *synthetic* viewpoint and a tendency to analyze connections between things and value spheres rather than to separate them.³ Perhaps partly due to this, the age-old question of the aesthetic formation of the self also came up again, showing why the notion of aesthetic subjectivity should be linked to questions of ethics and politics.⁴

Undoubtedly one of the key challenges that have come up during this crisis in aesthetic theory concerns the supposed universality and neutrality of the aesthetic subject. According to the earlier tradition of aesthetics – based on the work of Immanuel Kant, Edmund Burke, and some other eighteenth-century aestheticians – the apprehension of aesthetic qualities transcends all personal interests and concentrates one’s attention on the object of aesthetic appreciation itself. Consequently, pure (*rein*) aesthetic attention has been conceived to be incompatible with interest in other values, including social and ethical values, as well as cognitive concerns for truth and falsity. Preoccupation with one’s own particular situation, interest or gender has therefore been a standard mark of *nonaesthetic* attention. (Korsmeyer 1993, vii-viii.) As a result, major aspects of subjectivity such as sexuality, pleasure and social position have been excluded almost totally from the domain of aesthetic research on the grounds of irrelevance.

Against this view, a vast number of contemporary aestheticians (from many schools of thought, not only post-modern and post-structuralist) have pointed out, at least since the 1980s, that aspects of human existence such as power, sexuality and gender are present in *all* conceptual schemes, no matter how masked they may be by claims of the subject’s universality and generality. Moreover, the study of the aesthetic subject has become more complex because of the better awareness of the influence of constructors such as ethnicity, class and other differences on aesthetic perception, values and self-images.

Carolyn Korsmeyer crystallizes this shift in aesthetic theory in her *Aesthetics in Feminist Perspective* (1993) in the following words: “Gone is the idea that we can speak of ‘the’ act of appreciation and perception, and in its place is a complex model of readers and beholders whose particular genders, histories, and other ‘differences’ such as race and cultural situation frame interpretation and ascription

of value” (Korsmeyer 1993, viii). On the other hand, as Korsmeyer continues, gone also is the earlier stress on the “purity” of aesthetic discipline, the idea that “matters of ‘aesthetic’ quality can be isolated from their traditional contraries: practical or instrumental value, moral significance, the exercise of political power. The answers to the questions posed from feminist perspectives are far from settled, but the framework within which they are formulated has altered the landscape of inquiry.” (Ibid.)

As I will explicate in this dissertation, the aesthetic writings of the French historian and philosopher Michel Foucault represent a very similar attempt to re-define and politicise the subject, although in slightly different terms. Throughout his career, Foucault continually investigated how human beings constitute themselves as subjects on the one hand, and how they treat each other as objects on the other. This problem was so central for him that he even stated that the general theme of his whole oeuvre was the subject (SP 209).⁵ Bearing this in mind, I will suggest that Foucault’s work not only includes implicit arguments and assumptions about the subject, even in cases in which the actual object of study is elsewhere – for example in art, power, systems of thought, the history of madness and sexuality – but that he also constantly attempted to re-write the notion of the subject to include aspects of life that earlier philosophy and aesthetics have typically ignored.⁶

I therefore maintain that Foucault’s inquiries on the subject are particularly relevant to contemporary philosophical aesthetics as well, and not only to the philosophy of the subject. By repeatedly situating his analyses of the subject in the context of aesthetics and art, and by extending the scope of the subject to include aspects of the body, sexuality, society, transgression, discourse, and power, he drives aesthetic research to reconsider, and even go beyond, its most common objects of study, that is, the general principles of art and beauty. As I will point out, in his early archaeological writings on avant-garde literature Foucault concentrates on redefining the aesthetic subject through the terminology of transgression, sexuality and affectiveness. Later on, he takes up the notion of aesthetics again, now in the ancient context of the aesthetics of the self, arts of living and the aesthetics of existence. In this late phase of his work, the notion of

the subject is largely replaced by the term 'self' (*soi*), that is now put at the core of critical activity.

I will show how, in Foucault's late aesthetics, the project of turning one's life into a work of art came to represent for him an attempt to liberate the modern individual to exist in alternative ways than she/he is perhaps supposed to exist. He found much in our self-understanding that is not voluntary and consciously chosen, even though to term it involuntary would miss the extent to which we constitute our identities by conforming ourselves to tacitly understood practices and generally accepted norms. (Hoy 1999, 15.) Foucault's talk about self-understanding thus refers – not to the Cartesian knowledge that the self can have of itself – but to the study of observable manifestations of situated and historically limited experiences of the self. When understood in this way, self-understanding is not a matter of autonomous decision, or of knowing the essential nature of one's natural self, but a matrix of social and discursive practices that vary historically, just as self-understanding does. (Ibid. 17-18.)

The practices and aesthetic techniques individuals might use to reshape their lives and selves represent for Foucault practices of freedom (*pratiques de la liberté*) that include important ethical and political promises of more free and autonomous ways of living.⁷ Expressions he uses, such as autonomy or self, are not grounded on the idea of an innate or essential subject that would precede aesthetic judgement, however. I will rather suggest that, when using these terms, he was attempting to describe modes of being oneself from the perspective of the *oneself* (meaning here an abbreviation of the self as relation to itself). This oneself is not an *entity*, but rather *pure practice*, always in a specific mode. Individual existence is therefore always in the form of conduct stylization in Foucault's later work, for it is exactly conduct that individualises individuals who wish "to give their existence the most graceful and accomplished form possible" (UP 250-251).⁸ Hence Foucault's idea that this oneself is human existence in an *aesthetic* mode (Boothroyd 1996, 362).

In my reading of Foucault's texts on the aesthetics of the self, I attempt to identify some structuring features at the core of his thinking. I will argue, for example, that

his thinking interacts not only with the focus in Enlightenment philosophy on the emancipation of the individual (an issue that is relevant to the actual emancipation of women as a larger whole as well), but also with developments in avant-garde aesthetics aimed at overcoming the isolation and alienation of the modern subject (urban, rational, productive, utilitarian) by turning his or her life into a work of art. Paying attention to these connections is to re-assess the thesis often made of Foucault, that he is an anti-Enlightenment thinker (Merquior 1985, 159; Wright 1986, 16). With this in mind, I argue that Foucault's late writings on aesthetics do not simply reject Enlightenment values (as his early aesthetics clearly does), but rather rework some of its central categories, such as the interrelated notions of the self, autonomy and emancipation (McNay 1992, 5).

Although my enquiry into Foucault's analyses of the aesthetic subject is the major component of the study at hand – the other major focus being on the feminist debate on the same issue – my intention is not to provide a systematic account of Foucault's work in this respect, nor to provide a methodological inquiry into his oeuvre from the viewpoint of feminist theory. The overriding emphasis in my investigation is rather on two more limited questions. Firstly, what sort of theoretical tools do Foucault's analyses of the subject and the self offer in terms of feminist attempts to rethink the aesthetic subject in ways that enable political subjects to transcend the homogenizing tendencies of power in modern societies? Secondly, how does the problem of the aesthetic constitution of the subject/self relate to the politics of identity, the body, the politics of representation, ethics, and questions of power and resistance, which are so important to all critical thinking?

As I will show, Foucault's thought parallels contemporary feminist theory in its attempt to reconsider the subject of the Enlightenment. Influenced by critical post-modern theory, post-structuralism and post-colonialism, much of feminist inquiry has come to operate within the so-called post-feminist position, which has broadened the notion of female subjects (women) by paying attention not only to gender differences, but also to differential factors of identity among women such as ethnicity, class and sexual differences.⁹ This broadening has even led to declarations that the female subject is dead, and that it is a position instead of a person (Christian 1997, 68). In this work, I do not intend to examine the complex

philosophical context in which post-feminism functions, however. Rather, I will try to critically scan some of its basic assumptions concerning the subject, which have also led to reconsideration of the aesthetic, ethical and political aspects of feminism.

As I will suggest, the development of feminist theory towards a post-feminist perspective has also brought to the fore the validity of the philosophical tradition of aesthetics. In my view, this has happened largely because, in contemporary thinking according to which the female subject is no longer explained as a natural or innate entity but seen far more in terms of cultural performance and different cultural positions adopted by different kinds of women, the idea of personal style, as well as of aesthetic technologies of gender, have assumed major significance (Heinämaa 1996 and de Lauretis 1987).

In elaborating this idea, I will show that Foucault's work on aesthetics includes material, the significance of which has not yet been fully recognized. I propose that this is obvious when we come to terms with his theorizations of aesthetic limit-attitudes and their key role in contemporary attempts to politicise and reconstruct the notions of gender identity and aesthetic subjectivity. There are, for sure, some inspiring comments on Foucault's aesthetics, but none of them, as far as I know, situate his insights explicitly within the canon of philosophical aesthetics, nor do they include a coherent view of his interest in the relations between aesthetics, the subject, power and the body.¹⁰

On several occasions, like Foucault and many contemporary feminists, I make references to social aspects not in order to provide a full account of aesthetics in this respect, but to show the symptomatic relation between aesthetic theory and social phenomena. It is also in this context that I will make some critical comments on Foucault's work. Following the lines of contemporary post-feminist thought, I will focus my attention especially on the relation of gender and sexualising power, and try to find out its position in modern theories of the subject and aesthetics of the self – an issue that is somewhat problematic in Foucault's own account as well. My primal aim is not to record some possible chauvinism in Foucault or in any other male thinker, however. Rather, I intend to point out

where critical feminist re-visioning of the philosophical reconsideration of the notion of the subject is needed, and how this re-visioning is practised in the work of some contemporary feminist intellectuals.

Because my intention is not to be simply for or against Foucault, but rather to move beyond polarized views on his work, I have chosen a method of research that illuminates his aesthetic writings on the subject and the body on the one hand, and that scans their usefulness for feminist theory on the other hand. In doing this, I will discuss Foucault's work from many different standpoints, some of which will show its applicability to feminist thinking, while some others critically point out his indifference to gender politics and women's historically lower status in the field of aesthetic subjectivity. The aim of this sort of research method is to address the strengths and weaknesses of Foucault's aesthetics at the same time, and to provide some tools for moving beyond him when needed.

My conclusions on Foucault's usefulness for feminist thinking are clearly positive, however. Like Jana Sawicki, one of the most influential spokespersons for radically pluralist feminism, I will suggest that the tools he provides can be used for feminist ends despite some evident gender-related problems in his thinking. Yet, as I will propose, critical and supplementary views are also necessary, at least when we discuss Foucault's work in the context of actual feminist problems.

Foucault and the Tradition of Philosophical Aesthetics

Ever since Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Judgement* (*Kritik der Urteilskraft* 1790), the tradition of aesthetics has been understood as exclusively a philosophy of the disinterested aesthetic mind and the specificity of aesthetic perception, or alternatively, as a philosophy of the specific (formal) qualities of aesthetic objects.¹¹ Foucault, however, connects the term 'aesthetic' to alternative forms of existing, as well as to questions of ethics and politics. In this respect, he uses the term 'aesthetics' in much the same way as proponents of the counter-tendencies

that have sought to extend the focus of philosophical aesthetics to include areas of life that the defenders of disinterested aesthetics have mainly excluded from high art (*schöne Kunst*) or pure aesthetics (*rein Ästhetik*). I am thinking here, for example, of Friedrich Schiller and his shift first from artistic to political and then to pedagogical art, and finally to the art of life (*Lebenskunst*), Friedrich Nietzsche's fundamentalization of aesthetic activity, Søren Kierkegaard and his description of aesthetic existence, and John Dewey's integration of art and life.

In challenging the defenders of pure autonomous aesthetics, Foucault takes up two arguments. Firstly, he claims that the notion of the subject is never at one with permanent structures that constitute or condition reality, but is produced historically in and through its social world. What this means, in concrete terms, is that the subject of aesthetics is also historically and socially shaped, and thus cannot express disinterested or universal perceptions and statements, as spokespersons for autonomous aesthetics have largely believed. Already in his archaeological period, Foucault pointed out that *all* knowledge simultaneously presupposes and constitutes power relations, which are relayed through different discourses be they aesthetic, philosophical or something else. His primary interest was not to record the ideological or political basis of disinterested aesthetics, however, but to show how the subjects of knowledge are constituted, and how this constitution is related to the historically varying issues of art, truth, knowledge and power. This is largely the same as saying that, in his thinking, the perceiving, acting and knowing subject becomes *politicized*.¹²

The second critical aspect of Foucault's thought concerns the tendency in philosophical aesthetics to associate art either with artists or with fixed art objects that are to be contemplated in sterile venues such as art galleries and museums. On this subject, he offers a polemical comment:

What strikes me is that fact that in our society, art has become something which is related only to objects and not to individuals, or to life. That art is something which is specialized or which is done by experts who are artists. But couldn't everyone's life become a work of art? Why should the lamp or the house be an art object, but not our life? (GE 236.)¹³

Although Foucault himself never made straight references to the tradition of philosophical aesthetics, his usage of the term ‘aesthetics’ finds legitimation not only as part of the counter-tendencies of aesthetics I mentioned above, but also with respect to the older tradition, according to which the word ‘aesthetics’ is associated with the Greek word class *aisthanomai*, *aistheta*, *aisthesis*, *aisthanestai*, *aisthetos* and *aisthetikos*, in other words, with expressions that designate sensation and perception altogether, prior to all artistic meanings.¹⁴

This usage is also to be found in Alexander Baumgarten, one of the most renowned pioneers of philosophical aesthetics.¹⁵ I suggest that Foucault’s interest in aesthetics as *aisthesis* was already evident in his early writings on artistic transgression, for example in “The Preface to Transgression” (1963), in which he attempts to liberate the rational subject to better cope with the affective and sexual aspects of being. Later on, when coming to terms with the history of sexuality and aesthetics of the self, he strengthened his position through his linking of sexual pleasure and aesthetic self-realization with individual autonomy and critique.

Finally, when located in the context of philosophical aesthetics, Foucault’s usage of the term ‘aesthetic’ might also be connected to current usage of the term, which is not restricted to the analysis of the disinterested character of aesthetic judgments, or to feelings associated with beauty. It has rather come to designate a branch of research that may include notions of aesthetic behavior or aesthetic lifestyle, environmental aesthetics, political art, aesthetic ideology, aesthetic peculiarities of contemporary mass media, feminist issues, and the increasing aestheticization of the world, to give just a few examples. Wolfgang Iser talks about these new domains of aesthetic research in terms of “new states of *aisthesis*,” which, for him, present one of the most challenging tasks of contemporary aesthetics. To cite Iser:

Aesthetics should make these new states of *aisthesis* and the accompanying transformation of cultural patterns the object of its analyses. By doing so it could presumably also help us carry out these transformation processes in a clearer and more reliable way. Besides, therein lies a chance for aesthetics

to change from a rather dusty old discipline to being an interesting field of contemporary analysis and discussion again. (Welsch 1997, 87.)

As this dissertation will show, Foucault's aesthetics offers one challenging example of this sort of contemporary aesthetic theory, which does not perhaps fit some of our earlier suppositions concerning aesthetics and art, but rather demands serious re-consideration of the basic premises of aesthetic research itself. Moreover, his thinking also offers a challenging background for a contemporary feminist aesthetician to test the functioning of her/his theoretical tools in the present age. What the grasping of Foucault's aesthetics demands, in my view, is a move towards what Carolyn Korsmeyer calls an "interdisciplinary viewpoint," which may also include aspects of thought from such areas of research as sexuality, the body, pleasure, ethics, politics, sociology or feminism (Korsmeyer 1993, ix).

Foucault and Feminism

In this study, the connecting of Foucault's aesthetics with contemporary feminist theory is primarily meant to demonstrate how his insights are compatible with theories of female aesthetic subjectivity, be the discussion focused on the subject or the self, the body, gender, or sexuality. Moreover, given that he is one of the major figures in recent discussions of the aesthetics of the self, all considerations of Foucault's work almost necessarily have to take into account contemporary feminist questions concerning the subject.

What makes the connection between these two discourses even stronger is the fact that Foucault's work has inspired a large number of feminists to rethink their conceptions of the subject and the self, as well as their views of the body, power, and language. Yet, at the same time, feminist debate has brought to the light some serious problems in Foucault's thinking. In discussing this, I intend to show how Foucault offers a set of adequate tools for re-constructing feminist views on the aesthetic construction of the subject and the self, on the one hand, and how, on the

other hand, his work requires critique and reformulation when brought together with feminist insights.

The engagement between the thought of Foucault and feminist theory has tended to focus on the work of his middle-years, most notably *Discipline and Punish* (*Surveiller et punir: naissance de la prison*, 1975) and the first volume of *The History of Sexuality* (*Histoire de la sexualité, I: la Volonté de savoir*, 1976).¹⁶ In this period of writing, usually described as his genealogical phase, Foucault presents his famous theory of power, which feminists have used to explain some aspects of women's oppression.

Despite the fact that Foucault himself mainly ignores the question of the equality of the sexes, or, better, makes only some rather superficial references to the issue, his suggestion that sexuality is not a natural or innate quality of the body, but rather the effect of historically specific power relations, embodied in the individual's process of subjection, has provided feminists with a fresh analytical framework through which to explain how women's experience is controlled and impoverished within certain culturally-determined stereotypes of female sexuality.

Moreover, his idea that the self and the body are produced through power, and thus are primarily cultural not natural entities, has made a significant contribution to feminist efforts to overcome the older essentialist ideas of women. (McNay 1992, 3.) As Jana Sawicki puts it, the importance of Foucault's account for feminism lies in the fact that he does not provide an alternative theory of the self, but rather "a way of looking at our theories of self and society and a method for re-evaluating them, for freeing up possibilities for new forms of experience that might lead to a different understanding of theory, of ourselves, of reality" (Sawicki 1991, 11).

For Foucault, it is first of all discourse that constitutes the bridge between the material and the theoretical (Braidotti 1991: 78-79, 88-89), in other words, discourse is productive not only of statements, but also of the subject as both the target and the object of power. So conceived, the subject is seen as a performative, discursive site, which is implicated in the very same power relationships that

allow the theoretical text to function. This analysis, as Mariam Fraser notes, has influenced feminist scholars because it “allows the material effects of discourse to be taken seriously, while at the same time, given the changing conditions of discourse, renders these effects contingent” (Fraser 1997, 24). More simply put, while the materiality of conceptions such as women is not denied, the notion of women as a foundational category that is fixed across cultures and through time is called into question.

What is relevant to feminist theory is also Foucault’s genealogical claim that power is always productive and not only suppressive, because it affects the constitution of our selves through various forms of knowledge, norms, ideals, stereotypes, laws, habits and discursive practices. Applied to the social norms and laws of heterosexualising Western culture, for example, this means that our being or becoming women (and men) is defined from birth to death by a complex network of limiting practices (such as what is considered to be normal), discourses, and ways of thinking and representing, which we cannot ignore even if we would like to. According to Foucault, normality and stereotypical views on sexuality are constituted in this network of power that models our subjectivity.

Seen in this way, individual identity, or one’s being male or female, or feminine or masculine, is not grounded on any innate or natural self, but becomes constantly produced and re-produced in and through different strategic cultural models and discursive practices that vary historically. For Foucault, these practices and strategies represent power relations, which are intimately connected to political power. At the same time, however, it is exactly these models and practices that may be used to disturb the existing limits and norms imposed on individuals, assuming that they are used creatively and in unexpected ways. To give one concrete and simple example, the representation of the female body and sexuality can also be reproduced and represented in ways that disrupt the stereotypical and normative ways of “looking like a woman.”

The active aesthetic disturbance of the stereotypical ways of representing and reproducing women is not, of course, valuable only for its own sake. In the contemporary West, it could rather be seen as one effective means of creating

representational space for different kinds of women, many of which do not fit the stereotypical picture. In other words, disturbing representations of women are part of their cultural idealization and are, in this respect, also effective political tools, because they have the power to challenge the look of the perceiver and show things otherwise. With this in mind, Kaja Silverman notes: “Visual texts are important because they have the power to re-educate the look” (Silverman 1996, 5).

Despite the fact that feminists have been mainly interested in Foucault’s genealogical work, and often ignore his early archaeology as well as his late writings on the aesthetics of the self, I will suggest that there are interesting connections between these phases and feminist theory. As I intend to explicate in the first part of this study, Foucault’s archaeological critique of the rational subject and his ideas of transgressive aesthetic subjectivity are parallel in many respects to the critique of feminists such as Luce Irigaray and Hélène Cixous who, like Foucault, attempt to open up a space in which to consider difference and otherness in the context of rationality.

In Foucault’s view, the greatest problem of our time is the inability to think difference, and the fear to conceive of the Other in the context of our own thought (AK 12). His example of this Other is not woman, however, as in Irigaray and Cixous, but a madman (and later on, in his aesthetics of the self, a homosexual), whose exclusion from and shutting out of history is the dark reverse side of the creation of rational subjectivity, who represents itself through the history of the Same – that is, the history of the rational order and identity imposed on things (OT, xxiv). The archaeological method is, in a nutshell, Foucault’s early attempt to unpack the discursive regularities that underlie the thought of the same, or the identity logic of Enlightenment rationality (McNay 1994, 48-49). As I will suggest, a similar theme is taken up in Irigaray and Cixous in terms of the reconsideration of the importance of “sexual difference” in philosophical thinking (which, according to Irigaray, is the fundamental philosophical question of our era) and women’s otherness; women who have been, just like Foucault’s madmen and homosexuals, excluded from the history of the sameness of rational male subjectivity.¹⁷

Foucault's early ideas on transgressive subjectivity and limit-attitudes led him to connect his visions to the creation of an avant-garde language in which the speaking subject is re-positioned and re-defined as an unstable linguistic structure that tends to disappear into the textual voids of avant-garde literature. Again, the same gesture is repeated in Irigaray's and Cixous's work. They also seek traces of the new feminine subjectivity from experimental avant-garde language (in Irigaray's advocacy of *parler femme* and Cixous's notion of *écriture féminine* as speaking to a kind of feminine unconsciousness), which ought to directly mirror female physical morphology, be this expressed through the linguistic experiences of feminine sexual *jouissance*, or in terms of some more focused parts of women's genitals (in Irigaray, the "lips that speak," for example).

The specific female style that both Irigaray and Cixous seek is, in principle, available to both men and women, but becomes associated strongly with the female body. The new subject who writes or speaks the feminine avant-garde language is, in their view, not attempting to master the objects of her knowledge, but creates instead openings and free space for the other and difference to emerge. It is a question of a specific feminine language, which overcomes the traditional hierarchies (between rational and sensuous, for example) and leads the way for more ethical modes of communication. So conceived, the constitution of the "new" subject is understood in Irigaray and Cixous, just as in early Foucault, as primarily an aesthetic experience in that it occurs at the point at which rational language, and along with it rational and coherent identity, break down into "raw" affective aesthetic material. Avant-garde literature thus becomes the site of the dissolution of the subject for both archaeological Foucault and "woman-centred" French feminism.

What is problematic in these accounts, in my view, is that despite their useful critique of the rational master-subject, early Foucault, and Irigaray and Cixous alike, end up idealizing experimental writing as a privileged medium of change and transgression. In other words, their radicalisation of the subject is linked to the radicalization of artistic language, but this analysis fails to offer any adequate perspectives on the institutional locations and broader ideological networks that frame textual production and perception – also when coming to terms with

experimental avant-garde texts (Felski 1989; Singer 1989). Therefore, I will argue that both archaeological Foucault and women-centred French feminism can be criticized for a tendency to *aestheticize* ideas of the transgressive subject, difference and otherness in ways that do not give enough attention to the ideological basis of their own critique or partly as a result of this, to the social and political problems of different groups of people for whom the idea of experimental writing does not seem to offer any adequate form of liberation (the non-educated, the non-white, the non-artistic, for example).

In other words, I claim that the avant-garde aesthetics of early Foucault and his feminist corollaries is problematic because it tends to generalize the experiences of a small aesthetic/literary elite to represent *the* new transgressive subject. Due to the elitist nature of their account, a huge number of individuals become excluded from the position of aesthetic subjects, and are implicitly denied all possibilities to respond critically to the specific limits imposed on *their* existence: at least, it is hard to see how this could happen through the visions of early Foucault and the French feminists mentioned above.

Later on in his oeuvre, when coming to terms with the aesthetics of the self, Foucault again takes up the notion of the aesthetic and represents it as a central theme in the idea of the reinvention of the self that takes the form of art of living or the aesthetics of existence. In this scheme, the subject no longer loses itself to avant-garde language, as was the case in Foucault's archaeological writings. Rather, through the process of aesthetic stylization of one's life, the individual takes him/her self as an object of complex and difficult elaboration, which Foucault also terms a work of art. He thus understands this kind of individual activity as a type of creative action and artistry.

Just like some earlier avant-gardists (dadaists, International Situationists, and Joseph Beuys, for example), Foucault does not take the creation of an individual lifestyle as merely a question of aesthetics, however. He rather considers the aesthetics of the self a term that designates a continuous attempt to criticize and break up social practices and power relations. In this respect, it is, again, a question of aesthetic limit-attitudes and transgressive subjectivity. In Foucault's

view, power can be shaken only when people become conscious of it and create an individual lifestyle, which seeks new, alternative ways of acting, speaking, thinking and relating. This individual lifestyle is like an artwork, not in the fixed, framed and stable sense of the term, but rather as an open process, as an ability to create unexpected relations to reality and to give artistic form to one's existence.

Seen in this way, philosophy comes to mean for Foucault a form of critical activity that is intimately connected to the individual's life and to creativeness. In this context, the stylization of one's self thus does not merely concern the "surface" or body aesthetics of the individual, but touches all levels of identity: the notion of style is intimately connected to the individual's moral and political existence, as well as to self-understanding. So conceived, style is a lifelong project of giving shape to the individual's existence, and it may involve the use of different kinds of technologies or techniques of the self.

Aesthetics, in this context, is used as a term that refers not to fixed artworks or to specialists called artists, but rather to different sorts of ethical practices that were meant to give individual life a certain aesthetic style and shape. To see how all-encompassing one's individual aesthetic style might be, we only need to look at Foucault's list of types of human endeavour and the different types of technologies developed to ease their pursuance.

For Foucault, the individual's style of existing, or alternatively, art of living, involves all the technologies that human beings have devised for shaping themselves and the world around them. There are four main categories in Foucault's analysis of the different technologies that might be used by the individual: 1) technologies of production, which permit them to produce, transform, or manipulate things, 2) technologies of sign systems, which permit them to use signs, meanings and symbols 3) technologies of power, which determine their conduct, and submit them to certain ends or domination, an objectivizing of the subject, and finally 4) technologies of the self, which permit them to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct and ways of being, so

as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of freedom, happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality. (TS 18.)

Embracing all of these aspects of human life, aesthetic style is the form human existence takes, as well as the process of actively *forming* that existence (McWhorter 1999, 190). What differentiates this idea from contemporary analysis of the so-called “aestheticization process” (meaning, roughly, the process in which the individual’s selfhood and life are turned into the raw material of aesthetic consumption or surface aesthetics) is that, in his late work, Foucault does not focus on the negative aspects of the aestheticization of the self in (post)modern societies, as thinkers such as Wolfgang Iser, Gerhard Schulze, Jean Baudrillard, Frederic Jameson and Susan Bordo do, for example.

Rather, as I intend to point out, for late Foucault, the aesthetic technologies of the self come to serve the ends of the enlightenment process in the sense that he introduces them as ways of enforcing an individual’s autonomy and experiences of freedom in an ethically and politically acceptable manner. What this also means is that his earlier hostility towards the Enlightenment tradition, expressed most clearly in *The Order of Things (Les mots et les choses 1966)*, is replaced in his late aesthetics by a much more positive account of how Enlightenment thinking may provide answers to the main concerns expressed in his late aesthetics: What is our own era, and how are we to constitute ourselves as subjects in its conditions?

In the last part of this study, I will consider how these ideas of late Foucault benefit feminist theorizations of the subject, gender identity and the body. As in the earlier parts, I will also put forward some critical viewpoints. My “final” suggestion will be that, although there are some limits to feminist collaboration with Foucault, his late aesthetics nevertheless offers a set of challenging tools for feminist attempts to rethink the subject in ways that enable political subjects to transgress the limits of normalizing gender practices.

Feminist Theory and Questions of Selves

For the most part, feminist theorists assumed earlier that there exists an identity, understood through the universal category of women, which not only initiates feminist goals and interests within discourse, but also constitutes the subject for whom political representation is pursued (Butler 1990, 1). Grounded in a hypothesized model of female consciousness or experience, which is taken to unite women across their differences, subject-based or essentialist feminist theory, which dominated the field of feminist studies until the late 1980s, stressed women's affinity with nature and the body, their greater need for intimacy and interpersonal relations, and their suspicion of abstract instrumental thought (Rich 1977; Griffin 1984; Gilligan 1982). This sort of women-centered or, alternatively, gynocritical thinking has typically operated within the conception of patriarchal ideology as a uniformly repressive and homogenous phenomenon that masks authentic female subjectivity, rather than as manifesting itself in complex formations of beliefs, discourses, structures and representations, which permeate and shape the subjective sense of self of both women and men (Felski 1989).

Based on these theoretical premises, the female aesthetics that evolved during the early years of the women's liberation movement in the 1960s and 1970s presented a radical response to a tradition in which the assumed goal of women's literature and art had been a smooth passage into a universal and neutral aesthetic realm.¹⁸ The claim was rather that women's writing expressed a distinct female consciousness, that it constituted a coherent literary tradition, and that women writers who denied their female identity restricted or even crippled their art. French feminist theorists on writing such as Irigaray and Cixous based their ideas of female language largely on these ideas. I use the term 'gynocritics' to refer to the feminist theories that developed alongside female aesthetics in the 1970s. Like the female aesthetics, gynocriticism identified women's writing as a central subject of feminist criticism, but rejected the concept of an essential female identity and style. The focus moved from authentic female subjectivity to the multiple signifying systems of female literary traditions and intertextualities. (Showalter 1997, 62-66.)

Contrary to these interpretations, which pursue authentic female subjectivity and its aesthetic representation, various post-feminist thinkers, such as Judith Butler, Susan Bordo, Teresa de Lauretis, bell hooks and Rita Felski, have stressed the complex connections between the subject, gender, class, ethnicity, power and politics, and the possibilities women have to create disturbance by using oppressive or stereotypical discourses (such as ways of talking and acting, and visual culture). According to them, it is not enough to ask how women could create authentic aesthetics of their selves based on ideas of universal femininity, or to consider how they could become more fully represented in art, language and politics, as many earlier feminists formulated their questions. Instead, various post-feminists have suggested that feminist research ought instead to ask how the category of women, the very subject of feminism, is produced and re-produced by the very structures of power through which emancipation is sought, and accordingly, how this cultural production of women affects their aesthetic constitution of their selves.

What this means is that post-feminist intellectuals do not presume the existence of a universally valid entity called ‘woman’ behind various aesthetic experiences, representations, values and deeds. Rather, they suppose that there exists a diverse group of people termed ‘women,’ who deserve to be represented through a number of different kinds of cultural practices and discourses, be these expressed in the form of philosophy, literature, pictures, performances, everyday aesthetics of the self or something else. Therefore, in the post-feminist framework women’s aesthetics of the self cannot be expressed in terms of uniform female aesthetics. Rather, the aesthetic subject becomes politicized and pluralized as a site of conflicting cultural interests and practices that become manifest in the different performances and representations of feminine or female self.¹⁹

With similar thoughts in mind, a number of post-feminist thinkers have suggested that we are not simply born women or men (as many earlier feminists supposed) because our selves and bodies cannot be said to have a *signifiable* existence prior to the mark of their socially produced gender (Butler 1990, 7). In other words, womanhood and manhood become perceived, first of all, as cultural skills we learn to *perform* – in much the same way as we learn to eat, walk or ride a bicycle

(Hein 1997). Due to the fact that the analysis of these skills easily leads to the analysis of individual style and aesthetic signs, through which one's style is necessarily expressed, post-feminist theories largely consider the analysis of the subject a question of aesthetics, be this discussed in terms of individual stylistics, aesthetic performance, or something else.

In this study, this post-feminist constructive aspect of gender functions as the basis for my analysis of feminist aesthetics of the self. I have chosen to stress the performative and socially constructed nature of gender in order to grasp some important ties between the aesthetic subject, the body, discourse and power that are, in my view, always present in the constitution of the self, but too often remain unarticulated, even in feminist debate. In other words, in my analysis of the feminist aesthetics of the self I stress the culturally constructed nature of gender because I am primarily interested in finding out how the problem of social and political power is related to the aesthetic constitution of the self and the body, and in considering what kind of possibilities exist to resist, alter, thwart and effect subversions inside this power by aesthetic means. I will therefore mainly ignore such vast areas of study as our biological bodies, which is without doubt an important object of feminist research, but a detailed analysis of which would demand no less than another dissertation.

On the Work at Hand

This thesis is divided into three parts. In the first and second parts, the problem of the aesthetics of the subject and the body is discussed through an analysis of Foucault's first two theoretical periods, archaeology and genealogy. Both of these, although with different emphases, attempt to reveal how the discursive practices that affect the constitution of our selves (such as truths about 'sexuality' and 'man') are motivated and shaped by power, and how even our scientific knowledge is always constituted in and through complex networks of power.

I will begin by explicating briefly how the question of the subject is represented in Foucault's archaeology, and continue with a closer examination of his views on avant-garde literature, transgression, discourse, ethics, the body, and sexuality. In the first chapter, my intention is to open up the main lines of his archaeological aesthetic argumentation and to consider why and how his earlier views on the issue of the subject are important for feminist debate (as well as for his own later thinking). What follows is a short introduction to the main concerns in the work of Irigaray and Cixous, who have expressed similar criticism of the Cartesian master-subject in relation to the issue of women's otherness and marginality in philosophical and artistic discourses.

In coming to terms with Foucault's genealogical method in the second part of my work, I intend to show how his thinking comes to include a more developed notion of power. As I will suggest, this happens largely along the shift in the centre of gravity from the language-centred analysis of discourse toward the genealogical analysis of the power relations inherent in the constitution of knowledge, the subject and the body. An important aspect of Foucault's genealogical analysis as far as feminist research is concerned is his notion of the bio-power with which he refers to the tendency of modern power to subject human bodies to the docility-utility principle.

Towards the end of the second part, I will consider the usefulness of Foucault's genealogical analysis of power, most notably his concepts of bio-power and docility, for feminist accounts by focusing on women's huge level of dissatisfaction with their bodies in the contemporary West. As I will point out, the power of normalizing discourses is well evidenced in all of the cases, in which women are afraid of becoming socially or sexually rejected for being "too fat" or "too old." Seen through these real historical experiences, the new freedom women are often claimed to have over their bodies in the era of body building, plastic surgery and personal training programs, seems to be just another historical expression of the normalizing power that has not simply increased their freedom, but has also tended to make them more docile in new ways.

Yet, as I will demonstrate, Foucault's genealogical notion of docility and, along with it, his notion of productive power, have also been criticized by some feminists, who find fault with his genealogical method for its negative tone, and for not offering tools to consider women's possibilities to actively change things "for the better." In my presentation of this problem, I will bring out some of these critical voices on the one hand, and on the other, I aim to move beyond all polarized views by showing that, although there is indeed a clear gender blindness in Foucault's account, his work provides a stepping stone toward the positive aspect of women's power.

As Part Three will illustrate, in the last period of his writing Foucault's interest shifts more clearly to the analysis of the positive aspects of power. Consequently, he now begins to consider power to be primarily a liberating force in the individualization process. In my view, this shift in his thought is interesting with respect to contemporary feminist insights, and there are good reasons to believe that it will also become an important object of analysis for feminist intellectuals in the near future, in the same way that his genealogy has been for feminism.

The applicability of Foucault's thinking to feminism will thus be pointed out again in the last part of the study. As in the earlier parts, I will also offer some critical insights, the main intention of which is to consider in which compartments Foucault's theoretical toolbox might be in need of some replenishment, and to point out that some parts of his work might even demand serious re-consideration, notably when they are used to support feminist debate on the subject, aesthetics, and the body.

By shifting the focus towards the present age and current feminist issues, I attempt to put into practice the principle that Foucault calls the "ontology of the present." In other words, my ultimate intention is to use the theoretical tools he offers as a means to constitute one theoretical picture of the questions of selves in our own era, notably questions concerning the aesthetic construction of the subject and the body. At the same time, my connecting of Foucault with feminist theory means complementing his work with a problem he did acknowledge but never really

examined, namely, the question of the equality of the sexes in the debate on the aesthetic constitution of the self.

Seen from another perspective, the study at hand is an attempt to take seriously the challenge Foucault offers to his readers when re-reading Kant's and Baudelaire's conceptions of modernity, and asking: What is our own era? And how are we to constitute ourselves as subjects in its conditions? In other words, this work is also an attempt to balance the tradition of the Enlightenment and critical modernity in the present time by bringing to light topical views on the aesthetic creation of the self.

I

ARCHAEOLOGY AND AVANT-GARDE AESTHETICS

1. ARCHAEOLOGY AND THE AESTHETIC SUBJECT

As I have already made clear, in this study my investigation of Foucault's thinking centers on two main questions. Firstly, what kind of tools does he offer in terms of attempts to rethink the subject in ways that enable political subjects to transcend the homogenizing tendencies of power in modern societies? Secondly, how do his views on subjectivity relate to actual subject of interest in the politics of identity, the body, the politics of representation, ethics and power?

To set this analysis in motion, I begin with a short introduction of Foucault's archaeological views on the subject, aesthetics, ethics and transgression. The final goal of my presentation of these issues is to prepare the way for the interpretation put forward in the second and third parts of this study, which illuminates Foucault's later elaborations of the notion of the subject. As I will demonstrate, the three perspectives of Foucault's writing – archaeology, genealogy and the aesthetics of the self – are not distinct from each other, but rather support and enlarge each other, not least in connection with questions concerning the subject or the self and on related issues of individual ethics and limit-attitudes.

In addition to this, I point out in the first part of the study some convergences between Foucault's earlier interests in avant-garde aesthetics and views by French feminists such as Cixous and Irigaray. These convergences are evidence of a common attempt to discuss aesthetic subjectivity in terms that highlight affective and embodied dimensions of human experience and preserve radical otherness, although with the difference that in Foucault, the exemplary case of this "other" was never a woman (as it is in Cixous and Irigaray), but rather a male madman, a homosexual and a criminal.

One of the central intentions of Foucault's archaeological method was to show that historical changes in discourses and knowledge affect our views on the subject. Moreover, as Foucault emphasized, once you define the "subject," you define what it is capable of being and doing. Consequently, all other possibilities are occluded, resulting in a type of death, in an impossibility for human *existence*.

This idea is well expressed in *The Order of Things* (*Les Mots et les choses: une archéologie des sciences humaines* 1966), in which Foucault analyses the impossibility of representing representation – i.e. the limits of capturing all possibilities for the self, and therefore the inability to close the circle of the subject onto itself. For Foucault, if limits are not given, and there is no essential “subject,” then we are obliged to create ourselves, in other words, to continually transgress the limits of our knowledge, language, and our selves.

These archaeological notions on the subject and limit-attitudes were closely related to Foucault’s critique of Enlightenment humanism, which took a self-reflective turn to construct man as an object of knowledge. In the context of his analysis of modern sciences (*The Order of Things*), he maintains that all social-scientific knowledge is based on a particular conception of human reality, namely that of man. Modern thought accepted this conception as definitive of human reality as such, defining man as that entity for which all representations of objects exist. To assert the reality of man in the modern sense is to posit a being that is both an object in the world and an experiencing subject through which the world is constituted. In Foucault’s view, this has been true at least since Kant, who was the first to consider representation as one form of thought, and also the first to seek the epistemological conditions that make it possible (OT, 303-343; Gutting 1995, 11).²⁰

The aim of these archaeological notions was twofold. Firstly, by calling into question the notion of man, Foucault hoped to undermine the idea in Enlightenment philosophy that scientific and rational thought progressively acquires a greater proximity to truth, thereby enhancing humanity. Secondly, he wished to deny that the human sciences had a genuine object (man) to talk about. As a logical conclusion, Foucault also set in doubt man’s position as a knowing subject: he did not consider knowledge to be constituted by the rational and fixed human subject, but rather saw it as an effect of a primary linguistic-discursive formation, or a set of fundamental rules that define the discursive space in which the speaking subject exists.

What resulted from his archaeological line of argumentation was the “death” of man, in other words, the transformation of the rational man-subject into a linguistic, transgressive and affective structure. One of the most extreme conclusions Foucault made on the grounds of this line of argumentation was that man was on the way out, and pure discourse was coming in, discourse without the knowing subject who utters the words. This idea led him to propose his famous thesis of the death of the author.

The Death of the Author

In his early essays, written between 1962 and 1969, Foucault applied the problem of man-subject and Enlightenment rationality to aesthetics through his treatment of late nineteenth-century and twentieth-century avant-garde literature. These investigations were all closely related to his philosophical projects, forming an inquiry into the thought beyond – or, better, outside – the subject.²¹ Instead of continuing the modern tradition that had, at least since Kant, connected artistic creation to the gifts of an individual subject, Foucault argued in his essay “What is an Author” (1969) that the author is nothing but a historically constructed rational idea: it is just a *question of a function of a certain discourse*, that is, a discourse whose function is to characterize the existence, operation, and circulation of certain discourses within a society (WA 124).

Foucault’s argument for the death of the author incorporated key socio-historical aspects that set genius- and work-centred aesthetics in doubt. He was interested in finding out how the author had been individualized in the West, and how we could conceive of the author’s function in the present age.²² With his emphasis on the importance of the *context* of each artwork, Foucault challenged the more traditional ideas of the author as intending to represent some specific thoughts or personal emotions in his or her work, as well as the (formalist) conception that prevails even today that criticism should focus on the structures of the work, which is to be studied for its intrinsic and internal relations. The critical question Foucault raised was: What is necessary to the work’s composition if a person

called “the author” does not write it? This raises another issue. Of what elements is the literary work composed? To cite Foucault’s own words: “If an individual is not an author, what are we to make of those things he has written or said, left among his papers or communicated to others? [...] What, for instance, were Sade’s papers before he was consecrated as an author? Little more, perhaps, than rolls of paper on which he endlessly unravelled his fantasies while in prison.” (WA 118.)²³

Foucault’s answers were intimately connected to his willingness to replace rational Cartesian thinking, which represents the philosopher – as well as the artist – as the sovereign and primary form of language by a more fluid notion of the subject (PT 42). The imagined disappearance of the subject (man/author) made Foucault discover a language that showed the essential void at its centre, a void that represented the “absence of the subject.” In another early essay entitled “A Preface to Transgression” (1963), he described this turning point towards transgressive new language in terms of silence, another language, and a void in which a multiplicity of speaking subjects are joined and severed, combined and excluded.

It should be noted that in his early aesthetic writings, Foucault never recommends abandoning the notion of the subject entirely. What he attempts to do instead is to grasp its functions, its intervention in discourse, and its structure of dependencies (WA 137). Seen in this way, the purpose of killing the author was not to get rid of the notion of the subject, but rather to *revitalize the idea of the subject* by situating it as a fluid and affective function, within the space cleared by Foucault’s archaeological tools. (WA 137. See also note 22, pp. 125.)

Moreover, because Foucault denies the idea of creative genius and correspondence between the intentions of the author and the work, “the essential basis of writing is not the exalted emotions related to the act of composition or the insertion of a subject into language” (WA 116).²⁴ It is rather primarily concerned with “creating an opening where the writing subject endlessly disappears” (WA 116).²⁵ In this respect, as Foucault concludes, the work could be seen as the murderer of the author. At least this is what he sees happening in the texts of

avant-gardist writers such as Flaubert, Proust and Kafka, whose texts transgress the limits of representational and subjective expression, cancelling out the signs of the writer's particular individuality, and obliterating the self that "does not require representation in books *because it takes place in the everyday existence of the writer*" (WA 117, emphasis mine).²⁶

The Aesthetic Subject and Transgression

Foucault's early interest in the aesthetic subject is also intimately linked to his attempt to reconsider the foundations of the knowing and speaking subject from the affective bodily standpoint. From his reading of Bataille, he suggests that "the death of God does not restore us to a limited and positivistic world, but to a world exposed by the experience of its limits, made and unmade by that excess which transgresses it" (PT 72).²⁷ Interestingly, Foucault sees the death of God as tied to the same experience as sexuality, namely the excess of experience, which he also terms "transgression."

In Foucault's view, transgression as an "excess of experience" both presupposes a limit and constitutes it in its attempt to overcome it. Alternatively expressed, transgression

[S]erves as a glorification of the nature it excludes: the limit opens violently onto the limitless, finds itself suddenly carried away by the content it had rejected and fulfilled by this alien plenitude which invades it to the core of its being. Transgression carries the limit right to the limit of its being; transgression forces the limit to face the fact of its imminent disappearance, to find itself in what it excludes (perhaps, to be more exact, to recognize itself for the first time), to experience its positive truth in its downward fall. (PT 73.)²⁸

Yet, transgression, for Foucault, does not mean *overcoming* the limits. It is rather that transgression and limit depend on each other, for "transgression is an action

which involves the limit, that narrow zone of a line where it displays the flash of its passage, but perhaps also its entire trajectory, even its origin; it is likely that transgression has its entire space in the line it crosses” (PT 73).²⁹ Therefore, as Foucault emphasizes, transgressive act it is not connected to the scandalous or the subversive, in other words, to anything aroused by mere negative associations, but rather affirms in a non-positive way the *limitedness of our being*.

For Foucault, this non-positive affirmation (transgression) is a movement of endless contestation – as opposed to Enlightenment rationality, which privileges a stable, fully self-reflexive consciousness at the centre of thought.³⁰ What this means, in practice, is that no content can bind transgressive affirmation, since by definition, no limit can possibly restrict it (PT 36). This led Foucault to propose that non-positive affirmation is perhaps simply the affirmation of division, not as a cutting gesture but as a *testing of the limits*. Therefore, the acts of transgression do not bind us to any positive content, for “contestation does not imply a generalized negation, but an affirmation that affirms nothing, a radical break of transitivity. Rather than being a process of thought for denying existences or values, contestation is the act that carries them all to their limits and, from there, to the Limit where an ontological decision achieves its end; to contest is to proceed until one reaches the empty core where being achieves its limit and where the limit defines being.” (PT 36.)³¹

A fact that is often ignored in the interpretation of Foucault’s early work is that one of the central aims of these rather abstract re-considerations of the subject and transgression was to create new space for ethical communication. In his essays “A Preface to Transgression” (1963) and “What is an Author?” (1969) Foucault links the disappearance of the man-subject explicitly with ethics – ethics in which the writing aesthetic subject constantly disappears to make room for “other voices.” At the same time, there seems to have been something more going on in Foucault’s thinking: when the subject is no longer interpreted as the foundation of knowledge and art, but is rather seen as something that proceeds constantly toward its own limits and even tends to disappear in language, it suggests a process of *reorientation* in which the subject constantly seeks its own limitedness and freedom.

This reorientation is meant to put in question the more traditional notion of the rational Cartesian master-subject, which is largely based on the displacement and derogation of its other and the elimination of the unknown, for the benefit of the man-subject's master position. In this sense, it seems to be justified to argue that Foucault's calling into question of the notion of the man-subject includes important ethical dimensions in the attempt to create space for difference and otherness to emerge.

Yet, due to its non-affirmative character, Foucault's early work on transgression is not an attempt to tell us what is right and what is wrong, nor does it offer any normative ethical principles (do not kill etc.).³² The ethical promise of the transgression lies instead in its possibilities to discover new ways of existing and relating, and as a result of this, in its offering a new art and philosophy that "regains its speech and finds itself again only in the marginal region which borders its limits" (PT 78).³³ As Foucault notes, two crucial questions arise: What kind of language can arise from such an absence of the knowing subject? And who is the philosopher who will now begin to speak? (PT 78)

In Foucault's view, giving up the idea of the Cartesian knowing subject and replacing it with the transgressive subject who disappears in language gives birth to a new philosopher who is aware that "we are not everything,"³⁴ and who learns that even the philosopher can never inhabit the whole of his language like a "perfectly fluent god."³⁵ For next to himself, he discovers "the existence of another language that also speaks and that he is unable to dominate, one that strives, fails, and falls silent and that he cannot manipulate, the language he spoke at one time and that has now separated itself from him, now gravitating in a space increasingly silent." (PT 78-79.)³⁶

Foucault also calls this affective linguistic structure "the mad philosopher" who does not find his way in language and is not the "mastering subject" of thinking and speech. He (or, possibly better, it) rather disappears to make way for philosophical language that proceeds as if through a labyrinth, losing and overflowing itself, "emptied of itself to the point where it becomes an absolute void – an opening, which is *communication*" (PT 80, emphasis mine).³⁷ Again,

this is not “the end of philosophy but, rather, the end of the philosopher as the sovereign and primary form of philosophical language.” (PT 79.)³⁸

The language that the mad philosopher speaks is thus not rational but rather affective and “overflowing.” Bataille, to whom “The Preface to Transgression” is dedicated, has special significance in Foucault’s insights. This applies particularly to Bataille’s theory of eroticism as a fundamental cultural experience, which embodies an elemental dynamic between continuity and discontinuity. According to Bataille, in erotic activity, all boundaries between individuals are partially and momentarily dissolved when the self is fleetingly taken over by the demands of the body and senses. In the words of Bataille: “Eroticism always entails breaking down of established patterns, the patterns [...] of the regulated social order basic to our discontinuous mode of existence as defined and separated individuals” (Bataille 2001, 18).³⁹

Similarly, Foucault suggests (1963) in his analysis of subjectivity and transgression that the experience of sexuality, notably when it is absorbed into language, takes us to a “dark domain” where we experience the absence of God and our own death, but also our limits and their transgression. At the same time, this darkness might also serve as a “source of light for those who have liberated their thought from all forms of dialectical language” (PT 86).⁴⁰ If sexuality were put into the place of rationality and dialectical thinking, Foucault argues, we would enter a “future culture of transgression.”

Yet, paradoxically, according to Foucault’s archaeological insights, modern philosophy and aesthetics cannot begin to *comprehend* the fleeting and singular moment of transgression, for this would lead to the solidifying of the contesting movement of the subject and knowledge, that is, to a certain (and much more serious) death. Therefore, transgression always remains an unspoken potentiality of which Foucault nevertheless dreams. In his own words: “Perhaps one day [transgression] will seem as decisive for our culture, as much a part of its soil, as the experience of contradiction was at an earlier time for dialectical thought. But in spite of so many scattered signs, the language in which transgression will find its space and the illumination of its being lies almost entirely in the future.” (PT

72.)⁴¹ This future culture is not mere utopia for Foucault, however: he finds traces from it in the work of some avant-garde writers, such as Maurice Blanchot, Pierre Klossowski and Georges Bataille.

2. FEMINIST EXPLORATIONS OF THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL TOOLS

What I find valuable in Foucault's early writings on the subject and transgression is that, despite his utopian and overtly linguistic tone, his rethinking of language is simultaneously a rethinking of the aesthetic subject from an ethical and affective perspective. In his analysis of the avant-garde literature of Bataille, Blanchot and others, Foucault turns the knowing subject into the transgressive subject, and makes aesthetics the basis of all critical thinking. I see three immediate consequences of this. First, the traditional opposition between the knowing subject (artist, philosopher) and the work of art (object/text) collapses, putting in doubt the ideas of the creative master subject and expression, as well as the division between art and (non-artistic) everyday life.

Second, literature is turned, at least ideally, into an existential structure or space in which the subject gains experiences not only of his/her possibilities of transgressing the limits, but also of his/her bodily finitude, that is, of historical engagement and affective limitedness (as distinct from the rational master position). Finally, artistic communication is differentiated from the ideas of subjective genius, expression and message, and turns into polyphonic space (or, possibly better, non-space) or silence, the experience of which inspires further study not only of the limitedness of our being, but also of the possibilities of communication between the subject and the not-me ("other").

Foucault's early work with the subject and transgressive aesthetics is not without problems, however. In my view, one of the most severe limitations of his early theory of transgressive subjectivity and language lies in its linguistic and artistic over-emphasis. In other words, he does not consider the possibility of

transgressive subjectivity in the everyday practice of one's social life, but rather analyses the move toward the ethical subject on a very abstract level, despite his emphasis on the engaged nature of the subject. He could, therefore be criticized for a tendency to aestheticize the idea of transgression which, in his scheme, finds its place only in a certain literary canon, typified by writers such as Kafka, Bataille, Nietzsche and Klossowski. Even sexuality as a transgressive force is analysed by the archaeological Foucault as a mere trait of linguistic expression, with no mention of the politics or history of sexuality, of the equality of the sexes, or of the ideologically-specific context of the artistic avant-garde (in this respect his views change considerably during the later phases of his work, as I will point out).⁴²

With similar kinds of critical ideas in mind – although perhaps with a somewhat problematic “anti-aesthetic” attitude – Lois McNay comments:

The experience of alterity does not reside exclusively in the elite realm of artistic practice; rather it is always implicit in the mundane strategies through which domination is maintained. The issue of otherness lies not in the aesthetic realm, but at the heart of the process through which the marks of difference – sexual, racial, cultural – are routinely turned into signs of inferiority and the way in which cultural hegemony is maintained by setting the valorized culture over the other. (McNay 1994, 47.)⁴³

One more critical comment on Foucault's early writings on the subject that I wish to make here concerns his utopian stance toward avant-garde art and language. It is hard to imagine that his dream of a future language in which the subject is replaced by a void and affective energy could ever become a reality in the Western philosophical and artistic traditions that are based on the idea of the *Name* and its commercial and symbolic exchange. To arrive at the point at which the mastering subject would disappear in the art and in language would, in other words, entail the collapse of our whole capitalist system and our ways of thinking, and this is not, at least at the moment, something that would seem to be happening. In this sense, Foucault's early radicalisation of the aesthetic subject

seems to be overtly academic, elitist and utopian, despite his claims of practical engagement.

Finally, Foucault could be criticized for the fact that all the examples he gives of transgressive writing derive from male writers and mainly reflect male perspectives on questions concerning subjectivity, sexuality, transgression, language and art (Klossowski, de Sade, Bataille, for example). In other words, there is no explicit consideration of gender issues in Foucault's early analysis of the subject and of transgressive aesthetic language. The transgression of the subject is rather idealized as part of the madness of the male philosopher and artist – a scheme that is not that new in the history of philosophy or art.

Yet at the same time, the critique implied by Foucault's early avant-garde dreams is an important one, and could be read as a reminder of various feminist critiques of the master subject – with the above-mentioned difference that Foucault does not criticize the traditional notion for its *gendered* nature. Many feminist critics hold that the notion of the rational, self-reflective subject, which has dominated Western thought at least since the Enlightenment, is grounded on the derogation and displacement of its other. In other words, the notion of rationality has taken precedence over the emotions and the senses, spirituality over the material, the objective over the subjective, the mind over the body, and the artificial over the natural.

The aim of these dualisms has been to place an abstract, pre-discursive Cartesian master-subject at the centre of thought and to derogate the body as the site that is opposed to the rational and the spiritual due to its emotional, passionate and demanding nature. In Lois McNay's words: "By prioritising the first term in the series of dualisms, classical thought [...] controls the parameters of what constitutes knowledge and monitors the extent and kind of discourse that are allowed to circulate." (McNay 1992, 13.) These dualisms have been used to mark the original or natural difference between the two sexes, rationality being an attribute given to male subjects while 'women' have typically represented the realm of the body, the senses, and love.

Developments in the feminist critique such as Luce Irigaray's idea of *parler-femme* and Hélène Cixous's writings on the *écriture féminine*, go some way to overcoming these traditional dualisms. Just like Foucault's mad philosopher, who does not master the language he speaks but rather floats endlessly towards his own limitedness in and through language, Irigaray's and Cixous's presentations of the female subject represent a belief in a new experimental avant-garde language, which is assumed to overcome the traditional hierarchies and oppositions between male/female, rational/sensuous, for example, and to offer in its place new, more ethical ways of communicating. Despite the fact that the problems in Irigaray's and Cixous's accounts have become increasingly apparent during the last ten years or so, the main ideas in their theories are worth presenting here in an effort to understand why the genealogical perspective is necessary for feminist studies.

Irigaray, Cixous and Avant-garde Writing

In this section, I will suggest that Foucault's early dream of an avant-garde language, or a future language that would offer space for transgression and affectiveness, parallels in many respects the work of feminist intellectuals such as Luce Irigaray and Hélène Cixous, who also take the critique of traditional dualisms as a point of departure in constructing a new version of the subject. What they add to Foucault's insights, in my view, is the question of gender, which is totally lacking from his early aesthetics.

My argument is that, in this respect, they could be said to radicalise some aspects of Foucault's thought, or perhaps better, to politicise his thinking towards a better understanding of the significance of gender to all intellectual work – including his own. This further progress in this respect leads to the consideration of some important questions to do with Foucault's work. How is his idea of the disappearing and transgressive subject positioned socially, and can its position be equally shared by all? What would the philosophical description of the mad philosopher be like if this fluent and affective linguistic structure Foucault terms

'the subject' were to be connected to the female, not the male, body and sexuality?

A rather well-known attempt at this sort of redeployment of descriptions of the feminine subject, sexuality and language is Luce Irigaray's description of the 'lips' that touch upon each other in female sexual pleasure. Taking the position that phallo(go)centric discourse (male-centred rationality) has limited women's understanding of sexual pleasure and differentiation, Irigaray tries to find new linguistic avenues that could explore women's unspeakable pleasure, which exists but cannot be fully articulated in language. She thus writes of the multiple ways in which woman, as a sex which is not one, touches herself all the time, since in any case, her genitals are formed of two lips in continuous contact (Irigaray 1985c, 210).

Female lips, as Irigaray emphasizes, are pressed against one another like strangers to dichotomy, lying perpetually half-open. For her, the same openness designates female ways of using language in which the subject does not attempt to know the object but rather offers silence and space for the other's becoming. It is thus not a question of knowing and mastering, but rather one of keeping oneself open to the not-me and otherness, of staying at the borders, of losing one's hold in a movement between me and you. Just as for Foucault, for Irigaray this sort of new language is also a promise of new ethics, for the silence that the female subject offers is also

[T]he condition for a possible respect for myself and for the other within our respective limits. It also assumes that the already existing world, even in its philosophical and religious form, should not be considered complete, already revealed or made manifest. If I am to be quiet and listen, listen to you, without presupposition, without making hidden demands – on you or myself – the world must not be sealed already, it must still be open, the future not determined by the past. If I am to really listen to you, all these conditions are essential. And moreover, that I do not consider language to be immutable. Otherwise, language itself controls, orders, and hinders freedom. (Irigaray 1996, 117.)

Irigaray also talks about the new female language in terms of *parler-femme*.⁴⁴ The utopian potential she associates with female language is grounded on her belief that the usage of language that expresses respect, indeterminacy and silence leads to the collapse of the hierarchical (male) division between sensibility and intelligence. In her view, female speech is intelligible exactly *because* “it remains sensible, related to the qualities of sound, rhythm, and meaning in the world of the subject(s)” (Irigaray 1996, 126).

This re-writing of the conceptions of the subject and language in terms of the female body and sensuousness is an attempt by Irigaray to provide women’s writing with a new authority based on their genital and libidinal difference from men (Showalter 1997, 63). At the same time, she strives to re-think sexual difference in terms of absolute alterity or radical otherness, in other words, as something that is not reducible to the knowledge of the mastering subject.

Irigaray thereby joins thinkers such as Foucault, Emmanuel Levinas and Jean-Paul Sartre in the attempt to break with a venerable tradition, which, since Parmenides, has judged it impossible to think of otherness in abstraction from sameness (the rational subject who is able to identify his objects of knowledge), or to conceive of difference except in relation to the same, and multiplicity as anything other than a repetition of the one (reason, *cogito* etc.). What she calls for is a radical reorientation, which requires no less than a disruption of the entire order of dominant values, economic, social, moral, and sexual. For her, it is women who call into question all existing theory, all thought, all language, inasmuch as men and men alone monopolize these. Women, in other words, challenge the very foundation of our social and cultural order, whose organization has been prescribed by the patriarchal system.

Irigaray’s challenging of the patriarchal system demands elaboration of a specifically feminine imagery in which women’s presumptively different relation to language (nowadays discussed in terms of *écriture féminine*), desire, and the body is expressed in its own specific ways.⁴⁵ What this also demands is that the concept of the speaking subject be re-defined. When Irigaray says that female sexuality is not unifiable and cannot be subsumed under the concept of the

subject, this is thus not because she has no interest in retaining – or creating for the first time in its own terms – the idea of female subjectivity. It is rather because she tries to develop a notion of woman as a subject that does not succumb to the metaphysical constraints of masculine subjectivity; one that is not defined in terms of the fully present, unitary, mastering subject, and one that does not refer back to the one as a repetition of the same. (Irigaray 1996 and 1985a.)⁴⁶

In other words, Irigaray's celebration of female subjectivity and indeterminate language is, for her, a means of diffusing and decentering a self that is now relativized as the product of a patriarchal bourgeois humanism (Felski 1989, 221). In this respect, her project is on much the same lines as Foucault's early writing on man and the subject with, of course, the difference that Foucault was not interested in the sexual difference or gender specificity of his transgressive avant-garde subject.

Another well-known French feminist writer on the relations between subject, artistic language and sexuality is Hélène Cixous. Just as in Irigaray's work and in Foucault, for Cixous the creation of the new subjectivity means raising the question of the possibility of speaking and communicating otherwise, in a more ethical manner. She, like Irigaray, sees language as linked to the repressive structures of thinking and narration we use to organize our lives. Since women have mainly figured within the socio-symbolic system only as the other of man, Cixous suggests that the redefinition of women's sexuality and history could recast the prevailing order. For her, writing is the main locus and means of this reformation. (Sellers 1993, xxix.)

This idea lead Cixous to seek a new experimental language, concrete examples of which she finds in the work of the feminist avant-garde writer Clarise Lispector (Cixous 1976; Cixous 1979; Cixous 1981). Like Irigaray, Cixous does not simply theorize the possibility of female writing that undermines the dual hierarchized structure of oppositions (subject/object etc.). She also attempts to produce the kind of writing that ought to express new forms and new narratives for the representation of sexual difference. (Shiach 1997, 270.)

In Cixous's view, one of the basic problems that women face in the West is the absence of sexual discourse that adequately describes women's libidinal economy and representation. Her advocacy of women's writing proceeds from her investigations of the construction of sexuality in patriarchy as an asymmetrical opposition between feminine and masculine, which is a mechanism that maintains male privilege. This differential economy affects not only sexual practices, but also sexual discourse, which is organized around the systematic absence of a discourse of *feminine jouissance*. In Cixous's view, this absence extends and serves the logic of phallo(go)centric sexuality, because the absence of discursive forms capable of representing women's pleasures in their differences has clear benefits for the patriarchal social order.⁴⁷ Even more useful to existing social arrangements are women who do not know what they want, since as long as men are the only ones who provide answers to the question of what women want and like, the answers will continue to reflect and strengthen male interests and privilege.⁴⁸

Cixous believes that women can disrupt and subvert the existing sexual order by *writing their bodies* in terms that empower women's specific needs and make them public. In the *Laugh of the Medusa*, in the context of liberating the New Woman she formulates her point of view in the following words:

Writing has been run by libidinal and cultural – hence political, typically masculine – economy, that this is a locus where the repression of woman has been perpetuated, over and over more or less consciously, and in a manner that's frightening since it's often hidden or adorned with the mystifying charms of fiction; that this locus has grossly exaggerated all the signs of sexual opposition (and not sexual difference), where woman has never *her* turn to speak – this being all the more serious and unpardonable in that writing is precisely *the very possibility of change*. (Cixous 1976, 879.)

The moment when women start to speak with their own voice is associated by Cixous with *écriture féminine*, feminine writing. She considers such writing feminine in two senses. First, Cixous suggests that women are closer to a specific feminine economy⁴⁹ than men, despite the fact that feminine writing is potentially

the province of both sexes. As a result, she believes that women's writing has the potential to circumvent and reformulate existing structures of thinking, subjectivity and language through the inclusion of other experience (Cixous 1986, 95-96). Cixous is especially interested in the idea that the inscription of the rhythms and articulations of the mother's body that also influence the adult self provides a link to the pre-symbolic union between the self and m/other, and so affects the subject's relation to language, to the other, to him- or herself and to the world (ibid. 88, 90-100).⁵⁰

The second point that Cixous stresses is that a feminine position refuses to annihilate or appropriate the other's difference in order to construct the self in a (masculine) position of mastery, and can, therefore, bring alternative forms of relation, perception and expression into existence. As Susan Sellers writes, "it is in this sense that Cixous believes writing is revolutionary. Not only can writing exceed the binary logic that informs our present system and thus create the framework for a new "language" and culture, but, she stresses, through its transformations, feminine writing will initiate changes in the social and political sphere to challenge the very foundation of the patriarchal and capitalist state." (Sellers 1994, xxix.) In Cixous's own words, feminine writing is:

A place [...] which is not economically or politically indebted to all the vileness and compromise. That is not obliged to reproduce the system. That is writing. If there is somewhere else that can escape the infernal repetition, it lies in that direction, where *it* writes itself, where *it* dreams, where *it* invents new worlds. (Cixous 1986, 72.)

However, a number of difficulties arise from Irigaray's and Cixous's conceptions of the feminine and its association with radical signifying practices exemplified in avant-garde writing. While most feminists agree that there is a need to revalue not only the concepts of the subject and language, but also women's pleasures and physical ways of existing, the solutions offered by the French feminists have been much criticized for essentializing and globalizing the female physique, and for indirectly reinforcing the traditional notions of the male/female and masculine/feminine divide. Because the theoretical difficulties of these

approaches have been widely commented on, and because the main interest in this work is to consider the question of the aesthetic creation of the self in the Foucauldian/feminist framework, I will not go into a detailed analysis of these debates here, but will briefly consider only some points that are crucial for my own investigations (for a more detailed discussion, see McNay 1992, 18-19; Soper 1997; Delphy 1987; Butler 1990; Showalter 1997, 63-64; Felski 1989).

A Critique of Cixous and Irigaray

The work of Cixous exemplifies well some problems inherent in the approaches to the female identity, body and sexuality presented above. The problems she takes up in her analysis of expressions of pleasure are, in many respects, important ones, and she opens up some new perspectives on feminist debates on women's bodily existence and aesthetic self-expression. Yet, the female or woman-centred aesthetics of Cixous has some serious weaknesses. There are four main points in my critique.

First, Cixous's way of grounding the dream of the liberation of the new Woman primarily on experimental language expresses a rather naive belief in the revolutionary potential of avant-garde art, as was the case with early Foucault. In my view, her way of connecting feminine and experimental writing begs the question of whether avant-garde textuality can, in fact, any longer be interpreted simply as subversive. In other words, Cixous's belief in the utopian potential of women's experimental writing fails to offer any analysis of the institutional locations and broader ideological networks framing textual production and reception. As Felski correctly notes, it could be argued here that "French feminism reveals an overestimation of the radical effects of linguistic experimentation which has not come to terms with the contemporary realization of the political limitations of modernism (Felski 1989, 222; Huyssen 1984 and McBurney 1985).

Secondly, problems arise from the fact that the concept of female style, as it is conceived by Cixous, describes only the avant-garde mode of women's writing, due to which many feminists have felt excluded by the prescriptive stylistics that seems to privilege the non-linear, experimental and surreal expression of a small intellectual elite (Showalter 1997, 63). In this respect, Cixous's theory of subversive feminine writing and subjectivity could be criticized for over-estimating the revolutionary significance of the reading and writing practices of a small enlightened minority, and for its dismissal of the more goal-based and mundane forms of feminist political activity (Felski 1989, 223). In other words, Cixous tends to *aestheticize* the ideas of femininity and sexual difference by reducing the ideas of liberation and the new order to the aesthetic sphere in which the subversive and disruptive feminist action should take place, at the same time ignoring the social and political problems of different groups of women.

Third, not such a convincing argument has yet been put forward supposing a relationship between gender and experimental writing. In the words of Felski,

[W]hen not grounded in a biologism which affirms a spontaneous association between a fluid textuality and a polymorphous female body, this argument relies on an analogy between the avant-garde and the feminine as forms of marginalized dissidence vis-a-vis monolithic and vaguely defined "patriarchal bourgeois humanism." Defining linguistic indeterminacy as feminine, however, renders the term so broad as to be meaningless, allowing almost any example of experimental writing in the last hundred years to be classified as feminine, and this conflation of modern literary style with an ideology of the feminine as quintessentially marginal is of little help in theorizing the historically specific locations of women in culture and society. (Felski 1989, 221-222.)

Moreover, and finally, Cixous has been criticized of not sufficiently problematizing her way of using the term 'women', but rather using it as a category based quite unproblematically on women's biological bodies. This way of seeing the female body as natural and universal constitutes a dangerous trap for feminism, because it ignores the manifold bodily differences between women and

seeks the solution from a somewhat utopian idea of the universal Female (Bailey 1993). Elaine Showalter articulates a rather similar notion, commenting that the essentialism of the universal female subject has also been open to charges of racism, especially “since black women’s texts were rarely cited as examples.” Hence, “as black women and others within the women’s movement protested against the inattention to racial and class differences between women, the idea of a common women’s culture had to be re-examined.” (Showalter 1997, 63.)

Parts of this critique have been addressed to Luce Irigaray too, whose articulation of female sexuality through the notion of the biological non-phallic body has been criticized for reducing women to their natural bodies without adequately addressing the social oppression of women and associated issues of power, history and politics, and without questioning the diversity of women’s experiences of their bodies (McNay 1992, 21).

With this critique in mind, Judith Butler comments that Irigaray’s theory risks identifying all women with a notion of femininity that is based on an aestheticized and non-phallic version of the body. The problem with Irigaray’s analysis of the female *jouissance* is that many women simply do not identify themselves with her description of the female body and sexuality, and hence might be easily written off from her visions of the new woman as male-identified or unenlightened (Butler 1990, 30; Soper 1997, 288). Moreover, Butler shows that the notion of the generally shared conception of women is problematic, because it is also based on the binary logic (men/women; masculine/feminine) that separates women analytically and politically “from the constitution of class, race, ethnicity, and other axes of power relations that both constitute ‘identity’ and make the singular notion of identity a misnomer” (ibid. 4).

Yet, in considering these critical viewpoints, it is also worth noting that French feminist philosophers are often too easily assumed by their English-speaking critics to be defending a uniform position, called essentialist, which equates biological sex with culturally defined gender.⁵¹ In reality, such a generalization is rather problematic and simplistic, because their theoretical positions are far from uniform, and some of them have changed position drastically during their careers.

The political and ethical implications of these variations are also rather complex (Kuykendall 1991, 217; Heinämaa 1996, especially 15-16, 166-167).

Moreover, as various re-readers of Cixous and Irigaray have shown, their analyses of the female body are not necessarily meant to serve the essential claims concerning women, but could also be interpreted as a critical *strategy* that becomes understood only in the historical context. The idea of the auto-erotic tactility of the female body, for example, as well as the picture of the lips which speak with each other, could also be taken as a critical response to Freud's (originally Greek) notion of the female body and sexual pleasure as defective and insufficient in itself.

In sum, Irigaray and Cixous could also be understood as trying to redefine the female body and sexuality without reference to the active male subject, which was taken earlier as the origin of female pleasure. Seen through this historical perspective, their essentializing of the female body and pleasure in specifically feminine terms is primarily an attempt to turn women's earlier negative definitions (woman as a variation of man, as lack, *homme manqué*, etc.) into a positive new image that emphasizes the specificity and autonomous value of the female body, desire and sexuality.⁵²

Another possible solution to the critique of essentialism in the French feminism is offered by Diana Fuss, who argues that feminists should not just label some feminist texts as essentialist and therefore bad, but should rather ask: if a text is essentialist, what motivates its deployment, why and how it is invoked and, most importantly, *what its political effects are* (Fuss 1989, xi. See also Butler 1990, 4-5). If, for example, Irigaray's or Cixous's writings on the female body and sexuality could be shown to support the self-understanding of some specific political group (white, well-educated, middle- or upper-class women, for example) and to ignore the essential problems of some other women, if they idealize aesthetics as a sufficient condition for subversive feminist political action, or if they exclude from feminist analysis the constitution of central categories of identity such as race, class and ethnicity (as Butler argues), they undoubtedly do deserve criticism that points out the ideological and political interests and blind

spots behind the texts – or at least they need supplementary views that bring to the fore the cultural, ideological and discursive dimensions of sexual identity.⁵³

One formulation of this sort of critique comprises post-feminist attempts to find out how categories of identity are engendered, immobilized and naturalized in various discursive, social and juridical practices. In other words, it is no longer a question of whether a specific universal female subject, sexuality or language exists, but one of how (and why) sexual identities are constructed and produced in the way they are. Another way of putting it is that the idea of anatomically given sex has been called into question, and the interest has shifted more towards the social construction of gender. So conceived, the task of the “political genealogy of gender ontologies,” as Judith Butler terms her studies, will be “to make gender trouble, not through the strategies that figure a utopian beyond, but through the mobilization, subversive confusion, and proliferation of precisely those constitutive categories that seek to keep gender in its place by posturing as the foundational illusions of identity” (Butler 1990, 33-34).

The genealogical aspect demands attention not merely to the utopian subversion of the patriarchal order through the linguistic revolutions of feminine writing, but far more to the cultural and political positions and networks in and through which discourses and practices concerning the subject, sex(uality) and gender are produced and maintained.

As I will demonstrate in the following second part of my study, this sort of point of departure also leads to reconsideration of the potential of feminist subversive language and experimental action. The important difference in women-centred thinking lies in the fact that post-feminist theorizations of gender no longer base their critique on the biologically common essence of woman, but are far more concerned with the discursive power practices that not only produce ideas of both sexual and gender identity, but can also be used to politicise and undermine them. Before moving on to a closer examination of these issues, allow me to go back to Foucault for a while and to consider the main points of his genealogical analysis of the subject, power, and the body.

II
A GENEALOGICAL CRITIQUE OF THE SUBJECT,
POWER AND THE BODY

3. GENEALOGY

Foucault's archaeological project was later continued in a scheme he called "genealogy." Unlike archaeology, which avoids the causal explanation of social change by restricting its focus to the historical inquiry into the ordering codes of our culture that have arranged the space of knowledge and discursive practices, genealogy (originally Nietzsche's term for non-eschatological, non-edifying historiography) permits social change to be at least contemplated, and it may concern gradual, continuous processes of social change too, in carefully analysing the complex relations between knowledge and power (Hoy 1999, 7).

The genealogical view, developed and extended especially in *Discipline and Punish (Surveiller et punir: naissance de la prison, 1975)* and in the first volume of *The History of Sexuality (La Volonté de savoir, 1976)*, supposes that each society has its general politics of truth, which Foucault also calls its "régime of truth." This aspect of politics and the types of discourses accepted and used in it are major subjects in his genealogical study. It is a question of finding out the mechanisms and instances which enable one to differentiate true and false statements, the means by which each is sanctioned; of analysing the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true, and the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth (TP 131).

Foucault's genealogical analysis of these distinctions opens up the path to immanent social criticism, criticism that does not presuppose an independent utopian standpoint. As a genealogist, Foucault wanted to diagnose the organizing trends of culture, because he believed that we are all (himself included) subjected to them. Like Nietzsche, he did not attempt to create an alternative model, but rather encouraged us to recognize the problems of the present and the constitution of ourselves. (Hoy 1999, 12-13.)⁵⁴ Hence, the genealogical method is meant to show how knowledge and power (which, according to Foucault, are always intertwined) effect the constitution of our historically specific selves.

Although a good deal of Foucault's archaeological method is also present in his later genealogy, the linguistic obsession in *The Order of Things* and in "The Death

of the Author” points toward a new emphasis on the inner relation of knowledge and power.⁵⁵ What this means is moving from a rather autonomous theory of language towards a more dialectical view in which the discursive and the material are linked together in a symbiotic relationship. His best-known formulation of this symbiosis is the power/knowledge nexus. Foucault’s idea is that, on the one hand, all knowledge is the effect of some specific regime of power, and on the other hand, various forms of knowledge constitute the social reality, which they analyse and describe. According to Foucault, power and knowledge directly imply one another, and there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor is there any knowledge that does not presuppose and represent at the same time power relations (DP 27). The effects of the power/knowledge nexus are relayed through different discourses, for it is in discourse that power and knowledge are joined together (HS 100).

The subject’s loss of transcendentalism is not compensated for Foucault in the genealogical method, as his short depiction of genealogy shows: “One has to [...] get rid of the subject itself, that’s to say, to arrive at an analysis which can account for the constitution of the subject *within a historical framework*. And this is what I would call genealogy, that is, a form of history which can account for the constitution of knowledge, discourses, domains of objects, etc., without having to make reference to a subject which is either transcendental in relation to the field of events or runs in its empty sameness throughout the course of history.” (TP 117) He is thus not concerned with how subjects form a constitution that determines who or what is sovereign, not even in his genealogy. What he wants to know instead is *how the subjects themselves are constituted*, and how this constitution is related to the historically varying issues of truth, knowledge, and power.

Foucault applies his genealogical problematic to the discursive production of sexuality in the first part of the *History of Sexuality*: “Sexuality must not be thought of as a kind of natural given which power tries to hold in check, or as an obscure domain which knowledge tries gradually to uncover. It is the name that can be given to a historical construct: not a furtive reality that is difficult to grasp, but a great surface network in which the stimulation of bodies, the intensification

of pleasures, the incitement to discourse, the formation of special knowledges, the strengthening of controls and resistances, are linked to one another, in accordance with a few major strategies of knowledge and power.” (HS 105-106.)⁵⁶ Therefore, Foucault concludes, sexuality cannot be thought of as a merely natural characteristic of a person. It is rather to be analysed as a historically varying construction that has no fixed essence or nature.

As I intend to point out in the sections to come, this sort of deconstruction or, perhaps better, disintegration of existing truths and self-certainties has been of use in feminist debates on the subject, aesthetics, gender identity, and the body. My intention is to illustrate that, on the one hand, Foucault’s genealogical work offers a set of challenging tools for analysing the effects of normalizing power on subjectivity (and, through that, on individual aesthetic appearances), and on the other hand, it also provides feminists with some “disintegrating” strategies for escaping the existing regime of sexuality through assertion of the transgressive aesthetics of the subject.

My argument in brief, is that in his genealogical work, Foucault considers subjectivity from two different angles: firstly, from the viewpoint of modern “docility” (which I term his negative aspect of power), and secondly, from the viewpoint of active resistance (termed here his positive aspect of power). The former aspect of his genealogical analysis is perhaps best presented in the first part of *The History of Sexuality* (1976), while the latter perspective is most forcefully explained in his essay “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History” (1971), in which Foucault presents parodic and farcical uses of identity as critical strategies in the creation of “alternative identities.”

As I will suggest towards the end of this part of my study, the negative aspect of Foucault’s analysis of power parallels many feminist notions of women’s cultural docility, while his genealogical ideas concerning individual resistance are much in line with the post-feminist idea that women can take the active role in creating their selves and aesthetic appearances, and thus also have “positive” power over their selves. As the third part of this study will demonstrate, in his late aesthetics

of the self, Foucault continued to address similar problems, but now in the context of ‘modernity’ and the ancient aesthetics of the self. In this context, the positive aspect of power came to mean for him an attempt to construct concrete expressions of resistance to normalizing power on the one hand, and a sketch for practical aesthetics, ethics and politics on the other.

Seen in the wider context, the usefulness of Foucault’s genealogy for the work at hand lies in his attempt to develop philosophical tools to study the question of how we are constituted as human subjects. His genealogical method takes into account the fact that, for the most part, the constitution of the subject is a result of subliminal socialization, not something we actively and consciously decide – or something we are born with. Like Nietzsche, who attacked the idea of a fixed human essence and nature – or like Heidegger, Sartre, and Gadamer, who were all interested in the subject’s engagement with a specific historical situation, although in very different terms and with very different conclusions – Foucault studies aspects of human beings that we generally take to be stable and fixed, but that historical analysis shows to be malleable and constituted. This is not only true of ideas such as the individual’s self or identity, but also of the human body (as experienced), which has been transformed throughout history by various technologies such as the capitalist exploitation of the worker’s body, the prison system, and the confession of sexual mores.

In Foucault’s view, there is much in our self-understanding that is not voluntary or consciously chosen, even though to term it involuntary would miss the extent to which we constitute our identities by conforming ourselves to tacitly understood practices and generally accepted norms (Hoy 1999, 15). To talk about self-understanding is therefore to refer – not to the Cartesian knowledge that the self may have of itself – but rather to the study of observable manifestations of situated and historically limited experiences of the self. Seen in this way, self-understanding is not a matter of autonomous decision, or of knowing the essential nature of one’s self, but a matrix of social and discursive practices that vary historically, just as self-understanding does. (Ibid. 17-18.)⁵⁷

It is this productive and social aspect of selfhood and identity that makes resistance – also aesthetic resistance – possible for Foucault. For, as he said in an interview late in his life, all human artifices can be unmade because they are made – assuming we know how they were made (HMD 1989, 252). This idea, as I will illustrate, has been extremely influential in some feminist practices that focus on the more political and ideological aspects of subjectivity and individual aesthetic appearance. Before moving into the analysis of these issues, let me begin my presentation of Foucault’s genealogical method by considering his groundbreaking essay “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History” in which he puts forward his positive aspect of power in terms of parodic uses of identity – an idea which is widely supported nowadays by many postfeminist thinkers.

Genealogy and the Dissociation of Identity

Foucault first employs the notion of genealogy in his essay “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History” (1971), in which he attacks traditional forms of history for their reliance on metaphysical concepts and totalising assumptions derived from the philosophy of the subject.

First, he argues that traditional or “total” history wrongly describes history in terms of linear development, as if there existed some “transcendental teleology” in which singular events are placed in universal explanatory schemas and linear structures, and thereby given a false unity. At the root of the interpretation that shows historical events as supporting a unified totality, he finds the notion of the subject who attempts to master history by placing himself (as a knowing subject) above everything by avoiding the exceptional and by reducing all things to the lowest common denominator. Citing Nietzsche, Foucault calls this form of history a supra-historical perspective.

A historian who practices supra-history encourages subjective recognitions and understands historical development as the unfolding and affirmation of essential human characteristics. As a result, history comes to operate around a logic of

identity or sameness, which means that the past is interpreted so as to confirm rather than disrupt the beliefs and convictions of the present (NGH 86-87; McNay 1992, 13-14.) A supra-historian, in short, denies his own singular perspective under the cloak of universals to assure his position as a knowing subject. He masks his body, passions, and his grounding in a particular time and place to secure the sovereignty of his timeless ideas. (NGH 90-91.)

Secondly, Foucault sees traditional history as falsely searching for origins as the source of specific historical process or sequence. This search assumes the existence of static forms that precede the external world of succession and accident (NGH 78). He criticises the search for origins as an epistemologically problematic quest for asocial and a-historical essences, which the supra-historian interprets as originals prior to the flux, movement, and heterogeneity of history. What he considers to be at the historical beginning of things is not the inviolable identity of their origin, but disparity and dissension (NGH 79). Thus, if the origin of the history of reason is analysed, for example, we find that it is not an innate sublime ability that is born with the divinity of man, but, first of all, something that is born from the chance and continuous warfare between individuals.⁵⁸

Against supra-history Foucault posits the notion, derived from Nietzsche, of effective history, *wirkliche Historie* or, alternatively, genealogy. Adopting Nietzsche's conception of the primacy of force over meaning, he opposes the endlessly repeated play of domination to the conception of origins and linear continuity (NGH 85). A genealogist does not see history as a continuous development and working through of an ideal schema, but rather takes it as being based on different power blocks, all of which attempt to impose their own system of domination. (McNay 1992, 14.)

So conceived, humanity is not seen as proceeding gradually towards universal reciprocity, at which point continuous social warfare is replaced by the rule of law. It rather installs each of its violences in a system of rules and thus proceeds from domination to domination. (NGH 85.) The critical task of the historian, then, is to uncover the contingent and violent emergence of these systems of domination, which Foucault also calls "regimes." Genealogy is meant to disturb

what was previously considered immobile, to fragment what was thought to be unified, to show the heterogeneity of what was imagined to be consistent with itself (NGH 82). This is also true of the human subject and the self, whose identity and unity are broken into pieces by the genealogical method:

Where the soul pretends unification or the self fabricates a coherent identity, the genealogist sets out to study the beginning – numberless beginnings, whose faint traces and hints of colour are readily seen by a historical eye. The analysis of descent permits the dissociation of the self, its recognition and displacement as an empty synthesis, in liberating a profusion of lost events. (NGH 81.)⁵⁹

As various post-feminist readers of Foucault's genealogy exemplify, this sort of breaking of the subject also leads to the reconsideration of gender categories. For if the genealogical eye tends to fragment all coherent identities as empty synthesis, it also sets in doubt universalising categories such as women and men, showing the heterogeneity and discontinuity inherent in them. (I will return to this shortly.)

At the end of his essay on Nietzsche, Foucault differentiates the main tasks of his genealogical effective history. First, it must offer to the “confused European” – who no longer knows himself because he ignores his mixed ancestries and seeks a proper role – the possibility of *alternative identities*, which are more substantial and individualized than his own. For Foucault, it is a question of *offering a parodic and farcical use of identity*, of turning the identification of our weak individuality with the solid identities of the past into our unrealisation through the excessive choice of identities. In this first respect, “genealogy is history in the form of an intense carnival.” (NGH 93-94.)⁶⁰

The second use of effective new history is the systematic dissociation of identity. Foucault considers this task necessary because “this rather weak identity, which we attempt to support and unify under a mask, is in itself only a parody: it is plural, and countless spirits dispute its possession” (NGH 94).⁶¹ The genealogical method replaces the idea of the unified self and immortal soul with a number of

“mortal souls,” in other words, the disintegrated, low and mortal aspect replaces the “high” aspect of human existence. This second task of the genealogist leads us to discover the roots of our identity, not in terms of synthesis but rather in terms of dissipation. If genealogy “gives rise to questions concerning our native land, native language, or the laws that govern us,” its intention is “to reveal the heterogeneous systems which, masked by the self, inhibit the formation of any form of identity.”⁶² (NGH 95.)

The third use of genealogy is to sacrifice the subject of knowledge that pretends to be neutral and masks his passions under commitment solely to truth. The genealogist shows that the scientific consciousness of the neutral subject is just one manifestation of the “will to knowledge.” The historical analysis of this will reveals that all knowledge rests upon injustice (that there is no right, not even in the act of knowing, to truth or a foundation for truth), and that the will to knowledge is “malicious” (something opposed to the happiness of mankind, as Foucault suggests). The will to knowledge does not in itself achieve universal truth, nor does it succeed in its attempts to master nature. It is through these notions that Foucault formulates the third task of genealogy as follows: “Where religion once demanded the sacrifice of bodies, knowledge now calls for experimentation on ourselves, calls us to the sacrifice of the subject of knowledge.”⁶³ (NGH 96; Nietzsche 1988a, no 501.)

Finally, unlike the supra-historical view, which concentrates on universals, origins, linear development and reason, effective history takes the examination of the *body* as its starting point, and through this analyses the effects of power in its most specific and concrete form. The replacement of the self-thematizing subject as the pivot of history with a notion of the body leads to a change in the historian’s methodology. Historical development is no longer interpreted as totality fully closed upon itself, but is understood as a conflict between different power blocks, i.e. permanent warfare. Being at the very centre of the struggle for domination, the body is moulded by the different warring forces (regimes) that act upon it. It is constantly “broken down by the rhythms of work, rest, and holidays; it is poisoned by food or values, through eating habits or moral laws; it constructs resistances.”⁶⁴ (NGH 87; Nietzsche 1988b, no 7.)

The body is thus conceived of in radically anti-essentialist terms, as being without constants: “Nothing in man – not even his body – is sufficiently stable to serve as a basis for self-recognition or for understanding other men”⁶⁵ (NGH 87-88). The body manifests “the stigmata of past experience and also gives rise to desires, failings, and errors” (NGH 83).⁶⁶ It is “the inscribed surface of events (traced by language and dissolved ideas), the locus of a dissociated self (adopting the illusion of a substantial unity), and a volume in perpetual disintegration” (NGH 83).⁶⁷ Genealogy, then, is situated within the articulation of the body and history. Its task is to “expose a body totally imprinted by history and the process of history’s destruction of the body” (NGH 83).⁶⁸ The aim of the genealogist is not, therefore, to systematize or produce universals, but to focus on singularities, to fragment and disperse the past. Effective history deals with events in terms of their most unique characteristics (NGH 88). It introduces discontinuity into our very being, multiplies our body and divides our emotions.

The idea that the body and the ways it is worked upon by power constitute a proper focus to history is also an underlying principle in Foucault’s two later studies, *Discipline and Punish* and *The History of Sexuality*. In these works, he replaces the supra-historical view with engaged perspectivism and an examination of the ways in which the body is violently and arbitrarily constructed and re-constructed in history in order to legitimise different regimes of domination (McNay 1992, 16).

As his analysis shows, investigations of the body and sexuality are also investigations of the modern constitution of the self, because the modern self is largely marked by the deployment of sexuality. As Foucault remarks, “It is through sex [...] that each individual has to pass in order to have access to his own intelligibility, [...] to the whole of his body, [...] to his identity.” For “We have arrived at the point where we expect our intelligibility to come from what was for many centuries thought of as madness; the plenitude of our body from what was long considered its stigma and likened to a wound; our identity from what was perceived as an obscure and nameless urge.” (HS 155-156.)⁶⁹ Sex, in short, has become constitutive of one’s construction of the personal identity and the self.

Foucault's suggestion is that the analysis of sexuality must be grounded on the analysis of *discursive practices*, because the whole discursive notion of sex is an artificial and historically changing construction. It has made it possible to group together anatomical elements, biological functions, conducts, sensations and pleasures, enabling individuals "to make use of this fictitious unity as a causal principle, an omnipresent meaning, a secret to be discovered everywhere" (HS 154).⁷⁰ Sex, so conceived, is not an autonomous agency, which "secondarily produces manifold effects on sexuality over the entire length of its surface of contact with power" (HS 155).⁷¹ It is rather "the most speculative, most ideal, and most internal element in a deployment of sexuality organized by power in its grip on bodies and their materiality, their forces, energies, sensations, and pleasures" (HS 155).⁷²

The philosophical study of these mechanisms is thus crucial, not only for our understanding of sex and sexuality but also for our understanding of the modern individual, for as Foucault suggests, these two concepts cannot be separated from each other.

The Modern Production of the Individual

Behind Foucault's genealogical emphasis lurks his willingness to create a new conception of the subject on the one hand, and the wish to rewrite the relations between the subject, the body, truth, power and knowledge on the other. He gives prior warning of neither, and in fact no one even knows what they *are*. This is due to the fact that knowledge (as *savoir*) does not consist of a collection of solid propositions and items (as *connaissance* does), but is rather like a frame within which various hypotheses gather their sense. It is, in other words, a matter of knowledge, which is more like a postulated set of rules that determine what kinds of sentences count as true or false in some domain. (Hacking 1999, 30.)

When applied to phenomena such as sex or sexuality, for example, this means that the same concept denotes different kinds of objects in different discourses, and

also occurs in different sorts of sentences. What this means in practice is that our supposed knowledge of what we call sex (or sexuality) is linked to a large circle of ideas, representations, consciousnesses, bodies, and systems of power, all of which aim at producing and sustaining the constituted knowledge of sex. What Foucault finds behind our knowledge and truth about sex, is a question of what governs our scientific statements about sex, and the way in which these statements govern each other to constitute a set of scientifically acceptable propositions, capable of being verified and falsified by scientific procedures (TP 112). Hence, as he concludes in the first part of the *History of Sexuality*, when we talk about sex, it is not only through preoccupation with it, but it also impinges on *political technologies of life*, because all such talk in the modern Western world is used as a means of access to the life of the individual and of the species.

Seen in this light, the whole notion of our sexual “nature” becomes a product of the specific modes of knowledge designed to make us objects of control. Although this knowledge is formulated and defended by a particular historical society, thus having no universal value, it is, first of all, *our own acceptance that we have some certain nature* that makes us an object of control, for this acceptance demands that we find it, confess it, and set our lives to rights by it (Taylor 1999, 78). It is, in other words, in the process of *subjection* (*asujettissement*) that we come to accept our being as an object of control, as something that can be measured, defined and normalized.

In Foucault’s view, this is true even in cases in which we may think that we gain more freedom when we get rid of, say, sexual prohibitions concerning the more traditional modes of love relations (as in Western cultures after the 1960s). For despite the fact that there may be more opportunities in the contemporary Western world to engage in sexual acts, and to express one’s sexual desires, we are nevertheless dominated by certain controlling images of what it is to be a fulfilled and healthy sexual being (Taylor 1999, 79). In Foucault’s words: “Responding precisely to the revolt of the body, we find a new mode of investment which presents itself no longer in the form of control by repression but that of control by stimulation. ‘Get undressed – but be slim, be good-looking, tanned’.” (BP 57.) He also calls this control of the body by stimulation the exploitation of eroticisation,

referring critically to the aestheticization of the body that does not liberate individuals, but rather controls their self-expression by aestheticized means.

One aspect of Foucault's genealogical analysis of subjection (*asujettissement*) that carries significance for feminism is that it shows how various forms of knowledge, as well as the truths we operate with, also serve the need to *control* and *normalize*, because knowledge can be used as a means to measure, classify, examine and categorize people and their personal choices and lifestyles. In Foucault's view, this is specifically true in the domain of sexuality.

Yet, it is important to realize that he does not attempt to explain the rise of technologies of control in terms of the modern identity of man as an individual. What interests him is the modern notion of individuality as one of its *products*. His suggestion is, in other words, that modern technologies of control bring about the modern individual as an object of control, and the being who is thus examined and made the target of policies of normalization is the one whom we have come to define as the modern individual. (Taylor 1999, 75.)⁷³ As I have already made clear, I call this aspect of Foucault's genealogical analysis his "negative aspect of power."

The contemporary success of plastic surgery could be used as a concrete example of what Foucault means. As Susan Bordo observes, we live in a culture in which "self-starvation, addictive bingeing and purging, exercise compulsions, and a multi-million dollar industry in corrective surgery are flourishing" (Bordo 1994, 239). Moreover, it is also a culture, which "inclines us away from systemic and historical understanding of these practices and the forms of normalization they serve. Instead, exercise, diet and plastic surgery are continually mystified in commercial constructions of body alteration as self-determination and creative self-fashioning" (ibid.). In other words, there is a huge business in the contemporary West in the process of subjection and individualism, but this process is easily commercialized and aestheticized, and it does not lead to true individuality but rather to the active self-*normalization* of the individual, which Foucault also describes as docility.

Docile Bodies

In the following three sections, I aim to exemplify what practical conclusions Foucault draws between the negative aspect of power and the bodily existence of modern subjects – an issue that is extremely relevant to current feminism(s) and critical aesthetic analysis of the forms of subjection that engender the “feminine” body, as I intend to point out a little further on.

Foucault uses the expression “docile bodies” to describe some central aspects of the control that modern bio-power has over the individual’s body and self-constitution. In *Discipline and Punish* he traces the roots of modern docility back to the seventeenth century, referring to La Mettrie’s *L’Homme-machine*, which is a materialistic reduction of the soul and, at the same time, a theory of training (*dressage*). Docility, for Foucault, joins the analysable body to the manipulable body. A body is docile that “may be subjected, used, transformed, and improved” (DP 136).⁷⁴

This very docility, according to Foucault, is the reason why Frederick II, the “meticulous king of small machines” and “well-trained regiments and long exercises”⁷⁵ was obsessed with celebrated automata: they also functioned as political puppets, small-scale models of power (DP 136). Despite the fact that body has always been an object of imperious and pressing investment, something new appeared in the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries along with the development of modern society: a whole new scale of control over bodily operations was now used to subject bodies to the docility-utility principle, which Foucault also terms ‘disciplines.’

In the modern era, these disciplines became general formulations of domination, but this power was not merely repressive. It also gave rise to a new art of the human body, which was directed “not only at the growth of its skills, nor at the intensification of its subjection, but at the formation of a relation that in the mechanism itself makes it more obedient as it becomes more useful, and

conversely.” (DP 137-138.)⁷⁶ Why, then, did this new form of power over the body emerge? What ends did Foucault’s analysis serve?

Foucault argues that, through the modern principle of docility, the human body entered some machinery of power, which explored it, broke it down and rearranged it. In his view, this rearranging was without question an “indispensable element in the development of capitalism; the latter would not have been possible without the controlled insertion of bodies into the machinery of production and the adjustment of the phenomena of population to economic processes” (HS 140-141).⁷⁷

Modern mechanics of power defined how one could have a hold over other people’s bodies so that they might operate as one wishes, not only do as one wishes, with the techniques and speed of working, and the efficiency, that one determines. Examples of this docility are most easily found among workers. The birth of the capitalist society and of industry forced many factory workers to work as long as 15 hours a day, regardless of whether they were men or women, adult or children. Thus the disciplines that modern society directed to the bodies produced subjected and practiced beings (“factory workers” or, alternatively, “bourgeois people” with their bourgeois bodily manners, for example), which Foucault terms docile bodies (DP 138).

The modern discipline directed at bodies has also given way to new ideas of the sexual and medical body. According to Foucault, this can be seen, for example, in the hysterization of women’s bodies, the pedagogization of children’s sex, and the socialization of procreative behavior. All part of a new deployment of the body, they give evidence of the fact that sexuality and the body, in the modern era, are to be understood – not as some kind of natural givens which power tries to hold in check – but far more as historical constructs. It is a question of production and the tactics practiced on bodies and sexuality, not one of their biological nature or inner essences. This notion lead Foucault to focus his attention not so much on models based on laws, but rather on the strategic models, that are to be analysed as forms of power relations that constitute a certain order of political bio-power. (HS 102-105.)

Bio-power

Foucault also describes modern forms of control of the body in terms of ‘bio-politics’ and ‘bio-power.’ He uses these terms to refer to certain positive knowledge that has been used to count and classify people in the modern era by compiling statistical data on births, deaths, sickness, suicide rates, fertility, and so on (Hacking 1999, 34). According to Foucault, this kind of power over life has been evolving since the 17th century, and it could also be seen as an indispensable element in the development of capitalism – which would not have been possible if the controlled insertion of bodies into the machinery of production had not been effected, and if the adjustment of the population to economic processes had not happened. Bio-power also served the needs of social hierarchization, as Foucault noted in the following:

If the development of the great instruments of the state, as *institutions* of power, ensured the maintenance of production relations, the rudiments of anatomo- and bio-politics, created in the eighteenth-century as *techniques* of power present at every level of the social body and utilized by very diverse institutions (the family, the army, schools and the police, individual medicine and the administration of collective bodies), operated in the sphere of economic processes, their development, and the forces sustaining them. They also acted as factors of social hierarchization, exerting their influence on the respective forces of both these movements, guaranteeing relations of domination and effects of hegemony. (HS 141.)⁷⁸

What Foucault means by this is that the adjustment of the accumulation of people to that of capital, as well as the joining of the growth of human groups to the expansion of productive forces and profit, were made possible in part by the exercise of bio-power in its many forms (ibid.). Moreover, it was only through this kind of bio-power that Western people gradually learned what it meant to

have a body, conditions of existence, individual and collective welfare and so on, in other words, forces that could be modified and a space in which they could be handled in an optimal manner (UP 142). What followed, was that:

[F]or the first time in history [...] biological existence was reflected in political existence; the fact of living was no longer an inaccessible substrate that only emerged from time to time, amid the randomness of death and its fatality; part of it passed into knowledge's field of control and power's sphere of intervention. Power would no longer be dealing simply with legal subjects over whom the ultimate dominion was death, but with living beings, and the mastery it would be able to exercise over them would have to be applied at the level of life itself. (HS 142-143.)⁷⁹

What is at stake here is also a question of tactics of battle in which the biological existence of the population is taken as the defining strategy of states. In other words, power has been situated and exercised on the levels of life, the species, the race, the sex, and the large-scale phenomena of population. Foucault's analysis of bio-power is not restricted to the history, however, for it is diagnosed as a modern form of knowledge-power specific to our present time as well: he seems to believe that when one understands how bio-power works, one has a sense of intelligibility for understanding what sort of people we are today. This is not to say that bio-power is the only thing going on in our lives. Foucault rather makes the interpretive claim that if things are considered in this way, a lot seems to fall into place. As Hubert L. Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow suggest, bio-power could be defined as the way our current practices work to bring about an order in which Western people are healthy, secure, and productive (Dreyfus and Rabinow 1999, 116).

Foucault's way of painting a picture of a totally normalized society is meant to make it problematic. The implicit hope within his analysis seems to lie in the supposition that we have not been completely normalized yet. This would not be possible in the Foucauldian view either, since he denies the possibility of a theoretical standpoint from which this kind of claim could be asserted. Thus the optimism, or, perhaps better, the "hyper-militant pessimism,"⁸⁰ inherent in his

thinking lies in his belief that resistance to social developments can only come about from within the society, and from the areas that have not been fully normalized. (Hoy 1999 13-14; Gutting 1995, 10.)

For Foucault, the paradox of the modern constitution of the subject is that, although modern power produces and protects individuals and their rights, it also suppresses the individualization process by terming exceptions from the norm negatively and by punishing individuals for acting as individuals. For example, people whose sexual desires, outlook and activities do not fit the picture of normal sexuality are not appreciated in modern society for their individuality, but are rather criminalized or regarded as psychologically perverse.

In Foucault's view, it is crucial to be aware that modern definitions of perversity are also instrumental and connected to power, and that discursive definitions tend to *produce* stereotypes of sexuality rather than *repress* sexual desires. For "the implantation of perversions is an instrument-effect: it is through the isolation, intensification, and consolidation of peripheral sexualities that the relations of power to sex and pleasure branched and multiplied, measured the body, and penetrated modes of conduct. And accompanying this encroachment of powers, scattered sexualities rigidified, became stuck to an age, a place, a type of practice." (HS 48.)⁸¹ Moreover, as Foucault notes, from the nineteenth century onwards the discursive production of perversities has served countless economic interests, which "with the help of medicine, psychiatry, prostitution, and pornography, have tapped into both this analytical multiplication of pleasures and this optimisation of power that controls it" (HS 48).⁸²

The important point here for my own investigation is that in Foucault's genealogical analysis of the subject the body is seen as giving meaning within discourse only in the context of power relations. Sex and sexuality, so conceived, are no longer taken as mere biological or natural facts, but become *politicised*. In other words, they are presented not as an innate essence we are born with, but rather as manipulable cultural constructions and historically specific organizations of discourse, power, bodies and affectivity. (Butler 1990, 92.) At this point, it is

crucial to ask what Foucault means by power, which is such a central conception in his genealogical analysis of the subject, the body and sexuality.

Power

In contrast to views that consider power in terms of ideology, superstructure, repression, law, and rights, Foucault's thesis is that while we have not ceased to think of power in terms of these models (laws, prohibitions, duties), we actually live in relations of power, which are quite different and cannot thus be described properly in their terms. What is wielded through the modern technologies of control is something that is concerned, first of all, with normalization and bringing about a certain result, whether defined as health or good function, and all deviations from these are treated as cases to be brought back to what is considered to be normal. (Taylor 1999, 75.)

This feature of modern power goes along with two others. First, modern power is not concerned with prohibitions and instructions that directly restrict our behavior, as has been the case with the more traditional forms of power, but it must be seen as *productive*. Consequently, it also constitutes new kinds of subjects and new kinds of desires and behavior. It is, in other words, out *to form us as modern individuals*. Second, the usage of modern power cannot be reduced back only to the subject, and it cannot be satisfactorily depicted in terms of ideology or superstructures.⁸³

It is inherent in the old models that power presupposes a certain who, in other words, some identifiable party who is organizing the lives of other people (or, as a result, prevents us from doing certain things) (Hacking 1999, 34). Foucault denies this more traditional hierarchical model of power as opposition between rulers and the ruled. For him, "power is not an institution, and not a structure; neither is it a certain strength we are endowed with" (HS 93).⁸⁴ Rather, it is "the name that one attributes to a complex strategic situation in a particular society" (HS 93).⁸⁵ In the first part of the *History of Sexuality*, he presents a brief crystallization of his way

of using the term power, which explains some central features of his interpretations of sexuality and the self. There are five points in his account.

1) *Power is not something one holds on to or allows to slip away, because it is exercised from innumerable points, in the interplay of non-egalitarian and mobile relations.*

2) *Relations of power are immanent in other types of relations (economic, processes, knowledge, and sexuality), not in a position of exteriority with respect to them.* Relations of power are not manifested in super-structural positions (as prohibitions and accompaniment), but have a directly productive role, whatever they come to play.

3) *Power comes from below.* In other words, it is not binary and all-encompassing opposition between rulers and the ruled, or the oppressors and the oppressed. We must rather suppose that the manifold relations of force that come into play in the machinery of production, in limited groups, families and institutions, are the basis of the wide-ranging effects of cleavage running through the whole of society. These relations of force form a general line of force that traverses local oppositions and links them together. They also bring about redistributions, realignments, homogenizations, convergences and serial arrangements of force relations. Major dominations are, moreover, the hegemonic effects that are sustained by all of these confrontations.⁸⁶

4) *Power relations are both intentional and non-subjective.* If they are intelligible, this is not because they are the causal effect of some other instance that explains them, but rather because they are imbued with calculation, for power is always exercised with series of aims and objectives. This is not to say that it results from the decision or choice of an individual, however. Its rationality is characterized by tactics that are often quite explicit at the restricted level at which they are inscribed (local cynicism of power). These tactics become connected to one another, propagating and attracting one another, but finding their base of support and their condition elsewhere. They end up by forming comprehensive systems:

their logic is clear, the aims decipherable, and yet usually no one is there to have invented them, and only a few can be said to have formulated them.

5) *Where there is power, there is resistance.* This resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power. The existence of power relations cannot be thematized in terms of their being an inside power, however, nor can it be regarded as an essential feature of the ruse-like nature of history (if history is the ruse of reason, power is the ruse of history, always emerging as the winner). It is rather to be understood as depending on a multiplicity of various points of resistance, which are present everywhere in the power network. Hence there is no single locus of great Refusal, no soul of revolt, no source of all rebellion, and no pure law of the revolutionary. Instead, *there is a plurality of resistances, and each of them is a special case:* resistances that are possible, necessary, improbable, spontaneous, savage, solitary, concerted, rampant, violent. *By definition, they can only exist in the strategic field of power relations.* Resistances are spread over time and space at varying densities and in irregular fashion, sometimes mobilizing groups of individuals in a definitive way, inflaming certain moments in life, certain points of the body, and certain types of behavior. (HS 94-96.)

Thus, Foucault concludes, *power is everywhere*, not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere (HS 93). It is, in other words, in the moving substrate of force relations where states of power are engendered. This is also true of discourses, which are to be seen not simply as the surface or projection of power mechanisms, but as something in which power and knowledge are joined together. For this reason, discourse must be conceived of “as a series of discontinuous segments whose tactical function is neither uniform nor stable” (HS 100).⁸⁷ For discourses, just like silences, are not simply subservient to power or raised up against it. When we analyse them, “we must make allowance for the complex and unstable process whereby discourse can be both an instrument and an effect of power, but also a hindrance, a stumbling-block, a point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy” (HS 100-101).⁸⁸

In Foucault's genealogical scheme, discourse thus produces and transmits power by reinforcing it, but it also undermines and exposes power, and even makes it possible to thwart it. In other words, discourse functions as a mediator of power and at the same time offers possibilities to resist it. Forms of resistance are not universal, but strategic and empirical. They are responses to specific types of power, whose mechanisms they attempt to unveil. Resistance is to be seen not as functioning *outside* of power, however, but rather as a position *within* power, as a reaction to it, or as a production of new expressions of power that remain necessarily inside its networks.

As an example of the discourse that offers the means for its own undermining, Foucault refers to the discursive production of homosexuality, showing how the appearance of nineteenth-century psychiatry, jurisprudence and literature produced a whole set of discourses on the species and subspecies of homosexuality, perversions, inversion, and "psychic hermaphroditism." By so doing, it made possible the formation of a reverse discourse in which homosexuality began to speak on its own behalf, demanding that its legitimacy or naturalness be acknowledged, often in the very same vocabulary, using even the same categories by which it was medically dismissed. (HS 101.)

What Foucault argues is that there is not a discourse of power on one side, and opposite to it another discourse that runs counter to it. Discourses are rather to be seen as tactical elements or blocks that operate in the field of force relations. It should also be borne in mind that counter-discourses are also plural in nature. In other words, different and even contradictory discourses may exist *within the same strategy*, or they may circulate without changing their form from one strategy to another, opposing one. Thus, there is no point in expecting discourses on sex and sexuality to tell us what strategy they derive from, what kind of ideology (dominant or dominated) they represent, or what kind of moral divisions they accompany. As Foucault suggests, it is much more important to question discourses on the two levels of their tactical productivity (what reciprocal effects of power and knowledge they ensure) and their strategic integration (what force relation and what conjunction make their utilization necessary in a given episode of the various confrontations that occur). (HS 102.)

4. GENEALOGY AND FEMINISM

Despite the fact that Foucault himself mainly ignores the question of the equality of the sexes, or, better, makes only some rather superficial references to the issue, his genealogical suggestion that sexuality is not a natural or innate quality of the body, but rather the effect of historically specific power relations, embodied in the individual's process of subjection, has provided feminists with a fresh analytical framework through which to explain how women's subjectivity and existence are controlled and impoverished within certain culturally-determined stereotypes of female sexuality.

What is relevant to feminist theory is also Foucault's genealogical claim that power is always productive and not only oppressive, because it affects the constitution of our selves through various forms of knowledge, norms, ideals, stereotypes, laws, habits and discursive practices. Applied to the feminist terminology, this means that our being or becoming women (and men) is defined from birth to death by a complex network of limiting practices and discourses, which we cannot ignore even if we would like to.

Seen in this way, individual gender identity is not grounded on any natural or innate self, but becomes constantly produced in and through different strategic cultural models and discursive practices that vary historically. For Foucault, these practices and strategies represent power relations, which are intimately connected to political power. At the same time, however, it is exactly these models and practices that may be used to disturb the existing limits and norms imposed on individuals, assuming that they are used creatively and in unexpected ways.

With these notions in mind, I will explore in the following sections the usefulness of Foucault's genealogical tools for feminism. As I will illustrate, Foucault's work has inspired a large number of feminists to rethink their conceptions of the subject, as well as their views of power, resistance, and the body. Yet, at the same time, feminist debate has brought to the light some problems in Foucault's thinking. In discussing this, I intend to show how Foucault offers a set of adequate tools for re-constructing feminist views on the subject and the self, on the one

hand, and how, on the other hand, his work requires critique and reformulation when brought together with feminist insights.

The Advantages of Foucault's Genealogical Method for Feminism

As I will demonstrate in this section, many contemporary post-feminist theorists are motivated by the same four tasks that Foucault set for his genealogical method. For the first, a large number of feminists have been interested in offering perspectives on alternative identities. This has often led feminist thinkers to consider identity in terms of parody, masquerade or farce rather than as something authentic or essential.

As I will point out later, there is also a strong tendency in post-feminist theory to consider identity not as something fixed and stable that we are born with, but rather as cultural practice or process, which can be turned into a parody and counter-discourse. In this respect, both post-feminism and contemporary subversive art offer concrete examples of discourses that not only produce and use power by suggesting meanings to things, but also work as stumbling-blocks for hegemonic discourses and as a source of meaningful resistance.

In many cases, the central aim of feminist resistance is to offer alternative ways of idealizing women and to resist stereotypical heterosexual normality. According to Judith Butler, gender is a strategy for survival within compulsory systems (such as heterosexuality), a strategy that has clearly punitive consequences. For “discrete genders are part of what ‘humanizes’ individuals within contemporary culture; indeed we regularly punish those who fail to do their gender right.” (Butler 1990, 139-140.)

In this respect, Butler's idea of gender can also be read as one form of the controlling bio-power that Foucault talks about. In her book *Gender Trouble* (1990), Butler uses the expression “heterosexual matrix” to describe the strategies of power that attempt to naturalize bodies, desires and genders. For Butler, the heterosexual matrix is a hegemonic epistemic/discursive model of gender

intelligibility, which assumes that “for bodies to cohere and make sense there must be a stable sex expressed through a stable gender (masculine expresses male, feminine expresses female) that is oppositionally and hierarchically defined through the compulsory practice of heterosexuality.” (Butler 1990, 151, note 6.)⁸⁹

The heterosexual matrix is grounded on three main suppositions of the characteristics of normal woman and man, which could be depicted as follows:

WOMAN	MAN
Women’s body	Man’s body
Desire for men	Desire for women
Women’s social role	Men’s social role

By defining the normal individual through this sort of normative model, the heterosexual matrix functions as one form of productive and organizing power: it aims to produce two genders, heterosexual men and heterosexual women. In other words, the discourse that supports the heterosexualizing power produces a specific body culture and a sexual culture, and represents this culture as a norm, defining at once the limits of normality. When confronted with marginal or alternative sexualities and identities, the heterosexual matrix does not allow them to be represented as culturally-accepted sites of identity, although it might allow them to exist. Instead, alternative identities and ways of living are criminalized, medicalized and ignored, or at least turned into objects of jokes. (Balsamo 1999, 55.)

Feminist productions of counter-discourses to the normative heterosexualizing power bring an element of disorder to discussions on sexuality and identity. An individual aesthetic deed can function as such a source of disturbing discourse. In this context, as I will show, individual identity is not to be taken as a mere site of alternative aesthetic deeds. The construction of identity is, in fact, also a political category in that it might function as a site of cultural otherness. This is so, I

suggest, because alternative aesthetic appearances have the power to show by their very existence that the hegemonic practices of sexuality and identity represent, not the truth, but merely one possible order, which can be also changed or even replaced by other orders (as history also shows).

With similar ideas in mind, Kaja Silverman suggests that we need alternative visual texts (that she also terms “textual interventions”), which activate in us the capacity “to idealize bodies which diverge as widely as possible both from ourselves and from the cultural norm” (Silverman 1996, 37). In her view, this is important because without this sort of counter-action we easily end up idealizing women in a way that “not only restricts ideality to certain subjects, while rendering others unworthy of love, but also naturalizes the former as essentially ideal.” Thus, we should learn how to idealize women in oppositional and provisional ways that create more space for their aesthetics of the self and alternative styles of living. At the same time, we should make sure that these new representations do not turn into ones that “work to naturalize the end result of that psychic activity in a way that might be ultimately productive of simply new, reified ideas.” (Ibid.)

Secondly, the systematic dissociation of identity, or alternatively, its pluralization, which is the second task of Foucault’s genealogy, is important for all feminists who aim to replace the older (essentialist, universalist) notions of woman by a plural term ‘women,’ and who attempt to show that this category does not represent a synthesis between different women, but rather includes dissipation and discontinuity. As Judith Butler says, “if one ‘is’ a woman, that is surely not all one is: the term fails to be exhaustive, not because a pre-gendered ‘person’ transcends the specific paraphernalia of its gender, but because gender is not always constituted coherently or consistently in different historical contexts, and because gender intersects with racial, class, ethnic, and regional modalities of discursively constituted identities. As a result, it becomes impossible to separate out gender from the political and cultural intersections in which it is invariably produced and maintained.” (Butler 1990, 3.)

As Silverman, in turn, suggests, a middle-class white woman, for instance, is culturally encouraged to see herself and to represent herself as the bodily ideal in relation to which both black women and homeless men are largely perceived as insufficient or inferior (Silverman 1996, 36). There are also women who identify themselves with the cultural images of masculinity, in other words, women who seek to embody the man who represents their individual ideal. The problem with which post-feminists are concerned is that in cases such as this, the imaginary accession to masculinity is often described as a travesty or perversion of the “real thing,” and so fails to lead to the desired identification with her ideality. (Ibid.; Halberstam 1999, 127.)

By creating textual interventions in the hegemonic images of masculinity/femininity, feminists such as Judith Butler, Jana Sawicki, Kaja Silverman, bell hooks, Judith Halberstam, Teresa de Lauretis and various others seek to create more space for alternative styles of living and alternative aesthetics of the self, while paying specific attention to the differences among women. Using Foucault in this respect means acknowledging the multiplicity of difference among women, and claiming the end of woman as a universal category (Ramazanoglu 1993, 9; de Lauretis 1997, 34-35; Sawicki 1991). Moreover, it also means asking what kind of category woman constitutes: whether she represents a culturally produced gender or a natural/biological sex, and what the precise nature of the distinction between these two aspects of her existence is (Elam 1994, 42).

As part of this critique, many contemporary post-feminist theorists have argued that we should give up the idea of a stable notion of gender as a foundational premise of feminist politics, because the construction of the categories of women and men as coherent and stable subjects seems to lead to the regulation and reification of gender relations. Moreover, the stability of the gender categories can be shown to achieve coherence only in the context of the heterosexual matrix, which many feminists attempt to overcome, for good reasons. (Butler 1990, 5.) Instead of speaking of specific feminine sexuality – a discourse through which thinkers such as Irigaray and Cixous try to effect changes in power relations – post-feminists offer a plurality of pleasures that often transgress the supposition in the heterosexual matrix that female desire is grounded on the biological woman’s

desire for the opposite sex (man), and vice versa. In the words of Judith Halberstam:

[P]leasure might be sex with a woman who looks like a boy; pleasure might be a woman going in disguise as a man to a gay bar in order to pick up a gay man. Pleasure might be two naked women; pleasure might be masturbation watched by a stranger; pleasure might be a man and a woman; but pleasure seems to be precise [...] Wanting a man with a vagina or wanting to be a woman transformed into a man having sex with other men are fairly precise and readable desires – precise and yet not at all represented by the categories for sexual identity we have settled for. (Halberstam 1999, 127.)

Third, Foucault's insistence that genealogical study should have the examination of the body as its starting point, even replacing the notion of the self-thematizing subject, has attracted the interest of some post-feminists. As the second point above implies, post-feminists do not take the stable notion of gender as a foundational premise of feminist politics. Therefore, in the bodily context, they do not assume that there is some universally valid experience of the female body and sexuality on which feminist politics and aesthetics could be based. For them the body is rather the site of permanent struggle, a site in which various power blocks impose their effects, and on which the most serious wars over signification are enacted.

In short, the body is taken by post-feminists not as something essential in itself (the female body, the male body, the heterosexual body) but rather as a locus of dissociated self and volume in perpetual discontinuity. The focus is thus paid on the *openness of bodily identity*, not on its fixed character, on singularities, not on universals. Thus the task is to fragment and disperse female and male bodies (on the levels of experience and representation) rather than to present them as coherent or essential. With these ideas in mind, Butler shows how this sort of notion of the body easily leads to consideration of the question of the aesthetics of the self, or as she terms it, "styles of the flesh." She writes:

If the body is not a 'being' but a variable boundary, a surface whose permeability is politically regulated, a signifying practice within a cultural field of gender hierarchy and compulsory heterosexuality, then what language is left for understanding this corporeal enactment, gender, that constitutes its 'interior' signification on its surface? Sartre would perhaps have called this act 'a style of being', Foucault 'a stylistics of existence' [...] I suggest that gendered bodies are so many 'styles of the flesh'. These styles are never fully self-styled, for styles have a history, and those histories condition and limit the possibilities. Consider gender, for instance, as a *corporeal style*, an 'act', as it were, which is both intentional and performative, where 'performative' suggests a dramatic and contingent construction of meaning. (Ibid. 139.)

Finally, with respect to the fourth aspect of Foucault's genealogical method, intellectuals termed post-feminists in this work are also willing to get rid of the traditional idea of the neutral, universal or disinterested subject of knowledge. What interests them is the possibility of replacing the idea of the neutral knowing subject with the more politically-aware notion of the subject who is produced in a complex network of history and power, and who also necessarily *uses* power.

Seen in this light, women are not taken as mere victims of a patriarchal society, but are interpreted as using power themselves too, not least in their relation to their selves and to other women. In other words, the "experimentation on ourselves" that Foucault demands every genealogist to practice parallels the post-feminist idea that women may take the role of active subjects in the formation of their selves and styles of living. Neither Foucault nor post-feminists consider these positions neutral however, and both acknowledge that they express very different sorts of interests, needs and problems within the disintegrated and historically changing category of women.

Within this framework, feminist ideas of emancipation and resistance also become understood in new ways that are no longer grounded on the idea of universal emancipation or universal liberty and equality (like the utopian *state* of affairs). In the post-feminist scheme, resistance is explained as something that is not only

heterogeneous and plural, but also constantly changing in the moving substrate of force relations and discourses. This means that there is not one unified discourse or counter-strategy called feminism, but rather different and sometimes even contradictory counter-discourses that might function within the same critical feminist strategy.

Reconsidering Women's Power: Beyond the Oppressor/Oppressed

As I will illustrate in this section, Foucault's genealogical scheme also implies that feminist analysis of power should not be based on the traditional model according to which men are simply oppressors and women are mere victims of patriarchal power. For if it is true that power comes from everywhere, and if resistance is always found where there is power, *women also produce and use power*, despite the fact that they are in many ways also oppressed by the political structures, habits and value beliefs of the patriarchy. This notion has led many feminists to elaborate the old distinction between oppressors and oppressed, and to reconsider women's relation to power.

Seen in a larger perspective, the question of power is as central to feminist theory as the question of the subject, because all feminism demands some tracing of the connections between the persistence of male power and women's experiences of sexual subordination. These connections have an effect not only on feminist political strategies, but also on how women's possibilities for empowerment and active agency are understood (Ramazanoglu 1993, 17).

There is no space here to go into detail about the historical debates on power and women's oppression (on this issue, see Bordo 1994; Bartky 1988; McNay 1992, notably pp. 36-37; and hooks 1984). Rather, maintaining the topic of the constitution of the subject and the body, I will emphasize only the traits that have a bearing on the uses of Foucault's insight for the contemporary generation of feminist theories. For it is exactly on this point that Foucault's views show their attraction in the contemporary analysis of female subordination and male

domination – much of which, as Susan Bordo correctly notes, is reproduced voluntarily through self-normalization to the stereotypical everyday habits of femininity and masculinity (Bordo 1994, 233).

This is surely not to claim that all gender subordination could be explained in terms of voluntary choices: women are also subordinated both emotionally and physically, and financially trapped in degrading jobs and violent relationships (ibid.). Foucault's usefulness for feminism has been rather more apparent in his analysis of productive power and the politics of appearance. Allow me to point out here, following Susan Bordo's analysis, three crucial points in Foucault's analysis of power that have inspired contemporary feminists' views on women's constitution of their selves in this respect.

First, within the Foucauldian/contemporary feminist framework, it does not make much sense to regard men merely as the enemy or the oppressor, because power is not simply *possessed* by men. In other words, power is not something that people have, but it is rather a non-centralized struggle of forces, which constitutes a dynamic network into which power comes from everywhere, including from below.

Therefore, the prevailing forms of selfhood and subjectivity that sustain dominance and inequality are not constructed and enforced by design, control and punishment from above (as sovereign power is exercised), but rather effected through multiple processes that have no unique origin or location. Seen through Foucauldian eyes, the subordination and regulation of women does not proceed only through physical restraint and coercion, despite the fact that social relations contain such elements. Rather, *women could also be seen as participating in reproducing sexist culture through individual self-surveillance and self-correction to norms and stereotypes* (Bordo 1994, 233 and Bordo 1993, 28). I will analyse this phenomenon more concretely a little later in terms of women's docility.

My second point is connected to Foucault's idea that power forces are not based on chance, nor are they random, but configure instead to assume certain particular historical forms, within which certain groups *do* have dominance over others. In other words, although power is not *held* by any *one*, it does not mean that it is

equally held by *all*. Power produces different kinds of strategies, the general design or institutional crystallization of which is embodied in the state apparatus, in the formulation of the law, in the various social hegemonies, manners of representation and interpreting, for example.

Patriarchy is one example of such a strategy, or hegemony. In my view, awareness of this fact is as crucial for feminist studies on power as awareness of the particularity of each local struggle inside the patriarchal society, for to ignore it would mean ignoring the idea that there are also some forms of major domination (as Foucault pointed out in his analysis of power) despite the fact that power is not held by any *one*. (Bordo 1994, 232.)

Third, and finally, if power also includes its own resistance, or rather, multiple points of resistance – which mobilize groups of individuals in a definitive way, inflaming certain moments in life, certain points of the body, and certain types of behavior, as Foucault suggests (HS 96) – women should be seen as being capable of resisting and undermining power strategies that effect their daily lives and self-understanding. From this perspective (that Bordo terms postmodern), both the earlier feminist emphasis on women's social conditioning and the later move to normalization seem to ignore the unstable nature of subjectivity and, along with it, the creative potential of individuals. (Bordo 1994, 233-243.)

Put in another way, when it comes to the everyday politics of the self and bodily (aesthetic) appearance, contemporary post-feminism has focused more on actively resisting and disturbing the normative and normalizing practices of our culture than on describing women as passive, powerless victims of patriarchy. As I intend to point out, in coming to terms with the contemporary feminist aesthetics of the self, opportunities for resistance are often sought from the oppressive and stereotypical discourses *themselves*, not from outside the oppressive logic of the patriarchal society. In other words, contemporary critique tends to turn strategic power discourses against themselves by repeating and imitating them in ways that undermine, disturb and thwart their chain of meanings in the way that Foucault suggests resisting discourses operate. Just as for the genealogical Foucault, for genealogically-oriented post-feminists the central site of this resistance is the

body, which is not just an object of docility but can also be used as means of undermining its stereotypical or oppressive representations.

Genealogy of the Sexualized Body

In this section, I will show more precisely how Foucault's genealogical notion of the body as the locus in which power relations are manifest in a very concrete form has made a contribution to feminist thinking on the body. As I will suggest, what is of special significance is his insistence on the body as a historical and culturally-specific entity. Moreover, his way of demystifying the body from all sorts of original or natural essences, as well as his stressing of historicism and perspectivism, has offered feminists a theoretical framework in which the body can be analysed as a concrete phenomenon without eliding its materiality with a fixed biological or pre-discursive essence (McNay 1992, 17).

Feminists have long been preoccupied with the question of how to conceptualise the sexualised body without positing an original sexual difference that would precede our becoming male or female. Lois McNay explains the importance of this task in the following terms:

On a fundamental level, a notion of the body is central to the feminist analysis of the oppression of women because it is upon the biological difference between the male and female bodies that the edifice of gender equality is built and legitimised. The idea that women are inferior to men is naturalized and, thus, legitimised by reference to biology. This is achieved through a twofold movement in which, firstly, women's bodies are marked as inferior by being compared with men's bodies, according to male standards (*homme manqué*) and, secondly, biological functions are conflated with social characteristics. In many respects, masculine characteristics can be seen to be related to dominant perceptions of the male body, i.e. firmness, aggression, strength. However, man, unlike woman, is understood as being able to transcend being defined in terms of his biological capacities

via the use of his rational faculties. In contrast, women, as de Beauvoir notes, are entirely defined in terms of their physical capacities. (McNay 1992, 17.)

The devaluing and derogation of the female body and sexuality through comparison with the male body, and the definition of the female through “original” biological categories, has led to different strategic systems of oppression: to the underestimation of women’s mental and bodily capacities, to the representation of women as mere objects of the heterosexual male’s desire, to the subjection of women in confinement to medical power, to the construction of female sexuality as deficiency or frigidity and, along with it, the denial of female sexuality as a locus of autonomous experience and *jouissance* (Kintz 1989, 64; McNay 1992, 18).

Some feminists, notably the radical feminists and the so called new French feminists, have reacted to the traditional underestimation of the female body and sexuality by emphasizing the importance of creating practices that attempt to disturb and subvert earlier ways of reducing it back to the male ideal model. This has often led to the stressing of the stability and centrality of sexual difference as a constitutive principle, and, along with it, to the constitution of what has been called female aesthetics.

It is via the female, or “woman-centred” aesthetics that some feminists have striven to inscribe a female idiom in critical discourse and to define feminist critical stylistics based on women’s gender-specific experience. In much the same spirit, in an article entitled “Toward a Feminist Aesthetic” (1978), Julia P. Stanley and Susan J. Wolfe put forward the compelling hypothesis of the need to create a coherent female style or aesthetics, because “the unique perceptions and interpretations of women require a literary style that reflects, captures, and embodies the quality of our thought.” This style, in their view, must be a “discursive conjunctive style instead of the complex, subordinating, linear style of classification and distinction” (Stanley and Wolfe 1978, 59, 67).

Sharing the same belief, Adrienne Rich proposed in 1975 that feminism needs the idea of a common female culture. As she notes, “Divided from each other through our dependencies on men – domestically, tribally, and in the world of patronage and institutions – our first need has been to recognize and reject these divisions, the second to begin exploring all that we share in common as women on this planet.” (Rich 1975, xvii.)

As I pointed out in my assessment of Irigaray and Cixous, French feminist writing of the same period produced the concepts of *écriture féminine* and *parler femme*, which followed rather similar lines of argumentation. These ideas and terms were meant to represent women’s style as a textual rupture and subversion in avant-garde literature, available to both women and men, but more intimately connected and even analogous to female sexual morphology (Showalter 1997, 63).

In much the same spirit, thinkers such as Annie Leclerc and Julia Kristeva have also attempted to create new ways of valuing the female body by recovering a positive image of women’s biological selves and specific sexual pleasure (*jouissance féminine*) through the analysis of their style of speaking and writing.⁹⁰ While the French critique of phallo(go)centrism takes very different paths in the work of Irigaray, Cixous, Leclerc and Kristeva, it all explores the possibility of a concentric feminine discourse. This discourse, as Elaine Showalter explains, is critical at its very root, for “whether clitoral, vulval, vaginal, or uterine; whether centered on semiotic pulsions, childbearing, or *jouissance*, the feminist theorization of female sexuality/textuality, and its funky audacity in violating patriarchal taboos by unveiling the Medusa, is an exhilarating challenge to phallic discourse” (Showalter 1997, 63).

Yet, at the same time, there are some serious problems in these feminist accounts. Most of their theoretical and political limitations stem from their fetishizing of sexual difference, feminine subjectivity and marginalization, which has lead many theorists to equate oppression with fixed meanings and to conclude that the feminist subversion of identity constitutes the most radical form of cultural activity. The appeal of such a theoretical position is easy to understand: by remaining within the themes of feminine marginality, artistic experimentation and

“original” sexual difference, it is relatively easy to retain the oppositional purity of feminism (or feminine), and to keep one’s “hands clean.” The ideological positioning of feminism or the feminist avant-garde is not so easily transcended, however. As Felski notes, the fetishizing of strategies of experimental writing represents just one more dead-end in its inability to offer any serious defence of or justification for women’s struggles for social, economic and political change. (Felski 1989, 223.)

What many post-feminist intellectuals propose instead is that, while feminist politics and theory must include the question of women’s pleasure, since the history of women’s oppression is so closely tied up with the regulation of female sexuality, feminism cannot be reduced to the mere play of desire and in particular not to the *jouissance* liberated by the experimental text. For the subversion of the unified master-subject and fixed meanings does not seem to imply in itself anything other than some sort of utopian anarchism, which could just as easily serve the interests of all sorts of political extremes as feminist political goals. (Ibid.)

The alternative interpretation, offered by post-feminist gender theorists, emphasizes that gender, just like ethnicity or class, is a fundamental or organic *social variable* in human existence, not something that is original, universal or natural. Therefore, within post-feminist theorization, the object of feminist criticism undergoes a remarkable transformation. Unlike the theories that emphasize women’s writing or specific female sexual pleasure (*jouissance feminine*), post-feminist problematizations explore ideological description and the social production of gender.

Against this background it seems justifiable to suggest that all those feminist analysts who have attempted to overcome the earlier limitations of feminist theory by paying attention to the genealogical issues Foucault talks about, represent an important shift in the historical development of feminism. Unlike the views that base ideas of the gendered self and body on the notion of original and essential sexual difference, recent post-feminist gender theories concentrate more on the discursive practices through which gendered identity and our bodily experiences

are produced and reproduced. Just as for Foucault, for the feminists who support these views, sexual identity and gender are not something original we are born with, but they are rather the most speculative elements in the deployment of sexuality organized by power (HS 155).⁹¹ Paying heed to this genealogical point of view means politicizing and challenging the essential claims of some earlier feminisms.

Gender as a Performance

As I will illustrate in this section, one of the most challenging formulations of these post-feminist claims is that of Judith Butler, whose *Gender Trouble* (1990) is one of the most cited books among contemporary feminists. Butler draws on Foucault's genealogical work to produce a new analysis of how we construct categories in order to understand sex, gender and desire. The point of departure of her research is the study of the historical present, and the task is, briefly, "to formulate within this constituted frame a critique of the categories of identity that contemporary juridical structures engender, naturalize, and immobilize" (Butler 1990, 5).

What this means is that her genealogical perspective still focuses on the question of gendered identity but not on the grounds of gender stability that would prove the foundational premise of feminist politics. Rather, what has come to replace older notions of sexual identity is a new sort of feminist politics and identity, "one that will take the variable construction of identity as both a methodological and normative prerequisite, if not a political goal." (Ibid.) So conceived, the task of the feminist genealogy of the category of women is to outline the political operations that produce and hide what qualifies as the juridical subject of feminism. According to Butler, feminist genealogical critique

refuses to search for the origins of gender, the inner truth of female desire, a genuine or authentic sexual identity that repression has kept from view; rather, genealogy investigates the political stakes in designating as an *origin*

and *cause* those identity categories that are in fact the effects of institutions, practices, discourses with multiple points of origin. The task of this inquiry is to center on – and decenter – such defining institutions: phallogocentrism and compulsory heterosexuality. (Butler 1990, viii-ix.)

One of Butler's principal aims in *Gender Trouble* is to explore how traditional binary logic has trapped critical understandings of sex and gender. In her view, even if the sexes appear to be binary in their constitution and morphology, there is no reason to assume that genders should also *remain* as two.

As Butler writes, the supposition of a binary gender system implicitly maintains the belief in the mimetic relation of gender to sex, whereby gender is seen as mirroring sex or as being otherwise restricted by it. Therefore, when the constructed status of gender is theorized as radically independent of sex (as in Butler's own post-feminist account), gender itself becomes "a free-floating artifice, with the consequence that *man* and *masculine* might just as easily signify a female body as a male one, and *woman* and *feminine* a male body as easily as a female one." (Butler 1990, 6.)

Butler's project, then, is to explain why there can be subversive separations between the terms 'sex' and 'gender.' If, as Butler suggests, gender is a cultural meaning that the sexed body assumes and practices, it cannot be simply derived from the natural body. It would appear to be more relevant to ask: "Does being female constitute a 'natural fact' or cultural performance, or is 'naturalness' constituted through discursively constrained performative acts that produce the body through and within the category of sex?" (Butler 1990, viii. See also McNay 1992, 21-22; Bordo 1993, 165.)

In Butler's view, gender is primarily a cultural performative that demands repetition (acts, habits, ways of talking, and looking, for example) rather than something coherent, original or innate. Identity needs coherence, but this coherence should be sought from the level of the "surface politics of the body," not from the ideas of original essences or selves. This is so, she argues, because

“acts, gestures, and desire produce the effect of an internal core or substance, but produce this on the surface of the body, through the play of signifying absences that suggest, but never reveal, the organizing principle of identity as a cause” (Butler 1990, 136). Moreover, such acts, enactments and gestures are always performative in a sense that “the essence or identity they otherwise purport to express are fabrications manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means. That the gendered body is performative suggests that it has no ontological status apart from the various acts which constitute its reality.” (Ibid.)

As various concrete examples of female masculinity or feminine manhood suggest, we need to think more subtly about the broad repertoire of gendered styles that women and men may adopt. Therefore, Butler urges us to reconsider how and why gender should be understood as a pluralizing concept that appreciates many different masculinities and femininities instead of universally valid womanhood or manhood. At the same time, she casts suspicion on the idea that sex is grounded on pre-discursive nature because, in her view, it is culture, after all, that has played a crucial part in explaining and naming sex. In other words, it is culture that has established sex as a marker, which creates some sort of natural distinction when in fact it is an arbitrary sign of difference. Sex, therefore, should be reconsidered as just as much a cultural construction as gender is presumed to be (Bristow 1997, 212).

Butler even goes so far as to claim that gender as a discursive element actually gives rise to a belief in inner or pre-discursive sex. What this means is that *sex is retrospectively a product of gender* so that, in a sense, gender can be shown to come *before* sex. This is not to say that gender is simply the “real thing” for contemporary feminists. Butler rather calls it drag or performance, a particular kind of imitation. So conceived, gender is understood as an ideal that is its own projection and does not exist anywhere else.

As a logical conclusion to this line of argumentation, Butler writes that genders can “be neither true nor false, but are only produced as the truth effects of a discourse of primary and stable identity” (Butler 1990, 136). To some degree, the

same seems to be true of anyone, for no-one living in the contemporary West can escape being shaped, re-shaped, named and categorized in the same grip of gender ideals. Hence Butler's claim: we are all nothing but drags.

Docile Female Bodies

As I have suggested above, post-feminist gender theory is in many respects a close relative of Foucault's genealogical analysis, which denies all coherent original, pre-discursive and natural structures of the subject, and attempts to find out ways in which the subject and the body are conceptualised and articulated within different cultural discourses and historically specific knowledge/power networks (Balsamo 1999, 3).

Another important aspect of Foucault's genealogy for these feminist analyses is his interpretation of modern selfhood and the body as being shaped by the subject's docility to the normalizing power. In a piece of writing entitled "The Eye of Power" (1977), Foucault notes: "There is no need for arms, physical violence, material constraints. Just a gaze. An inspecting gaze, a gaze which each individual under its weight will end by interiorising to the point that he is his own overseer, each individual thus exercising this surveillance over, and against, himself." (EP 155)

As I will illustrate in this section, this notion has been very useful, for example, in attempts to understand contemporary phenomena such as eating disorders, plastic surgery and body building, all of which seem to incorporate women's need to show their selves in culturally accepted and appreciated forms. The problem with this inspecting gaze for women is that, in a patriarchal culture, women learn to look at themselves through the heterosexual male perspective, as Laura Mulvey pointed out in her now classic analysis of the "male gaze" (Mulvey 1975).

Women's constructions of a discrete gender are, in other words, often not grounded on their individual desires, or experiences of their bodies and selves, but are rather based on their experiences of the heterosexual matrix and the male gaze.

Advertisements, movies, pornography, and existing beauty myths influence the desired appearances of woman in each culture, and on how women should behave to be desired or appreciated as feminine. In Mulvey's view, the point in the case in which women themselves find these representations desirable is some sort of cross-identification or transsexual identification, in which women adopt the male gaze.⁹²

Seen in a wider context, it seems that the importance of performing one's body image (and, along with it, gender) has grown in the contemporary West to such an extent that it directly influences the individual's self esteem, behavior and psyche. What this means is that the body image no longer refers to mere physical existence or to stereotypical gender roles, but also includes the mental picture a person has of her/his body, as well as the individual's thoughts, feelings, judgements, sensations, awareness and behavior. It is not merely a question of new ways of creating one's self, however. Rather, as Bordo correctly notes, there seems to have been a remarkable shift in what constitutes the aesthetics of the body: for the first time in history, fat rather than appetite or desire has become the declared enemy, and people have begun to measure their bodily achievements by numbers on a scale rather than by their mastery of excess and impulsive desires (Bordo 1994, 185).

In Bordo's view, most eating disorders arise out of and reproduce normative gender practices of our culture; practices that are meant to train the female body in obedience and docility to cultural demands, while at the same time being *experienced* and *explained* in terms of personal power and control (Bordo 1994; Bordo 1995; Bordo 1990b). The ideal of slenderness, for example, as well as the diet and exercise that have become inseparable from it, offer the illusion of meeting the contradictory demands of the contemporary ideology of femininity through the body.⁹³

The old interest in shaping the body through fasting, ascetics and visual appearance (clothes, make-up, jewelry, patches) is thus nowadays directed directly at the physical body, which has come to designate the whole characteristic of a person (Sykora 1993). The effects of this new body culture –

or, alternatively, the change in the aesthetic “regime” concerning the body – are not always liberating, however, and may be rather tragic: women’s dissatisfaction with their body image is so prevalent in our society that it is almost considered normal. To cite the words of Bordo: “Preoccupation with fat, diet, and slenderness [...] can function as one of the most powerful normalizing mechanisms of our century, insuring the production of self-monitoring and self-disciplining “docile bodies” sensitive to any departure from social norms and habituated to self-improvement and self-transformation in the service of these norms” (Bordo 1993, 186).

In most cases, normalizing bio-power also regulates the aesthetic ideals and standards of women’s bodybuilding through the stereotypical ideals of femininity and masculinity. As Anne Balsamo points out in her *Technologies of Gender* (1999), female bodybuilders are culturally reconstructed according to dominant codes of femininity and racial identity, despite the fact that the female athletes also violate traditional codes of feminine identity and bodily concepts (Balsamo 1999, 41).

The transgressive element in women’s bodybuilding can be linked to two phenomena. First, women who use bodybuilding technology to sculpt their bodies might be seen as culturally transgressive because they attempt at reconstruction against the “natural” identity of the female body. Second, when female athletes use technology to achieve more muscularity (a male body prerogative), they also transgress the “natural” order of gender identity. Thus, what we discover through an analysis of media images of female athletes is that “representations of their bodies often highlight their transgressive nature.” (Ibid. 43.)

Yet, as Balsamo points out, women have not simply gained more freedom through the practices of bodybuilding, weight training and power lifting. For through these technologies, many female bodies are technologically transformed into new kinds of material embodiments of cultural ideals of “natural” femininity and erotic beauty. (Ibid. 47.) Therefore, it seems justified to argue that female bodybuilding is not merely transgressive. It may also apply some rather traditional aesthetic

ideals of femininity to female bodies, and use them as criteria in their aesthetic valuation.

A good example of this is given in *The Hardcore Bodybuilder's Source Book*, in which judges are given the following instructions about judging female competitors:

First and foremost, the judges must bear in mind that he or she is judging a woman's bodybuilding competition and is looking for an ideal feminine physique. Therefore, the most important aspect is shape, a feminine shape. Other aspects are similar to those described for assessing men, but in regard to muscular development, it must not be carried to excess where it resembles the massive muscularity of the male physique. (Kennedy and Mason 1984, 181.)

What this citation clearly shows, in my view, is that, although female bodybuilders transgress aesthetic gender boundaries, they are not reconstructed or even redefined according to an "opposite" gender identity, nor do they necessarily create space for new ideals of femininity. They reveal, instead, how culture tends to place bodies in their place, that is, subjected to its "other," no matter whether they attempt to be transgressive or not. For white women, this other is typically the idealized strong male body; for black women it is the white female body. In Balsamo's words: "A closer study of the popular culture of female bodybuilding reveals the artificiality of attributes of "natural" gender identity and the malleability of cultural ideals of gender identity, yet it also announces quite loudly the persistence with which gender and race hierarchies structure technological practices, thereby limiting the disruptive possibilities of technological transgressions." (Balsamo 1999, 55.)

As these few practical examples suggest, there seems to be a vast network of discourses that produce and re-produce our conceptions and experiences of the aesthetics of the gendered body in Western cultures: discourses that encourage individuals to imagine the possibilities of the body and to close their eyes to their limits and consequences (Bordo 1994, 39). The homogenizing representations of

the female body are one crucial example of such discourses, be they manifest through advertising, pornography, art or philosophical aesthetics.⁹⁴ Stereotypical aesthetic images function as models against which individuals continually judge, measure, discipline and correct themselves. Their function is, in a nutshell, to normalize the body, to make it fulfil the norms and stereotypes addressed to it through cultural discourses. (Ibid. 25.)

Historically changing gender stereotypes and normalizing culture are thus manifest not only on the level of texts and beliefs, but primarily, as Foucault's genealogical analysis suggests, as the *practical* and *direct* controlling of the body.⁹⁵ Female bodies become docile bodies through the ever-changing, stereotypical, elusive ideal of femininity. In other words, women's living bodies are normalized into bodies whose forces and energies are habituated to external regulation, subjection, and "improvement." They are turned into bodies that might feel autonomous, transgressive and free while being regulated into normality, usefulness and docility (Bordo 1993, 166, 174).

Yet, on the subject of controlling the female body appearance through the maintenance of stereotypical feminine ideals, it would be too simplistic to regard the problem of women's subordination in this respect in terms of the traditional oppressor/oppressed model. Rather, as Bordo suggests, we must abandon the idea that power is something possessed by one group and levelled against another, and think instead of "the network of practices, institutions, and technologies that sustain positions of dominance and subordination in a particular domain" (Bordo 1993, 167). What this means is that each case of domination has to be studied as a unique phenomenon, which needs specific forms of counter-action to be subverted and disturbed.

Seen in this way, it is useless to see men as the mere enemy of women. Rather, it seems to be apparent that *both* sexes suffer from the same sexism and heterosexism, despite the fact that men often have a higher stake in maintaining institutions within which they occupy dominant positions (in pornography, for example). The suffering of men from the (hetero)sexist culture comes not only from inequalities in their racial, class, and sexual situations, but also from the fact

that most men, just like women, find themselves implicated and embedded in sexist practices and institutions that they have not created as individuals, and that they also might feel tyrannized by. (Bordo 1994, 234.)

A point of relevance in Foucault's genealogical views on power to these feminist considerations is apparent in his attempt to criticize and reconstruct the (hetero)sexualizing power: his genealogical method shows that supposed truths of the body, the subject, sexual identity and sex are produced and reproduced in the material world in which power is brought to bear on all the forms they take. As I have shown, this idea not only illuminates individual docility, but also implicitly deconstructs the idea of monolithic patriarchy as a source of power, and suggests that women also partake actively in making their bodies conform to historically specific ideas of femininity. From this perspective, women's bodies are not mere victims or oppressed flesh of male domination and commodification, but become understood rather as variable sites of power/knowledge relations in which women themselves also actively take part. (Ramazanoglu 1993, 15.)

The notion of women's active role in power relations is crucial for the work at hand for two reasons. First, it suggests that, even in the case of docility, women are also acting as *doers*, not merely as those who are *done to*. This means that women are not mere victims, but also responsible for the creation of their subjectivities. Secondly, if women, like all subjects, partake actively in power relations, as Foucault's insights imply, they are also apparently granted the possibility to change these power relations through their actions.

This more positive aspect of Foucauldian power analysis will be linked with feminist insights in the third part of this study, which focuses on the issue of the aesthetics of the self. My argument will be that, although Foucault never thoroughly analyses the positive aspects of women's power – and although his theorizations also include some problems when seen through feminist lenses – his work nevertheless offers a good tool-kit for elaborating views on women as active agents who have the power to create their unique aesthetics of the self and to transgress some of the limits imposed on their gender.

Before going into this discussion, it is important to consider some evident shortcomings in Foucault's genealogical account. I will therefore continue with a feminist critique of his genealogical method and attempt to encapsulate both its limitations and value for feminist debate.

A Feminist Critique of Foucault's Genealogy

As I have pointed out, Foucault's genealogical work on the subject, the body and power has been useful for feminist theorizations of the same issues. Moreover, his theoretical apparatus has also highlighted some inadequacies in the feminist debate, and has been functional in reconstructing it. During the past ten years or so, however, some feminists have called the feminist alliance with Foucault into question, arguing that his analyses of subjectivity, power and resistance threaten to undermine the emancipatory project of feminism (Sawicki 1991, 96). In conclusion, therefore, I will illustrate both the limitations and value of Foucault's genealogical account by bringing it to bear on recent discussions of women's specific history and bodily existence, as well as on the debate on their potential for active self-determination and resistance.

One major line of feminist criticism that has been levelled at Foucault's work is that he ignores the gendered nature of modern disciplinary techniques for the body, and that this has resulted in certain gender blindness in his theory. With this in mind, some feminists have criticized him for failing to analyse *gender itself* as an institutionalized and organized system of differences, which constitute the individual body and render it meaningful. Anne Balsamo, for example, comments that "in a way that contradicts his analytical intentions to consider the system of differentiations that make the body meaningful, gender often functions for him as a natural given" (Balsamo 1999, 21).

In much the same spirit, Francis Bartkowski argues: "What Foucault has done is to reproduce and produce as history the patriarchal history of sexuality" (Bartkowski 1988, 47). Given these critical comments, Balsamo takes the work of

current feminists to be articulating what Foucault could not (or did not) articulate, namely, a history of sexuality from a site of resistance by addressing the construction of the feminine, femininity, and Woman to describe how gender is, to put it in Foucauldian terms, “a primary apparatus of scientific bio-power that constructs the body as an intelligible object” (Balsamo 1999, 22).

Another serious challenge to Foucault’s genealogy is that his treatment of the body is inadequate because he does not explain how men and women have related differently to the institutions of modern life (Bartky 1988; McNay, 32-38; O’Brien 1982). In other words, some feminist analysts argue that, as an object of bio-power and docility, the female body, for him, does not seem to possess any specificity apart from the male norm. Rather, both male and female bodies are regarded in his genealogy as passive objects of the same disciplinary power.

With this critique in mind, Sandra Lee Bartky puts a forceful case against Foucault’s analysis of docility, while at the same time recognizing the considerable achievements of his inquiries into the cultural exercise of power.

Foucault’s account [...] of the disciplinary practices that produce the ‘docile bodies’ of modernity is a genuine *tour de force*, incorporating a rich theoretical account of the ways in which instrumental reason takes hold of the body with a mass of historical detail. But Foucault treats the body throughout as if it were one, as if the bodily experiences of men and women did not differ, and as if men and women bore the same relationship to the characteristic institutions of modern life. Where is the account of the disciplinary practices that engender the docile bodies of women, bodies more docile than the bodies of men? Women, like men, are subject to many of the same disciplinary practices Foucault describes. But he is blind to those disciplines that produce a modality of embodiment that is particularly feminine. To overlook the forms of subjection that engender the feminine body is to perpetuate the silence and powerlessness of those upon whom the disciplines have been imposed. Hence, even though a liberatory note is sounded in Foucault’s critique of power, his analysis as a whole reproduces

that sexism which is endemic throughout Western political theory. (Bartky 1988, 63-4.)

Foucault's gender blindness has been shown to be evident in cases such as his analysis of the docility of the prisoner's body. In *Discipline and Punish*, for example, he does not pay any attention to questions such as how the treatment of female and male prisoners has differed in the history of the modern prison institution and how these differences have been related to the dominant constructions of masculinity and femininity.

Focusing on this issue, Patricia O'Brien points out that, in fact, there are remarkable differences between the treatment of male and female prisoners in the modern prison institution (the term 'modern' refers here to the historical period that began in the 17th and 18th centuries). While male criminals are typically perceived in terms of social deviance, female criminals are perceived in terms of inherently regressive, biologically limited female sexuality. The argument at its most extreme has been that "all menstruating, lactating, ovulating, pregnant, newly delivered, newly sexually initiated and menopausal women were prone to crime" (O'Brien 1982, 68). Therefore, most women could be seen as criminally deviant during any period of their adult life. As O'Brien testifies, female criminals have also been perceived as less receptive to rehabilitation than their male colleagues, whose problems have been defined as mainly "social" (ibid.; McNay 1992, 34).

Furthermore, Foucault's analysis of bio-power and docility has been criticized for denying the subject's potential for active self-determination and resistance. As various feminists have shown, in coming to terms with modern bio-power and the body, Foucault ignores his own idea that where there is power, there is also resistance, and explains modern bio-power instead as merely a normalizing force.⁹⁶ Lois McNay crystallizes the central problems of Foucault's account in this respect as follows:

Although, during the nineteenth century, there was undoubtedly an intensified feminization of the female body, the implication of Foucault's

monolithic conception of power and passive account of the body is that the experiences of women were completely circumscribed by this notion of a pathological and hysterical feminine sexuality. What Foucault's account of power does not explain is how, even within the intensified process of the hysterization of female bodies, women did not slip easily and passively into socially prescribed feminine roles. (McNay 1992, 41.)

What McNay wishes to point out here is that Foucault's genealogical way of describing individuals as docile bodies offers an inadequate account of many women's experiences and leads to the underestimation of the significance of the freedoms that women have gained in modern society. By positing bio-power as the fundamental constitutive principle of the social realm, law and knowledge, in McNay's view, he reduces all social institutions to the simple effects of an all-pervasive bio-power, and he could therefore be accused of overestimating the normalizing effects of disciplinary power in industrial societies (McNay 1992, 46; Rose 1984).

In the light of these accusations, McNay criticises Foucault for failing to recognize that new social phenomena such as women's right to vote, to have their own money, and to decide whether to marry, divorce and to have children or not, their possibilities to have legal abortions (in some countries), to engage in sexual relationships, to participate in feminist organizations and politics, and so on, are also products of modern bio-power. In other words, McNay stresses the fact that women have not simply adjusted to the roles addressed to them in modern society, as in her view, Foucault claims. They have also produced counterfactuals in an attempt to cancel or to resist the power imposed on their lives and their aesthetics of the self. With this in mind, she concludes that modern power has not only disciplined women's bodies in a negative sense, but has also given them significantly more freedom of control over their lives (McNay 1992, 45).

My own reaction to these criticisms is twofold. On the one hand, I agree with feminists who disapprove of Foucault for ignoring the question of practical gender differences in his "histories" and aesthetics – as I agree with many of the critical voices that suggest that the idea of women's potential to actively resist the effects

of normalizing power is never properly taken up by him. Furthermore, in questions of subjectivity, the body and transgressive aesthetics, which are among the main themes of this study, it is also somewhat problematic that all of the concrete examples Foucault gives of resistance derive from male agents, be they linked to art, madness or aesthetics of the self (the subject of his texts is also always *il*, he). What Foucault ignores, in other words, is that what is culturally transgressive for male agents is not necessarily transgressive at all for female agents, and vice versa, due to the fact that the cultural (as well as the bodily) positions and experiences of women and men differ, sometimes radically.

In this respect, Foucault's genealogical work seems to be in need of some further interpretation, which would show better awareness of gender inequalities and develop further his views on subjectivity, resistance, power and the body. Identifying this problem is not, of course, radical in itself: this sort of supplementary work on Foucault's writings has been undertaken since the late 80s by a vast number of feminist intellectuals, and it seems to get better all the time.

Yet, when trying to map my own position in the feminist debate on Foucault's genealogical work, I also wish to emphasize that, despite his gender blindness, it is also the genealogical Foucault who has provided many feminists with the tools for radical criticism, political struggle and change. Moreover, in the face of McNay's argument that Foucault's genealogical analysis of the body is limited to the mere emphasizing of docility, I wish to point out that his genealogical analysis is not *merely* an analysis of modern docility or an overestimation of the normalizing effects of disciplinary power in industrial societies, as McNay argues. It also includes an aspect of positive power, in other words, power to effect changes, although this view might be somewhat underdeveloped in his genealogical writings.

As I have suggested, this positive aspect of Foucault's genealogical power analysis is most forcefully put forward in his essay on "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History" (1971), in which he offers some challenging insights into the possibilities of turning subjectivity, identity and the body into a source of endless parody and carnival, suggesting that despite modern modes of docility, there is always a

possibility to engage in new ways of living and performing oneself, and thus to transgress the limits of this very docility.

Given its importance for all feminist debate, the presentation of Foucault's late elaboration of this positive aspect of power will be the starting point for the following part of this thesis, in which I attempt to grasp the shift in the centre of his thinking towards a view on the power he terms "the aesthetics of the self." As I will show, this relatively little-considered late phase of his work has important implications for actual feminist debate, notably on questions concerning women's aesthetic construction of their selves and on related issues of self-government, individual ethics and politics.

III
THE AESTHETICS OF THE SELF

5. FOUCAULT'S LATE AESTHETICS

As I suggested in the previous part of this work, Foucault's analysis of knowledge/power and the genealogical diagnosis of the development of what he calls bio-power challenges us to reconsider our views on the relation between the subject, the body, and individual freedom in the Western world. Despite the fact that he terms his inquiries histories, his work deals with our contemporary reality in many different ways.

In Foucault's view, the normalizing society (in which we all undoubtedly live) is the historical outcome of technologies of power that are centred on life. Hence, we should not let the idealistic formulations of various constitutions and codes (claims on freedom, fraternity and equality, for example) deceive us, nor should we believe that the laws – which operate more and more as norms that rule our lives – simply protect us, because it is exactly these juridical forms that have made an essentially normalizing bio-power acceptable. (UP 144.) Foucault's judgement of modern bio-power is, in a sense, negative: he believes that we have entered a phase of juridical regression in comparison with some earlier societies (notably those preceding the 17th-century) we know of.

In the context of contemporary reality, Foucault's scepticism seems to be well-founded. Despite the fact that one would think that women have gained more freedom of control over their lives and bodies, modern bio-power manifests itself in many cases in which women's juridical rights over their own bodies are still a painful subject of political struggle, be this struggle linked to abortion, prostitution, sexual abuse, violence or non-heterosexual motherhood. On another level, it seems that very many of us turn our selves into docile bodies, which manifest obedience to the normalizing power, even at the cost of getting seriously ill or dying. In modern Western cultures, individual docility often appears to be manifested through *aestheticized* practices of the self, in other words, through aesthetic practices of appearance that are meant to shape the individual's body to better meet stereotypical gender ideals, as I suggested in my discussion on docile female bodies.

New modes of female docility are apparently often linked to the illusion in the form of commodities and advertisements that provide people with aesthetic sign language through which to interpret their “unique” existence in the world. In many cases, this aspect also covers individual manifestations of sexuality: many people make use of the possibility to express their sexual urges, advertising themselves with the help of commodity aesthetics as individual sexual beings. It is, however, highly questionable, whether this sort of aesthetic creation of one’s subjectivity and body is anything other than an expression of cultural docility – or at least quite often this seems to be the case.

In this last part of my thesis I will show how, in his late writings, Foucault attempted to develop a critical alternative for this sort of “aestheticization” of the subject by looking more intensively at possible forms of active resistance that could strengthen individual autonomy and also effect changes in social conditions. What he offers, I suggest, is in some respects a more positive account of the subject, who might also transgress the limits of bio-power through the search for alternatives to modern self-subjugation (Bernauer 1990, 9).

In his late thinking, Foucault also seems to believe that philosophers like him are particularly useful to various excluded and oppressed groups that have not thus far been able to speak in their own voice, such as homosexuals, madmen and criminals. This is already true of Foucault’s earlier works, in which there was a certain cry, as Michel Serres pointed out as early as 1961 when reading Foucault’s *Folie et déraison*: a cry in favour of all those who were disgraced, quarantined, or oppressed and kept in a state of ostracism and excommunication. In studying the histories of these excluded and oppressed groups of people, Foucault was attempting to re-write history from the viewpoint of the Other (OT xxiv). At the same time, his concern for the disenfranchised – the poor, the mad, the sexually deviant, prisoners, factory workers, and children attending the rigorous schools of the nineteenth century – seemed to exhaust itself in allowing the voices of these groups to become heard. In other words, he invited his readers to react with revulsion to the living conditions of these people and their oppression, but had

nothing to say about eliminating or reducing their problems. (Nehamas 1998, 175.)

For this reason, various interpreters of Foucault's work have accused him of nihilism and negative theology, for example.⁹⁷ However, what these commentators have largely missed, in my view, is that his late turning to the problematic of the aesthetic practices of the self was meant to overcome exactly this weakness in his thinking, and to construct a view on the individual's possibilities to change things "for better."

Alternatively expressed, the aesthetic practices of the self represent a positive program that seeks opportunities to enforce alternative forms of identity and living, and points to the fact that multiple local possibilities for resistance already exist in our construction of our selves. So conceived, the subject is not seen as a mere passive body in the grip of disciplinary power. It is represented instead as a site of critical contestation and as being able to use power him/herself too, not least with respect to one's own self.

From the Docile Body to the Active Self

The move toward a more active notion of the self came in the second and third volumes of the *History of Sexuality* (*L'usage des plaisirs*, 1984 and *Le souci de soi*, 1984), and in Foucault's interviews and articles from the beginning of the 1980s.⁹⁸ In this last third of his writing period (he died in 1984), Foucault's focus shifts towards the forms and modalities of one's relation to oneself by which the individual is constituted and recognizes himself as the subject. He writes about this constitution of the self in terms of practices of the self (*pratiques de soi*) and the aesthetics of existence (*esthétique de l'existence*).

Foucault's focusing on these practices is not merely a question of aesthetic stylization or aestheticization of life. It is rather that, by studying the aesthetic practices of the self, he attempts to ground his theorization of the active self on the

ethical and political premises he believes could better serve individual freedom, and even society as a whole. As I intend to point out, he seeks support for this sort of theoretical construction from ancient Greco-Roman thinking on the one hand, and from the critical modernity of Immanuel Kant and Charles Baudelaire on the other.

Despite the fact that the focus slightly changes in Foucault's late work, I maintain that he is not giving up his earlier methodologies of archaeology and genealogy, as some other commentators have suggested.⁹⁹ As he declares, the problematic of aesthetic practices of the self is to be seen as situated at the point where archaeology of problematizations and a genealogy of practices of the self intersect (UP 11-12). In my opinion, Foucault's late theorization of the aesthetics of the self could also be seen as a continuation of his archaeological analysis of aesthetic limit-attitudes and transgression (Part I) – as well as it can be interpreted as a continuation of his genealogical analysis of the positive aspect of power, presented most powerfully in his essay on “Nietzsche, Genealogy, and History” (Part II).

Yet, the task Foucault now sets himself is slightly different: he attempts to show how, in classical antiquity, sexual pleasures and sexual activity were problematized through aesth/ethical practices of the self, bringing into play the criteria of an aesthetics of existence (UP 12). Although it is a question of one more history, Foucault's interest is not restricted to the past. Rather, his analysis opens up the question of the limitations of sex, sexuality and personal freedom in the present too, inviting those disadvantaged by it to develop strategies to effect changes in their existential condition. (Poster 1999, 210.) This critical inquiry, as I will point out, parallels in many respects the current feminist debate on gender, sexuality, self, the body and freedom.

With a shift in emphasis from the docile body to the active self, Foucault attempts to attribute a certain degree of independence and autonomy to the ways in which individuals act, especially in the ordering of their everyday existence (McNay 1992, 61). As I have stressed, this is not to say that the idea of the individual's

ability to resist is new in itself in Foucault's thought. On the contrary, it is much more reasonable to read his aesthetics of the self as an elaboration of the idea that he came up with in his genealogical analysis of discourses: "Discourses are not once and for all subservient to power or raised up against it, any more than silences are. We must make allowance for the complex and unstable process whereby discourse can be both an instrument and an effect of power, but also a hindrance, a stumbling block, a point of resistance and starting point for an opposing strategy." (HS 101.)¹⁰⁰ If this notion is considered in the context of aesthetic practices of the self in Foucault's late work, the emphasis is no longer on the terms 'docility,' 'discourse,' 'knowledge,' and 'power,' but shifts to the idea of active self-government and the aesthetic *practicing* of one's self, which might, just like discourse, transmit and produce power, but also undermine it and expose it.

Alternatively expressed, in his theorization of the aesthetics of the self, the subject is still seen as a product of certain practices of knowledge-power, as already suggested in his genealogical method, but the idea of governmentality has come to include new aspects. As I have demonstrated, in his earlier genealogical works Foucault related the idea of governmentality primarily to bio-power, arguing, that the modern state was made up of a network of institutions and practices, which employ manifold techniques of power to order individuals, processes of subjection and social relations. In his genealogical analysis of these techniques, he attempted to describe the processes by which the subject is disciplined and regulated, and subjected to processes of normalization and individualization.

Additionally, the subject was shown to be tied to its own identity through conscience or self-knowledge: searching endlessly its own truth, the subject binds itself still further to regimes of knowledge/power (Fraser 1997, 28). With these notions Foucault wanted to prove that normalizing state power was not grounded on the repression of desires, but rather on the strategies of bio-power that individuals *incorporated* as the essence of their selves, as the meaning of their souls, and as the law or truth of their consciousness and desires (homosexual self, hysteric self, mad self, for example). Seen from this perspective, governmentality

is not the imposition of laws, but rather the regulation of the population through various controlling and normalizing techniques, such as statistical data on births, deaths, suicides, madness, sexuality, normality and fertility. Like disciplinary power, this sort of governmentality targets each individual as a means with which to maintain social control, which gives it negative character (McNay 1992, 67-68; Butler 1990, 135; Sawicki 1991, 39).

What is new to some extent in Foucault's late writings is that it is also through techniques of self-government that individuals can come to resist the modern state's government of individualisation. In other words, following the lines of argumentation he had developed in his genealogical method, he still emphasizes the fact that each subject constitutes itself actively through the process of subjection (*assujettissement*), but now he comes to term this constitution practices of freedom (*pratiques de libération*), or aesthetic practices of the self (EE 733).

This is not to say, however, that Foucault turned toward some sort of simple individualism, or that he grounded his theory of the subject on the idea of a totally autonomous, sovereign subject who could be taken as the origin of all social action. Rather, in his late aesthetics, he explicates from a new perspective why the notion of subjectivity and individual autonomy should be used in such a way as to avoid all suggestions that individual freedom takes the form of the recovery of the natural, authentic self (Dews 1989, 38).¹⁰¹

Aesthetics, Ethics and Politics

As I will demonstrate, Foucault's turning to the issue of the aesthetic practices of the self also represents a new angle on the question of ethics. The primary locus of his late thinking on ethics is no longer embedded in avant-garde language or in the disappearance of the author into the textual void, however, but is far more focused on the power individuals exercise over themselves through their creating of individual aesthetics of existence.

Ethics, so conceived, is not exhausted by our relations to others, in other words, by norms and codes of moral behavior that govern the interaction between various individuals and groups. It rather has its roots, first of all, *in the ways in which individuals regulate themselves and relate to themselves*. Therefore, Foucault maintains, when coming to terms with ethics we should study the ways in which we practice self-government and at the same time constitute ourselves as the moral subjects of our actions and desires. Ethics, so conceived, is the care of the self.

This idea is not new, of course, as Foucault himself demonstrates as he guides his readers back to the practices of the self in Greco-Roman Antiquity. Yet, when coming to terms with his own era, Foucault does not regard his contemporaries to be very liberated and, on the level of freedom and personal existence, not even very advanced. Foucault justifies this viewpoint by showing that unlike Christianity, which presents life after death as the best part of the individual's existence, Greco-Roman Antiquity did not require one to wait until life after death. Rather, free men acted so as to give their lives certain values (bring the maximum possible brilliance to their lives, reproduce certain examples), and this acting was meant to turn their lives into "an object for a sort of knowledge, a *tekhnē*, that is, for an art" (GE 245).¹⁰²

In Foucault's view, there was a similar culture in the Renaissance era, which revitalized the ancient idea of the aesthetics of existence, although in a slightly academic form (GE 251). Moreover, in a piece called "What is Enlightenment," he connects the philosophical inheritance of the aesthetics of the self to Immanuel Kant's modern philosophy, and interprets his own late aesthetics as part of the critical tradition of Kantian Enlightenment. In the context of modernity, Foucault's admiration is directed not only to Kant's "high" rational ideals, however, but also to the "low modernity" of the French poet and aesthetician Charles Baudelaire. Like Kant, who claims that we must engage in a constant critique of the world around us and of ourselves if we are to reach a more mature stage of existence and individual autonomy, the Baudelairean aesthetics demands, in Foucault's view, that individuals start to reflect critically on their own era and

their individual selves (WE 38-39). As I will demonstrate, it is largely on the grounds of these modern ideas that Foucault creates his own critical theorizations of the “ontology of the present” and the “ontology of ourselves.”

In some of his late articles and interviews Foucault comes to apply his critical insights on the aesthetics of the self to the homosexual movement and homosexual identity. By emphasizing the idea that sexual minorities should not merely attempt to *defend* their rights in the battle for autonomy and equal rights, but should also actively create and *affirm* their unique aesthetics of their selves, he shows his regard for some contemporary subcultures as one possible site of a more enlightened/mature life and autonomous self-creation.

When I examine these more contemporary issues in the context of Foucault’s thought, I will suggest that he considers the issue of aesthetic practices of the self not only as a matter of the aesthetic re-creation of some groups of individuals, or the creation of new “advanced” subcultures. I rather propose that the critical attitude inherent in the Foucauldian aesthetic practices of the self, be they practices connected to homosexuality or to something else, involve the political task of changing the dominant culture as well.

I will therefore connect Foucault’s late views on aesthetics of the self not only to ethics, but also to critical politics. Furthermore, it is primarily through this link between aesthetics and politics that I will seek from his late work material for constructing a feminist view on his aesthetics of the self. As I will suggest, Foucault’s ideas on transgressive subjectivity, the body, and sexuality are extremely relevant to current feminist debate, because they offer useful tools for the critical analysis of the current problems of women, and even give some practical suggestions that might help in the re-creation of our ideas concerning female selves. (McWhorter 1999, 191.)

6. AESTHETIC PRACTICES OF THE SELF

In the two last parts of the *History of Sexuality* Foucault provides a concrete illustration of what he means by practices of the self by examining ancient Greek and Roman behavior. This shift in focus from modern attitudes to sexuality and the body in the first volume to the study of classical mores might seem surprising at first, but he explains both the theoretical and historical significance in the introduction to the second part of the history of the sexuality (*The Use of Pleasures* 1984).

Foucault's earlier intention had been to write a history that would show how the notion of sexuality had been established since the beginning of the nineteenth century in connection with other phenomena. These included the establishment of rules and norms, partly old, partly new, which found support in juridical, pedagogical, religious and medical institutions, and changes in the way individuals were led to assign value and meaning to their duties, their pleasures and conducts, their dreams, feelings and sensations. He noticed in his genealogical studies that he could not analyse the formation and development of the experience of sexuality without studying the genealogy of desire and the desiring subject at the same time. He therefore expressed his intention to analyse

[T]he practices by which individuals were led to focus their attention on themselves [...] as subjects of desire, bringing into play [...] a certain relationship that allows them to discover, in desire, the truth of their being, be it natural or fallen. In short, with this genealogy the idea was to investigate how individuals were led to practice, on themselves and on others, a hermeneutics of desire, a hermeneutics of which their sexual behavior was doubtless the occasion, but certainly not the exclusive domain. Thus, in order to understand how the modern individual could experience himself as a subject of 'sexuality,' it was essential first to determine how, for centuries, Western man had been brought to recognize himself as a subject of desire. (UP 5-6.)¹⁰³

The study of the subject of desire led Foucault to ask in the voice of a genealogist: “What were the games of truth by which human beings came to see themselves as desiring individuals?” (UP 7.)¹⁰⁴ A related question that started to interest him in the two last parts of *The History of Sexuality* concerned the question why sexual activities and pleasures were an object of *moral* solicitude: “Why this ethical concern – which, at certain times, in certain societies and groups, appears more important than the moral attention that is focused on other, likewise essential, areas of individual or collective life, such as alimentary behavior or the fulfilment of civic duties?” (UP 10.)¹⁰⁵

In raising these questions in the context of Greek and Greco-Roman culture Foucault notes that the problematization of sexuality and ethics was linked to a group of practices that might be called the “arts of existence,” or “techniques of the self.” What he means by these phrases, are those voluntary and intentional actions by which men not only set themselves rules of conduct, but also attempt to transform themselves, to change themselves in their singular being, and to make their life into an artistic *oeuvre* that carries certain aesthetic values and meets certain stylistic criteria. (UP 10-11.)

In Foucault’s reading of the ancient texts, the Greek master class developed a specific aesthetic way of living (*manière de vivre*), which he also describes in terms of the Greek *tekhnē tou biou* and the economics of pleasure (GE 235). One of the key findings of philosophers such as Socrates, Seneca and Pliny was, according to Foucault, centred around the question: Which *tekhnē* should I use in order to live as well as I ought to live? (GE 235.) He points out how, with the help of this question, the Greeks interpreted the age-old problem of *tekhnē tou biou* as a question of an aesth/ethical technique of the self (*tekhnē de soi*).

As the usage of the term *tekhnē* already implies, one’s aesthetic stylisation of the self was not a rest cure, but rather a long process of active exercising, practical tasks, and various activities. As Foucault demonstrates, there was the care of the body to consider, physical exercises without overexertion, health regimens, the carefully measured satisfaction of needs, meditations, the reading of and

conversations on books, and the recollection of “truths” that one might know already but that must be more fully adapted to one’s own life. (CS 51.)

Although similar ideas of the arts of existence or techniques of the self also feature in later phases of Western culture, in Foucault’s view they lost much of their importance when they were assimilated into the exercise of priestly power in early Christianity, and later into medical, educative, and psychological types of practices in modern societies. In order to clarify the difference between these two cultures, notably in their different attitudes to the ethical subject, Foucault differentiates two aspects of morality. The first refers to moralities that stress the importance of the code (its richness, its systematicity, and its capacity to adjust to every possible case and to embrace every area of behavior), and the second to those in which the strong and dynamic element can be found in the forms of subjection and the practices of the self. (UP 30.)

In the former case, as Foucault demonstrates, the important thing is “to focus on the instances of authority that enforce the code, that require it to be learned and observed, that penalize infractions” (UP 30).¹⁰⁶ In such cases, the subjection occurs mainly in a quasi-judicial form, where the ethical subject refers his conduct to a law, or set of laws, to which he must submit (UP 30).

When it comes instead to the second type, to the moralities that stress the importance of subjection, the system of rules and moral codes may be quite rudimentary, and their exact observance is often relatively unimportant – at least compared with what is demanded of the individual in his relationship to himself, in his actions, thoughts and feelings as he aims at forming himself as an ethical subject. Here, the emphasis is on the forms of relations with the self, on the techniques and methods by which the individual works them out, on the exercises by which he makes of himself an object to be known, and on the practices that enable him to transform his own mode of being (UP 30).¹⁰⁷

Foucault himself was much more keen on this second model of ethics. This is typified in his view of Greco-Roman culture, which does not aim to offer a basis

for a universally valid moral theory, but rather conceives of ethics as a *tekhnē*, or alternatively as “a *savoir-faire* that by taking general principles into account would guide action in its time, according to its context, and in view of its ends” (UP 62).¹⁰⁸

Although the necessity of respecting the law and the customs – the *nomoi* – was often underscored in Greek and Greco-Roman antiquity, more important than the laws was the *attitude* that caused people to respect them. The accent was thus placed on the relationship with the self, on the methods and techniques by which a man belonging to the master class worked them out, on the exercises by which he made himself an aesthetic object (or an example) to others, and on the practices that enabled him to transform his individual mode of being. (UP 31.) With this in mind, Foucault suggests that ethics is a way of existing, a style of existing, a way of relating oneself to oneself and others, and not a universalizing principle that guides everyone’s actions (UP 62; PE 587). It therefore demands constant creation and certain know-how, just as the making of an artwork does. He also talks about this work in terms of ‘care.’

Care

What runs through the whole cycle concerning Socrates’ death is the establishment, the foundation, in its specifically non-political nature, of a form of discourse which is primarily occupied with, which cares for, care – whose care is the care of the self.

Foucault, Lecture at the Collège de France

In his last lectures at the Collège de France (1984), which focused on Socrates and the Cynics, Foucault pointed out that in antiquity, reflection on liberty and practices of individual freedom were closely related to the notion of care.¹⁰⁹ In his view, this no longer holds true in our own time, because in the contemporary West, one’s (philosophically grounded) caring of oneself is often regarded as suspicious. By way of explanation, he took his listeners back to Socratic views on life and philosophy, stressing the idea that the cure is reached through the process

of taking care of oneself, and that this caring also constitutes the main task of philosophy. Despite the fact that this is the central theme of Plato's early works, and is given a radical expansion in the *Phaedo*, Foucault concentrates in his lectures on the *Apology* and the *Laches*, showing how Socrates' individual mission could be seen as creating a new understanding of the old conception of *parrhēsia* (literally "saying everything," but also "telling-the-truth"), and how this new understanding could function as a basis for philosophically understood aesthetics of the self.

What is important in the Socratean *parrhēsia*, in Foucault's view, is that, with its help, Socrates aimed to show to his fellow citizens that what was important was not reputation or money, but care of oneself. In other words, what is most important in life is not concern for the world, but concern for wisdom, truth, and one's own soul. Foucault interprets the Socratean aim of making people care for themselves as the use of one's reason in order to find out who one is and how one can best be. (Nehamas 1998, 165-166.) This caring is closely connected to philosophising, for as Foucault concludes in the Socratean spirit, "If I attend to you, it is not in order to transmit to you the knowledge you lack, but so that, having realized that you know nothing, you will learn thereby to care for yourselves" (cit. in Nehamas 1998, 166).¹¹⁰

In *The Use of Pleasure*, Foucault studies four aspects of ethics conceived of as care of the self. First, he focuses on the aspects of the self or the individual that are relevant to ethical reflection ("determination of the ethical substance"), aspects that constitute the individual as a moral or ethical entity. For example, one's sexuality or fidelity might be part of one's "ethical substance," while one's athletic ability or "surface beauty" may not (although the imperatives of working for "one's health" or "body" are nowadays almost considered ethical imperatives).

Second, Foucault gives attention to the ways in which people recognize their moral obligations to themselves. These modes of subjection (*mode d'assujettissement*) are grounded on the way in which one establishes an individual relation to the rule and recognizes oneself as obliged to put it into

practice (fidelity, for example). Third, he considers the aspects of morality that are connected to forms of elaboration, of ethical work (*travail éthique*) that one performs on oneself, not only in order to harmonize one's personal conduct with a given rule, but to try to transform oneself into the ethical subject of one's own behavior. For example, one's sexual behavior can be practiced and measured in relation to the rules one tries to apply (fidelity, austerity, respect for the other).

Fourth, and finally, Foucault considers the *telos* of the ethical subject, in other words, the idea that an action is not only moral in its singularity, it is also moral in its circumstantial integration and by virtue of the *place* it occupies in each pattern of conduct. This aspect of morality stresses one's attempts to become some sort of person through ethical behavior. (UP 26-28.) The *telos* of the ethical subject, as well as the ways in which moral actions contribute to it, are, of course, themselves historically variable.¹¹¹ In Foucault's view, this is also true of the aesthetic practices of the self that were used in Antiquity to train the above-mentioned ethical skills, be these practices linked to the regulation of sexual desires, behavior, ways of acting and relating to others, or something else.

Despite the fact that care for oneself is centred on the individual's life and on its aesthetic and ethical formation, both Socrates and Foucault argue that it also precedes, or perhaps even constitutes, care for the other. With this in mind, Foucault refers to Socrates' usefulness to his city, that is, to his importance to his fellow citizens and to his benefits to his friends, and points out that Socratic *parrhēsia* is good not only for the individual, or for those involved in communication and telling-the-truth to each other, but for the city as a whole. Mixing his voice again with that of Socrates, he says: "In urging you to care for yourselves, I am being useful to the whole city. And if I try to protect my life, it is precisely in the city's interest to protect true discourse, the courageous truth-telling which urges the citizens to care for themselves." (Nehamas 1998, 168. See also ECP 7)

So conceived, caring for oneself did not mean that one could do whatever felt good. On the contrary, aesthetic practices of the self were primarily practices of

asceticism and self-restraint, and they were typically manifested through what Foucault calls “the diet of pleasures.” The controlling of one’s sexual appetite, for example, was considered morally important by the Greeks because without such self-restraint, those who were masters of their own life (rich white males) could have just as easily turned into tyrants as into *bon souverains* (good governors). In this respect, controlling oneself meant controlling one’s relations with others, or trying to avoid misusing one’s power and, at the same time, avoiding becoming a slave to one’s own appetite (and thus not-free). (ECP 8.)

In my view, the normative thrust inherent in Foucault’s late insights is hidden in his belief that if one manages to stylize one’s way of living through practices such as “the diet of pleasures,” the respect of others will naturally follow. In Foucault’s words: “Care for the self is ethical in itself, but it implies complex relations with others, in the measure that this *ethos* of freedom is also a way of caring for others” (ECP 7)¹¹². And again: “*Ethos* implies also a relation with others to the extent that care for self renders one competent to occupy a place in the city, in the community or in interindividual relationships which are proper – whether it be to exercise a magistracy or to have friendly relationships” (ECP 7).¹¹³

According to Foucault, a tyrant is a person who does not choose himself, unlike a good sovereign does, because “the risk of dominating others and exercising over them a tyrannical power only comes from the fact that one did not care for one’s self and that one has become a slave to his desires” (ECP 8).¹¹⁴ In the history of philosophy, the creating of one’s aesthetics of the self has been an important task for all those who wish to become good governors. Foucault supports this idea by once more citing Socrates, who says provocatively to young men: “Hey, you, you want to become a political person, you want to govern the city, you therefore want to take care of others but you did not take care for yourself, and if you do not take care for yourself, you will be a bad leader” (ECP 13).¹¹⁵

It was with these classical thoughts in mind that Foucault attempted to show that contemporary philosophers could also take their work as a form of caring for

oneself and as an art of existing – given, that this caring is understood as a process of discovery, not of who she/he originally or essentially is, but far more of *inventing and improvising who one could possibly be*. Philosophising in this sense (as well as the philosophical subject/the self) is a form of critical inquiry and at the same time, a creation of art, which is in a constant state of becoming. Like all creativity, it is necessarily situated in history, because not everything is possible at all times. Nevertheless, just like all creativity, it also involves changing the knower him/herself. So conceived, philosophical writing becomes understood as one possible form given to creative life.¹¹⁶

As Foucault develops this line of argumentation, he comes to speak more and more often of his own work in relation to ways of living, creative ethical undertakings, practices of freedom, and life itself as a work of art. The idea that individual life and even philosophical thinking could also be considered critical artistic practices leads him to criticize the tradition of art and aesthetics that associates art primarily with specific art objects and specialists called ‘artists.’ Hence his cry:

What strikes me is that fact that in our society, art has become something which is related only to objects and not to individuals, or to life. That art is something which is specialized or which is done by experts who are artists. But couldn’t everyone’s life become a work of art? Why should the lamp or the house be an art object, but not our life? (GE 236.)¹¹⁷

In my view, this citation bears some interesting resemblances to Foucault’s earlier archaeological thought in which he draws on avant-garde aesthetics for its transgressive force. What has changed on the path from the analysis of avant-garde writing to aesthetic practices of the self, I suggest, is that he came to consider the aesthetics of the *self* as a form of this transgression. In other words, it is no longer writing, the context, or the importance of the empty space left by the disappearance of the author/subject that is at the core of his critical research, but rather the concrete limits of the self – limits that one’s personal aesthetics of existence is meant to examine and transgress. What is relevant in this

transgression is not any particular subject or identity, as Jon Simons suggests, but the *process of subjection as art* (Simons 1995, 76).

Yet, it should not go unnoticed that, despite its resonance of autonomy, there is also some irony in this self-fashioning. For Foucault is well aware of the fact that everyone's personal aesthetics of the self necessarily includes being moulded by various outside forces and attempting to fashion others. Thus, despite one's efforts to create an individual aesthetics of the self, one remains tied to control mechanisms and outside forces.

In Foucault's view, this should not make us passive, however, for to abandon self-creating is to abandon the craving for freedom, and to let go of the hold upon one's self, even if it is a self based on fiction, is to die. (Simons 1995, 76; Greenblatt 1980, 257.) There is thus a need for techniques of aesthetic self-empowerment, which Foucault also discusses in terms of practices of the *askeesis*, because they support individual freedom and might help individuals to become freer from domination by the other (ECP 2-3; UP 72-7). Because of their critical function, aesthetic practices of the self are not confined to aesthetics and ethics, but are also essentially part of one's personal politics and freedom.

Practical Politics of the Self

In his late thinking, Foucault considers the political force of philosophy mainly to lie in the philosopher's ability to deal with questions of domination, be these questions analysed on the level of knowledge, sexuality, the body, aesthetic appearance, economy, human relations or institutions. As he stresses, this critical function of philosophy derives, at least partly, from the Socratic imperative presented above: "Be concerned with yourself, i.e., ground yourself in liberty, through the mastery of self" (ECP 20).¹¹⁸ Politics, so conceived, is primarily understood as concrete praxis and aesthetic stylisation of the subject/the self, which Foucault also presents in his late work as the "praxis of freedom."¹¹⁹

Aesthetic practices of the self are, in Foucault's view, intrinsically connected to politics already due to the fact that they seek individual freedom. This is also true of attempts to philosophise practices of the self, for freedom, as he suggests, is in itself political (ECP 6).¹²⁰ Moreover, the question of freedom is political "in the measure where being free means not being a slave to one's self and to one's appetites, which supposes that one establishes over one's self a certain relation of domination, of mastery, which was called *arche* – power, authority" (ECP 6).¹²¹

In the light of the above, it seems justified to propose that Foucault's ideas concerning freedom are not merely descriptive, but also incorporate a significant political aspect. I suggest that we read the Foucauldian practices of the self as political on two levels.

The first is the individual level, on which he sees freeing oneself of the domination of others as a political task. In this respect, Foucault's practices of the self are also part of one's personal politics (or micro-level politics), because they are expressions of the power one has over oneself as a socially-positioned being. So conceived, aesthetic practices of the self are meant to transform individuals into politically active subjects who do not resign themselves to normalizing and controlling powers, but try to effect changes through critical practices of the self. These practices need not be unique, and in fact, they rarely are. In most cases, they are instead schemes that already exist in some form in one's culture, or that are suggested to the subject by her/his culture, society, or social group. Without the subject's decision to choose, nothing happens however, because people decide for themselves whether or not to care for themselves, as Foucault denotes (ECP 11). (I'll return to this Kantian idea a little later.)

Secondly, Foucault's analysis of practices of the self in terms of freedom are explicitly connected to the aim of producing critical effects on social reality at large in that direction (Oksala 2002, 246). When applied to Foucault himself, who came to see his own writing as part of the philosophy understood as the critical art of living, this implies that he believed that philosophers like him were directly useful to the public and society because of their attempts to create new

alternatives for living. To become a critical philosopher in the Foucauldian sense is to become original and unified in the Nietzschean sense of the term (“we want to be the poets of our lives,” [“wir wollen die Dichter unseren Lebens sein”], Nietzsche 1988b, no. 299). In other words, it is to require individuals to produce nothing less than a new model for living, a new art of living, extending our understanding of what a subject can be, in much the same spirit as artists might enlarge our sense of what art can accomplish (Nehamas 1998, 179).

What then, we should ask, does Foucault mean by the expression ‘freedom’ in his late work? Why does he call the self and the subject free, if it is always constituted in and through some limited historical situation? And why, even more oddly, does he term the subject autonomous if it has no independent life apart from its social reality?

Freedom

In response to the questions raised above, I propose the division of Foucault’s usage of the term ‘freedom’ in his late work into three different strands. Firstly, as I have already demonstrated, it has a strong political emphasis. Secondly, I propose that it can be linked to his ontological insights into the subject – which seem to be, interestingly, closely related to Jean-Paul Sartre’s thinking. Finally, I will suggest that Foucault’s notion of freedom is connected to the Enlightenment thought from which he derives, at least partly, his late interest in the subject’s autonomy and freedom.¹²² I will explicate the second (ontological) aspect in this section, and turn to the third aspect concerning the Enlightenment tradition in the sections to come.

My thoughts on the Foucauldian subject’s ontological freedom are based on the notion that for Foucault the self is always in a state of becoming, and cannot therefore be apprehended as a real existent. In other words, for Foucault, there is no founding inner self with a fixed identity, but rather a self that is a relation of oneself to oneself, mediated in and through the social and material world. Thus

the subject can never, strictly speaking, coincide with the self, for this would cause the self to disappear (for the *relation* to the self would disappear if the self became a fixed identity). In this sense, I maintain – against Foucault’s own statements – that his late notion of the self is a close reminder of the Sartrean subject, who also “escapes identity while positing it as unity” (Sartre 1995, 77). Let me explain briefly what I mean by this argument.

In his essay on the genealogy of ethics, Foucault argues that his viewpoint on the freedom of the subject and the creation of one’s self differs radically from Sartre’s thinking because Sartre refers to the self in terms of authenticity and inauthenticity, and thereby “turns back to the idea that we have to be ourselves – to be truly our true self,” as Foucault writes (GE 237).¹²³ His assertion that Sartre links the term ‘authenticity’ with the self certainly holds true. What Foucault fails to recognize is that, for Sartre, the term ‘authenticity’ presents *exactly* the kind of relation of oneself to oneself that takes this self to be inconsistent with itself. In other words, I insist that Sartre’s notion of authenticity of the self does *not* refer to some innate or fixed entity, as Foucault claims, but on the contrary, it indicates the understanding of the self as an open and aesthetic process. In this respect, Sartre’s position is indeed very close to Foucault’s late aesthetics.¹²⁴

A few short extracts from Sartre’s *Being and Nothingness* (*L’Être et le néant* 1943) immediately prove the falsity of Foucault’s interpretation of the Sartrean subject – as well as the similarities between his late views and those of Sartre. Note, for example, the following paragraph from Sartre:

In fact the self cannot be apprehended as a real existent: the subject can not *be* self, for coincidence with self [...] causes the self to disappear. But neither can it *not* be itself since the self is an indication of the subject himself. The *self* therefore represents an ideal distance within the immanence of the subject in relation to himself, a way of *not being his own coincidence*, of escaping identity while positing it as unity – in short, of being in a perpetually unstable equilibrium between identity as absolute cohesion without a trace of diversity and unity as a synthesis of a

multiplicity. This is what we shall call presence to itself. (Sartre 1995, 76-77.)¹²⁵

In *Being and Nothingness*, as well as in his posthumously published *Notebooks for an Ethics* (*Cahiers pour un morale* 1947-48, published in 1983), Sartre explains the same idea in terms of authenticity. In the latter book, he notes, for example: “Man creates the World [...] above himself or rather [...] he *surpasses himself* through this creation and he is this very surpassing, he is nothing other than this absolute nihilating of himself so that the world may exist. He has the joy of being consciousness of being and, at the same time, of not being his creation. [...] The world is me in the dimension of the Not-me.” (Sartre 1992, 498.)¹²⁶ This negativity cannot, in Sartre’s view, be overcome, because “it is me but always in another dimension of Being, always *other than myself*” (ibid.)¹²⁷ Therefore, he concludes, “originally, *authenticity consists in refusing any quest for being*, because I am always *nothing*” (ibid. 475, emphasis mine).¹²⁸ We thereby rediscover in our self “the characteristics of the work of art since in this too there must be some ‘matter to shape’ that lends its Being (otherwise it would remain subjective and a dream)” (ibid. 498).¹²⁹

It should be pointed out that neither Foucault nor Sartre suggest, in the romantic vein, that freedom is an expression of the subject’s inborn autonomy. Instead, the ontological freedom of the subject is taken by both of them to be an endless task of *producing* oneself as a coherent entity (self). In other words, neither presents the subject’s ontological status as a fixed, free position in the world, that is, as an autonomous and fixed site of being. Rather, the ontological freedom of the subject is explained by Sartre as the task of creating oneself and as a judging oneself free, and by Foucault as the endless task of producing oneself.¹³⁰ Both thinkers also associate this work with artistic creation.¹³¹ Seen in this way, I suggest that freedom is not only a critical task but can also be seen as an original responsibility that is grounded in the subject’s ontological inconsistency with itself.

Alternatively expressed, freedom is not, for Foucault or Sartre, some sort of happy condition that would ease individual life. It is rather the difficult task of producing

oneself in a complex modern world in which one's constitution of oneself is not only a privilege, but also a big risk. Like Sartre, Foucault does not attempt to tell individuals how they should act or how they should create themselves. For both, too, there seem to be wrong or at least ineffective ways of creating oneself, namely, ways that ignore or deny the fact that the subject is ontologically free to make alternative constructions of itself and free to reflect and transgress its limits – not absolutely free, but free in the context of some limited historical situation and in the context of each self. Therefore, I suggest that both Foucault and Sartre clearly imply that an individual who denies or ignores his/her ontological inconsistency with her/himself – and thus, denies his/her freedom – lives in a state of “bad faith” (*mauvaise foi*).

In *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre describes this bad faith as an attempt to hide from oneself the truth of oneself. What he means by this is that an individual who lives in bad faith pretends to know the truth of her/his self, that is, she/he pretends to be some sort of fixed “thing-in-itself.” Sartre's famous example is the waiter in the café who is playing *at being* a waiter in a café (Sartre 1995, 59). This playing is, in his view, strongly motivated by social pressures, for it is, first of all, society that demands that he limit his existence while at work to the role of the waiter, or, in another context, to that of a grocer, a soldier, or a lover. Sartre also analyses the idea of *being* a homosexual as an expression of bad faith, since in this case, too, an individual – as well as those who talk of someone's existence in terms of *being* a homosexual – denies his ontological freedom and inconsistency within himself (thus, also in the domain of sexuality), and tries to constitute himself as a fixed thing (ibid. 65). In his *Notebooks for an Ethics*, Sartre comments that therefore “authenticity lies in unveiling being through the mode of non-being” (Sartre 1992, 474).¹³²

I suggest that Foucault's equivalent of the famous Sartrean phrase bad faith is the expression “California cult of the self,” which he uses to designate a relation to the self that ignores the subject's ontological freedom. The “good faith” individuals may manifest in their action is grounded on the recognition that the self is not a fixed thing, but an open process and an artificial construct, which is

inconsistent with itself. In Foucault's words: "We have to dig deeply to show how things have been historically contingent, for such and such reason intelligible but not necessary. We must make the intelligible appear against a background of emptiness and deny its necessity. We must think what exists is far from filling all possible spaces." (FWL 139-40.)¹³³

With the California cult of the self, Foucault refers to an aesthetic cult of oneself, which does not include the same philosophical and moral motivation as the aesthetic practices of the self in which he was interested. Instead, the cult members typically believe that "One is supposed to discover one's true self, to separate it from that which might obscure or alienate it, to decipher its truth thanks to psychological or psychoanalytic science, which is supposed to be able to tell you what your true self is" (GE 245).¹³⁴ Thus, for Foucault, the California cult of the self represents a denial of the creative processes and of one's freedom rather than their realization (McWhorter 1999 196). In his view, it is even in opposition to aesthetic practices of the self, for, "not only do I not identify this ancient culture of the self with [...] the California cult of the self. I think they are diametrically opposed" (GE 245).¹³⁵

In other words, what is at stake in the creation of the self as a "praxis of freedom" is not only the surface stylization of one's appearance or of "anything-goes" morality. If this were the case, Foucault would not term these practices aesthetics of the self, but would rather talk about the California cult of the self. This differentiation is crucial, I assert, not only because it shows that Foucault's notion of freedom has an ontological basis, but also because it separates his philosophical aesthetics of the self from the commercialized *aestheticization* of the self, which tends to transform individual existence into aesthetic consumption without even trying to cope critically with questions such as domination, society, subjection, freedom and ethics.

On the ontological level, Foucault's late notion of freedom does not merely refer to the subject's inconsistency with itself, however. I suggest that it is also intimately linked to his ideas concerning the ontological contingency of the

present time, and to the opening up of the possibilities of this very present (ibid.; Rajchman 1985b, 46). On this level, the ontological analysis of individual freedom and transgressive politics overlap.

In the following section, I will show how Foucault applies the above mentioned two aspects of freedom of the subject (political and ontological) to the present time in his analysis of homosexual identity and “gay” styles of living. As I will illustrate, homosexuality does not, in Foucault’s view, have much to do with fixed and stable identities. Instead, he suggests that, just like all identities, the homosexual self should be interpreted as a site of critical practices of freedom, which are brought to life through a certain style of existence, or art of living, which might be called ‘gay’ (SC 292).

Homosexuality and Identity

As I have suggested, one of the central political goals of Foucault’s philosophical aesthetics of the self is to support and strengthen the existential possibilities of various excluded groups to sound out on their own. In this respect, his aesthetic theorizations have an explicitly political character: they work to re-define identity as a site for cultural resistance and individual autonomy that might pave the way for alternative styles of living and identification. My argument so far has been that Foucault’s way of defining the subject as an ontologically free being supports this task: the self that is interpreted as not being fully present in itself cannot legitimate its own being as the truth of itself. Instead, each construction of the self is taken to be a result of active subjection, a historical process that could have been otherwise as well.

As we have seen, this kind of view of the self has not only political but also ethical consequences in Foucault’s thinking. This does not mean, however, that it leads to the offering of some normative standards for moral action. Rather, his late aesth/ethics of the self encourages individuals to accept each self as an open process and as critical work done on freedom. Alternatively, his theorizations

attempt to aid those of us who are looking for a way out or beyond existing sexual regimes.

In a late interview, “Sex, Power, and the Politics of Identity” (1984), Foucault explicates the importance of the aesthetic practices of the self for various sexual minorities by referring to the homosexual movement, which was, in his view, at that time much more in need of the art of existence than of scientific knowledge of sexuality.

[W]hat the gay movement needs now is much more the art of life than a science or scientific knowledge (or pseudoscientific knowledge) of what sexuality is. [...] Sexuality is something that we ourselves create – it is our creation, and much more than the discovery of a secret side of our desire. We have to understand that with our desires, go new forms of relationships, new forms of love, new forms of creation. Sex is not a fatality: it’s a possibility for creative life. (SPPI 163.)¹³⁶

As this citation clearly shows, for Foucault, practices of the self are also an important part of homosexual politics of the self, because they work to free sexuality and pleasure from the chains and restrictions that society and its juridical forms impose on the individual’s constitution of their selves and of sex (ECP 3). In his view, the liberation of pleasure concerns not only homosexuals, but also heterosexuals, who are not, in practice, much more free in the realization of their individual sexual desires.

By defining sexuality in terms of the possibility to live a creative life, Foucault once more associates one’s sexual practices of the self with creating an artwork. He suggests that the creative work on one’s sexual self should be part of individual basic rights. In his view, the rights everyone has in choosing her/his sexuality are not respected enough in the West, even if the situation improved after the 1960s (the changes in the medical and juridical definitions of homosexuality, for example). What still remains to be done is to *affirm* actively

different sexual choices and forces through creative practices of the self, which are not created in the mere *defence* of homosexuals' right to exist.

According to Foucault, concentration on the creative action of each individual is even much more important than the emphasizing of one's fixed (homosexual, or any other) identity (SPPI 164-165). This is due to the fact that practices of the self are creative strategies that can create a new culture, but this culture cannot be based on the idea of fixed *identity* – notably if we, along with Foucault, accept the claim that there is no essential identity, but only a moving grip of power relations in and through which individuals continually constitute themselves.¹³⁷ Seen in this way, acts of affirming alternative identities are significant because they are forms of expression of our critical work on the limits imposed on individuals/us. In other words, they enforce individual style in terms of freedom rather than fixed identities, and thus advocate also social change in the direction of freedom.

Alternative practices of the self, such as homosexuality, thus represent one form of active resistance. In his late work, Foucault interprets this sort of resistance as even *prior* to domination. As he notes, the moment one ceases to do what one is expected to do, or transgresses the definitions and limits addressed to one, one starts to *utilize* power relations. So conceived, *resistance comes first* and remains superior to all other forces inherent in the struggle for power, *for it is resistance that forces power relations to change*. (EE 740-741.) Seen in this way, the aesthetic practical politics of the self are, again, inseparable.

Transgression, Pleasure and Identity

To see what kind of new stages of (politicised) *aisthesis* Foucault is after in his discussion of the homosexual identity, I will go back to issues of transgression and pleasure for a while to see how they are related to the notion of subject in his late aesthetics.

By linking sexual pleasure (*désir*) with creative life, Foucault opposes the view, characteristic of much earlier medical and naturalistic discussion, which suggests that pleasure can be used as a calibration in terms of normality (“Tell me what your desire is and I will tell you who you are, whether you are normal or not, and then I can validate or invalidate your desire”). Against this sort of understanding of pleasure, Foucault states that there is no “pathology” of pleasure, or “abnormal” pleasure. Instead, pleasure is an event outside the subject, or at the limit of the subject, taking place in that something, which is neither of the body or the soul, which is neither inside nor outside – in short, a notion neither assigned nor assignable. (Foucault in Halperin 1995, 93-94.)¹³⁸

So conceived, pleasure can be understood as a critical moment of transgression, which contests the limit between intelligible and unintelligible experience, as well as that between a normal and an abnormal way of existing. As I pointed out in Part I of this study, Foucault already wanted to liberate the living subject of desire in his archaeological critique of rational subjectivity. The notion of transgression was meant to convey the idea that subjectivity is constantly on the move towards its own limits. Yet, as Foucault stressed in the “Preface to Transgression” (1963), transgression does not entail *overcoming* the limits, but it is rather a form of their non-positive affirmation. This non-positive affirmation turns the subject into a site of endless contestation (in contrast to Enlightenment rationality, at the core of which is stable, fully self-reflective consciousness). In Foucault’s words, which I quoted earlier when considering his early insights into avant-garde writing: “To contest is to process until one reaches the empty core where being achieves its limit and where the limits define being” (PT 36).

The archaeological Foucault saw the ethical promise of transgression as lying mainly in its possibilities to open up new ways of existing in language (creating space for multiplicity, disruption, affectiveness and otherness), and new ways of philosophising. In his own terms, the transgressive usage of language paved the way for the mad philosopher who no longer attempted to master the objects of his knowledge, but rather lost himself to (erotized) language. In this process, the

knowing subject was replaced by multiple speaking subjects, which were joined and severed, combined and excluded.

At the same time, as I proposed, transgression was intimately linked with Foucault's willingness to liberate the affective and sexual forces of the subject – forces of *aisthesis* that the rational notion of the subject forcefully ignored and even denied. With this in mind, he argued that, in the rationalized modern world, it is specifically in the realm of sexuality that the possibility of the experience of transgression remains. In other words, according to early Foucault, modern sexuality was de-naturalized into an object of discursive analysis, and only pushing it to its limits could undermine this position. In terms of his archaeology, the privileged site for this pushing was avant-garde aesthetics and, most notably, avant-garde literature.

In my view, Foucault's late aesthetics of the self is in much the same sense a limit experience and an attempt to seek new stages of transgressive *aisthesis*. For him, the individual's freedom from normalizing forms of individuality consists, in brief, in the aesthetic exploration of the limits of one's subjectivity, body and sexual pleasure. By questioning the necessary or given limits of identity/self, the possibility of transgressing them is critically established and, as a result, the possibility of creating new kinds of subjective experiences and new kinds of pleasures is opened up.

Yet, when we compare Foucault's earlier ideas on artistic transgression with his late aesthetics, we soon come to realize that, although the main line of his argumentation is partly the same, the emphasis has shifted away from the analysis of avant-garde language as a site of transgressive action toward the notion of the *self* as a practical site of endless contestation and limit-attitudes. This shift in interest also leads him to consider the experimental and aesthetically shaped body as a site of transgressive action and identity. Allow me to make some comments on this in the following section before moving on to consider the third aspect of Foucault's notion of freedom, which is linked to his analysis of the Enlightenment.

Experimental Bodies

When Foucault's late views on the self, identity and transgression are applied to issues to do with the body and sex(uality), we can interpret them in two ways (Oksala 2002, 178-180). Firstly, with respect to the notion of intelligibility, Foucault's ideas concerning sexual pleasure suggest that, despite the fact that the body is always a discursive site in the sense that it is used as an object of various disciplinary technologies and scientific discourses, it is also capable of distorting, overflowing and multiplying its discursive classifications through experiences of pleasure.

There are, in other words, experiences of pleasure that clearly fall outside of the discourses that our culture imposes on bodies and desires (such as lesbian pleasure, bi-sexual pleasure, transgendered pleasure and autistic pleasure, to name just a few), and such experiences might be rendered mute and unintelligible because of their "strange" character. In this respect, the experiencing body that feels pleasure can take normal/normalizing language to the point at which it breaks down and loses its power of definition, even of expression.

Yet, as Johanna Oksala observes, this breaking down of definitive language does not mean the return to a *pre-discursive* body. It is rather, as she explains by citing the words of Foucault, that the body as a contestation exists on the limits of discursive language, in those moments "when language, arriving at its confines, overleaps itself, explodes and radically challenges itself in laughter, tears, the overturned eyes of ecstasy" (Oksala 2002, 181-182; PT 48-51.) Hence, the experience of the limit can be realised in language, but this might happen only at the moment "where it says what cannot be said" (ibid.).

Secondly, the experiencing affective body might transgress the limit between the normal and the abnormal. In other words, in Foucault's view, the notion of pleasure can also be used to describe an event 'outside the subject,' or at the limit of the subject, taking place in that something, which is strictly speaking neither of the body nor the soul, and which is neither inside nor outside (Oksala 2002, 180;

Halperin 1995, 93-94).¹³⁹ So conceived, the body that experiences pleasure may transgress the definitions concerning our “true” or “normal” self – definitions that modern bio-power attaches to individuals through various normalizing discourses and practices. In her reading of Foucault’s notion of the body and transgression, Oksala aptly crystallizes this transgressive force of bodily pleasure.

Sexual experiences transgress and also constitute the limit between the norm and what falls outside it. The experiential body is not outside the norms but neither is it fully within them. It cannot be reduced to either one of these alternatives. The very process of normalization sets the limits for normal experiences, but these limits open up possibilities of transgression which affirm the potential limitlessness of the body. The Foucauldian body is capable of generating resistance, of presenting not malleability but excess and transgression as pleasure. This resistance is not a return to a wild and natural body, however, but it is resistance made possible by the normalizing power. (Oksala 2002, 180.)

As I have suggested, for Foucault, philosophical criticism and the critical view of our freedom consist largely of reflecting upon the limits imposed on ourselves and considering our possibilities of transgressing them. In this respect, and in the context of Foucault’s aesthetics of the self, all critical action is clearly a reflexive and conscious endeavour that implies some degree of subjective autonomy. Therefore, it is not totally surprising that, in his late aesthetics, he comes to connect his analysis of individual freedom and self-stylisation to Kantian Enlightenment.

7. THE AESTHETICS OF THE SELF AND THE ENLIGHTENMENT

When will you begin to live virtuously, Plato asked an old man who was telling him that he was attending a series of lectures on virtue. One must not just speculate forever; one must one day also think about actual practice. But today we think that those who live as they teach are dreamers. (Immanuel Kant, *The Philosophical Encyclopaedia*)

For me intellectual work is related to what you could call aestheticism, meaning transforming yourself (MS 14).¹⁴⁰

This transformation of one's self by one's own knowledge is [...] something rather close to the aesthetic experience. Why should a painter work if he is not transformed by his own painting? (MS 14.)¹⁴¹

An aspect that is often ignored in discussions of Foucault's aesthetics of the self is that he does not base his insights only on ancient writings. His thoughts are also influenced by modern philosophy and aesthetics, notably Kant's essay on the Enlightenment.

When coming to terms with Kant and Enlightenment thought, Foucault uses the concept of Enlightenment as one way of thematizing and crystallizing the aims of his critical theorizations of the subject and the aesthetic practices of freedom. It is not, in other words, the only possible context and in Foucault's view there may be even better ways to express the same ideas (another context to which he refers, again, is avant-garde aesthetics). Yet, there are certain strengths in Kant's account. As I will illustrate in the following sections, the benefits of Kant's theory of enlightenment for Foucault derive mainly from the fact that it offers intellectually challenging views on the ways in which the individual's freedom and social responsibility could be brought together.

When Foucault's theorizations of the subject and the aesthetics of the self are considered in the context of Enlightenment thought and Kant's philosophy, a set of counter-arguments immediately arises. Was it not exactly the unpleasant underside of Kantian Enlightenment that Foucault was dedicated to exposing in his early archaeological work, notably in his critique of Cartesian rationality and its exclusion of the 'other' from the history of the rational 'same'? What about

the subject who was described earlier by genealogical Foucault as primarily a product of discourse and knowledge-power relations, and who was not supposed to reach any autonomous or authentic stage, and not even to talk about the process of enlightenment? How can the same subject suddenly start to test the limits of himself, and even the world around him? Does this not require that he be able to step outside the network of power/language/knowledge that shapes his subjectivity?

There are good reasons to pose these critical questions. For it is true that Foucault had fought with Kantian Enlightenment and humanist views on man since *The Order of Things* (1966), criticizing not only the credibility of rationality and progress, but also the very idea of the autonomous and true subject who was to free her/himself from the domination of others and become mature (Norris 1995, 166; Nehamas 1998, 174). There was, however, at least one significant reason for him to turn towards the tradition of the Enlightenment in his late aesthetics. I suggest that this reason was linked to his attempt to construct a more developed view on the individual's possibilities to effect changes in his/her self as well as in his/her historical situation – a view for which the heritage of the Enlightenment offers many useful tools.

Despite his interest in Kant's work, Foucault does not merely repeat Kantian ideals, however, but rather submits Enlightenment rationality to critical re-appropriation. What results is not the Kantian question of the necessary limitations of knowledge, but a more positive form of the questions: what possibilities of *concrete* historical critique can we find in our time, and how are we to transgress the limits imposed on our subjectivities, thoughts and languages?

As my analysis will point out, Foucault also finds support for his re-interpretation of Enlightenment thinking in the "low modernity" of Charles Baudelaire, notably in his writings on dandyism and modernity. At the same time, Foucault's position on this network of ideas is rather unique. This is due partly to the explicitly politicised nature of his project, and partly to his ways of legitimating the process of enlightenment, not so much on the basis of universal common reason, but far

more in terms of multiple reasons, experimental lifestyle, transgressive subjectivity, sexuality and the body.

What remains of the project of enlightenment in Foucault's late aesthetics is a critical "ontology of ourselves," which has to be considered not as a theory, a doctrine, or a permanent body of knowledge that is accumulating, but far more as an *ethos* and an attitude – a philosophical life in which "the critique of what we are is at one and the same time the historical analysis of the limits that are imposed on us and an experiment with the possibility of going beyond them," as Foucault suggests (WE 50). So conceived, the reconsideration of the subject in the context of Enlightenment thought also provides some interesting tools for feminist attempts to rethink the subject in terms of autonomous self-government, multiplicity and active resistance, as I will point out a little further.

The Birth of the Modern Subject

In a piece entitled "What is Enlightenment?" which took its cue and its title from an essay of Kant's published in November 1784 by the liberal *Berliner Monatschrift*, Foucault imagines that Kant's famous question What is Enlightenment? (*Was ist Aufklärung?*) is posed to him two centuries later. In his interpretation of Kant's text, Foucault gives special attention to Kant's way of defining enlightenment by the term *Ausgang*, a way out, or an exit, which Foucault sees as presenting the birth of the modern subject. For Kant, the modern enlightened man exists in his own historicity, freed from the continuities of religion and tradition, having made "his way out." He is looking for a difference, asking: "What difference is today introducing with respect to yesterday?" (WE 33-38; Siivonen 1996, 79.)

Kant indicates that the way out characteristic of enlightenment is a process that releases us from a state of tutelage or immaturity (*Unmündigkeit*). By tutelage he means a state of mind that makes us accept someone else's authority. According to Kant, individuals (especially women) usually remain in tutelage because they

are idle and suffer from a lack of courage. It is not, in other words, necessarily due to the capacity for reason, but primarily because of laziness and ill will, that most people never become adult and autonomous and do not begin to use their reason in public. This makes them follow the rules and canons of others, and keeps them in chains. Unlike the autonomous enlightened man whose attitudes are free and who is the master of his own life and reasoning, those who live in an immature state obey and let others decide for them.¹⁴² With these critical notions in mind, Kant formulates his famous definition of Enlightenment:

Enlightenment is man's release from his self-incurred tutelage. Tutelage is man's inability to make use of his reason without direction from another. Self-incurred is this tutelage when its cause lies not in lack of reason but in lack of resolution and courage to use it without direction from another. *Sapere aude!* "Have courage to use your own reason!" – that is the motto of enlightenment (Kant 1996, 7. Translation has been altered.)¹⁴³

By making this transcendental turn toward individual reasoning, the modern (Kantian) individual is assumed to be able to live heroically. In other words, he/she should be able to give up the dependence on religion and metaphysics as a basis for justifying and valuing some specific practices of the epoch, and should turn instead towards the public usage of his/her own reason. (Kant 1996, 13; Dreyfus and Rabinow 1999, 111.) The process of enlightenment is even some sort of task and an obligation in Kant, because he takes each individual to be responsible for himself/herself and his/her immature status. Therefore, his instruction "have courage to use your own reason!" (*Aude sapere!*) forms the heart of the process of enlightenment in which men participate both collectively and individually in the process of becoming adult and free (WE 35).

Like many other analysers of the Enlightenment tradition (such as Theodor W. Adorno, Max Horkheimer, Jürgen Habermas), Foucault wished to retain this tradition of rationality, and regarded it as a useful tool in the more contemporary expression of critical thought – because individual autonomy and the creation of "new subjectivities" also requires rational work on our limits. What he

emphasized, however, was that the criticism inherent in this work is no longer to be used in the search for formal (Kantian) structures with a universal value. Instead, Foucault considered the task of Enlightenment thinking to be to make an historical investigation into the events that have led us to constitute ourselves and to recognize ourselves as subjects of what we are thinking, doing and saying. This viewpoint led him to pluralize the notion of reason.

The Pluralization of Reason

As I suggested above, for Kant, it is only through the legitimate use of reason that the individual's autonomy can be assured. In this sense, as Foucault claims, the Enlightenment is the age of the *critique* (WE 38). With this idea in mind, in his late writings Foucault retains from Enlightenment thinking exactly the notion of the subject's rational autonomy and places it at the heart of his theory of the aesthetics of the self. Just like Kant, he considers this notion essential to the individual's ability to exercise critical judgement, free from dominant beliefs, norms and desires.¹⁴⁴

Yet, Foucault's position also differs in some important respects from that of Kant. Firstly, unlike Kant, who sees the Enlightenment as *the* exit of man's self-incurrent tutelage, Foucault stresses that we must acknowledge that the process of enlightenment is (and always was) just one more discursive paradigm, or one of those shifting orders of language or representation that make up the structural genealogy of Western reason (Norris 1995, 168). Therefore, his own work does not orient the process of analysis toward "the essential kernel of rationality" that is assumed to be found during the process of enlightenment. On the contrary, critical thinking, in Foucault's view, must be directed toward the "contemporary limits of the necessary," that is, toward what is not or is no longer indispensable for the constitution of ourselves as autonomous subjects (WE 43).

Secondly, Foucault argues that there are no universally applicable transcendental principles and standards, such as universal reason, that could be applied to human

nature and life. In opposition to Kant's universalising account, therefore, he proclaims that the quest for a morality to which everyone should submit would be "catastrophic" (FI 12). Furthermore, as he suggests elsewhere, we should not forget that "it was on the basis of the flamboyant rationality of social Darwinism that racism was formulated, becoming one of the most enduring and powerful ingredients of Nazism. This was, of course, an irrationality, but an irrationality that was at the same time [...] a certain form of rationality." (SKP 249.)¹⁴⁵

Although Foucault recognized the necessity of rationality for all critical thought, he thus also wanted to analyse its limits, historical effects and dangers. In his version of enlightenment, the individual subject's rational autonomy is thus not bound up with the idea of the unified rational subject. Far from it, for, as he saw it, *there exists multiple and historically specific forms of rationality*, due to which reason can never discover its essence or founding act, but only "different modifications in which rationalities engender one another, oppose and pursue one another" (SPS 443).¹⁴⁶

This plurality of reasons does not necessarily mean that individuals may not use their reason to criticize other rational practices in public. In other words, by pluralizing reason Foucault is not arguing that "anything goes." It is my contention that, for him, the pluralization of critique is rather a necessary moment in the formation of individual autonomy, but such critique cannot be grounded on universal common reason because this would ignore individual differences as well as the elements of rational disintegration within the subject itself and within reason.

By denying the idea that the process of enlightenment is grounded on the usage of universally valid reason, Foucault also rejects the strong universalist premises that hold such values to be more than just a product of our own cultural attachment to the philosophic discourse of modernity (Norris 1995, 169). With the help of these limitations, Foucault manages to avoid legitimating the "story of enlightenment" as *the* truth of our condition and our future possibilities.¹⁴⁷ In that sense, the criticism engendered by Foucault's enlightenment is not transcendental, and its

goal is not that of making metaphysics possible. Rather “it is genealogical in its design and archaeological in its method.” (WE 46.) He also describes the task as “patient labour giving form to our impatience for liberty” (WE 50).

It might be worth stressing here that Foucault’s views on the Enlightenment and individual liberty are not to be confused with the romantic notion of liberation. I suggest, moreover, that it is also here that it is crucial to make a distinction between Foucault’s aesthetics of the self and Friedrich Schiller’s, for example, whose writings might at first glance seem to reflect some of the main themes of Foucault’s late work.

For unlike in Schiller, whose critical aesthetics and political theory are centred around the link between the domination of nature and the domination of man (especially in *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man* 1795), for Foucault the domination of man’s inner nature comes about not just through a change of attitude towards nature (the exaltation of instrumental reason), but primarily through training and the internalization of certain aesth/ethical disciplines and practices, including sexual behavior, the diet of pleasures, and care for the self and others. In other words, for Foucault, the creation of individual aesthetics of the self is not either a question of “overcoming” one’s nature, or of transforming one’s life and body into an artifice, but rather one of turning the material we usually call the self (or individual life) into a site of creative action and political contestation.

So conceived, the main problem of Enlightenment thought for Foucault is not so much in preserving the primacy of reason (as in Kant and the intellectualist communication theory of Jürgen Habermas), or in the domination of nature (Schiller), but rather *in the attempt to respond to one’s historical situation in a critical and creative manner*. This critical “ontology of the present,” as Foucault terms it, has two separate but related components: it demands work on oneself (ontology of ourselves), and responding critically to one’s time and surroundings (ontology of the present time) (Dreyfus and Rabinow 1999, 112). I will describe shortly the main contents of this differentiation in the following section.

Ontology of the Present and Ourselves

In his presentation of the idea of the ontology of the present Foucault mentions three axes, the specificity of and interconnections between which have to be analysed if we are to grasp something of the questions “who are we?” and “what is our own era?” These are the axis of knowledge, the axis of power, and the axis of ethics. According to Foucault, the historical ontology of ourselves has to provide answers to an open series of questions. It has to make an indefinite number of inquiries, which might be specified and multiplied, but which will all, in one way or another, address the following important issues: How are we constituted as subjects of our own knowledge? How are we constituted as subjects who exercise and submit to power relations? How are we constituted as moral subjects of our own actions? (WE 48-49.)

Elsewhere, Foucault describes this sort of question as a diagnosis of “what today is.” This diagnosis does not consist in some simple characterization of what we are, but rather demands us to follow “the lines of fragility in the present – in managing to grasp why and how that which is might no longer be that which is” (SPS 449-450).¹⁴⁸ In more concrete terms, Foucault demands that all critical thinking analyses freedom as *concrete* and historically limited, that is, as a site of concretely possible transformation. This work could also be described as the microphysics of power, because it represents attempts to clarify what forms of rationality are involved in the process of domination and how knowledge is used as a technique of power.

As I have suggested, the primary site of this sort of (positive) critical analysis and transformation in Foucault’s later thinking is the individual self. For him, realizing one’s freedom consists, first of all, in one’s willingness to face the idea that action is not grounded in universal and ahistorical theories of the individual subject, any more than it is in the conditions of community and speaking, but that it demands active agency on the part of an individual. Hence, Foucault’s notion of freedom is not only ontological, but also political and historical: he strives to find

out what historical (and political) limits there are that restrict our freedom and how the aesthetic practices of the self could work to “free” this freedom.

Yet, the critical question soon arises that if Foucault does not even attempt to provide universally valid norms for human action and morality, how can we avoid the situation in which the subject who commits crimes, rapes or kills, for example, is merely considered to be realizing his/her freedom and creating a unique aesthetics of the self? (McNay 1992, 45; Plaza 1980, 31; Oksala 2002, 230). From where, in other words, can we seek moral criteria for action if the only critical basis we have is that individual autonomy tests the limits of the self and the present?

This is not an easy question, as Foucault himself acknowledges in his essay on the Enlightenment. For if we limit ourselves to exclusively partial and local inquiry (such as studying the individual practices of the self), we seem to run the risk of letting ourselves be determined by some more general structures over which we have no control, and of which we may even not be conscious (WE 47). He offers two solutions to this dilemma. Firstly, he suggests that we need to give up hope of acceding to a point of view that would give us access to complete and definitive knowledge of what may constitute our historical limits. In other words, Foucault suggests that we cannot grasp the *whole* of our historical time, but we can construct a valid *perspective* on our era, as well as on our selves.¹⁴⁹

Secondly, Foucault emphasizes that this does not mean that we cannot do any work except in disorder and contingency, and that the work on our limits (practices of the self) also has a certain generality, systematicity and homogeneity. (WE 47.) Despite the engaged and historicist character of his thinking, Foucault retains some notion of transcendence in the sense that he sees us as being able to go beyond the limits that have been imposed on us historically.

For Kant, the Enlightenment and autonomy consisted, at least in part, in one’s mature use of reason defined as the moment when humanity will “put its own reason to use, without subjecting itself to any authority,” as Foucault comments

(WE 38). Similarly, for Foucault, the notion of the mature, autonomous use of reason is used as the basis of the critique that is directed towards an investigation of the self, which he nevertheless takes as a historical and practical entity rather than as ontologically and transcendently given.

Yet, the aim of Foucauldian autonomy is not to achieve a state of impersonal moral transcendence, but rather to refuse to submit to the “government of individualization” by constantly questioning what seems to be natural and inevitable in one’s own identity: an interrogation of the “contemporary limits of the necessary” (WE 43). For him, the subject is autonomous in the sense that it is capable of critique, but this critique has no purely transcendental or ahistorical value. Rather, it is always historically situated and contextual. Therefore, I suggest that the transcendence embedded in Foucauldian rationality is still transcendence but it should be understood as *historicized* or *fallen* transcendence, rather than that which could bypass this very historical present.

Moreover, it could be argued that it is exactly this idea of “fallen transcendence” that makes Foucault claim that the historico-critical attitude of the autonomous subject must be an *experimental* one if we are not to settle for the affirmation or the abstract empty dream of freedom. For what he means by this is that all work done at the limits of ourselves must open up a realm of historical inquiry, on the one hand, and, on the other, it must put itself to the test of contemporary reality so that we can both grasp the points at which change is desirable and possible, and determine the exact form this change should take.

Therefore, as Foucault states, “The historical ontology of ourselves must turn away from all projects that claim to be global or radical,” for we know from experience that “the claim to escape from the system of contemporary reality so as to produce the overall programs of another society, of another way of thinking, another culture, another vision of the world, has led only to the return of the most dangerous traditions” (WE 46). So conceived, the ethos of the Enlightenment is not faithfulness to doctrinal elements, but rather “the permanent reactivation of an

attitude – that is, of a philosophical ethos that could be described as a permanent critique of our historical era” (WE 42).

In the light of these notions, Foucault concludes that it is better to prefer the very specific transformations that might, for example, concern our ways of being and thinking, our relations to authority, and the ways in which we usually perceive insanity or illness. With this in mind, he characterizes the philosophical ethos that is appropriate to his critical ontology of ourselves as “a historico-practical test of the limits that we may go beyond, and thus as work carried out by ourselves upon ourselves as free beings” (WE 46-47).

As a concrete example of this sort of critical work on subjectivity and the present, he refers to Baudelaire’s consciousness of modernity as “the ephemeral, the fleeting, and the contingent” (WE 39). In Foucault’s view, Baudelaire’s modernity is both a form of relationship to the present and a mode of relationship that one has to establish with oneself. To be modern in the Baudelairean sense is not to accept oneself as one is in the flux of passing moments. What it demands instead is a certain asceticism and active aesthetic self-shaping. As Foucault points out, it is this taking of oneself as an object of complex and difficult elaboration that Baudelaire, in the spirit of his day, called *dandyism*.

Dandyism

As I will show in this section, Baudelaire’s writings on modernity and modern aesthetic subjectivity have inspired not only Foucault’s views on the “ontology of the present,” but also his attempts to rethink the subject. As was the case with Kant, he does not merely repeat the views of Baudelaire, however, but rather attempts to create a new version of enlightenment rationality on the grounds of Baudelaire’s thinking. As I will suggest, for Foucault, the “enlightened” aesthetics of the self includes *both* the rationalist “high” dimension of Kant’s thinking *and* the “low” affective side of Baudelaire’s aesthetics. Thus considered, Foucault’s late analysis of the aesthetic subject does not ignore the importance of reason for

individual aesth/ethics and political autonomy, as Baudelaire does in some respects. Yet it acknowledges the importance of the body, sexuality and affectiveness in critical thought and action – all aspects of subjectivity that are largely lacking in Kant’s rational account.

Foucault’s interest in bringing together the critical aspects of the Kantian Enlightenment and Baudelaire’s notion of modernity might, at first sight, seem surprising. However, it should be noted that, just as the idea of the Enlightenment is not restricted by Kant to his own time, Baudelairean modernity should not be regarded as a mere periodizing label, despite its strong historical connections to late-19th-century European reality and aesthetics. What Baudelaire means by modernity is each present in its presentness, in other words, the present in its purely instantaneous quality (doomed to become antiquity in the future), which also contains an element of the eternal (or classical). In this sense, as Foucault bears out, Baudelaire’s analysis of modernity contains elements that are applicable to various other historical phases of modernity as well, including our own time.

Foucault approves of Baudelaire’s analysis of modernity for two reasons. Firstly, he is interested in Baudelaire’s way of defining it in terms of the discontinuity of time. At this level, Baudelairean modernity represents for him a certain break with tradition, a feeling of novelty, or vertigo in the face of the fleeting moment. However, as Foucault points out, these ephemeral, fleeting and contingent aspects of the present are also connected to another aspect of modernity in Baudelaire’s work, namely, to the attempt to recapture something eternal in this very present. This eternity is not, in Foucault’s (or in Baudelaire’s) view, something that goes beyond the present time, however. Rather, it is to be found *within* the present instant (WE 39). As I have indicated, I understand that Foucault means by this sort of eternity something like a fallen transcendence or some sort of historicized universal (as Sartre would call it).

Secondly, Foucault finds in Baudelaire’s writings a model of the modern art of the self, and understands this model as a mode of relationship that has to be

established with oneself. He also refers to “the deliberate attitude of modernity” in Baudelaire’s work, which is “tied to an indispensable asceticism.” (WE 41.) The famous Baudelairean spokesperson for this sort of modern attitude is the dandy, or, almost synonymously with him, the flâneur/modern artist.

What this partly fictive, partly real Baudelairean modern man aims at – and what interests Foucault in his character – is an individual attempt to cultivate the idea of modern beauty in his personality, to satisfy his passions, to feel, and to think (Baudelaire 1999, 535). On this level, modernity for Baudelaire represents a new kind of existential “cult of oneself” (*culte de soi-même*), which is based on ideas of disinterestedness (dandyism as a manifestation of social inactivity and non-utilitarian liberty), and on attempts to constantly bring forth one’s originality in relation to one’s own historical era (ibid. 536-537).

For the Baudelairean modern man, the city streets function as transitory stages of modern life on which those who seek modernity can find living expressions of actual beauty – be this expressed in fashion, gestures or human faces, or just simply in the heterogeneity of the crowd (ibid. 517). This modern beauty is not conventional and pretty, however, but rather discontinuous, fleeting, bizarre and strange. In this sense, it could be seen as offering space for differences and ruptures – or perhaps more appropriately, ruptures and discontinuities are to be seen as its essential traits.

As we find in the writings of Baudelaire, on the formal level, modern artistic achievements depend upon individual innovation in language and in modes of representation. Modern art, so conceived, can speak to eternity only by freezing time and all its fleeting elements. (Harvey 1989, 21.) For Baudelaire, however, the historical, affective and transitory (“low”) dimension of modernity was even more important than the eternal and immutable (high, classical) aspect of art, given his belief that eternal beauty exists only as an abstraction, or as a “general surface of diverse beauties.” He also considered the particular and fleeting element of modern beauty more challenging in that it grows from our individual passions: in

Baudelaire's view, it is due to the particular nature of our passions that we have our own specific conceptions of beauty (Baudelaire 1999, 237).¹⁵⁰

Being part of "low" rather than "high" (Kantian, rational) modernity, dandyism was for Baudelaire an example of the specifically modern attitude of making one's body, behavior, passions, and existence a work of art. According to Foucault, a dandy is nevertheless not a perfect being, nor does he have any specifically modern essence. He is rather an individual who is aware of the historical limits of himself and his situation, but who *tries to invent himself as a kind of transgression of these limits* (WE 40-42). Therefore, Baudelaire's modernity does not liberate man in his own being, but rather compels him to face the task of *producing* himself (WE 42). In other words, modern man is not going off to discover himself, his truth, and his hidden inner secrets, but he rather tries to *invent* himself through creating his personal aesthetics of the self.

To put it another way, to be modern in the Baudelairean sense is to *choose* to be modern. It is, first of all, a question of a new attitude or sensuousness, manifested in one's critical relation to the present era. At the same time, I suggest that for Baudelaire (as well as for Foucault), the modern attitude represented a new form of existential heroism, because the path to modernity is difficult: it is full of uncertainties and risks. This uncertainty is largely due to the imaginative and contingent nature of modern man's creation: modernity or the "present in its presentness" is not a reality to be copied by the artist, but far more a work of his or her own imaginative creation by which he or she penetrates beyond the banality of observable appearances where eternity and ephemerality are one.¹⁵¹

Moreover, what I wish to emphasize, by taking up Foucault's connections to the low modernity of Baudelaire is that, for Baudelaire the modern cult of the self was, first of all, a manifestation of the *culture of difference*. In other words, a true dandy does not follow any given rules, laws or norms, nor does he care for official values such as money, conformism, heterosexuality and marriage (Saidah 1993, 141). Despising the limits of common sense, and the typical or normal, the dandy

creates his own aesthetics of the self, which is dedicated to useless passions and extreme leisure.

On this level, I suggest that the dandy is a perfect example of individual alienation from society and official culture. His enchantment also expresses a certain revolt against bourgeois and capitalist values with their rationalized and utilitarian lifestyle ideals. In this respect, the dandy's aesthetic cultivation of the self is also political and socially transgressive: it is meant to illuminate the limits that society places on individuals, and to test these limits by doing things differently – imaginatively and often without any other useful purpose than one's personal pleasure and aesthetic satisfaction.

The Body as a Site of Artistic Creation

One more important aspect of Baudelaire's modern aesthetics of the self for the work at hand – an aspect that Foucault for some reason ignores – is that his modern reflexivity of the self pervasively affects not only one's psychic processes or gestures but also the experience of the body. In this section, I will illustrate briefly what I mean by this statement.

In Baudelaire's texts on dandyism, the body could not function outside of the internally referential systems of modernity (Giddens 1991, 7). As Baudelaire's writings clearly evidence, the body of the dandy is itself reflexively mobilized: he conceives of it as some sort of raw aesthetic materiality that has to be cultivated into a work of art. What this also means is that, in the aestheticist culture of dandyism, the body becomes torn apart from all images of nature. This separation is well echoed in the writings of some other analysers of dandyism as well. To cite the words of Oscar Wilde: "The first duty in life is to be as artificial as possible" (Wilde 1983, 156), hence his conclusion: "One should either be a work of art, or wear a work of art" (ibid. 157). Or, as Baudelaire puts it, asserting that because nature does not provide us with morality, "everything that is good is always a product of art/skills (*d'art*).” Therefore, in Baudelaire's view, morality, just like

beauty, should be grounded on the “order of the beautiful” rather than on nature (Baudelaire 1999, 542).¹⁵²

In Baudelaire’s texts, the dandy serves both as the creator and the object of his art. The aesthetic cultivation he practices on his body is meant to transform his art into an art of living, and his style into a personal style of living (Saidah 1993, 145). The primal point of interest in the dandy’s search for happiness is thus his own body, understood as an artificial work of art that is to take over the naturally beautiful. Much the same as in Greco-Roman cultures, this demands some aesthetic moderation on the individual’s part. Examples of this self-control are to be found, for example, in the 19th century dandy’s admiration of slenderness and in his use of corsets, which squeezed the body so tightly that the famous dandy Barbey d’Aurevilly once blurted out to Baudelaire: “If I were to partake in Holy Communion, I’d blow up” [“Si je communiais, j’écarterais”] (Natta 1989, 12, translation mine).

These principles of nineteenth-century aestheticism might at first sight appear as a movement towards the narcissistic cultivation of one’s bodily appearance. The question is not quite that simple, however. As Anthony Giddens points out, the modern interest in the aesthetic cultivation of one’s personality and body could also be seen as the expression of a much more deeply-rooted concern to actively construct and control the body (Giddens 1991, 7). For here we can also see an integral connection between work on the body and lifestyle – manifest, for example, in the dieting and exhibitionist dressing of dandies.

Another typically modern example is the cultivation of the sexual characteristics of the body, also frequently referred to in Baudelaire’s descriptions of the androgynous gender of dandies (Monneyron 1993, 199-200; Carassus 1971). By cultivating the sexual body as a site of aesthetic re-creation, a dandy represents a culture of difference and differentiation. His aesthetics of the self, in this sense, becomes the basis, or, perhaps better, the essential means of testing the limits of the present and “ourselves” and at the same time manifesting not only an

individual lifestyle, but also one's philosophical, moral and political attitudes toward present society.

Despite the fact that the dandy's critical action is grounded far more on individual passions and feelings than on reason, his critical project also seems to be, in some respects, close to the Kantian subject of enlightenment. For both Kant and Baudelaire seek the autonomy of the modern subject in the context of the present, attempting to free individuals from the normative and materialist chains of society, as well as from religion, moralism and tradition. Both of them also repeat another essential characteristic of enlightenment thought, namely the idea that nature must be overcome in order to become "mature." In the process of creating a modern aesthetics of the self, nature thus becomes a sort of negative other, a dark reverse side of the enlightenment process that an autonomous individual attempts to re-shape and control through various aesthetic practices.

Yet, it is also crucial to note that the critical re-shaping of one's aesthetics of existence has come to mean somewhat different things for Baudelaire and Kant. I will discuss these differences in the following section in terms of two modernities (high and low), as well as of two different interpretations of the term 'enlightenment': *the* Enlightenment and enlightenment.

The Modern Aesthetic Subject: On the Edges of High and Low

As I have shown, for Foucault, the enlightened aesthetics of the self includes both the "high" dimension of Kant's thinking and the "low" side of Baudelaire's aesthetics. In this respect, his late theorizations of the aesthetics of the self can be said to offer a new version of enlightenment rationality.

We could express the same idea by saying that, when coming to terms with rationality and Enlightenment thought, Foucault links together two different aspects of modernity and enlightenment. Following Scott Lash's and Jonathan Friedman's analysis, I use the expression "high modernity" or "high modernist

subjectivity” to refer to a version of identity that assigns extraordinary privilege to judgement and especially to cognition, and devalues, correspondingly, the aspects of the libidinal, affective, body, touch, and the faculty of perception, so that vision itself is, so to speak, “colonized by reason” (Lash and Friedman 1992, 5).

In the face of this, the so-called “low modernist” alternatives stress instead experimental living, change and movement, as well as the bodily level of existence, including aspects of sexuality, desire and pleasure. Like high modernity, low modernity works toward an ethics, but as Lash and Friedman remark, “an ethics without blueprints.” For its universalism is “one which fosters cosmopolitanism, but cosmopolitanism *without* emancipation” (ibid. 3).

As these terminological differentiations concerning modernity already suggest, there are some crucial differences between Kant’s and Baudelaire’s critical insights – differences that I am convinced must be taken up in order to fully understand Foucault’s position in this specifically modern network of ideas. I will emphasize three points in my analysis of these differences.

First, unlike Kant, who guides the modern subject to follow the “high” lines of reason, the Baudelairean modern subject tends to turn toward the aesthetic cultivation of the “low,” that is, the body, passions and sexuality. This low interest in human life reasserts itself against the high modernist cult of reasoning and civilizing by different means. It emphasizes the importance of aestheticist perception and the aesthetic stylisation of the self against the modernist colonialization of perception by our logical faculties (Hoffmann-Axthelm 1993), it turns toward tactile and passionate alternatives to cognitivist assumptions of high modernity, and it produces a template for the modern unconscious that tends to reassert itself against the high modernist civilization process (Lash and Friedman 1993, 5-6). I suggest that, in this respect Foucault is on much the same lines as Baudelaire, notably in coming to terms with the aesthetic subject, the experimental body, limit-attitudes and sexuality.

In my opinion, the second difference between Baudelaire's and Kant's critical modernities is in their different viewpoints on historical progress. What connects Kant's essay on the Enlightenment with Baudelaire's dandyism is, in Foucault's view, the fact that the *promesse de bonheur* (promise of reconciliation or happiness) of both thinkers is embedded in the promise of critique. Yet, I contend that, at the same time, there are some significant differences between the two, which are worth taking up here so that we may better understand the specific character of Foucault's own interpretation of the terms 'modernity' and 'Enlightenment'. What I particularly have in mind here is that, unlike in Kant, the promise of reconciliation in Baudelaire's modern aesthetics is not rooted in the individual's public usage of reason. Instead, the possibility of redemption or reconciliation is actualised in the aesthetic constitution of what he simply calls 'modernity' or 'modern subjectivity.'

Therefore, the critical task in the Baudelairean (and Foucauldian) aesthetics of the self is not to construct universally valid structures of reason. What Baudelaire was aiming at, I suggest, was to recognize the modern individual as a non-determined subject who has the power to test the limits that society and others place on the self (the requirement to be rational, to marry, to produce, to rationalize relations between work and leisure, art and life, for example). What Foucault finds valuable in this account is that this critical quest leads Baudelaire to stress the importance of autonomous self-government and aesthetic self-creation rather than universal structures of reason.

Altogether, for both Kant and Baudelaire modernity represents an individually chosen attitude and *ethos* that arises out of and is at the same time an attempt to respond critically to one's own historical situation. What has changed on the road from German idealism to Baudelaire's mid-nineteenth-century aesthetics is the spirit of rational optimism inherent in Kant's thought. This brings us to cross the third difference between Kant's and Baudelaire's views on critical modernity. Whereas Kant's essay on the Enlightenment still promotes reliance on rational reasoning and universally valid statements, Baudelaire's modern aesthetics of the self has turned passionate, tragic, historically embedded and sad. Neither do his

modern heroes manifest the same belief in progress and *promesse de bonheur* as Kant's modern heroes, scholars and academically trained men of genius do. Rather, he concentrates on searching for fleeting experiences of modernity. In Baudelaire's texts, such experiences are more often found on the dirty faces of rag-and-bone men, beggar-girls and prostitutes than on the scrubbed faces of well-educated upper class scholars, the Kantian spokespersons of the Enlightenment. In this respect, I suggest that Baudelaire's position – like Foucault's – is far more low, popular and avant-garde than the high aesthetics of Kant and his followers.

The same lack of reconciliation is also to be found in Baudelaire's notions of modern art. While in the late 18th century writings of Kant the aesthetic subject might still experience reconciliation and wholeness by referring to the organic character of an artwork, the application of reason and the universal validity of aesthetic judgement, the low modern subjectivity of Baudelaire and Foucault remains without reconciliation despite the modern subject's constant attempts to find “a way out” of or “an exit” from the limitations imposed on one's existence.

As Baudelaire suggests, the more remote from everyday life modern art becomes, the more it withdraws into complete aesthetic autonomy – and the more painfully the lack of reconciliation is brought to conscious awareness. In my view, the same pain is reflected in the endless *ennui* of the Baudelairean outsider (a dandy) who identifies himself with Parisian rag-and-bone men, beggar girls and prostitutes rather than with Kantian academics and geniuses. Like Foucault in his analysis of madmen and homosexuals, Baudelaire sees in these figures examples of modern heroism, which nevertheless does not lead to reconciliation or happiness. (Benjamin 1992, 96 and Harvey 1989, 26.)

Unlike Kant, both Baudelaire and Foucault thus doubt the success of the process of enlightenment. As Foucault remarks, “I do not know whether we will ever reach mature adulthood” (WE 49). This belief is also echoed in his argument that, despite the possibility to create critical aesthetics of the self, and to effect changes in social conditions, we can never become totally free, because freedom is not a

fixed state of being. It is far more a name that can be ascribed to our possibilities to create ourselves and transgress the limits imposed on us by society and others (not in the sense of overcoming these limits, but as illuminating and critically testing them). In other words, we can never attain freedom because we cannot get rid of power relations and domination, not even in the domain of aesthetics.

Yet, despite the doubt that Foucault expresses with respect to Enlightenment thinking on rational utopianism, he regards the task of creating critical aesthetics of the self to be extremely important. For him, its importance lies, first of all, *in the attempt* to set individuals free from domination by others – although he considers this utopian freedom more a rhetorical means of directing our actions to support the practices of liberty instead of accepting the stages as given. He summarizes his view on enlightenment in the following words: “I do not know whether it must be said today that the critical task still entails faith in Enlightenment; I continue to think that this task requires work on our limits, that is, a patient labour giving form to our impatience for liberty” (WE 50).

What Foucault’s views on enlightenment bring out, moreover, is that he actually never rejects the notion of the subject, but instead aims to criticize our ways of using it as an essential basis of creativity, of the self, of the body, artistic value, for example. At the same time, this criticism is meant to open up new perspectives in terms of practical ethical and political goals: it is used to support the view that human beings are unstable processes, and contain the potential for their own undoing. Individuals are not, in short, mere puppets in the networks of power, because they are granted the possibility of transgressing the limits imposed on them, and might be able to become something in their own right.

Hence the creation of individual aesthetics of the self is, for Foucault, a site not only of aesthetic stylization but also of an individual’s political contestation. It might be worth emphasizing, however, that Foucault does not claim that such a creation would be *enough* in the attempt to resist power in modern societies. What he stresses is that critical practices of the self might function as a source of powerful critique and even transformation, because all governmentality implicates

“a relation of oneself to one-self.” For wider changes in power to take place, however, new laws and new techniques of government need to be created, which would better serve the liberty of the subjects. (ECP 31.)

Against this background, I maintain that, even in the context of modernity, Foucault’s aesthetics of the self is a specific theoretical constellation. Preoccupied with the same urge for historicism and engagement as both Kant and Baudelaire, but working at the same time in the context of ancient theories of the self and contemporary sexual politics, he repeats the same question that Kant and Baudelaire both posed in ways that were typical of their own eras: What is our own time, and how are we to constitute ourselves as subjects in its conditions?

Yet, as I have shown, the suggestions Foucault offers do not merely repeat the views of Kant or Baudelaire, but rather present a new version of enlightenment rationality and modernity. Moreover, with respect to Kant, I propose that, to the degree that Baudelaire and Foucault both attempt to turn the life and body of an individual into a *transgressive* site of a living artwork, they do not merely continue the tradition of Kant’s philosophical Enlightenment (*Aufklärung*), they also turn it into a program of exceeding (*Aufhebung*), that is, of exceeding the limits of the autonomous spheres of aesthetics, ethics and politics, as well as those between the high (rational, universal) and the low (passionate, bodily, historically engaged).

To put it another way, the character of the “high” radically changed in Baudelaire’s and Foucault’s critical description of modern subjectivity: it is no longer grounded (at least not primarily) on the usage of reason and universally valid judgments, but rather on some sort of fallen transcendence, which is still transcendence but cannot avoid soiling itself in the passionate chaos and mess of everyday life.

8. CRITICAL INSIGHTS INTO FOUCAULT'S LATE AESTHETICS

As indicated thus far, Foucault's late emphasizing of the active aspect of the self suggests a dynamic relationship between social structures and individuals. What he argues is that by creating aesthetic practices of the self, the individual can stop being a mere docile body and enter the domain of power as an active agent. This attitude does not belong to victims or slaves, but rather to self-empowering individuals who try to transform their situation by partaking actively in the strategic play or struggle (*la lutte*) over the government of their selves.

In short, Foucault's message is that we are products of history and power relations, but given their shifting nature, we can also try to transform ourselves and the world we live in. In this sense, he suggests that individuals are autonomous and free. Free to try to construct themselves; free to attempt to break away from the normalizing mechanisms of knowledge-power, and "to counter the grip of power with the claims of bodies, pleasures, and knowledges, in their multiplicity and their possibility of resistance" (HS 157).¹⁵³

Despite the importance of these ideas in reconsidering notions of the self, identity and sexuality, Foucault's late writings on aesthetics have also been the subject of heated debate, not least among feminist intellectuals. In the following sections, I will therefore consider how these late Foucauldian ideas are echoed in recent feminist debate on the subject/the self, and what kind of difficulties and merits arise when his insights are brought together with current feminist questions.

As in the earlier sections of this work, I will not come out simply for or against Foucault, but will attempt to discuss both the strengths and weaknesses of his work. The final intention of my consideration is to move beyond polarized debate on his work by further developing some practical and theoretical implications of his aesthetics of the self. Therefore, although I strongly defend the usefulness of his late aesthetics to current feminist debate on aesth/ethical and political subjectivity, I also wish to point out that there are some aspects of his work that should be further developed. In my view, it is only through this sort of

“unorthodox” reading of Foucault, or “moving beyond Foucault,” that we might discover the positive implications of his aesthetics for feminist theorizations and practices, and maximize the benefits of his insights for feminist ends.

A Feminist Critique of the Aesthetics of the Self

One of the most searing criticisms of Foucault’s late aesthetics concerns, again, his indifference to the implications of gender. As I will exemplify in this section, feminist theorists have criticized him on two main points: 1) his presentation of masculine forms of erotic practice as his model for ancient sexuality and aesthetic practices of the self in general, and 2) his omission of the historical construction of sexuality as gender-specific.¹⁵⁴

According to Rosalyn Diprose, there is a fundamental gender problem already in Foucault’s depiction of the sovereign self, which goes deep into the very structures of his thinking (Diprose 1994). Diprose does not mean by this that Foucault positions the self as an innate or abstract entity – she is well aware of his way of explaining subjection as a historically and culturally specific process that precedes interiority. The problems rather arise from the fact that the Greek aesthetics of the self disqualifies women on two counts, which Foucault, in Diprose’s view, tends to reiterate in his own theory.

For Diprose, the first problem is that women’s use of pleasure was derived by Greek men not from women’s own selves and bodies, but from their roles as wives, mistresses and mothers. Secondly, she pays attention to the fact that moderation, which was perceived to be a necessary prerequisite for self-mastery, was considered by the Greeks an essentially masculine structure of active virility. In other words, self-mastery and active self-creation was possible only for a person who was both free and active in character, and these attributes were addressed to men only – men as free citizens and men as active penetrating participants of sexual intercourse.

Along similar lines, Ellen Greene suggests that one of the most disturbing gender problems in Foucault's late aesthetics is the fact that he, just like ancient Greco-Roman thinkers, ignores the question of what a not-male-centred version of erotic relationships would be like. As we have seen, in his inquiries Foucault valorizes the phallic mode of representation, which represents and organizes erotic relations as necessarily hierarchical and power-driven. What results from this, in Greene's view, is that he fails to identify his "analytic of power" as male-specific and as linked to the larger patriarchal ideology of Greek culture. Moreover, as a result, he does not recognize that the model of domination and discourses that produce sexuality in his own analyses are also strongly gendered: they reflect a male-centered perspective that takes patriarchy for granted, and always constructs sexual subjectivity as male. (Greene 1996, 2.)

With similar problems in mind, Teresa de Lauretis argues in her book *Technologies of Gender* (1987) that Foucault's gender blindness is manifest in his insistence that sexuality and power are coextensive. For to deny gender in the analysis of this "coextension," she insists, is to deny the social relations of gender that validate and constitute the sexual oppression of women – and to retain an 'ideology' that is manifestly self-serving to the male-gendered subject (de Lauretis 1987, 15; Thornton 1991, 186.)

Foucault was not unaware of these problems. He explicates in the second part of his history of sexuality (*L'usage des plaisirs* 1984) how the masculine character and structure of ancient moderation and ethics echoes the views of Aristotle, who explicitly rejected the Socratic argument for a basic unity of virtue that implied that virtue was identical in men and women.

As Foucault points out, Aristotle only focused on the masculine male virtues, and ignored those that were exclusively feminine. Thus, in Aristotle's view, for the relationship between men and women to be in good order, both partners must have a share in the same virtues, although both sexes possess them in their own specific ways. The one who is ruling, i.e., the man, possesses moral goodness in its full and perfect form, while the ruled, including women, need only have moral

goodness to the extent required of them (as not-free and not-citizens). So conceived, man as a ruler embodies moderation and courage as full virtues, while in women these virtues merely serve other virtues. As a result, as Foucault aptly notes “the man stands both as a complete and finished model of these virtues and as that principle motivating their practice.” (UP 84.)¹⁵⁵

Hence, Foucault concludes, the Greeks gave moderation an essentially masculine structure, which meant that immoderation must necessarily imply something else. As his analysis evidences, this negative other (my term) was connected by Greek male thinkers to the feminine characteristics of an individual, be they present in the male or the female body. Therefore, to be moderate and available for active aesthetic self-creation and ethics demands one to be male and masculine, while being feminine or a woman means being passive, weak and immoderate, and in a state of non-resistance with regard to the force of pleasure.

With this division in mind, Foucault remarks that being feminine or a woman “meant being incapable of that virile stance with respect to oneself that enabled one to be stronger than oneself. In this sense, the man of pleasures and desires, the man of non-mastery (*akrasia*) or self-indulgence (*akolasia*) was a man who could be called feminine, but more essentially with respect to himself than with respect to others.” (UP 84-85.)¹⁵⁶ So defined, femininity and government of the self (and, along with it, aesthetics of the self) are defined as opposite characteristics.

Yet, despite the fact that Foucault registers some of the ambivalences of Classical representations of women, Diprose accuses him of not really attempting to analyse their significance or structural importance for his own understanding of the expressions freedom and self-government. Moreover, she argues that his premise that the Greeks were primarily interested in passivity and activity, and not in masculinity and femininity, is also problematic, because Greek males associated passivity so strongly with women and femininity that these two terms cannot be separated from each other.

Passivity and femininity are, in other words, two sides of the same coin, binary opposites to the terms masculinity and activity – opposites that both produce and maintain each other. They are irretrievably linked in patriarchal societies, which use the negative female value to produce the positive value of being male (or masculine). Therefore, as McNay, in turn, observes, “At points the artificial separation Foucault tries to maintain between femininity and passivity breaks down and the two categories are shown to be imbricated in each other” (McNay 1992, 78).

According to McNay’s evaluation, for Foucault to remain at the very basic level of gender analysis and to be content with asserting that women did not figure in the exclusive domination of the virile model is to remain at a rather banal level of analysis, given that the value and importance of masculinity only gains significance in relation to the lack of femininity. In addressing this problem, McNay concludes that this blind spot of Foucault’s is even more remarkable given “that most of his previous works – most notably *Madness and Civilization* – have been dedicated to demonstrating how domination is achieved through the constitution of a marginalized and inferior ‘other’” (ibid. 79).

In a similar vein, Diprose accuses Foucault of re-creating a model of self-mastery and ethics, which depends upon a struggle to subordinate the feminine characteristic of immoderation to the male body and self, and which (unlike the female body and self) also becomes a locus of artistic creation. Again, the problem is, first of all, in the exclusion of the female or feminine other from the domain of active subjectivity. With these notions in mind, the criticisms of Diprose and McNay suggest that the shutting away of women from the domain of aesthetic (and ethical) self-creation in Foucault is not necessarily mere omission, but could be seen as a structural necessity. (Diprose 1994, 30.)

Following similar critical lines, Mariam Fraser goes on to suggest that the exclusion of women from the aesthetics of the self is repeated in Foucault, who prioritises care of the self over care of others. As a result, she finds that Foucault maintains “the relation with the self over and above relations with others or any

intersubjective – or indeed non-subjective – experience.” (Fraser 1997, 30.) McNay argues, in much the same spirit, that the most problematic aspect of Foucault’s aesthetics of the self is its disengaged and undialectical character, which she sees to conflict with recent feminist attempts to understand more fully the intersubjective dimension of social relations. In her view, Foucault did not want “to relinquish some notion of political engagement in favour of an uncritical, extreme particularism.” (McNay 1992, 163.) She suggests, therefore, that he fails to explain how “the potential uncovered in the exploration of identity can be communicated to others in order to initiate progressive change at the level of the group, community or class” (ibid. 165).

In my view, these feminist critiques of Foucault’s late aesthetics are to some extent justified, but rather too polarized (I will return to this latter aspect a little later). For it is true that in his late aesthetics, too, he mainly ignores the question of the feminine and female other, and concentrates once again on idealizing traditions of transgressive aesthetics that are clearly gendered and that associate aesthetic subjectivity with masculine values and self-images.

Consequently, Foucault never properly considers the question of what not-male-centred versions of aesthetics of the self might be like. Furthermore, he also ignores the fact that women’s problems have been very different in questions concerning aesthetic self-creation, as well as in their experiences of individual sexual selves and pleasures. Perhaps partly as a result of this, he excludes from consideration all those alternative texts that present women’s viewpoints on erotic relations and “styles of loving,” such as the one presented by Sappho, the ancient Greek poet (Greene 1995 and 1996; Benjamin 1988; Richlin 1991; Skinner 1993; Williams 1995; Snyder 1997).¹⁵⁷

Due to these problems, it seems justifiable to say that Foucault’s theorizations of the aesthetics of the self clearly remain in the tradition of male-centred thinking. Moreover, the exclusion of women as positive active agents from the domain of aesthetics and active self-government seems, indeed, to have had some structural importance in his thinking: despite the fact that he recognizes the oppositional

character of the terms ‘feminine’ and ‘masculine,’ he never really tries to deconstruct this binary opposition, but repeats it through a rather traditional (masculine) definition of individual self-government – and clearly to the benefit of masculinity.

In my view, it is specifically here that we must interrupt and disturb Foucault’s theorizations and add to his agenda at least some traits of the historical female voices that are kept silent in his inquiries. As I will illustrate next, this also seems to be true of his analyses of modern aesthetics of the self, which similarly focus on male experiences of limit-attitudes and aesthetic subjection.

Culte de moi and the Question of Gender

Similar problems in terms of gender to those I mentioned above in Foucault’s reading of the ancient texts recurs in his essay on the Enlightenment, in which he connects the ancient theme of the aesthetics of the self to Kant’s and Baudelaire’s notions of modernity. Allow me to elaborate, therefore, a little further on this critical journey beyond Foucault’s insights by showing that his analyses of Baudelairean dandyism and Kantian Enlightenment are also in need of some re-thinking when considered in the light of feminist studies.

As I have shown, Baudelaire came to represent for Foucault some sort of idealized aesthetic male icon – an icon representing modern attitudes and the active individual (dandy) who attempts to turn his life into a site of art. Foucault considers dandyism, in brief, an example of a specifically modern attitude (*culte de moi*), which is characterized by the willingness to make one’s body, behavior, passions and existence a work of art. Like his earlier interest in avant-garde literature, in which Foucault turned toward mad male thinkers and mad male artists, his late interest in arts of living was also restricted to transgressive male figures and their sexual liberation. Women, as well as their art, are, again, excluded totally from Foucault’s insights on transgressive aesthetics.

In my view, the lack of female examples is not the most serious problem in Foucault's account, however. I contend that what is even more problematic is the fact that he misses or actively ignores the fact that for Baudelaire a dandy is by definition the opposite of a woman. In other words, just as in ancient theories of the self, in which femininity and self-government are largely taken as opposite conceptions, in Baudelaire there is a deep structural opposition between women and dandies, and the two cannot be brought together within his theoretical order (Wolff 1985 and Pollock 1990, 70-71). In my view, this is well evidenced in his early definition of a dandy, which places a strict opposition between the terms 'dandy' (artificial, pure beauty) and 'woman' (something natural and sexually uncontrolled). In Baudelaire's own words:

A woman is the opposite of dandy. Therefore, she is horrible. A woman is hungry and she wants to eat, she's thirsty and wants to drink. She is in heat and wants to be fucked. [...] A woman is natural, that is, she is disgusting [*abominable*]. Therefore, she is always vulgar... (Baudelaire, cit. in Kempf 1997, 69, translation mine.)¹⁵⁸

For Baudelaire, women's sexuality represented something questionable and even horrifying, which he, just like the Greek male thinkers read by Foucault, rather associated with immoderation and the drive for instant pleasure than with individual self-government (without which, as we have seen, there is no need for the aesth/ethical training of one's self). Moreover, Baudelaire differentiated the aesthetic enjoyment men might feel when observing women from what they feel when the observing the aesthetic appearance of dandies. In his view, the female body is aesthetically imperfect by nature and thus it cannot, cause pure aesthetic enjoyment, as perfect male bodies do (Baudelaire 1999, 540). In short, for Baudelaire, the word 'dandy' implied beauty and high intelligence at the same time, while female beauty was fragile, decorative and part of a whole that is "stupide peut-être" (possibly stupid) (ibid. 513, 539).

Furthermore, what Baudelaire's texts show is that it is *his text* itself that constructs the notion of woman across the fictive map of urban spaces, in other words, the

spaces of modernity (Pollock 1990, 72). As a result of this productive imagining of the sign 'woman,' women are excluded from the category of active aesthetic subjects and are suppressed by the logic of the same (male rationality). In other words, female otherness, not to mention alternative forms of women's lives and loves, is not appreciated or even recognized as a positive value in Baudelaire's male-centred modernity.

Perhaps partly due to this, Baudelaire does not appreciate at all the androgynous character of dandies as characteristic of women. Quite the contrary: he refers to the well-dressed female dandies of Parisian cafés as manifestations of "Narcissism and stupidity," despising their modern aesthetic appearance.¹⁵⁹ The strict structural opposition between a woman and a dandy is also manifest in his statement that female dandies do not exist because women who dress and act like dandies "do not think," nor do they contemplate the crowds and city streets in the ways in which a "true *flâneur*" does. This is, in fact, all he has to say about the transgressive aesthetics of the self of his female contemporaries!

As Griselda Pollock points out, Baudelaire's texts on dandyism are marked by an opposition between the home and the outside space of freedom in which there is liberty to look without being watched or even recognized in the act of looking. This space is the imagined freedom of the voyeur, of the *flâneur*/dandy/modern artist. (Pollock 1990, 70-71.) However, as Janet Wolff argues, this space is clearly reserved for male agents. Hence, there is no female equivalent of the masculine figure of the *flâneur*/dandy – or, perhaps better, there is not and *could not* be a female *flâneuse* (Wolff 1985).

Throughout his writings, Baudelaire also repeats a common presupposition of his era concerning the oppositional nature of women and intelligence. As Frédéric Monneyron comments, mid nineteenth-century aesthetic misogyny in France reflected, in this respect, the conceptions of women developed by eighteenth century philosophers such as Arthur Schopenhauer, Immanuel Kant and Edmund Burke (Monneyron 1993, 200). Reduced to the roles of mothers, wives, mistresses and passive aesthetic objects, women found that their only available tasks were to

please the male eye, to love men and to take care of their children. Being introduced as belonging to the uncontrolled nature that modern enlightened men are to overcome, women remain victims of the dualism of enlightenment thinking – in other words, they are not included in the program of individual liberation, but are positioned on the reverse side of the process of enlightenment.

Sigfried Weigel crystallizes this problem in her *Body- and Image-Space* (1996) in the following words, which are worth citing in full:

[W]hen it comes to [...] women's desire for a subject position, and to a speaking position located as it were on the reverse side of enlightenment, it soon becomes tangible how the dialectic is then set into motion in such a way that it is not easy to gain a secure foothold. For women cannot simply be turned into, or declared to be, the obverse. Any attempt to make up lost ground in terms of the self-realization hitherto denied her or to reduce the male subject's head start in the process of enlightenment would have far more serious consequences for women than the detrimental effects of progress as attested by and for man. Whereas for man the process and practices of laying claim and subjugating Nature were largely carried out on the material and the images of the other, and above all of the other sex, for women this work on the process of civilization would affect what is her own: *mater-materia*, the mastering and rationalization of which is the prime goal of the preservation of selfhood; the woman's body as the *skandalon* of a rationally oriented history. The sacrificial structure of the history of the enlightenment not only repeats itself more corporeally and closer to the bone, as it were, in the female subject, but women at the same time also have a share in both the reverse and the observe sides. (Weigel 1996, 67-68.)

As a result of this repressive logic, the *female* variant of the dialectic of enlightenment (in addition to Reason and Other) introduces what might be described as a *third position*. This position is highly unstable, however, due to the fact that it must maintain relations with both sides of the dialectic, that is, with

both reason and the Other (nature). The position of the female subject is thus far more complicated than that of the male. It also introduces a *doubly-reversed* perspective in the sense that the perception and speech of the second sex wishes to occupy the position of the first, but it cannot simply shake off its provenance from the dark reverse side. The complexity of this constellation also seems to constantly elude conceptual articulation. (Ibid. 68.) In this respect, as Weigel further observes, what the tradition of enlightenment seems to be in need of is the introduction of a *polyperspectival* and *topographical* dimension to dialectical thinking.

Given the above notions, Foucault's choosing of Baudelaire, and to some degree, Kant as the spokespersons of *the* experience of modernity is problematic, in that this experience is clearly gendered (McNay 1994, 149). Following the traditional lines of white male aesthetics of the self, Foucault, just like most of his male predecessors, comes to ignore the question of the female other. In my view, one of the most serious ethical and political problems in his aesthetics of the self derives from this fact. In other words, despite his stress on multiplicity, difference and discontinuity, he takes it for granted that his reading of the history of the aesthetics of the self is primarily from the free-white-male perspective. Moreover, he never practices self-interrogation or offers a critique of the racial, class and gender biases in his own theorizing, and consequently various other others also remain largely invisible to his thinking.

In this connection, some feminists have commented that the problems inherent in Foucault's degendered or impersonal perspective go beyond simple gender blindness. Lois McNay, for example, suggests that his failure to analyse the implications of presenting the Baudelairean dandy as the paradigm of modern ethics "results in tensions and aporia which undermine Foucault's explicit arguments" (ibid. 150). What she means by this is that

Foucault insists that the starting point for an ethics of the self is a critical ontology or politics of location that is as "precise as possible," that is oriented to the "contemporary limits of the necessary." Yet, having stressed

the necessity for a rigorous and detailed form of self-critique, the detail that remains significantly unaddressed in Foucault's own politics of self-location is the deflection or identification that permits him to situate a conventional and gendered notion of the 'heroization' of the self at the centre of a radical ethics. (Ibid. 151.)

McNay thus criticizes Foucault for insisting that modern ethics of the self embodies some sort of limit-attitude, and yet the frontiers of modern identity are clearly located in a figure who belongs to a canon of male avant-garde literature. Against this interpretation, she suggests that we could find much more forceful and relevant examples of the contemporary exploration of identity from the cases of women who are increasingly stepping into social settings in which the only available identities are often those offered by dominant, masculine stereotypes. (Ibid.; Giddens 1991, 216.) In her view, this also seems to be the case in the domain of contemporary critical art, in which the feminist problematizations of identity and the self form one of the strongest avant-garde challenges of our own time.

In my opinion, the critical comments I have presented above are important because they imply that not *all* philosophically valid practices of the self are simply exercises in freedom or critical aesthetics, as Foucault seems to suggest, but some might also support the maintenance of gender hierarchies and even political practices of exclusion. Therefore, we should not be content with the theoretical celebration of individual freedom, but should give special attention to various *practical* limitations individuals might face, depending on their gender, ethnicity, class and sexual identity.

With this in mind, I suggest that a critical interrogation of the aesthetics of the self demands that we pose the critical question: *Whose* body and self is it that is free to change its aesthetic appearance at will and to affect others through this self-creation? Alternatively: *Whose* aesthetics of the self is taken in each theory as presenting an ideal case? Is this self gendered? Does it belong to some specific class and ethnicity? This sort of pluralizing (and politicising) of the theory of

aesthetics of the self is crucial, I maintain, because without it we are in danger of romanticizing our ideals of the aesthetics of the self, and of ignoring its potentially oppressive aspects.

With the same sort of critique in mind, a variety of theorists have resorted to criticism of Foucault's late aesthetics of the self in terms of his "retreat to aesthetics." Moreover, his aesth/ethical insights have also been criticized for the lack of normative standards for moral action. In the two following sections I react to these last critical sets of arguments before moving on to an analysis of the advantages of Foucault's late theorizations for feminism.

The Retreat to Aesthetics

Foucault's theorizations of the aesthetics of the self have also been an object of heated criticism outside the feminist circles. Many of these critics have acknowledged the aestheticist tone underlying Foucault's idea of the care of the self. Richard Wolin (1986), for example, assigns Foucault's work of addressing aesthetics a utopian critical function, which, in his view, may at best lead to the imaginative creation of new realities "by offering alternative, powerful views to the present and possibilities to exist otherwise" (Wolin 1986, 85). However, he feels strongly that the aesthetic realm should not be differentiated from other realms, such as the ethical and the cognitive, if attitudes to creative aesthetic practices are not to remain merely abstract or elitist.

The problem in Foucault's account, according to Wolin, is that aesthetic action *per se* is prioritised over the validity of the action. What he means, in more concrete terms, is that Foucault endorses the adoption of any kind of non-conventional subject position, rather than trying to specify what subject positions should be adopted. As a result, Wolin argues, he ends up with a decisionist position, according to which the only criterion for an individual's action is that acts have to be performed tastefully; with due respect for "stylistic concerns

which elevate such actions above the mundane actions of the vulgar ‘many’” (ibid. 84).

With these critical remarks, Wolin concludes that Foucault’s aesthetics of the self introduces no difference between manipulative practices of the self that are predatory in relation to others, and practices that attempt to break down what Foucault regards as oppressive forms of identity. Hence, Wolin claims that Foucault’s ethical approach is no more than an aesthetic game of one-upmanship, totally lacking in any kind of collective politics. Foucault’s standpoint favours, in Wolin’s view, “either an attitude of narcissistic self-absorption or one of outwardly directed, aggressive self-aggrandizement” (ibid. 85).

Charles Taylor (1989) concentrates instead on demonstrating how the modern sense of the self, to which Foucault’s ideas are also tied, is structurally underpinned by an aesthetic expressionism that has its roots in the Romantic epoch. By expressionism Taylor means here the late-eighteenth-century idea that all individuals are different and original, and this originality determines how they ought to live. Along with romantic, expressive view of human life there also arose a new understanding of art, which was seen as the activity through which expression of the self was achieved. This shift in the focus of aesthetic theory led to a concentration on the idea of expression instead of imitation or *mimesis*.

From his analysis of this historical development Taylor then goes on to explicate how the Romantic notion of aesthetic expressionism is still central to the modern understanding of identity, although in thinkers such as Baudelaire and Nietzsche, the emphasis shifted from concentration on the relation between nature and the self to a more reflexive stress on the self’s relation to itself. Even the most anti-subjectivist modernist positions share, and indeed accentuate, the Romantic emphasis on the poet or artist as an ideal paradigm of being human. (Taylor, 1989, most notably 461-462, 481.)

If we consider Foucault’s aesthetics of the self as part of the specifically *modern* tradition of understanding the self as Taylor, for example, does, it is, in my view,

somewhat problematic to accuse him of simple elitist aestheticism. Referring to this, Lois McNay comments that it may be more interesting to view his work “as yet another variation of the Romantic/modernist quest to retrieve a more intense or worthwhile form of experience which escapes the deadening effects of the instrumental rationality which pervades contemporary culture” (McNay 1992, 161). McNay also points out that Wolin’s criticizing of Foucault for irrationalist decisionism is rather superficial, if not misleading and suggests that a close reading of Foucault’s texts soon reveals that his relation to Enlightenment thought (as well as to ethics and politics, I would add) is much more complex than Wolin is prepared to admit.

Moreover, Foucault’s prioritising of aesthetics as a realm of critical contemporary action could be seen as the continuation of a tradition of critical modern thinking. This tradition runs from Nietzsche’s emphasis on the process of creative destruction in order to affirm the self in a fragmented world, through Simmel, who stressed the notion of the stylisation of life in order to break free from the homogenizing tendencies of modern culture, and through Adorno and his focus on the potentiality of the modernist work of art to transcend the commodifying forces that have come to dominate modern mass culture, to John Dewey’s and Richard Shusterman’s intergration of art and life. (McNay 1992, 160.) In the context of this tradition, it is my contention that Foucault’s drawing on the notion of aesthetic self-creation could also be seen as an attempt to rethink the subject as a site of ethical (and political) action that escapes the utilitarian logic and instrumental rationality that structures contemporary social experience.

Seen in this context, it could be argued, in response to all those who accuse Foucault of simple elitism or irrational decisionism, that in his late aesthetics of the self, the creation of one’s self as a transgressive work of art is not meant to represent a gesture of withdrawal, or elitist aestheticism, but rather emphasizes the fact that *everyone’s* life and identity always involve a process of self-creation and are open to re-creation and change. Therefore, I maintain that it is not completely justified to insist that the aesthetic element in his ethics of the self simply represents a turning into some sort of narcissist aestheticism. For it could also be

seen as an attempt to free moral imagination from the mere repeating of existing norms and laws, and to establish new experimental ways of existing. From this perspective, Foucault's aesthetics of the self aims to activate a critical utopianism, which carries a clear promise of the possibility of change (or at least the promise of multiple local changes). (McNay 1994, 147-148.) As I see it, this idea is crucial to all current feminist viewpoints on women's critical aesthetics of the self.

In my view, another aspect that should not be ignored is that in many respects, Foucault's position is close to that of the radical avant-garde art of the 19th and 20th centuries, which also attempted to overcome the differentiation between art and life in capitalist societies by turning the life of an individual into a transgressive art of living (I am thinking here of Baudelaire, Rimbaud, Dadaism, early surrealism, parts of Russian avant-garde, International Situationists and Joseph Beuys, for example). In this context, I believe that we have to acknowledge that Foucault's aesthetics is not grounded on Kantian ideas of pure and disinterested aesthetics, or on aesthetic decisionism, as Wolin suggests. Rather, throughout his oeuvre, he attempted to continue the tradition of critical aesthetics and political avant-garde art, which, since the early 19th century, has sought to connect aesthetic values with ethical and political values, and to turn the life of an individual into a site of radical art.¹⁶⁰

One more criticism of Foucault's late aesthetics that is worth taking up here – at least to which I wish to react in this study – concerns his apparent lack of normative standards for moral action. This aspect has been addressed most forcefully by Jürgen Habermas, who has accused Foucault of a lack of normative grounding in his analyses (Habermas 1987).

With Habermas's evaluations in mind, Lois McNay goes on to argue in her book *Foucault and Feminism. Power, Gender and the Self* (1992), that, in order to respect others and difference concretely, that is, in order to incorporate the ideas of the other and difference into the feminist political program and also to respect differences in the theory of the aesthetics of the self, it is necessary to work within some normative framework (McNay 1992, 156). Because her book is one of the

few existing broader feminist attempts to “move beyond” Foucault’s aesthetics of the self, I will summarize her main ideas here, despite my disagreement with her.

McNay’s Normative Solution

The most intense criticism that McNay directs at Foucault’s late work concerns the lack of normative criteria in his ethics of the self. She begins her critique by labelling Foucault a postmodern thinker because of some parallels between his thought and that of Lyotard. Attacking the whole postmodern debate (which she interprets quite superficially), she argues against Foucault’s and Lyotard’s pluralizing of truths, moralities and reasons, claiming that “feminist critique necessarily rests on normative judgements about what constitutes legitimate and non-legitimate forms of action in relation to the political goal of overcoming the subordination of women.” (McNay 1992, 117.) This is so because feminists cannot, in her view, “afford to sacrifice such validity judgements for the more relativist position of performative or local justification espoused by postmodern theorists” (ibid.). She then turns to Habermas’s discourse ethics, which, she believes, succeeds in providing the basis for feminist politics that combines respect for difference with ideas of solidarity and collective political aims.

In a nutshell, Habermas’ normative discourse ethics is grounded on the supposition that social norms are legitimated if they are or could have been the product of a reasoned conversation achieved under certain idealized conditions that Habermas calls an “ideal speech situation” (Habermas 1990). As his “discourse principle” is meant to illustrate, discourse ethics is a proceduralist account of moral rightness. It is his belief that only the norms that meet (or could meet) *with the approval of all* participants in practical discourse can claim to be morally valid (ibid. 66).

Habermas argues, moreover, that if this common approval of a moral norm is to be taken as belonging to a process that participants can regard as rational, the process must meet certain conditions. These conditions turn out to be rather

demanding when they are examined and include unlimited time, freedom from oppression, and the availability of all relevant information.¹⁶¹ According to Habermas, they are not, however, externally imposed criteria developed by the moral theorist, but are to be found *within the attitudes of the participants themselves*. This is so, he argues, because in order for participants to be able to think of the justificatory process as good enough for what they agree counts as fully valid, they must believe that each of them has met these conditions. They may discover, of course, that the conditions do not hold, but this does not lessen their critical potential. (Habermas 1999, 298.)

In Habermas's view, truth is also defined essentially in terms of this sort of rational consensus. So conceived, it means, first of all, the promise to attain a rational consensus of what counts as "true." Moreover, Habermas links his notion of rational consensus with emancipatory critique, stating that emancipatory critique is governed by the supposition that rational consensus between individual participants can be achieved not only with regard to some problematic truth claims but also with regard to problematic norms. (McNay 1992, 183.) If this is applied to the feminist concept, it suggests that women's emancipation should also be sought from the rational consensus between different groups of women, rather than in the acceptance (or "celebration") of their differences.

What McNay finds valuable in Habermas's account is that he models social relations along the lines of rational interaction and intersubjectivity, rather than basing his ethics (like Foucault) on the idea of individual "solitary activity." It is, in her view, in this contradiction that Habermas offers a way of "conceiving of a politics of difference which does not necessarily slide into an atomized politics, an attitude of *laissez-faire* or a simplistic celebration of difference *qua* difference" (ibid. 181.) McNay suggests that there is in Habermas's ethics the suggestion of a theory of communicative action, which posits the political aim of "establishing a community based on the tolerance and protection of individual and group differences" (ibid.).

Ignoring totally the fact that Foucault's notion of care also implies care of the other, as I have shown earlier in this study, as well as the fact that he also sought some systematic political forces (as I suggested in connection with his work on homosexuality, for example), McNay simply reduces Foucault's aesthetics of the self back to some sort of rough relativism or extreme subjectivism or, as she expresses it herself, "simplistic celebration of difference *qua* difference." Yet, her legitimation of this sort of interpretation remains extremely contradictory (she praises Foucault at the same time for offering better tools for coping with individual existence than Habermas, for example). Moreover, I maintain that her way of solving the problems of Foucault's ethics comes undone when it is examined more closely. I will explicate briefly what I mean by this statement.

Despite his stress on the importance of the autonomous use of reason in different groups and individuals, Habermas's discourse ethics is largely grounded on the idea of commonly-valid reason, the application of which will lead individuals to understand each other and to communicate successfully with each other. My argument is that this sort of viewpoint, notably when it is taken as the basis for a theory of ethics, runs counter to many of Foucault's aims and also threatens to destroy what I find *ethically* (as well as politically) valuable in his account. This is so, I contend, because Habermas's account denies the existence of multiple reasons or different reasons by suggesting that, in idealized speech situations, all participants will end up drawing similar conclusions if they use their reason autonomously (in this respect, Habermas is a Kantian thinker).

Secondly, I suggest that, partly as a result of this, Habermas' theory of communication does away with notions of the 'other' and 'difference' rather than preserves them. For if these notions are conceived of as something that can be fully understood, the *otherness* of the other is not actually allowed to exist but is rather taken as some sort of intellectual obstacle that should be removed by using tools of common reason. Alternatively, and perhaps better, the existence of the other in communication is taken as a metaphor for the immature stance of communication, that is, as something that has to be overcome in the process of emancipation.

By pluralizing reason and truth, Foucault, in my view, attempts to strengthen this very ethical dimension of intersubjectivity and communication. This is not to say, for sure, that his ethical theory is perfect (I'm thinking here of his gender-blindness, for example). What I wish to stress against McNay, however, is that the tendency to develop the ethical relation of the self to otherness and not-me is clearly present in Foucault's thought. Therefore Foucault, in contrast to Habermas, stresses that we must re-write our notion of reason so as to offer space for the fact that, in fact, "reason is self-created, which is why I have tried to analyze forms of rationality: different foundations, different creations, different modifications in which rationalities engender one another, oppose and pursue one another" (SPS 443).¹⁶²

For Foucault, in other words, there is not just one common reason that makes communication possible, and which should overcome the communicative problem of the other. Rather, there is an endless number of different reasons and reasonings, one example of which is the techniques of the self in Greek and Roman antiquity. In my view, this supports the idea that there is also a multiplicity of individual lifestyles, or aesthetics of the selves, the ethical traits of which cannot be reduced back to the logic of the same, or explained in terms of one single rationality.

Therefore, when interpreting the aesthetic techniques of the self, Foucault does not even try to offer us a coherent and universally valid ethical theory, which McNay seems to be in need of. Rather, he attempts, first of all, to construct a genealogy of problems, or problematizations, which is meant to show not that everything is bad (*mauvais*), but that *everything is dangerous*, as Foucault himself comments in his essay on ethics (GE 231). This does not mean, however, that Foucault's emphasizing of individuality is a sign of ethical irresponsibility or irresponsible relativism, or that it simply ignores the notion of the other, as McNay suggests. On the contrary, I argue that he emphasizes pluralist individuality precisely for ethical reasons, in his very resistance to the tendency to ignore the existence of individual differences and otherness.

Why, then, does Foucault end up stressing the importance of difference rather than intersubjective communication or the prioritising of the other? I suggest that the reason may lie in his practical supposition that opposition to normalizing and oppressive state power grows in an important sense from individuals, that is, from attempts to shape one's way of existing and relating, as well as from associating one's self with the critical interrogation of the cultural limits imposed on our subjectivity. So conceived, the quest for individual freedom and aesthetics of the self legitimately turns into a question of creating new forms of subjectivity that may function as sites of resistance, at both the individual and collective levels, stretching the limits of what our selves and existences might entail. (Oksala 2002, 229.) In my view, this account does not run counter to demands to respect the other, but rather supports them on both ethical and political levels.

The problem with McNay's solution is, in short, that she wishes to create space for differences *and*, at the same time, to offer a universally valid normative ethical theory. It is, of course, true that "consensus" does not necessarily entail "sameness" of viewpoint, and it can also be a function of setting aside differences without eliminating them. I maintain, however, that McNay does not succeed in this too well, because in her aim to create a universally valid ethical theory, somewhat ironically, she tends to reduce all differences back to the rationality of the same. Moreover, in accusing Foucault of extreme particularism and subjectivism, she ignores the fact that his position is not simply subjectivist, irrationalist, or non-ethical simply because he stresses the multiplicity of rationalities and truths. Rather, as I have already suggested, care of the self can also be seen as implying care for others, given that this care is practised in the name of freedom.

What should be noted, moreover, is that the idea of freedom of individual choice does not actually imply the freedom of *acts* in Foucault's work. Rather, as he comments in a late interview, freedom is a *choice* made in the name of freedom (note, again, his Sartrean tone of voice). In other words, we are free to choose, but this does not mean that we are free to act against other individuals as we like. In his own words:

I say freedom of sexual *choice* and not freedom of sexual *acts* because there are sexual acts like rape which should not be permitted whether they involve a man and a woman or two men. I don't think we should have as our objective some sort of absolute freedom or total liberty of sexual action. However, where freedom of sexual choice is concerned one has to be absolutely intransigent. This includes the liberty of expression of that choice. By this I mean the liberty to manifest that choice or not to manifest it. (SC 289.)¹⁶³

It may be true that, in his aesthetic inquiries of the self, Foucault does not provide a coherent theory of ethics. Yet, I maintain that this does not lessen the ethical (or political) strength of his writings. The usefulness of Foucault's late insights for feminism lies mainly in his way of looking at our theories of the self and society, and in his attempt to re-evaluate them, in "freeing up possibilities for new forms of experience that might lead to a different understanding of theory, of ourselves, of reality," as Jana Sawicki puts it (Sawicki 1991, 11).

What this means, in practice, is that what I find valuable in Foucault's late theorizations is, first of all, that he is not willing to reduce his views according to some normative principle, but attempts to encourage philosophers to cope with difference in ways that do not reduce them back to the same (common reason, cogito, rational consensus). This effort is valuable, I maintain, not only because it shows respect for differences and others, but also because only in this way is it possible to truly point beyond existing alternatives in questions concerning the issue of the self, not least in terms of sexual freedom and gender.

As the above comments suggest, there are some evident strengths in Foucault's late theorizations of the aesthetic subject, also for feminist ends. I therefore wish to emphasize that, when analysing Foucault's late writings, acknowledging the weaknesses of his account is not enough, especially if we are to move beyond the polarized and simplifying analyses of his work. With the same sort of idea in mind, Jana Sawicki notes that

In the ‘final’ analysis, proof of the value of using Foucault for feminism will be in the puddings, that is, in the practical implications that adopting his methods and insights will have. Attending to the exigencies of feminist practice will sometimes require that we either ignore Foucault or move beyond him. A Foucauldian feminism would require no less. (Sawicki 1991, 109.)

Allow me therefore to make my own contribution to this “moving beyond Foucault” by further developing some aspects of his late thinking which seem to benefit feminist theorizations of the subject.

The Advantages of Foucault’s Late Aesthetics for Feminism

There are five main points in my analysis of the advantages of Foucault’s late aesthetics for feminist theorizations of the subject. Firstly, I maintain that his idea of the subject’s active self-creation, based on the problematization of straightforward causal connections between individual practices and either social or natural determinants, brings his insights closer to the non-reductive analysis of women’s status and identities proposed in recent post-feminist theory. This emphasis is important and also practically useful for feminist ends, I suggest, because it implies that, although there are structures of domination, notably constructions of gender, which ensure the overall subordinate position of women in society, in their daily lives many women do not find themselves oppressed, but rather experience that they exercise an amount of power and influence over other individuals and themselves (McNay 1992, 66-67).

What this also suggests is that women, as social subjects, do not always fit the picture of women as representations. In other words, there is a certain discrepancy and slippage between the stereotypical representations of women and women as the subjects of real historical relations, of which gender is perhaps the primary but not the only relation (McNay 1992, 67-69; de Lauretis 1987, 10). Therefore, it seems reasonable to argue that, despite their oppressed position in Western

patriarchies (inequalities in power position and wages, prostitution), women also use power, and can affect their historical situation and selves in one way or another.

In order to grasp this discrepancy between women's representations and their actual stages of everyday life, a number of contemporary feminists have suggested that power must be analysed not just as a mechanism of domination, but also from the perspective of microphysics of power, including the individual's possibilities of functioning as an active agent in the constitution of the power relations that form her/his historical being.

With this in mind, feminist intellectuals have emphasized that, for example, women who work in their domestic sphere do not necessarily perceive themselves as powerless or as oppressed victims of patriarchy, but might just as well view their domestic functions in terms of an alternative system of positive values through which they interpret their experiences. Therefore, the argument has been that we should not just accept the negative clichés associated with women's social position, in domestic work for example, but we should open up our perspective to include the positive and more complex experiences women might have, including their experiences of their/our own power (Waerness 1987, 35).

This change in perspective from older feminist ideas of colonized and oppressed females – and also from the Foucauldian-influenced feminism that centres on normalization, bio-power and docility – toward the notion of the subject as an actively acting agent has led many feminists, quite naturally, to stress possibilities of resistance, both at the individual and collective levels (possibilities to create diverse alliances). At the level of feminist theorization, this has produced new key words, such as contestation, intervention and subversion. The Foucauldian post-feminist, Susan Bordo, terms this shift in feminist theory the postmodern position:

Postmodern feminism [...] criticizes *both* the “old” discourse *and* the [Foucauldian] reconstruction of it [...] for over-emphasizing [...] control, for failing to adequately acknowledge the creative and resistant responses that

continually challenge and disrupt it. From this post-modern perspective, both the earlier emphasis on “social conditioning” and the later move to “normalization” underestimate the unstable nature of subjectivity and the creative agency of individuals, “the cultural work” (as one theorist puts it) “by which nomadic, fragmented, active subjects confound dominant discourse. “Gaps” in that discourse are continually allowing for the eruption of “difference,” and even the most subordinated subjects are therefore continually confronted with opportunities for resistance, for making meanings that “oppose or evade the dominant ideology.” There is power and pleasure in this culture, television critic John Fiske insists, “in being different.” (Bordo 1994, 235.)

The second advantage of Foucault’s late aesthetics for feminism partly overlaps the above notions: it is embedded in his vision that the individual constitution of identity might be considered as critical strategy and a way of affirming alternative lifestyles. To put it in Foucauldian terms, through the formation of a critical ontology of the self, and through the affirmation of one’s personal stylistics of the self, it becomes possible to formulate an alternative political (and ethical) standpoint from which individuals, male and female alike, can actively resist normalizing power and its government of individualization.

In my view, this idea seems at least to benefit feminist theorizations that attempt to build up new perspectives on women as political subjects who might cause changes in their social position through the creation of alternative identities and aesthetic practices of the self. With similar ideas in mind, Mariam Fraser notes that “Foucault’s work has enabled feminists both to recognize the individuality of the self and also to work against it. Since individuality is itself found to be a technique which contributes to the creation of coherent selfhood, it is possible for the relation between an individual and its identity to be opened up, and to be made available as a site of political contestation.” (Fraser 1997, 24.)

These sorts of ideas to do with women’s active self-government have recently been put forward most forcefully in post-feminist gender theorizations, parts of

which I have described earlier in this report. Instead of explaining one's biological sex as the foundation of identity and sexual pleasure, post-feminist gender theorists have emphasized the role of gender as a strategic play and cultural performance that has the power to effect changes too, even in 'sex'. So conceived, the individual's sexual self is not understood as an innate destiny, but is seen far more as an open coalition and a site of political contestation.

The third advantage of Foucault's late aesthetics is that it pluralizes aesthetic resistance and individual "stylistics" of desire, thereby offering space to consider the differences among feminisms as a resource rather than a weakness or a threat. As I have pointed out, in Foucault's terms, there need not be a coherent subject of sexual politics, nor need there be any essential connection between an individual's sexual practices and one's gender identity (or its aesthetic performing). Sexual identity and the self can rather be understood in terms of the diversity and multiplicity of sexual experiences and individual styles.

This notion fits well with Jana Sawicki's suggestion that Foucault's work enables us to think of difference as a resource rather than a threat. To cite the words of Sawicki: "Difference can be a resource insofar as it enables us to multiply the sources of resistance to the many relations of domination that circulate through the social field." For, as she continues, if there is no single locus of power, "then neither is there a central locus of resistance. Moreover, if we redefine our differences, discover new ways of understanding ourselves and each other, then our differences are less likely to be used against us." (Sawicki 1991, 45.)

With similar thoughts in mind, many post-feminist analysts have taken up not only the oppression of women as a large group of people, but also the different forms of active self-government that women might employ as individuals and as specific groups. This stressing of individuality of resistance is extremely important, I maintain, because without the concrete study of the specificity of each case, women's activities as autonomous social subjects cannot be properly understood, nor can we present (or respect) differences among feminists.

Quite naturally, this sort of pluralist standpoint has paved the way for new visions of feminist politics, too. Unlike the foundationalist theories of the subject, which assume that common identity ('woman') precedes the elaboration of political interests, many current gender theorizations view identity and the self as variable cultural constructions, which can be practised politically without any stable identity. What this also means is that female subjectivity and the self are understood as sites of political contestation and individual acts, which might create space for multiple transgressive practices of womanhood and hence support new models of living and alternative forms of subjection. In other words, female subjectivity is perceived as a complexity and site of differences, which demands active re-creation and repetition, and therefore remains open to change.

So conceived, the female subject is allowed to have a unique relation not only to politics but also to aesthetics, the body, pleasure and sexuality. As a result, many feminists have ceased searching for a universal Woman or universally valid feminine aesthetics, and emphasize instead the multiplicity of the possibilities embedded in one's being a woman – or, perhaps better, in the aesthetic creating of each female self.

The fourth advantage of Foucault's late aesthetics is embedded in his linking of the aesthetic subject with the ethical subject. As I have demonstrated, his late notion of care of the self also includes the aspect of the care of others. In my view, this ethical aspect is so crucial for Foucault that he even denies the value of aesthetic practices of the self that do not carry ethical care of others in their structures (as in the California cult of the self, or in the superficial aesthetic cultivation of one's "health" or athletic body). For this reason, I regard feminist critics who accuse Foucault of simply prioritising the care of the self over the care of others to be too simplistic, if not misleading.

My suggestion is rather that despite the fact that there are some gender problems inherent in Foucault's late aesthetics – problems that we must analyse and overcome – his late notion of the self is also of use in feminist attempts to re-write the notion of the subject so as to include ethical and political aspects of otherness.

Moreover, I propose that the usefulness of his insights is evident in cases such as those in which feminists consider gender identity and its aesthetic formation as a site of cultural performance and parody, which might express political resistance through individual – and sometimes also collective – aesthetic choices (manifested in “lesbian chic,” and gender-blending, for example). Therefore, I maintain that, in the context of feminist re-considerations of the self and political subjectivity, Foucault’s aesthetic insights into the construction of individual selfhood also offer a useful set of tools for developing feminist theorizations of the aesthetics of the self, be this done in terms of feminist theory or subversive art (I will return to this shortly).

Last but not least, I maintain that Foucault’s late aesthetics also strengthens the counter-tendencies in philosophical aesthetics that have sought to overcome the earlier limitations of “high” (Kantian) aesthetics by including in the notion of aesthetic subjectivity the “lower” dimensions of human existence such as sexuality, affectiveness, desire, and the body. Due to the fact that it is exactly these aspects of subjectivity that have been excluded from philosophical mainstream definitions of aesthetic subjectivity (as “feminine” or “female” characteristics, in contrast to the idealization of “disinterested” male rationality), it is, in an important sense, these very aspects that are also of great use in attempts to deconstruct the theoretical tools and methods of aesthetic research to better meet the challenges of contemporary feminist thinking and art.

It is with these advantages of Foucault’s late aesthetics in mind that I turn next to consideration of the implications of his work for feminist theorizations of the aesthetics of the self.

9. FEMINIST AESTHETICS OF THE SELF: PLURALIST POLITICS OF PARODY

As I have demonstrated, in his theorizations of the aesthetics of the self, the project of turning one's self or subjectivity into an object of art came to represent for Foucault an attempt to liberate the modern individual, to allow him or her to exist in ways other than he/she is perhaps "supposed" to exist. With this in mind, Foucault suggested that the practices and aesthetic techniques individuals might use to reshape their selves are actually practices of freedom that include important ethical and political promises of more autonomous ways of living. In this study, I have termed this aspect of Foucault's power analysis his "positive aspect of power."

In the following final sections, I suggest that this positive aspect of Foucault's power analysis parallels contemporary feminist theory in its attempt to reconsider the subject in terms of multiplicity, transgression and limit-attitudes. In interpreting these connections, I will focus specifically on two current feminist re-interpretations of the subject, namely, those put forward by Jana Sawicki and Judith Butler.

When coming to terms with Foucault's late aesthetics and the issue of the feminist aesthetics of the self, we should, in my view, bear in mind his argument that there is no "single locus of resistance" and no "source of all rebellion," as Foucault suggests in the first part of his *History of Sexuality*. Rather, power is to be understood as depending on a multiplicity of points of resistance, which are present everywhere in the power network. In my view, this holds true also of the feminist aesthetic practices of the self, which should be understood not so much as a single locus of great refusal or revolt, but far more in terms of a plurality of resistances, each of which is a special case. Thus conceived, feminist aesthetic practices of the self are spread over space and time at varying densities and in an irregular fashion, sometimes mobilizing groups of individuals in a definitive way, and sometimes inflaming certain moments in life, certain points of the body, and certain types of behavior, as Foucault's genealogical analysis of resistance suggests. (HS 94-96.)

Following much the same lines of thought, Sawicki and Butler proceed to reconstruct Foucault's thinking, not through any universally-valid normative code, as in McNay's case, but far more in his own terms, which in Sawicki's work are used to fit into the terminology of radically pluralist feminism, and in Butler's writings, to the post-feminist theorizations of gender identity.

Sawicki's Radically Pluralist Feminism

In this section, I will introduce the main principles of Jana Sawicki's interpretation of Foucault's thinking, which functions as an important theoretical background in my own understanding of feminist aesthetics of the self. Recognizing well the challenge offered by Foucault's genealogies on the self, Sawicki interprets his thinking in terms of "radical pluralism," rather than as relativism, extreme particularism, decisionism, aestheticism, or something that should be judged according to normative principles.

What Sawicki means by the expression "radical pluralism" is pluralism that differs from so-called liberal pluralism on three points. First, it operates with a model of identity that is relational, dynamic and constantly in formation at the microlevel of society. In other words, radical pluralism exists only in the hierarchical context of power relations. This kind of relational and dynamic notion of identity also recognizes plurality both within and between subjects. In this respect, it differs from so-called liberal pluralism, which sees political power as decentralized and dispersed among competing interest groups that are supposed to have a relatively stable identity and to compete on an equal basis for political representation and influence. (Sawicki 1991, 8.)

The second point of difference is that radical pluralism operates with an expanded sense of the political. What this means is that it also politicizes social and personal relationships, which liberal theory tends to overlook. Moreover, it politicizes theory. Therefore, it treats theories, first of all, as practices that serve as instruments of domination as well as of liberation. In so doing, like Sawicki

denotes “it adopts historically inflected categories and attends to the theoretical prerequisites for addressing diversity.” Hence, it might also uncover experiences of domination that are often overlooked within traditional emancipatory theories. With this in mind, she concludes, “One could argue that a political strategy that is attentive to differences, to using and bridging them, is vital if we are to build the global networks of resistance necessary for resisting global forms of domination.” (Sawicki 1991, 9.)

Third, and finally, radical pluralism is distinct from liberal pluralism insofar as it challenges hegemonic power structures. For as Sawicki comments, it is “based on a form of incrementalism in which the distinction between reform and revolution is collapsed” (ibid.). Yet, this incrementalism is not grounded on a narrow definition of politics, nor does it deny the need for major structural transformation, or the existence of hegemonies based on gender, class, race and other forms of domination. It is an incrementalism, which “recognizes domination, but also represents the social field as a dynamic, multidimensional set of relationships containing possibilities for liberation as well as domination.” (Ibid.).

In developing her main ideas of radically pluralist feminism, Sawicki admits to having found Foucault’s discourse immensely useful for feminist purposes. The key difference between her interpretation and of McNay’s is that, while McNay clearly fails in promoting the idea of difference by turning toward the consensus of rationality, Sawicki looks for the solution in Foucault’s thinking itself, suggesting that his remarks concerning the plurality of resistances and struggles – both within and between subjects – could be used to account for the struggles over the differences that exist within feminism (ibid. 10). What Sawicki is after, in short, is pluralistic feminist politics and theory that do not reduce the different experiences of women’s oppression back to common rationality and rational consensus, but rather express increased sensitivity to differences among women as well, leaving space for the otherness to emerge. As I show in the following, this sort of pluralism also offers an interesting basis on which to develop feminist politics of difference, as well as radically pluralist aesthetics of the self.

The Politics of Difference

Although there has been much dissatisfaction with the postmodern jargon of difference during last ten years or so, in my view, the issue is still extremely relevant to contemporary feminist thinking. I am not thinking here of the simple celebration of difference, but rather of rigorous rethinking through of what “living with difference” might entail in practice, both at the intersubjective level and within each subjectivity itself. (McRobbie 1993, 129-130 and Mercer 1990.)

In other words, it is my contention that the demand to cope with difference in everyday life is still undoubtedly one of the most serious political and ethical challenges feminism has to face, both inside its own circles and in relation to non-feminist realities. Along similar lines, Angela McRobbie calls the contemporary tendency to better cope with difference a “necessary inclusion in the new intellectual agenda of difference,” which also recognizes the importance of the hidden dimensions of subjectivity that modern discourse has not offered a legitimate place, in other words, “that of a black woman, that of the mother, the daughter, that of the feminist intellectual, the feminist teacher” (ibid. 130).

Bringing to light the practical existence of differences among women could also be seen as one of the central tasks of actual feminist aesthetics of the self. In this sense, just as Foucault came to see the creation of active practices of the self as an aesthetic, ethical and political task, so the feminist constitution of identity should not be interpreted as a mere superficial aesthetic stylization of one’s selfhood, gender and body. Rather, I suggest that it could be seen as offering possibilities to reconstruct identity as a site of political contestation and alternative self-formation.

The question of difference is not, of course, anything new in feminist theory. On the contrary, it has often been conceptualized in the debates on women’s differences from men (biological, psychological and cultural), for example.

However, in these accounts, the notion of difference has often incorporated the idea that there exists some specific form of women's experience, or women as a unified category, distinct from men. Just like many contemporary post-feminist thinkers, Sawicki is not content with this solution. Rather, she stresses that the cause of conflict in everyday life is also rooted in an important sense in the differences among women (class, sexual practices and ethnicity, for example).

In terms of differences among women, it should be emphasized that the notion of difference is not simply strength in the feminist theory. For the very existence of differences among women forces one to ask: how, in that case, there can be any effective form of political action and theory. Who, in other words, could stand up and represent the feminist subject and agent of feminist politics if there is no longer a common denominator called women?

In pointing out this problem, Sawicki comments, rightly, that difference is not necessarily critical or counter-revolutionary, because power sometimes utilizes difference to fragment opposition. Just as Foucault argued that difference might be the source of resistance and change, but it is also the source of disunity and fragmentation, Sawicki goes on to point a picture that emphasizes difference and heterogeneity among women, while at the same time trying to create a basis for radically pluralist feminist politics.

In Sawicki's view, the notion of difference is turned into strength in feminist politics and theorization only if the practical implication of the plurality of women's problems and identities is implemented in multiple local struggles against the many forms of power exerted over women on the everyday level of social relations. This raises the question of whether some forms of resistance are more effective than others. It is, for her,

a matter of social and historical investigation and not of a priori theoretical pronouncement. The basis for determining which alliances are politically viable ought not to be an abstract principle of unity, but rather historical and contextual analysis of the field of struggle. Thus feminism can mobilize

individuals from diverse sites in the social field and thereby use differences as a resource. (Ibid. 26.)

So defined, there is no common abstract denominator ('Woman') that could be used as a promise of women's reconciliation. Nor is there any coherent revolutionary subject (rational woman, for example) whose interests and problems intellectuals could represent globally. Rather, there is a social need for specific intellectuals who operate, not with universals or global revolutions, but rather with local battles, specific groups of people and specific problems (families, hospitals, universities, sexual subgroups, social relations, women's objectivation and representation, self-determination, and so forth).

According to Sawicki, emphasizing the importance of specific rather than universal intellectuals is connected to the historical evidence that what often looks like a change for the better might have undesirable consequences (ibid. 27). Therefore, "struggle must never grow complacent. Victories are often overturned; changes may take on different faces over time. Discourses and institutions are ambiguous and may be utilized for different ends." (Ibid. 27-28.)

If feminist thinking is to take these notions seriously, it cannot base its criticality on the ideas of universal emancipation or mere consensus of reason. The radically pluralist viewpoint involves using history in genealogical ways instead, that is, in ways which attempt to lend an ear to the marginal and subsumed voices that lie "a little beneath history" – the voices of the abnormal, the disempowered, the mad, the delinquent, and all sorts of women (ibid. 28). These voices are not ones that would lead to mere "atomized politics," or "an attitude of *laissez-faire*," as McNay argues. Rather, as Sawicki suggests, they "are the sources of resistance, the creative subjects of history" (ibid.). Rather than promoting rational consensus, universalism, and the common emancipation of all women, this sort of Foucauldian feminism holds a promise of radical pluralism, which locates a number of discontinuous and local struggles against different forms of power in both the present and the future.

Yet, an important and difficult question arises from these critical remarks. Namely, if there is no common feminism, and not even common problems among women, what, then, is the difference between the radically pluralist point of view and aesthetic decisionism, or the anything-goes relativism that some of Foucault's critics accuse him of promoting? Furthermore, does the emphasis on the politics of difference offer any reasonable grounds for constructing a feminist theory of social transformation – or grounds for constructing critical theorizations of feminist aesthetics of the self?

In my view, Sawicki offers a challenging response to these questions in her comment that although a politics of difference “does not offer feminists a morality derived from a universal theory of oppression, it need not lapse into a form of pluralism in which anything goes.” For it is possible to make generalizations on the grounds of specific theoretical analyses of particular struggles. Moreover, studying these struggles enables individuals to identify patterns in relations of power, thereby helping them to identify the “relative effectiveness or ineffectiveness, safety or danger of particular practices.” (Sawicki 1991, 32.)

As an example of the dangers one might face when coping with particular struggles, Sawicki mentions a series of links that have been drawn between the radical feminist strategy of anti-pornography legislation and the New Right's efforts to censor all sorts of sexual practices that, in their view, might pose a threat to the heterosexual and patriarchal model of the family. As Sawicki points out, acknowledging this danger

is not to suggest that the anti-pornography movement is essentially reactionary, but rather that at this time it may be dangerous. Similarly, one ought not to assume that there is any necessary connection between transgression of sexual taboos and sexual liberation. Denying that censorship is the answer to patriarchal sexual oppression is not tantamount to endorsing any particular form of transgression as liberatory. (Sawicki 1991, 32.)

Bearing this in mind, we could say that genealogically enlightened pluralist feminism also acknowledges of the dangers inherent in the feminist theory itself. Instead of purporting to offer a universally valid viewpoint on the problems of all women, it stresses the importance of the politics of difference, including different views on moral and political judgements, which are all geared to specific contexts and problematizations. Yet, at the same time, it may support some wider structures of resistance that are often reflected in local struggles. In other words, despite their different questions, and different social contexts and solutions, most feminisms seem to seek, in one way or another, to effect changes in the patriarchal hegemony that tends to reduce women to objects of male desire and ownership, and to support their autonomy and rights to self-determination.

In my view, these insights also offer a valid perspective for constructing theorizations of feminist aesthetics of the self. In this context, these are formulated in terms of radical pluralism rather than universal femininity, common womanhood, or universal rational consensus between different women. Unlike McNay's normative solution, the critical pluralist standpoint does not preclude systematic analysis of the present, but rather requires that our categories be primarily provisional (Sawicki 1991, 32).

What this means is that it supposes that, if feminists are really to cope with differences and also *to respect them in practice*, they have to cope with the uncertainty and stress that arise from the fact that there are unbridgeable differences among women and feminist viewpoints; differences which might be used either to divide feminist critics, or to enrich feminist politics and aesthetic practices of the self. This effort to better cope with difference is extremely important for, as Sawicki concludes, "if we are not the ones to give voice to them, then history suggests that they will continue to be either misnamed and distorted, or simply reduced to silence" (ibid.).

In my opinion, giving space to these misnamed, distorted or silenced subjects of history could also be taken as one of the most challenging ethical (as well as political) tasks in contemporary feminist theorizations of the aesthetics of the self.

For it is my contention that only by developing our reactions to real historical differences might we succeed a little better in rethinking the subject in ways that enable political subjects to preserve their otherness and to transcend the master-slave dialectic of recognition (often practised by women themselves, too).

In the following section, I develop this idea a little further by turning once more to Judith Butler's post-feminist gender analysis, which in my view also offers some useful tools for "moving beyond Foucault" in questions of the aesthetics of the self.

Gender Identity as a Site of Political Contestation

In this section, I will suggest that Judith Butler's much analysed *Gender Trouble* (1990) is also on much the same lines as Foucault's late aesthetics, although Butler herself associates her affiliations with Foucault merely in terms of his genealogical period. Reading Butler's gender theorizations through the lenses of Foucault's late work, rather than merely through his genealogy, I will propose that her notions on identity and gender offer one real and challenging basis for constructing views on the feminist aesthetics of the self.

As I have shown, one of the most pressing political struggles for Foucault was the struggle against forms of subjection, that is, against the regulated and stereotypical forms of identity and sexuality that are tolerated in contemporary society. I have also argued that it is this very struggle against the government of individualization that lies at the heart of his analysis of (modern) aesthetics of the self. Once more, in his own words:

T]he 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 decades. (SP 216.)¹⁶⁴

In line with Foucault's analysis, Judith Butler does not consider culturally intelligible subjects to be the result of their biological essence or innate self, but rather sees them as the resulting effects of a rule-bound discourse (Butler 1990, 145). Despite her genealogical terminology, Butler's gender theory offers more than a mere genealogy of the subject of feminism: it also represents an attempt to elaborate tools for the active undermining and thwarting of the cultural practices that limit women's aesthetic creation of their selves. Just as in Foucault, this resistance does not happen outside of the power relations – it is rather a question of power being undermined by its own means.

In other words, if it is discourse and representation, for example, that largely produce our identities, and even our sexed and bodily experiences, it is also discourse and representation that offer the means for opposition. To put it in the terminology of aesthetics: if it is through the controlling and normalizing of our aesthetic practices of the self that the cultural networks of power tend to limit our self-creation and modes of subjection, it is also the undermining of these aesthetic practices *by aesthetic means* that offers us the possibility to make “emancipatory” moves away from this controlling power. Butler explains her view in the following words:

In a sense, all signification takes place within the orbit of the compulsion to repeat; “agency,” then, is to be located within the possibility of a variation of that repetition. If the rules governing signification not only restrict, but enable the assertion of alternative domains of cultural intelligibility, i.e., new possibilities for gender that contest the rigid codes of hierarchical binarisms, then it is only *within* the practices of repetitive signifying that a subversion of identity becomes possible. (Ibid. 145.)

Butler supposes that, in the production of one's sexual identity, gender is some sort of cultural norm and ideal to which one is always somehow related, despite

the fact that this norm can be never fully internalized. This negative aspect of self-governmentality is not all that she has to say on the subject, however. In *Gender Trouble* she suggests some new perspectives on the shaping of gender identity, which include both the negative and positive sides of Foucauldian power analysis.¹⁶⁵ Like late Foucault, she ends up stressing the importance of aesthetics in her considerations of the positive aspects of individual empowerment.

In my view, the positive aspect of Butler's analysis of women's power is crystallized in her notion that the subject is not *determined* by the cultural rules through which it is produced, because "signification is *not a founding act, but rather a regulated process of repetition* that both conceals itself and enforces its rules precisely through the production of substantializing effects" (Butler 1990, 145). In other words, the internal core or substance of one's self is not originally given, but is produced and reproduced through a series of acts, gestures and desires that project the self *on the surface of the body*. However, the body, or its aesthetic sign language, cannot fully incorporate one's self. Rather, the self is aesthetically performed through the body "through the play of signifying absences that suggest, but never reveal, the organizing principle of identity as a cause." (Ibid. 136.)

In my view, the radicalism of Butler's re-reading of the notion of the (sexual) subject lies mainly in her way of politicising the assumed naturalness of sexual identity and appearance, and in showing the artificial and changing nature of gender differences. This leads to a rebuttal of the simple alternatives of nature and culture, sex and gender. As Diana Elam puts it, for Butler, nature is a sort of retro-projected illusion of the real origin of culture, yet that illusion is necessary to culture, in its very capacity to represent itself. (Elam 1994, 50.)

Moreover, a crucial notion for the work at hand is that if gender is seen as a cultural performance and not as a natural fact, it can also be aesthetically re-created, criticized, transgressed and altered. In Foucauldian terms, it can be re-made given that we know how it was made. As Butler shows, this is well evidenced in all of the parodic cases in which gender identity is turned into

explicit imitation and gender performance, such as in the cultural practices of drag, cross-dressing and the aesthetic stylisation of butch/femme sexual identities. Applying the same idea to artistic terminology, Butler defines gender identity as an open “assemblage,” the totality of which is permanently deferred (Butler 1990, 16).¹⁶⁶

Despite the fact that there are some problematic limitations in Butler’s account, notably her stressing of the purely linguistic character of identity, her insights are, in my view, extremely useful in the contemporary debate on women’s identities and critical aesthetics of the self. For if gender identity is considered primarily as a cultural practice that demands the repetition of gestures that embody cultural meanings (heterosexual woman and gay man, for example), the possibility to *repeat differently* and to construct one’s aesthetic performance of the self in new and different ways remains open. With this in mind, Butler places the politics of difference not only on the level of intersubjective relations, but also on the level of the constitution of the relation to one’s self. So conceived, the critical contestation of one’s gendered self has significance for both social reality and the individual her-/himself.

Individual style, in this context, comes to represent a name for what individuals seek to enhance, nurture or shelter even when they attack sexual regimes. To cite the words of the Foucauldian feminist Ladelles McWhorter: “The work of style is the artistry with which we live our lives. We can’t just say no to sexual regimes; if we want to undermine the regimes of power and knowledge that oppress and threaten to dominate us, we have to cultivate a new way of life that stands counter to them and eventually that is just other to them. And that is a matter of the deliberate cultivation of style.” (McWhorter, 1999, 190.)

Butler’s way of defining gender as a cultural ideal that cannot be fully internalized has drawn attention to the demands placed on women through the cultural production of their gender. In this context, the idea of the normality of the heterosexual identity is also critically re-thought. As Butler points out, it seems that *no one* can completely embody the ideals of the “heterosexual matrix”

because one's injunction *to be* a given gender necessarily produces failures, which disturb the coherence of gender identity in their multiplicity. Moreover, the injunction to *be* a given gender takes place through discursive routes that are not always compatible with each other, and that also vary historically.

To give an example: to be at the same time a heterosexually desirable object, a good mother, and a fit worker, signifies a multiplicity of demands, which are not part of one's natural or transcendental self but are rather discourses of a conflictual cultural field; ambiguous discourses that women have to relate themselves to, and that they have to take up in one way or another. (Ibid. 145.) In Butler's own words: "There is no self that is prior to the convergence or who maintains "integrity" prior to its entrance into this conflicted cultural field. There is only a taking up of the tools where they lie, where the very "taking up" is enabled by the tool lying there." (Ibid.)

I maintain that the most challenging argument in Butler's gender theory is precisely this. Women have to repeat the multiple and often contradictory discourses addressed to them in order to perform their gender identity, but just as bodily surfaces are enacted *as* natural, so these surfaces might become the site of denaturalized and dissonant aesthetic performance that reveals the performative status of what is considered natural.

In the field of contemporary subversive art, we find convincing examples of this sort of dissonant gender performance in the work of artists such as Cindy Sherman, Barbara Kruger, Nan Goldette, Carolee Schneemann, Jenny Holzer, Hannah Wilke, Heli Rekula, Aurora Reinhardt, Kari Soinio, and many more. In Butler's inquiries, the aesthetic practices of self, which many of these artists critically study, are discussed in terms of gender parody and drag.

Drag and the Aesthetic Politics of Parody

As I will suggest in this final section, the cultural practice of drag offers one interesting possibility for studying the artificial and floating nature of gender identity, and along with it, women's possibilities to actively affect the creation of their individual selves. As Butler notes, imitating gender drag "implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself – as well as its contingency" (ibid. 137). For her, the notion of gender parody does not assume the existence of an original, which such parodic identities imitate. It rather represents the perpetual displacement and fluidity of identities, suggesting openness to re-signification and re-contextualization. Moreover, "parodic proliferation deprives hegemonic culture and its critics of the claim to naturalized or essentialist gender identities. Although the gender meanings taken up in these parodic styles are clearly part of hegemonic, misogynist culture, they are nevertheless denaturalized and mobilized through their parodic recontextualization." (Ibid. 138.)

Butler hence argues that drag, at least in principle, is a cultural practice that has the virtue of revealing the *imitative structure* of gender by showing how being male or female, masculine or feminine, entails a performance that requires the production and repetition of specific bodily signs. Instead of claiming that drag simply copies an original gender identity, she claims that it shows how *all* gender identities are actually mere derivative copies. So conceived, it is through performative acts that each one of us learns to become a woman or a man, a heterosexual, a lesbian, a homosexual. Here Butler adopts a strong constructionist position, thus making her affiliation with Foucault very clear. (Bristow 1997, 215.)

It is not difficult to find a practical application of Butler's argumentation: the notion of primary or original gender identity is often parodied within various sub-cultural practices, such as the sexual stylization of gender identities. This sort of gender parody is also a common phenomenon in contemporary subversive art, which often plays with the parodic representation of gender identity, womanhood, manhood, heterosexuality, queer practices, and so forth. The interesting aspect of

these representational gender parodies is, in my view, that they show how parodic uses of identity can function as occasions for subversive laughter, and this reveals that normality or sexual naturality are actually mere copies, ideals that no one can totally embody. What they also show, is that parodic repetitions of gender might function as active *political* practices of resistance by which aesthetic performers may try to challenge the existing norms and stereotypes addressed to women or men.



Heli Rekula, *Dèsire (flirt)* 1996, lamda C-print



Aurora Reinhardt, *So Feminine* (part of a triptych) 1998



Kari Soinio, *Mother Nature's Son* 1992/94

By showing that gender is nothing but a series of acts that demands repetition, the whole notion is opened up to self-parody, break-up, self-criticism, and “those hyperbolic exhibitions of ‘the natural’ that, in their very exaggeration, reveal its fundamentally phantasmatic status” (Butler 1990, 146-147). As Butler emphasizes, the parodic deconstruction of gender identity does not in itself mean the deconstruction of politics, however. Rather, it “establishes as political the very terms through which identity is articulated” (ibid. 148). So conceived, the term ‘women’ and ‘men,’ for example, comes to present a whole series of aspects, which are not taken as natural or essential but rather politicised and pluralized, in other words, read anew in a critical light.

Yet, as Butler observes, parody is not subversive in itself – just as the recognizing of difference does not necessarily support difference – since parodic laughter depends on context and reception. In other words, parody must meet certain conditions for the subversive laughter to emerge. If, for example, a feminist parodic performance is given to an audience that does not believe there could be anything wrong with the existing gender norms and stereotypes, parodying them will hardly do much to change such opinions, nor will it make the perceivers laugh, at least not subversively. Similarly, a listener who does not have the basic knowledge of, say, rock/pop culture can hardly understand what critical function might be embedded in the acts of a female guitarist who performs parodic riffs that imitate the overtly masculine gestures of the average rock guitarist.

Thus, there are good reasons to argue that feminist gender parody can have a truly effective function only when the *audience is capable* of interpreting it as a parody. In this sense, parodic usages of identity seem to be subversive only to the degree that people are able to interpret these practices as parodies, or, alternatively, to the degree that they are enlightened enough to grasp what is going on in the parodic uses of gender. In this respect, feminist aesthetics of the self is necessarily, I argue, an intellectual and often also an elitist expression of thought and action. This is not, indeed, to deny or lessen its importance, but rather to affirm that there is no feminist aesthetics of the self that could solve the problems of all women or effect global transformation in the living conditions of everybody.

With similar thoughts in mind, Butler makes the salient observation that there must be a way to understand “what makes certain kinds of parodic repetitions effectively disrupted, truly troubling, and which repetitions become domesticated and recirculated as instruments of cultural hegemony” (ibid. 139). The contemporary ideals of slenderness and androgyny, for example, do not necessarily function as emancipatory or subversive practices in which gender differences become blurred or transgressed, despite the fact that this might seem to be the case. They might well offer aesthetic ideals of the female body that actually function to essentially torment many women’s lives, leading to eating disorders and self-normalization, and even death.

On the same subject, Susan Bordo has pointed to the fact that some contemporary commercial strategies actually represent the body as a site, not only of creative self-fashioning but also of cultural and political *resistance*. Yet, upon closer examination, the slogans, which might suggest that the ideals represented in the advertisements support the freedom of women, and their self-determination and choice, are often nothing but nice commercial tricks that take advantage of the jargon of feminist debate. What Bordo’s comment suggest, in short, is that the ideals of female resistance and emancipation that advertisements typically project are often only superficially or commercially subversive, and do not seem to have any real emancipatory impact on women’s lives or aesthetic appearance.¹⁶⁷

Nevertheless, there is no ready-made formula by which we could differentiate truly troubling repetitions of identity from those that merely tend to promote the maintenance of cultural hegemonies. What remains to be done, I suggest, is to study each case as a specific one, which entails asking certain questions. If the subject is constituted largely through the aesthetic practices of the self, and if this constitution could also be seen as a form of resistance, what are the new types of struggle that are immediate and particular rather than centralized and mediatized? Alternatively, what are the new modes of subjection, which tend to have no fixed identity? (Deleuze 1988, 115.) What of the intellectual’s new functions, which in this scheme are particular and specific rather than universal? What are they, more precisely?

As I see it, the existing discourses and representations of women that affect our constitution of the gendered self, most notably their homogenizing and stereotypical character, are a major cause of women's oppression and discrimination, also also of the huge amount of eating disorders and self-dissatisfaction. Therefore, the potential for change is rooted, at least partly, in the potential to affect the gender discourses and ways of representing women. Although I am rather sceptical about vision of a future in which oppression and stereotypical and normalizing practices no longer exist, my outlook is by no means thoroughly negative. Like Susan Bordo, Judith Butler, bell hooks, Teresa de Lauretis and various other feminist thinkers, I believe that we can affect the normalizing gender stereotypes by bringing into focus some marginalized or ambiguous aspects of our identities (sexual, gendered and ethnic, for example), which is an act that in itself might transform these discourses.

This proposal has, of course, a lot to do with Foucault's analysis of power, notably with his arguments that power comes from below and that resistance is always there where the power is. In the context of normalizing gender discourses, this means that I believe that we can turn power discourses against themselves, or at least undermine their effects, by using them differently, in different contexts and in different chains of meaning. As I have suggested, various sub-cultural practices, as well as critical feminist art, offer a lot of interesting material for this turning of stereotypical gender discourses against themselves using their own methods.

However, subcultures and radical art are not the only area in which individuals can be subversive and critical. I believe that the same resistance can also be expressed on the level of everyday existence by effecting local and often minute shifts in discursive power. One effective manifestation of this sort of resistance (although not the only one) is an individual's ways of performing her-himself to others, in other words, on the level of one's personal politics of appearance. In a similar vein, Judith Butler and Susan Bordo suggest that, by presenting a mocking enactment of the performative nature of gender, drag and other parodic practices (cross-dressing and gender-blending, for example.) that are proliferated *from*

within gender-essentialist culture might effectively disturb and subvert our culture and its belief in the notion of a true, natural gender identity (Butler 1990, 137-38; Bordo 1994, 236). As Butler puts it:

This perpetual displacement constitutes a fluidity of identities that suggests an openness to resignification and recontextualization; parodic proliferation deprives hegemonic culture and its critics of the claim to naturalized or essentialized gender identities. Although the gender meanings taken up in these parodic styles are clearly part of hegemonic, misogynist culture, they are nevertheless denaturalised and mobilized through their parodic recontextualization. (Butler 1990, 138.)

In considering these remarks, it should be borne in mind that feminist aesthetics of the self cannot provide one single form of resistance, but must take each resistance form as a special and local case. This is because all power discourses are special cases as well, and thus need unique reactions in order to be undermined. What this means in practice is that the problems poor black women living in Nigeria face in their everyday lives are certainly not the same ones as faced by white middle-class women living in Finland. The discourses and representations that tend to make these women docile or oppressed also differ significantly. Therefore, it is my contention that the genealogical feminist's task is, first of all, to study carefully how discourse, representation and normalizing power are linked to each other in each special case, and to develop specific creative critical responses to each oppressive power structure.

Moreover, along with Susan Bordo, I suggest that true resistance to the normalizing directives demands no less than personal risk-taking in terms of making one's self different in practice, and not only in being radical or subversive in textual play (Bordo 1994, 243). In other words, the subversions of dominant cultural practices happen much more easily on the textual level than in the world of true everyday human interaction, in which the repression is real (hooks 1990, 22). What this means, finally, is that subversive practical action is possible, although not easy or safe.

CONCLUSION

In this dissertation, I have attempted to identify the type of theoretical tools that Foucault's analyses of the subject offer in terms of feminist attempts to rethink the aesthetic subject in ways that enable political subjects to transcend the homogenizing tendencies of power in modern societies. In addressing this problem, I have on the one hand sought to investigate how the problem of the aesthetic constitution of the subject/self relates to questions of the politics of representation and identity, of the body, and of power, and on the other hand, how aesthetic (re)formation of the subject could function as a source of critical action and resistance.

In the first two parts of this study, I presented an overview of Foucault's archaeological and genealogical insights into these issues. This inquiry has shown that even in his earlier archaeological work, he connects the question of the subject intimately to the issues of aesthetics, transgression, discourse, ethics and the sexual body. As I have suggested, Foucault's archaeological analyses of the aesthetic subject bring forth his early attempt to highlight affective and embodied dimensions of human experience – dimensions that Foucault, like French feminists such as Irigaray and Cixous, associate with experimental avant-garde literature and the birth of the new ethical subject. With this in mind, I have argued that, although Foucault's archaeological analysis of the aesthetic subject suffers from gender blindness in its idealization of the transgressive male subjectivity, it also includes challenging insights for feminist theorists who, like Foucault, attempt to preserve radical otherness in their theorizations of the subject.

Through the development of his genealogical method, Foucault extends his archaeological constellation of ideas and begins to consider how discourse structures modern forms of subjection through various disciplinary practices the function of which is to form people into isolatable individuals who enact their own self-controlling order that he calls "docility." In Foucault's view, power,

especially in its modern form, has a particular locus in the body, not primarily in repressive or limiting bodies, but rather by directing their energies towards production, normalization and control. The first part of *The History of Sexuality* is an attempt to show that this is nowhere as evident as in the realm of sexuality. With this in mind, Foucault considers the practices of subjection dangerous, because they often lead to normative practices that regulate individuals' freedom as they impose ready-made limits and truths on their selves.

Another key aspect I have taken up in my analysis of Foucault's genealogical analysis of the modern constitution of the subject is the idea that it is only through these very discourses in power that resistance and expressions of freedom are made possible. In other words, since modern individuality is itself found to be a technique that contributes to the creation of a coherent selfhood, the relationship between an individual and his/her identity could also be opened up and made available as a site of political contestation. As I have shown in the second part of this dissertation, these genealogical ideas are much in line with so-called post-feminist theory – a term I have used to designate some contemporary feminists who are interested in working on the genealogical analysis of issues such as women, the self, sexuality, gender identity and the body.

In the final phase of his work, the practice of refuting categories of subjectivity via the transgression of limits became the basis of Foucault's discussion of the aesthetics and ethics of the self. Unlike the earlier archaeological and genealogical phases of his writing, in which Foucault concentrated primarily on analysing the discursive formation of the subject and relations between the subject, knowledge and power, his late theorizations on the aesthetics of the self seek new ways of critically considering the possibilities open to each individual for affecting his or her self-formation and self-government in modern societies. Following the lines of thinking that he had earlier traced in his essay on "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History" (1971), Foucault's late theorizations concentrate on discovering ways of actively disturbing and undermining power to achieve the benefit of a more-heterogeneous culture and more-ethical ways of existing.

In his late work, by positing ethics as aesthetic practices of the self, Foucault demonstrates that the subject is immanent within the limits of discursivity, but also irreducible to them. With this in mind, he argues in an interview entitled “The Subject and Power” (1982) that we have to promote new forms of subjectivity through the refusal of what he calls “victimized individuality” (SP 216). This idea, as I have demonstrated, is important for all feminists who attempt to show that power is not merely a negative force of victimization and oppression, but also includes possibilities for its own undermining, not least in the domain of aesthetic self-formation.

Opening up these questions has also led me to consider both the problems and strengths of Foucault’s late aesthetics for feminist ends. As far as the problems with his account are concerned, I have not only criticized his analysis for its gender blindness and for the lack of positive images of female agents. I have also tried to point out the advantages of his account for feminist theorization, and to move beyond the polarized views of his thinking. In this respect, I have attempted not only to present and interpret Foucault’s insights. I have also tried to suggest some ways out of the problematic gender limitations in his thinking.

To counter those critical interpreters who have accused Foucault’s aesthetic theorizations of a relativism in which “anything goes,” I have therefore argued that the individualization and pluralization of reason in his late aesthetics is a crucial element in any critical reconsideration of the status of subjectivity in the social space, qua the status of the other as something that might be so radically different no possibility for rational consensus between the subjects perhaps exists. In opposition to the views of Lois McNay, for example, who sees in the pluralization of truth and reason an attitude of *laissez-faire*, I have therefore maintained that to respect others in a concrete manner and to admit that deep, even unbridgeable, differences between individuals actually exist, demands the sort of rational disintegration and fragmentation that Foucault offers us.

In the last part of this study, I have sought support for these insights from the writings of two “Foucauldian” feminists, Jana Sawicki and Judith Butler. As I

have argued, theorizations of the aesthetics of the self in terms of radically pluralist feminism do not lead to irresponsibility or extreme relativism (as Habermasian feminists such as McNay argue), but rather refer to ethics (and practical politics), which is itself based on attempts to preserve radical otherness and difference, and, by so doing, shows respect for other subjects, sexualities and bodies.

As I have shown, in this respect Foucault's insistence on the heterogeneity of aesthetic practices of the self does not, as some of his critics have claimed, run counter to feminist efforts to effect changes in women's social position, nor does his theory deny the possibility of feminist political programs. On the contrary, meeting the need to cope with differences in a practical manner, among women also, appears to be the only way to create more space for a truly heterogeneous society and culture in which the existence of individual differences is not only defended but also *affirmed* through multiple, individual, "caring" styles of living.

In Foucault's view, this kind of affirmation of alternative practices of the self might, indeed, create more space for a truly heterogeneous society – a society in which individuals are better allowed to do their self-transforming work on the grounds of their own choices, pleasures and desires. As I have argued, in this respect, Foucault's theory of the aesthetics of the self attempts to fulfil the same utopian task as both Kant's and Baudelaire's critical modernity did in their own time, although in somewhat different terms. In other words, it works to set individuals free from the normative and oppressing structures of everyday life, and to create space for a more autonomous and creative culture. Such a culture would, through the concrete experimental aesthetic practices of our selves, allow us more space to study the critical questions both Kant and Baudelaire addressed to critical modernity: What is our own era and how are we to constitute ourselves as subjects under its conditions?

In sum, as this lengthy journey to considering the usefulness of Foucauldian tools in feminism has shown, even though there are some gender problems in Foucault's theorizations of the aesthetic subject, his insights nevertheless offer a

set of useful tools for critical analysis of the current problems suffered by women, and even provides some practical suggestions that might help individuals to bring about changes in the dominating networks of knowledge and power and to create different kinds of selves and communities no longer bound by the dictates of heterosexualizing identification, or some other normalizing net of practice and discourse.

NOTES

¹ Like Wolfgang Iser, I use the term 'aestheticization' to refer to the tendency to stylize one's life through a commodified lifestyle and role models. For more detailed discussion on this issue, see Iser 1995 and 1997; Schulte 1997.

² See, for example, Giddens 1991; Lash and Friedman 1993; Kolb 1986.

³ This sort of development has also happened inside of analytical aesthetics itself, which has come to incorporate issues to do with the environment, feminism and politics. (For a more detailed discussion of this, see Hein and Korsmeyer 1993; Brand and Korsmeyer 1995; von Bonsdorff and Seppä 2002.)

⁴ See, for example, Richard Shusterman's pragmatic approaches to the aesthetic construction of the self (Shusterman 2000a and 2000b). The philosophical aspects of the arts of living have interested other American pragmatists too, such as William James and C.S. Peirce. So-called post-analytical aesthetics has also been influenced by this tradition. As Wilhelm Schmidt suggests, this explains why Foucault's work has been attractive to philosophers such as Richard Rorty, Paul Rabinow, Martin Jay and Charles Taylor (see Schmidt 1999, 47).

⁵ In "The Subject and Power," Foucault says, "It is [...] the subject, which is the general theme of my research" (SP 209). ["le sujet [...] constitue le thème général de mes recherches" (SPO 223).] When reading this sort of generalisation made by Foucault himself, we need to be aware that he was quite prone to providing overall interpretations of his work, as David C. Hoy rightly comments, and that he stressed the importance of different themes on different occasions (Hoy 1999, 3). Yet, I contend that there is no reason to ignore Foucault's statement on the specific importance of the issue of the subject for his whole oeuvre, not least if we consider this statement in the light of the texts he wrote in the different periods of his life (see also Oksala 2002, 15).

⁶ Foucault's writings are generally interpreted along three primary axes. First, he appears as a philosophical historian who developed his archaeology of discourse in the *History of Madness* (1961), *The Birth of the Clinic* (1963), *The Order of Things* (1966) and *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1969). The essays he wrote on literature and "other works of imagination" are also usually included in this first phase of his work. Second, Foucault created a genealogy of power relations in *Discipline and Punish* (1975) and *The History of Sexuality I* (1976), which was meant to deepen his methodological innovations and mutually-supporting theories of knowledge, power and the subject (Gutting 1995, 2). The third axis represents a problematization of aesthetics and the ethics of the self, as is manifest in the second and third parts of *The History of Sexuality* (*The Use of Pleasure*, 1984 and *The Care of the Self*, 1984) and in the articles and interviews that appeared around the late 1970s and early 1980s. This last phase of his work is often described as his "return to the subject" (see, for example, Gutting 1995, 13; Jones 1991).

I would, however, characterize Foucault's work in slightly different terms. For the question of the subject always seems to be at the core of his thinking, even though his interpretations and theoretical framework change during the different periods of his writing. Whether he is analyzing the construction of objects of knowledge such as the subject, the body, the author, madness, sexuality or criminality, one of his central intentions is to show that the human subject is not a set of permanent structures that constitute or condition reality, but is produced historically in and through its social world. Foucault therefore never represents the subject as an abstract, innate, essential, neutral or universal entity. What interests him is the "genealogy of the modern subject" as a historical and cultural reality. (SS 9. See also Kritzman 1985.)

⁷ As I explicate further on, for Foucault, the problematic of aesthetics represents at the same time a theory of individual ethics, because he sees the individual's *ethos* as being grounded on the same "aesthetic order" of the self. He takes as his model the ancient moral of Greek free men, which in his view was centred on the problem of personal choice and an aesthetics of existence. In the second part of his *History of Sexuality*, Foucault defines the ethical subject as a "process in which

the individual delimits that part of himself that will form the object of his moral practice, defines his position relative to that percept he will follow, and decides on a certain mode of being that will serve as his moral goal.” This, in his view, “requires him to act upon himself, to monitor, test, improve, and transform himself” (UP 28).

⁸ “donner à leur existence la forme la plus belle et la plus accomplie possible” (UPL 275).

A general formal definition of what Foucault understands by the expressions aesthetics of the self, and arts of existence is described in *Use of Pleasure* as follows: “What I mean by the phrase are those intentional and voluntary actions by which men not only set themselves rules of conduct, but also seek to transform themselves, to change themselves in their singular being, and to make their life into an *oeuvre* that carries certain aesthetic values, and meets certain stylistic criteria” (UP 10-11).

The citation in French runs: “Par là il faut entendre des pratiques réfléchies et volontaires par lesquelles les hommes, non seulement se fixent des règles de conduite, mais cherchent à se transformer eux-mêmes, à se modifier dans leur être singulier, et à faire de leur vie une oeuvre qui porte certaines valeurs esthétiques et répondre à certains critères de style” (UPL 16-17).

⁹ There are also interpretations that present post-feminism as a position *after* feminism (a term that may be used only when feminism is no longer needed), or as a position that runs counter to the aims of feminist theories (On pejorative uses of the term, see, for example, Jones 1994 and Coppock, Haydon and Richter 1995).

As Leena-Maija Rossi pointed out (Rossi 1999, 17), post-feminism nowadays is rather generally understood as a term that refers to an area of discussion in which post-modern, post-structuralist and feminist perspectives intersect. My usage of the term is grounded on this kind of interpretation. For more detailed discussion on post-feminism, see Gamble 2000; Butler 1990a, 1-7; Butler 1990b; Butler 1992; Bordo 1990; Brooks 1997, 1-3; Vavrus 2002. On the connections between post-feminism and post-colonialism, see hooks 1995; Mohanty 1997 and 1991; Spivak 1999 and 1988. On the Finnish debate on post-feminism, see Rossi 1999, especially pp. 17-43; Jenu 1999; Hekanaho 1996, 10-14; von Bonsdorff and Seppä 2002, 8-17.

¹⁰ See most notably Lois McNay’s book *Foucault and Feminism* (1992), which studies Foucault’s late aesthetics of the self from the feminist perspective, and John Rajhman’s *Michel Foucault. The Freedom of Philosophy* (1985), which addresses Foucault’s connections with modernism. See also Johanna Oksala’s *Freedom in the Philosophy of Foucault* (2002), which illuminates some important aspects of Foucault’s late aesthetics with respect to ethics and sexual identity.

¹¹ The line of argumentation that has stressed the disinterested, universal and pure character of aesthetic perceptions was taken to its extreme in the article “The Intentional Fallacy” (1946) written by Monroe C. Beardsley and W.K. Wimsatt. They argue that all things that exist outside of concrete artwork (the poem, in their text) should be left outside of the sphere of aesthetics. Other standard treatments of this view include Frank Sibley’s “Aesthetic Concepts” (1959); J.O. Urmson’s “What Makes a Situation Aesthetic” (1957-58); Monroe C. Beardsley’s *Aesthetics: Problems in the Philosophy of Criticism* (1981/1952); and Monroe C. Beardsley’s “The Aesthetic Point of View” (1970).

¹² On the ideological and political character of autonomous aesthetics, see, for example, Bourdieu 1998; Bürger 1989; Murphy 1999; Rossi 1999.

¹³ “Ce qui m’étonne, c’est le fait que dans notre société l’art est devenu quelque chose qui n’est en rapport qu’avec les objets et non pas avec les individus ou avec la vie; et aussi que l’art est un domaine spécialisé fait par des experts qui sont des artistes. Mais la vie de tout individu ne pourrait-elle pas être oeuvre d’art? Pourquoi une lampe ou une maison sont-ils des objets d’art et non pas notre vie? (GEA 392.)

¹⁴ For a more detailed discussion of these terms, see Wirth 1997; Welsch 1996, 136.

¹⁵ For Baumgarten, the term ‘aesthetics’ was primarily an abbreviation of the longer expression

episteme aesthetike (1735; Alexander Gottlieb B, *Meditationes philosophicae de nonnullis ad poema pertinentibus*, Halle 1735, Hamburg 1983, CXVI, 86). He gave his first lecture on aesthetics in 1742, and published the first part of his *Aesthetica* in 1750. In this book, he uses the term aesthetics (*Ästhetik*) to designate the “science of sensuous cognition,” which is to comprehend all kinds of sensuous cognition. He also uses examples from the arts, notably from poetry, but only to illustrate what aesthetic perfection, as the perfection of *sensuous* knowledge, could be.

¹⁶ See, for example; Sawicki 1991; Braidotti 1991 and 1994; Probyn 1993; Butler 1990 and 1993; Pulkkinen 2000; Rossi 1999.

¹⁷ It might be worth adding here that the expression “sexual difference” (*la différence sexuelle*), which is favored by many French feminists, differs in some significant respects from the expression “gender difference.” As my analysis of contemporary feminism will show, the French usage of sexual difference often refers to the idea that women and men are biological opposites, which differ from each other both naturally and essentially. In sharp contrast to this view, in recent post-feminist theories such as that of Judith Butler, the expression gender difference rather implies that all “biological” or “natural” oppositions between the two sexes are also culturally produced and maintained, and can, thus, be critically questioned. For Butler (and various other “post-feminists”) both sex and gender are hence understood historically. This view also differs considerably from earlier sex/gender theorizations, such as Gayle Rubin’s now classical “The Traffic in Women” (1975), which still implies that sex is relatively fixed and stable and only gender varies from culture to culture.

¹⁸ I refer here to the neo-Kantian and formalist tradition of autonomous or pure aesthetics, which long dominated the discussion on modern arts, suggesting that works of art are designed to elicit nonconsummatory and idealized aesthetic indifference. Seen in this way, the possession of artworks indirectly testifies to the spiritual superiority of whoever possesses them. Hence the terms ‘neutral’ and ‘universal’ – and hence the ignorance of factors such as the spectator’s gender. (See also Brand 1995.)

¹⁹ On the differences between the terms ‘feminine’, ‘female’ and ‘feminism’, see Hein 1997, 133-134; Battersby 1989; von Bonsdorff and Seppä 2002. The term ‘female’ is usually associated with the biological and cultural aspects of one’s being a woman. Feminist research that is centred on this term might, for example, focus on questions of the equality of the sexes in the artistic field, or on studying traditional ways of representing women. Many earlier feminist critiques concentrated on the notion of the female. In post-feminist discussions, more interest has been paid instead to the notion of feminine, which is typically taken to represent a series of culturally-shaped characteristics that can be used to describe qualities of biological women and men. As Estella Lauter notes: “Most feminists believe that “feminine” characteristics associate with women and are not mandated by biology but are instead constructed by cultures.” Thus the term ‘gender’ refers typically to the effects of acculturation as expressed in behavior and attitudes (see Lauter 1993, 24).

²⁰ As Foucault points out, the concept of man had no role in the preceding Classical period, which simply identified thought with representation and thus could not form a concept of man defined in terms of its representation. In this sense, man did not even exist in the Classical period, but was only produced in the modern era. (OT 308.) Foucault also details ways in which the viability of the concept of man has come into question in the modern period, mentioning “the analytic of finitude,” which highlights the failure of modern philosophical efforts (from Kant to Heidegger) to forge a coherent view of an entity that is both the source and an object in the world. (OT 312-318.)

²¹ In 1963 Foucault published a study on the French experimental novelist Raymond Roussel, and from 1964 he participated in literary colloquia, most of which included members of the journal *Tel Quel* and an elite of the same name associated with Philippe Solliers. In 1963 he gave out an essay devoted to George Bataille, and in 1966 one devoted to Maurice Blanchot (“Préface à transgression,” *Critique* 195, Aug.-Sept. 1963, pp. 751-769, and “La pensée du dehors” *Critique*

229, June 1966, pp. 523-546. For English translations of these texts, see AME (“Preface to Transgression” and “The Thought of the Outside”). Among other literary characters who interested Foucault were Gustave Flaubert, Jorge Luis Borges, Alain Robbe-Grillet, and surrealists such as André Breton and Antonin Artaud.

²² To concretise the artificial nature of the notion of the author, Foucault points out four features in the books or texts of various modern “authors” – authors from the late 18th century onward – that are constructed by the specific discourses centred on the notion of what an author is. First, the products of the author have been made objects of appropriation, a form of property (ownership, copyright, etc.), and as a result, literature is no longer seen as material (tales, stories) that *anyone* can tell (WA 124-125). Second, the author-function is not universal or constant in all discourse, but must be seen as historical and changing, for the meaning of the term ‘author’ in the 18th century, for example, differs remarkably from the meanings addressed to the authors of our day (WA 125). Third, the author-function is not formed spontaneously through the simple attribution of a discourse to an individual, but results from a complex operation whose aim is to construct the rational entity we call an author (as a result of which we speak, for example, of the individual’s creative power or originality) (WA 127). And finally, the term ‘author’ does not simply refer to any actual individual insofar as it simultaneously gives rise to a variety of egos and to multiple subjective positions that individuals of any class may come to occupy. (WA 130-131.)

²³ “Si un individu n’était pas un auteur, est-ce qu’on pourrait dire que ce qu’il a écrit, ou dit, ce qu’il a laissé dans ses papiers, ce qu’on a pu rapporter de ses propos, pourrait être appelé une “oeuvre”? Tant que Sade n’a pas été un auteur, qu’étaient donc ses papiers? Des rouleaux de papier sur lesquels, à l’infini, pendant ses journées de prison, il déroulait ses fantasmes.” (QA 794.)

²⁴ “Dans l’écriture, il n’y va pas de la manifestation ou de l’exaltation du geste d’écrire il ne s’agit pas de l’épinglage d’un sujet dans un langage” (QA 793)..

²⁵ “il est question de l’ouverture d’un espace où le sujet écrivant ne cesse de disparaître” (QA 793).

²⁶ “n’a pas à être représenté dans les livres, puisqu’il est accompli dans l’existence même de l’écrivain” (QA 793).

²⁷ “La mort de Dieu ne nous restitue pas à un monde limité et positif, mais à un monde qui se dénoue dans l’expérience de la limite, se fait et se défait dans l’excès qui la transgresse” (PTR 236).

²⁸ “Il opère comme une glorification de ce qu’il exclut; la limite ouvre violemment sur l’illimité, se trouve emportée soudain par le contenu qu’elle rejette, et accomplie par cette plénitude étrangère qui l’envahit jusqu’au coeur. La transgression porte sa limite jusqu’à la limite de son être; elle la conduit à s’éveiller sur sa disparition imminente, à se retrouver dans ce qu’elle exclut (plus exactement peut-être à s’y reconnaître pour la première fois), à éprouver sa vérité positive dans le mouvement de sa perte.” (PTR 237.)

²⁹ “La transgression est un geste qui concerne la limite; c’est là, en cette minceur de la ligne, que se manifeste l’éclair de son passage, mais peut-être aussi sa trajectoire en sa totalité, son origine même. Le trait qu’elle croise pourrait bien être tout son espace.” (PTR 236.)

³⁰ Foucault borrows the term ‘contestation’ from Maurice Blanchot who, according to Foucault’s interpretation, used it to designate exactly the philosophy of non-positive affirmation, the testing of the limits. (See PT 36).

³¹ “[La contestation] ne s’agit pas là d’une négation généralisée, mais d’une affirmation qui n’affirme rien: en pleine rupture de transitivité. La contestation n’est pas l’effort de la pensée pour nier des existences ou des valeurs, c’est le geste qui reconduit chacune d’elles à ses limites, et par là à la Limite où s’accomplit la décision ontologique: contester, c’est aller jusqu’au coeur vide où l’être atteint sa limite et où la limite définit l’être.” (PTR 238.)

³² Foucault's usage of the term 'transgression' changes slightly in different texts, as McNay has pointed out (McNay 1994, 46).

³³ "[philosophie qui] ne peut reprendre la parole, et se reprendre en elle que sur les bords de ses limites" (PTR 242).

³⁴ "nous ne sommes pas tout" (PTR 242).

³⁵ "comme un dieu secret et tout-parlant" (PTR 242).

³⁶ "[il découvre qu'il y a, à côté de lui] un langage qui parle et don't il n'est pas maître; un langage qui s'efforce, qui échoue et se tait et qu'il ne peut plus mouvoir; un langage qu'il a lui-même parlé autrefois et qui maintenant s'est détaché de lui et gravite dans un espace de plus en plus silencieux." (PTR 242.)

³⁷ "vidé de soi jusqu'au vide absolu – ouverture qui est la communication" (PTR 243).

³⁸ "[I]l ne s'agit pas d'une fin de la philosophie. Plutôt de la fin du philosophie comme forme souveraine et première du langage philosophique." (PTR 242.)

³⁹ "Ce qui est en jeu dans l'érotisme est toujours une dissolution des formes constituées [...] de ces formes de vie sociale, régulière, qui fondent l'ordre discontinu des individualités définies que nous somme" (Bataille 1957, 25).

⁴⁰ "[peut-être] s'illumine-t-elle pour ceux qui ont enfin affranchi leur pensée de tout langage dialectique" (PTR 249).

⁴¹ "Peut-être un jour apparaîtra-t-elle aussi décisive pour notre culture, aussi enfouie dans son sol que l'a été naguère, pour la pensée dialectique, l'expérience de la contradiction. Mais malgré tant de signes épars, le langage est presque entièrement à naître où la transgression trouvera son espace et son être illuminé." (PTR 236.)

⁴² On the ideological basis and context of the avant-garde, see Murphy 1999; Orton and Pollock 1999; and Krauss 1985.

⁴³ In McNay's view, Foucault forgets his own earlier insistence in *Mental Illness and Psychology* (*Maladie mentale et personnalité* 1954) on understanding madness in relation to its *social* conditions of existence, which results in too much reliance on an aestheticized notion of madness (McNay 1994, 47).

⁴⁴ The idea of a female language is presented in *Ce sexe qui n'en est pas un*, *Parler n'est jamais neutre* and *L'aime à toi*. In these works, Irigaray associates women's ways of using language directly with the female body and sexuality.

⁴⁵ Irigaray's ideas have been applied to other genres of art too. For example Mary Ann Doane and Anette Kuhn have both suggested that there could be an essentially feminine cinematic aesthetic which would express and reproduce feminine identity.

⁴⁶ Unlike the rational subject, Irigaray's female subjectivity does not attempt to master the object of her speech and thinking, but rather comes and goes, in herself and outside of herself, endlessly. If this subject seems to be without qualities of her own, and if she is unable to talk about herself without getting lost in the process, this is not because she has no qualities of value, or place or identity on her own. It is rather because metaphysics does not speak her language, because she cannot be grasped by counting and quantification.

⁴⁷ Cixous's notion of the phallogocentric order is linked with Jacques Lacan's notion of the Symbolic Order. She understands that Lacan's naming the center of the Symbolic Order as the Phallus clarifies what a patriarchal system language is – or, more specifically, what a phallo(go)centric system it is. The expression 'phallogocentric' is also tied to Jacques Derrida's

idea that in Western culture, the structure of language relies on spoken words that take precedence over written words, which makes the word “logocentric” describe Western culture in general. Cixous (as well as Irigaray) combine these two ideas in their attempt to show that Western cultural systems and structures are “phallogocentric” in the sense that they are based on the primacy of certain terms in an array of binary oppositions. For them, a phallogocentric culture is one which is structured by binary oppositions – male/female, order/chaos, language/silence, presence/absence, speech/writing, light/dark, good/evil, and so forth – and in which the first term is usually valued over the second term. Both Cixous and Irigaray insist that all valued terms (male, order, language, presence, speech) are aligned with each other, and that all of them together provide the basic structures of Western thought.

⁴⁸ For a more detailed discussion on jouissance as it operates in Cixous, see Betsy Wing’s notions in her translation of Cixous, and Catherine Clement *The Newly Born Woman* (Cixous and Clement 1986, 165). See also Singer 1989.

⁴⁹ Cixous describes differences between what she considers to be a feminine and masculine “economy” in terms of different attitudes to giving. Relying on Marcel Mauss’ ideas on the gift (Mauss 1950), she argues that the masculine is concerned with property, and that all gifts, therefore, function to reinforce his position. The feminine gift, in contrast, is given without calculation and simply for the other’s pleasure. (See *The Newly Born Woman*, pp. 84-88. The French reference is pp. 155-63 of *La Jeune Née*.)

⁵⁰ Julia Kristeva’s work also converges with these ideas, notably her distinction between what she calls the “semiotic” and the “symbolic,” which she develops in texts such as *Revolution in Poetic Language* [*La Révolution du langage poétique*, 1974] and *Powers of Horror* [*Pouvoirs de l’horreur*, 1980]. Kristeva maintains that all signification is composed of these two elements. For her, the semiotic element is the bodily drive as it is discharged in signification. As the discharge of bodily drives, it is also associated with the maternal body, the first source of rhythms, tones and movements for every human being, since we have all resided in that body. The symbolic element of signification is associated instead with its grammar and structure. In brief, it is what makes reference possible (for example, words have referential meaning because of the symbolic structure of language).

Yet, it must be noted that Kristeva’s relation to feminism has been somewhat ambivalent, and that she also rejects many of Irigaray’s and Cixous’ ideas by criticizing all attempts to seek a uniquely feminine language. In Kristeva’s view, this task is impossible. Neither does she agree with feminists who maintain that language and culture are essentially patriarchal and must therefore be somehow abandoned. Instead, she argues that culture and language are the very domains of speaking beings, and that this must be the case with women too - since women, in her view, are primarily speaking beings. Against the second wave of feminism to which she associates this critique, Kristeva endorses what she identifies as the third phase, which refuses to choose identity over difference, but rather explores multiple identities, including multiple sexual identities. With this in mind, Kristeva proposes that there are as many sexualities as there are individuals. (Kristeva 1984, 22-27.)

⁵¹ Judith Butler, for example, criticizes Irigaray for globalizing the problem of a masculinized economy, and accuses her of practicing “epistemological imperialism” and “colonizing gestures” (Butler 1990, 13). In much the same spirit, Susan Hekman warns readers of Irigaray and Cixous of their essentialism (Hekman 1990, 45).

⁵² As Diane Elam puts it, rather than celebrating a hypostatized female body, Irigaray’s use of the rhetoric of biological discourse refigures anatomy and multiple female pleasure, writing *through* and *with* the body rather than writing *of* the body, and this is the sense in which Cixous has also spoken of “writing the body” (Elam 1994, 62).

⁵³ On colonialist and ethnically biased problems in Irigaray and Cixous, see for example, Kanneh 1997.

⁵⁴ Foucault’s Nietzschean attitude towards the idea of epistemology is that there is nothing optimistic to say. To question the will-to-power is to reject the common motive of Hegelian

eschatological historiography and Cartesian epistemology. Thus, Foucault, like Nietzsche, wanted to abandon the striving for objectivity, denying the intuition that Truth is one. To see him as a Nietzschean enemy of historicism (rather than as one more historicist enemy of Cartesianism), we must see him as trying to write history in a way that denies the notion of historical progress, as Richard Rorty remarked (Rorty 1999, 46). This means taking seriously his asserted aim to introduce into the very roots of thought the notions of “change, discontinuity and materiality” (AK 231), and thereby, as Rorty comments, “to help us drop the notion that later and more inclusive thought is automatically closer to the real” (Rorty 1999, 46).

⁵⁵ According to Foucault, the question of power is inherent already in *The Order of Things*, but what is lacking is reference to the “discursive regime.” In an interview “Truth and Power” (1976) he says: “I confused this too much with systematicity, theoretical form, or something like a paradigm. This same central problem of power, which at that time I had not yet properly isolated, emerges in two very different aspects at the point of junction of *Madness and Civilization* and *The Order of Things*.” (TP 113.)

⁵⁶ “[La sexualité] ne faut pas la concevoir comme une sorte donnée de nature que le pouvoir essaierait de mater, ou comme un domaine obscur que le savoir tenterait, peu à peu, de dévoiler. C’est le nom qu’on peut donner à un dispositif historique: non pas réalité d’en dessous sur laquelle on exercerait des prises difficiles, mais grand réseau de surface où la stimulation des corps, l’intensification des plaisirs, l’incitation au discours, la formation des connaissances, le renforcement des contrôles et des résistances, s’enchaînent les uns avec les autres, selon quelques grandes stratégies de savoir et de pouvoir.” (VS 139.)

⁵⁷ Foucault’s genealogical method, and in fact already his archaeology, could also be viewed as interpretive analyses as Dreyfus and Rabinow suggest (1999). This means that the one who practices interpretive analytics realizes that he/she him/herself is also produced by what he/she is studying, and consequently he/she can never stand outside it. The task of the genealogist, so conceived, is to realize that cultural practices are more basic than any theory. Seen in this light, the seriousness of theory can only be taken as part of society’s on-going history. According to Dreyfus and Rabinow, we need to be aware that the archaeological step back that Foucault takes in order to be able to grasp the strangeness of our society’s practices does not mean that he considers these practices meaningless. Quite the opposite: “[S]ince we share cultural practices with others, and since these practices have made us what we are, we have, perforce, some common footing from which to proceed, to understand, to act. But that foothold is no longer one which is universal, guaranteed, verified, or grounded.” (Dreyfus and Rabinow 1999, 115.)

⁵⁸ As Foucault says, once more citing Nietzsche: “Devotion to truth and the precision of scientific methods arose from the passion of scholars, their reciprocal hatred, their fanatical and unending discussions, and their spirit of competition – the personal conflicts that slowly forged the weapons of reason (NGH 78; See also Nietzsche 1988c, no 34).

The citation in French runs: “L’attachement à la vérité et la rigueur des méthodes scientifiques [est née] de la passion des savants, de leur haine réciproque, de leurs discussions fanatiques et toujours reprises, du besoin de l’emporter – armes lentement forgées au long des luttes personnelles.” (NGLH 138.)

⁵⁹ “La où l’âme prétend s’unifier, là où le Moi s’invente une identité ou une cohérence, le généalogiste part à la recherche du commencement – des commencements innombrables qui laissent ce soupçon de couleur, cette marque presque effacée qui ne saurait tromper un œil un peu historique; l’analyse de la provenance permet de dissocier le Moi et de faire pulluler, aux lieux et places de sa synthèse vide, mille événements maintenant perdus” (NGLH 141).

⁶⁰ “La généalogie, c’est l’histoire comme carnaval concerté” (NGLH 153).

⁶¹ “[C]ette identité, bien faible pourtant, que nous essayons d’assurer et d’assembler sous un masque, n’est elle-même qu’une parodie: le pluriel l’habite, des âmes innombrables s’y disputent” (NGLH 155).

⁶² “[Si la généalogie] pose à son tour la question du sol qui nous a vu naître, de la langue que nous parlons ou des lois qui nous régissent” (NGLH 156) [...] “[c’est pour] mettre au jour les systèmes hétérogènes qui, sous le masque de notre moi, nous interdisent toute identité” (NGLH 154).

⁶³ “[L]es religions jadis demandaient le sacrifice du corps humain; le savoir appelle aujourd’hui à faire des expériences sur nous-mêmes” (NGLH 155).

⁶⁴ “il est rompu à des rythmes de travail, de repos et de fêtes; il est intoxiqué par des poisons – nourritures ou valeurs, habitudes alimentaires et lois morales tout ensemble; il se bâtit des résistances.” (NGLH 147).

⁶⁵ “[R]ien en l’homme – pas même son corps – n’est assez fixe pour comprendre les autres hommes et se reconnaître en eux” (NGLH 147).

⁶⁶ “le stigmate des événements passés, tout comme de lui naissent les désirs, les défaillances, et les erreurs” (NGLH 143).

⁶⁷ “surface d’inscription des événements (alors que le langage les marque et les idées les dissolvent), lieu de dissociation du Moi (auquel il essaie de prêter la chimère d’une unité substantielle), volume en perpétuel effritement” (NGLH 143).

⁶⁸ “montrer le corps tout imprimé d’histoire, et l’histoire ruinant le corps” (NGLH 143).

⁶⁹ “C’est par le sexe [...] que chacun doit passer pour avoir accès à sa propre intelligibilité [...] à la totalité de son corps [...] à son identité [...] nous en sommes arrivés maintenant à demander notre intelligibilité à ce qui fut, pendant tant de siècles, considéré comme folie, la plénitude de notre corps à ce qui en fut longtemps le stigmate et comme la blessure, notre identité à ce qu’on percevait comme obscure poussée sans nom.” (VS 206.)

⁷⁰ “elle a permis de faire fonctionner cette unité fictive comme principe causal, sens omniprésent, secret à découvrir partout” (VS 204).

⁷¹ “qui produirait secondairement les effets multiples de la sexualité tout au long de sa surface de contact avec le pouvoir” (VS 205).

⁷² “le plus spéculative, le plus idéal, le plus intérieur aussi dans un dispositif de sexualité que le pouvoir organise dans ses prises sur les corps, leur matérialité, leurs forces, leurs énergies, leurs sensations, leurs plaisirs” (VS 205).

⁷³ Foucault’s point of departure could, once again, be linked with Nietzsche, whose *Gay Science* (*Fröhliche Wissenschaft*) introduced a doctrine according to which there is no order in human nature or in how we are, and no possibility of judging or evaluating between ways of life. There are only different orders imposed on men by primal chaos, following their “will-to-power.”

⁷⁴ “Est docile un corps qui peut être soumis, qui peut être utilisé, qui peut être transformé et perfectionné” (SPU 160).

⁷⁵ “roi minutieux des petites machines” [...] “des régiments bien dressés et des longs exercices” (SPU 161).

⁷⁶ “pas seulement la croissance de ses habiletés ni non plus l’alourdissement de sa sujétion, mais la formation d’un rapport qui dans le même mécanisme le rend d’autant plus obéissant qu’il est plus utile, et inversement” (SPU 162).

⁷⁷ “un élément indispensable au développement du capitalisme; celui-ci n’a pu être assuré qu’au prix de l’insertion contrôlée des corps dans l’appareil de production et moyennant un ajustement des phénomènes de population aux processus économiques” (VS 185).

⁷⁸ “[S]i le développement des grands appareils d’État, comme *institutions* de pouvoir, a assuré le

maintien des rapports de production, les rudiments d'anatomo- et de bio-politique, inventés au XVIII^e siècle comme *techniques* de pouvoir présentes à tous les niveaux du corps social et utilisées par des institutions très diverses (la famille comme l'armée, l'école ou la police, la médecine individuelle ou l'administration des collectivités), ont agi au niveau des processus économiques, de leur déroulement, des forces qui y sont à l'oeuvre et les soutiennent; ils ont opéré aussi comme facteurs de segregation et de hiérarchisation sociale, agissant sur les forces respectives des uns et des autres, garantissant des rapports de domination et des effets d'hégémonie" (VS 185-186).

⁷⁹ "Pour la première fois [...] dans l'histoire, le biologique se réfléchit dans le politique; le fait de vivre n'est plus ce soubassement inaccessible qui n'émerge que de temps en temps, dans le hasard de la mort et sa fatalité; il passé pour une part dans le champ de contrôle du savoir et d'intervention du pouvoir. Celui-ci n'aura plus affaire seulement à des sujets de droit sur lesquels la prise ultime est la mort, mais à des êtres vivants, et la prise qu'il pourra exercer sur eux devra se placer au niveau de la vie elle-même." (VS 187-188.)

⁸⁰ Foucault uses this expression in his article "On the Genealogy of Ethics" (1984), in which he states that he is arguing not that everything is bad, but that everything is dangerous. Hence, he concludes, "my position leads not to apathy but to a hyper- and pessimistic activism" (GE 231-32) ("ma position ne conduit pas à l'apathie, mais au contraire à un hyper-militantisme pessimiste" GEA 386).

⁸¹ "L'implantation des perversions est un effect-instrument: c'est par l'isolement, l'intensification et la consolidation des sexualités périphériques que les relations du pouvoir au sexe et au plaisir se ramifient, se multiplient, arpentent le corps et pénètrent les conduits. Et sur cette avancée des pouvoirs, se fixent des sexualités disséminées, épinglées à un âge, à un lieu, à un goût, à un type de pratiques." (VS 66.)

⁸² "qui grâce à l'intermédiaire de la médecine, de la psychiatrie, de la prostitution, de la pornographie, se sont branchées à la fois sur cette majoration du pouvoir qui le contrôle" (VS 66).

⁸³ See, for example, Foucault's critique of the notion of ideology in TP 119. His critique of the superstructure model is to be found in HS 94.

⁸⁴ "[L]e pouvoir, ce n'est pas une institution, et ce n'est pas une structure, ce n'est pas une certaine puissance don't certains seraient dotes" (VS 123).

⁸⁵ "[C]'est le nom qu'on prête à une situation stratégique complexe dans une société donnée" (VS 123).

⁸⁶ Foucault's notion of hegemony has been connected to the writings of Antonio Gramsci. Some commentators see similarities between Foucault and Gramsci's views on the relations that are central to the establishment of hegemony, while others interpret Foucault as "anticipated on several points" by the latter (see Smart 1999, 158; Olssen 1999, Chapter 7).

⁸⁷ "comme une série de segments discontinues, don't la fonction tactique n'est ni uniforme ni stable" (VS 133).

⁸⁸ "Il faut admettre un jeu complexe et instable où le discours peut être à la fois instrument et effect de pouvoir, mais aussi obstacle, butée, point de résistance et départ pour une stratégie opposée" (VS 133).

⁸⁹ Butler draws the expression heterosexual matrix from Monique Wittig's (1990) notion of the heterosexual contract and from Adrienne Rich's (1987) notion of compulsory heterosexuality.

⁹⁰ Other French theorists such as Shoshana Felman and Monique Wittig have also examined the questions concerning the constitution of women's bodies by language, what language and knowledge are, and how women ought to speak and write.

⁹⁰ “le plus idéal, le plus intérieur aussi dans un dispositif de la sexualité que le pouvoir organize dans ses prises sur les corps, leur matérialité, leurs forces, leurs energies, leurs sensations, leurs plaisirs” (VS 205).

⁹¹ “le plus idéal, le plus intérieur aussi dans un dispositif de la sexualité que le pouvoir organize dans ses prises sur les corps, leur matérialité, leurs forces, leurs energies, leurs sensations, leurs plaisirs” (VS 205).

⁹² Teresa de Lauretis has developed another version of this argument. In her *Alice Doesn't* (1984), she maintains that the female spectator is classically split between her identification with “the image of the screen, perceived as spatially static, fixed, in frame, and feminine,” and identification with the camera, “apprehended as temporal, active or in movement, and masculine” (de Lauretis 1984, 123).

bell hooks has described a similar phenomenon in black women, who in her view tend to identify themselves with white male movie makers and see black people as these whites typically see them (Mulvey 1975 and 1981; hooks 1992. See also Brand 1999 and 2000.)

⁹³ As Bordo notes, in earlier times, a fatless, muscled body was not generally considered sexually desirable, because muscles were associated with the insensitive, the unintelligent and the animalistic: the *more* body one had, the *more* uncultured or uncivilized one was expected to be. This was especially true of the female body, whose aesthetic function was rather to represent weakness and small size and to leave associations of strength to the “naturally” strong other sex. (See Bordo 1993.)

⁹⁴ Philosophical aesthetics has also based many of its central categories, such as taste, beauty and sublime, on the heterosexual matrix and its rigid differentiation of the two sexes. Among the classics that link aesthetic ideals directly to the differentiation of the two sexes are Immanuel Kant (1798) *Anthropologie in pragmatischer Hinsicht*; Kant (1764) *Beobachtungen über das Gefühl des Schönen und Erhabenen*; Edmund Burke (1757) *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*; Georg Gessner (1818) *Bestandtheile der Weiblichen Schönheit*; and Hochfelden (1903) *Glück bei Damen. Oder die Kunst das weibliche Herz zu erobern. Praktische Leitfaden für junge Männer*.

On this issue, see Wiseman 1993, 169-178; Korsmeyer 1995, 49-65; Kellner 1993; Armstrong 1996. On the Finnish discussion see Hekanaho 2002; von Bonsdorff and Seppä 2002.

⁹⁵ In other words, it is through a number of seemingly trivial routines (table manners, toilet habits, etc.) that culture is “made body,” that is, converted into automatic, habitual activity (Bordo 1993, 165).

⁹⁶ Some social theorists have also given attention to the one-dimensional nature of Foucault’s theory of power. See Habermas 1987; Rose 1984.

⁹⁷ Maurice Blanchot, for example, interprets Foucault’s thinking as negative theology, showing that there remains almost nothing for him to say due to his endless rejections (“it’s not... nor is it... nor is it for that matter...”) (Blanchot 1987, 74).

⁹⁸ See, most notably, “Technologies of the Self,” “L’écriture de soi,” “What is Enlightenment?,” “On the Genealogy of Ethics: An Overview of Work in Progress,” “The Ethics of Care of the Self as a Practice of Liberty,” “The Concern for Truth,” and “The Return of Morality.”

⁹⁹ See, for example O’Farell (1989), who argues that Foucault’s late work on the subject of the self undermines his earlier views so effectively that his theory runs itself into a dead end. In much the same spirit, Luc Ferry and Alain Renault claim that Foucault’s late work is entirely inconsistent with his earlier views and “profoundly problematical” (Ferry and Renault 1990, 107-21).

¹⁰⁰ “Les discours, pas plus que les silences, ne sont une fois pour toutes soumis au pouvoir ou dressés contre lui. Il faut admettre un jeu complexe et instable où le discours peut être à la fois instrument et effect de pouvoir, mais aussi obstacle, butée, point de résistance et départ pour une

stratégie opposée.” (VS 133.)

¹⁰¹ In Foucault’s words: “I believe [...] that there is no sovereign, founding subject, a universal form of subject to be found everywhere. [...] The subject is constituted through practices of subjection, or, in a more autonomous way, through practices of liberation, of liberty, as in Antiquity, on the basis [...] of number of rules, styles, inventions to be found in the cultural environment.” (PPC 51.)

The citation in French runs: “[J]e pense effectivement qu’il n’y a pas un sujet souverain, fondateur, une forme universelle de sujet qu’on pourrait retrouver partout. [...] le sujet se constitue à travers des pratiques d’assujettissement, ou, d’une façon plus autonome, à travers des pratiques de libération, de liberté, comme, dans l’Antiquité, à partir, bien entendu, d’un certain nombre de règles, styles, conventions, qu’on retrouve dans le milieu culturel.” (EE 733.)

¹⁰² “un objet de connaissance, de *tekhne*, un objet d’art” (GEA 402).

¹⁰³ “les pratiques par lesquelles les individus ont été amenés à porter attention à eux-mêmes [...] comme sujets de désir, faisant jouer [...] un certain rapport qui leur permet de découvrir dans le désir la vérité de leur être, qu’il soit naturel ou déchu. Bref, l’idée était, dans cette généalogie, de chercher comment les individus ont été amenés à exercer sur eux-mêmes, et sur les autres, une herméneutique du désir don’t leur comportement sexuel a bien été sans doute l’occasion, mais n’a certainement pas été le domaine exclusif. En somme, pour comprendre comment l’individu moderne pouvait faire l’expérience de lui-même comme sujet d’une “sexualité,” il était indispensable de dégager auparavant la façon don’t, pendant des siècles, l’homme occidental avait été amené à se reconnaître comme sujet de désir.” (UPL 11-12.)

¹⁰⁴ “À travers quels jeux de vérité l’être humain, s’est-il reconnu comme homme de désir?” (UPL 13).

¹⁰⁵ “Pourquoi ce souci éthique, qui, au moins à certains moments, dans certaines sociétés ou dans certains groupes, paraît plus important que l’attention morale qu’on porte à d’autres domaines pourtant essentiels dans la vie individuelle ou collective, comme les conduits alimentaires ou l’accomplissement des devoirs civiques?” (UPL 16).

¹⁰⁶ “à chercher du côté des instances d’autorité qui font valoir ce code, qui imposent l’apprentissage et l’observation, qui sanctionnent les infractions” (UPL 36-37).

¹⁰⁷ Although these two aspects are present in all moral theories, Foucault sees the former type of morality as typical of the Christian moralities that brought about a strong codification of the moral experience, and the latter as familiar to the moral conceptions of Greek and Greco-Roman antiquity – which was more strongly oriented toward practices of the self and the question of *askeesis* than toward the codification of conducts or strict definitions of what is permitted and what is forbidden (UP 30.) Unlike the ascetics of Greek antiquity, which were detached from the scientific definitions of the self, and in which techniques of the self were associated with dietetics (the health of the body), economics (the husband’s running of the household) and eroticism (especially men’s love of boys), Christian moralities were strictly tied to the modes of *subjection* which, in the practices of confession and caring, became almost synonymous with self-renunciation. (See also Simons 1995, 73.)

¹⁰⁸ “d’un savoir-faire qui en tenant compte des principes généraux quiderait l’action dans son moment, selon son contexte et en fonction de ses fins” (UPL 73).

¹⁰⁹ Foucault’s last lectures were held at the Collège de France between 29 February and 28 March 1984 (Foucault died on 21 June 1984). These lectures have not yet been published. My references are based on Alexander Nehamas’ inquiries and translations of them, which are presented in his book *The Art of Living* (1998). For a more detailed analysis, see also Thomas Flynn 1994.

¹¹⁰ This idea, as Nehamas points out, seems to be based on the words of Socrates: “If you care for yourselves you will please me and mine and yourselves the most, even if you don’t see the point right now” (Nehamas 1998, 167).

¹¹¹ The purpose of the two last parts of Foucault’s history of sexuality is to document a number of different historical conceptions of and methods for constructing moral agents in different centuries.

¹¹² “Le souci de soi est éthique en lui-même; mais il implique des rapports complexes avec les autres, dans la mesure où cet *êthos* de la liberté est aussi une manière de se soucier des autres” (EPL 714).

¹¹³ “L’*êthos* implique aussi un rapport aux autres, dans la mesure où le souci de soi rend capable d’occuper, dans la cité, dans la communauté ou dans les relations interindividuelles, la place qui convient – que ce soit pour exercer une magistrature ou pour avoir des rapports d’amitié.” (EPL 714-715.)

¹¹⁴ “le risque de dominer les autres et d’exercer sur eux un pouvoir tyrannique ne vient précisément que du fait qu’on ne s’est pas soulié de soi et qu’on est devenu l’esclave de ses désirs” (EPL 716).

¹¹⁵ “Non, mais dis donc toi, tu veux gouverner la cité, tu veux donc t’occuper des autres, mais tu ne t’es même pas occupé de toi-même, et si tu ne t’occupes pas de toi-même, tu seras un mauvais gouvernant” (EPL 721).

¹¹⁶ Foucault was not, of course, the first to link philosophical writing with creative life. I suggest that a similar idea is to be found in Michel Montaigne’s sixteenth-century writings on the essay. Montaigne’s remarkable innovation was to see an essay not merely as one possible form of thinking and writing, but first of all an existential attempt to study one’s individual existence and its aesthetic form (*j’essaie, je m’essaie, je me suis essayé*). It was his view, in other words, that because nothing is self-evident, everything, including the self, must be constantly rethought in an “essayistic” existence (the French verb ‘essayer’ allied to the English ‘assay’, which had a variety of meanings: ‘to try to do something,’ ‘to experience a thing,’ or ‘to test something, putting it through trial runs’). What this demands is one’s development of what Montaigne calls “a small wisdom,” that is wisdom that he also represents as a praxis that is engaged in the limited historical situation and in the experiencing, concrete subject. On Montaigne’s theory of the art of living, see Schmidt 1998 and Schmidt 1999.

¹¹⁷ “Ce qui m’étonne, c’est le fait que dans notre société l’art est devenu quelque chose qui n’est en rapport qu’avec les objets et non pas avec les individus ou avec la vie; et aussi que l’art est un domaine spécialisé fait par des experts qui sont des artistes. Mais la vie de tout individu ne pourrait-elle pas être oeuvre d’art? Pourquoi une lampe ou une maison sont-ils des objets d’art et non pas notre vie? (GEA 392.)

¹¹⁸ “Occupe-toi de toi-même,” c’est-à-dire: “Fonde-toi en liberté, par la maîtrise de toi” (EPL 729).

¹¹⁹ For a more detailed analysis of Foucault’s ideas concerning freedom, see especially Oksala 2002.

¹²⁰ “est donc en elle-même politique” (EPL 714).

¹²¹ “dans la mesure où le non-esclavage à l’égard des autres est une condition: un esclave n’a pas d’éthique.” But, Foucault adds, it is also political “dans la mesure où être libre signifie ne pas être esclave de soi-même et de ses appétits, ce qui implique qu’on établisse à soi-même un certain rapport de domination, de maîtrise, qu’on appelait *archê* – pouvoir, commandement.” (EPL 714.)

¹²² My interpretation of Foucault’s usage of the term ‘freedom’ is on much the same line as Johanna Oksala’s ideas. See especially her *Freedom in the Philosophy of Foucault* (Oksala 2002).

¹²³ “il se replie sur l’idée qu’il faut être soi-même et être vraiment soi-même” (GEA 392).

¹²⁴ John Rajchman has also pointed out some similarities between Sartre’s and Foucault’s ethical accounts. In his view, Foucault’s ethics aims to further the modern ethical tradition, initiated by Sartre, which is focused around the question of a “modern praxis.” In Rajchman’s words: “A modern practical philosophy [...] is the philosophy for a practice in which what one is capable of being is not rooted in prior knowledge of who one is. Its principle is freedom, but a freedom which does not follow from any postulation of our nature of essence” (Rajchman 1985a, 166-167.)

¹²⁵ “En fait, le *soi* ne peut être saisi comme un existant réel: le sujet ne peut être soi, car la coïncidence avec soi, fait [...] disparaître le soi. Mais il ne peut pas non plus *ne pas être* soi, puisque le soi est indication du sujet lui-même. Le soi représente donc une distance idéale dans l’immanence du sujet par rapport à lui-même, une façon de *ne pas être sa propre* coïncidence, d’échapper à l’identité tout en la posant comme unité, bref d’être en équilibre perpétuellement instable entre l’identité comme cohésion absolue sans trace de diversité et l’unité comme synthèse d’une multiplicité. C’est ce que nous appellerons la présence à soi.” (Sartre 1943, 119.)

¹²⁶ “[L]’homme crée le Monde [...] au-dessus-de-lui ou plutôt [...] il se *dépasse* par cette création et il est ce dépassement même, il n’est rien que cet anéantissement absolu de soi pour que le monde existe. Il a la joie comme conscience d’être et de ne pas être à la fois sa création. [...] La monde c’est moi dans la dimension du Non-moi.” (Sartre 1983, 514.)

¹²⁷ “c’est moi mais pour toujours dans une autre dimension d’Être, pour toujours *autre que moi*” (Sartre 1983, 514).

¹²⁸ “originellement, l’authenticité consiste à refuser la quête de l’être, parce que je ne suis jamais *rien* (Sartre 1983, 492).

¹²⁹ “les caractéristiques de l’oeuvre d’Art puisque dans celle-ci *aussi* il faut une “matière à infirmer” qui prête son Être (sans elle l’oeuvre reste subjective et rêvée) (Sartre 1983, 514).

¹³⁰ I maintain that Foucault’s analysis of transgression and limits is also meant to support this kind of explanation of the ontological character of the subject/self as an existent that is not-fully-present in itself, but still posits itself as some sort of unity (self).

¹³¹ See, for example, Sartre’s *Notebooks for an Ethics*, p. 498.

¹³² “l’authenticité consistait à dévoiler l’être sur le mode de ne pas être” (Sartre 1983, 490).

¹³³ “Il faut creuser pour montrer comment les choses ont été historiquement contingentes, pour telle ou telle raison intelligible mais non nécessaire. Il faut faire apparaître l’intelligible sur le fond de vacuité et muer une nécessité, et penser que ce qui existe est loin de remplir tous les espaces possibles.” (AC 167.)

¹³⁴ “Dans le culte californien du soi, on doit découvrir en principe son vrai moi en le séparant de ce qui pourrait le rendre obscur ou l’aliéner, en déchiffrant sa vérité grâce à une science psychologique ou psychoanalytique qui prétend être capable de vous dire quel est votre vrai moi” (GEA 402-403).

¹³⁵ “[N]on seulement je n’identifie pas la culture antique de soi à ce qu’on pourrait appeler le culte de soi californien, mais je pense qu’ils sont diamétralement opposés (GEA 403).

¹³⁶ [À] mon avis, le mouvement homosexuel a plus besoin aujourd’hui d’un art de vivre que d’une science ou d’une connaissance scientifique (ou pseudo-scientifique) de ce qu’est la sexualité. [...] La sexualité est quelque chose que nous créons nous-mêmes – elle est notre propre création, bien plus qu’elle n’est la découverte d’un aspect secret de notre désir. Nous devons comprendre qu’avec notre désirs, à travers eux, s’instaurent de nouvelles formes de rapports, de nouvelles formes d’amour et de nouvelles formes de création. Le sexe n’est pas une fatalité; il est une possibilité d’accéder à une vie créatrice. (SPP 735.)

¹³⁷ With this in mind, Foucault formulates the following definition:

“If we are asked to relate to the question of identity, it must be an identity to our unique selves. But the relationships we have to have with ourselves are not ones of identity, rather, they must be relationships of differentiation, of creation, of innovation. To be the same is really boring. We must exclude identity if people find their pleasure through this identity, but we must not think of this identity as an ethical universal rule.” (SPPI 166.)

The citation in French runs: “Si nous devons nous situer par rapport à la question de l’identité, ce doit être en tant que nous sommes des êtres uniques. Mais les rapports que nous devons entretenir avec nous-mêmes ne sont pas des rapports d’identité; ils doivent être plutôt des rapports de différenciation, de création, d’innovation. C’est très fastidieux d’être toujours le même. Nous ne devons pas exclure l’identité si c’est par le biais de cette identité que les gens trouvent leur plaisir, mais nous ne devons pas considérer cette identité comme une règle éthique universelle.” (SPP 739.)

¹³⁸ These ideas derive from an interview with Foucault that was conducted on July 10, 1978. The text was first published in Dutch in 1982 (“Vijftien vragen van homoseksuele zijde van Michel Foucault,” in *Interviews met Michel Foucault*, eds. M. Duyves and T. Massen, Utrecht: De Woelrat), and in 1988 in French (“Le Gai savoir,” *Mec Magazine*). It has been translated into English, but it was omitted from the four-volume collection of Foucault’s texts and interviews *Dits et écrits 1954-1988*. The translation used here was done by David Halperin (Halperin 1995, 93-94.)

¹³⁹ David Halperin studies Foucault’s notions of pleasure and desire, and claims that pleasure, for Foucault, is an event at the limit of the subject, because intense pleasure is in some sense desubjectivizing or impersonal (Halperin 1995, 93-94. See also Oksala 2002, 180.)

¹⁴⁰ “pour moi, le travail intellectuel est lié à ce que vous définiriez comme une forme d’esthétisme – par cela, j’entends la transformation de soi” (MFSR).

¹⁴¹ “Cette transformation de soi par son propre savoir est, je crois, quelque chose d’assez proche de l’expérience esthétique. Pourquoi un peintre travaillerait-il, s’il n’est pas transformé par sa peinture?” (MFSR 536.)

¹⁴² Therefore, as Kant concludes, it would not be correct to say that his own era was enlightened (*aufgeklärt*), but should rather be described as “Zeitalter der Aufklärung,” meaning that people still need to work on their spiritual growth despite the fact that they have better opportunities to work themselves free. (Kant 1996, 15.)

¹⁴³ “*Aufklärung ist der Ausgang des Menschen aus seiner selbstverschuldeten Unmündigkeit. Unmündigkeit ist das Unvermögen, sich seines Verstandes ohne Leitung eines anderen zu bedienen. Selbstverschuldet ist diese Unmündigkeit, wenn die Ursache derselben nicht am Mangel des Verstandes, sondern der Entschliessung und des Mutes liegt, sich seiner ohne Leitung eines anderen zu bedienen. Sapere aude! Habe mut, dich deines eigenen Verstandes zu bedienen*” ist also der Wahlspruch der Aufklärung. “Beantwortung der Frage: Was ist Aufklärung?” (Kant 1996, 9.)

¹⁴⁴ At the same time, as I have suggested, Foucault’s studying of the freedom of the subject also implies the need to study (both ontologically and politically) the present time. In his own essay on enlightenment, Foucault crystallizes this modern/Kantian aspect of his own thought in the following words: “I shall thus characterize the philosophical ethos appropriate to the critical ontology of ourselves as a historic-practical test of the limits that we may go beyond, and thus as work carried out by ourselves upon ourselves as free beings” (WE 47).

¹⁴⁵ “le racisme fut formulé sur la base de la rationalité flamboyante du darwinisme social, qui devint ainsi l’un des ingrédients les plus durables et les plus persistants du nazisme. C’était une irrationalité, bien sûr, mais une irrationalité qui, en même temps, constituait une certaine forme de

rationalité.” (ESP 279.)

¹⁴⁶ “différentes modifications par lesquelles des rationalités s’engendrent les unes les autres” (STPS 441).

¹⁴⁷ As Christopher Norris notes, Foucault’s contestation requires that we read Kant’s philosophy as marked through and through by the error of mistaking culturally specific ideas for a priori valid truth-claims, or contemporary limits of the necessary for limits that are intrinsic to our very constitution as thinking and willing subjects (Norris 1995, 169). We could express the same idea by saying that, when coming to terms with rationality and Enlightenment thought, Foucault is on much the same lines as the so-called postmodern critics such as Jean-François Lyotard, whose incredulity toward meta-narratives (universal reason, universal art, universal morality and human nature, for example) corresponds to the crisis in metaphysical philosophy and the university institution that relied on it in the past (Lyotard 1987; Carroll 1987).

¹⁴⁸ “en suivant les lignes de fragilité d’aujourd’hui, à parvenir à saisir par où ce qui est et comment ce qui est pourrait ne plus être ce qui est” (STPS 449).

¹⁴⁹ With this in mind, I maintain that Foucault’s position is, primarily, perspectivist (in the Nietzschean sense of the term) and not relativistic.

¹⁵⁰ In Baudelaire’s view, on the other hand, the experience of the present demands both the archive that the past offers to us, and the actual experience of the present, for without this dialectic there is no such thing as an experience of the *living* present or, alternatively, of modernity.

¹⁵¹ In his commentary on the world exhibition of 1855 (“Méthode de critique. De l’idée moderne du progrès appliquée aux beaux-arts. Déplacement de la vitalité”), Baudelaire wrote that his idea of correspondence was to be taken as the opposite of all dogmatic definitions of art. In his view, perceptible beauty is “insaisissable,” that is, it exists either on one or the other side of reason: “Toute définition dogmatique, réductrice de la beauté ne produit que les prisons. Si on veut systématiser la beauté perceptible, l’essentiel de cette beauté se fait insaisissable. Cet essentiel est constitué par les correspondances; celles-ci établissent les rapports existant entre les êtres et les choses. Elles ne les cataloguent ni ne les analysent. Leur connaissance est de l’ordre de la sensation, de la perception, de l’intuition; c’est un au-delà ou un en deça de la raison.” (Baudelaire 1999, 256, note 1.)

¹⁵² Baudelaire’s text in French runs: “Le mal se fait sans effort, naturellement, par fatalité; le bien est toujours le produit d’un art [...] morale [...] peut être transporté dans l’ordre du beau.” (Baudelaire 1999, 542.)

¹⁵³ “[O]n veut faire valoir contre les prises du pouvoir, les corps, les plaisirs, les saviors, dans leur multiplicité et leur possibilité de résistance” (VS 208).

¹⁵⁴ See, most notably, the following feminist critiques and analyses of Foucault: Bartky 1990, 63-82; Butler 1990, 93-110; de Lauretis 1987; Diamond and Quinby 1988; Hartsock 1990, 157-75; Richlin 1991, 160-79; Thornton 1991, 181-93 and Greene 1996.

¹⁵⁵ “[des vertues] ont en l’homme à la fois leur modèle accompli et achevé et le principe de leur mise en oeuvre” (UPL 98).

¹⁵⁶ “[Être intempérant], c’est être incapable de cette attitude de virilité à l’égard de soi-même qui permet d’être plus fort que soi. En ce sens, l’homme de plaisirs et de désirs, l’homme de la non-maîtrise (*akrasia*) ou de l’intempérance (*akolasia*) est un homme qu’on pourrait dire féminin, mais à l’égard de lui-même plus essentiellement encore qu’à l’égard des autres.” (UPL 98.)

¹⁵⁷ Given the fact that Sappho’s poetry has been preserved and appreciated within the Western literary tradition up to our present era, it is indeed curious that Foucault omits any mention of her in his discussion of ancient Greek erotic and homosexual aesthetic practices of the self. As a result, women’s perspectives on the aesthetic subjectivity are, again, excluded from Foucault’s discussion

of limit-attitudes, and the female voices are kept strictly a little beneath his histories.

¹⁵⁸ “La femme est un contraire du Dandy. Donc elle fait horreur. La femme a faim et elle veut manger, soif et elle veut boire. Elle est en rut et elle veut être foutue. [...] La femme est naturelle, c’est-à-dire abominable. Aussi est-elle toujours vulgaire...” (Baudelaire cit. in Kempf 1977, 69.)

¹⁵⁹ In his famous essay “Le Peintre de la vie moderne” (“The Painter of Modern Life”), Baudelaire writes:

“À la porte d’un café, s’appuyant aux vitres illuminées par-devant et par-derrrière, s’étale un de ces imbéciles, dont l’élégance est faite par son tailleur et la tête par son coiffeur. À côté de lui, les pieds soutenus par l’indispensable tabouret, est assise sa maîtresse, grande drôlesse à qui il ne manque presque rien (ce presque rien, c’est presque tout, c’est la distinction) pour ressembler à une grande dame. Comme son joli compagnon, elle à tout l’orifice de sa petite bouche occupé par un cigare disproportionné. Ces deux êtres ne pensent pas. Est-il bien sûr même qu’ils regardent? À moins que, Narcisses de l’imbécillité, ils ne contemplent pas la foule comme un fleuve qui leur rend leur image. En réalité, ils existent bien pour le plaisir de l’observateur que pour leur plaisir propre.” (Baudelaire 1999, 546.)

¹⁶⁰ It is rather common nowadays to associate the term ‘avant-garde’ primarily with the 20th century. The historical roots of this expression date back to the Middle Ages, however.

The artistic avant-garde in its modern usage was brought into existence early in the nineteenth century by Olinde Rodrigues, a close friend of the famous utopian socialist Claude-Henri Saint-Simon. As Matei Calinescu notes in his *Five Faces of Modernity* (1987), it was not by chance that the romantic use of avant-garde in a literary-artistic context was derived from the language of revolutionary politics. This occurred in 1825 when the term was applied to arts in Rodrigues’ dialogue “L’Artiste, le savant et l’industriel,” published in a volume entitled *Opinions littéraires, philosophiques et industrielles* (Paris: Galerie de Bossange Père, 1825). The reason why artists had previously performed only some sort of secondary role in social life was, in Rodrigues’ view, their lack of a “common impulse” and a “general ideal.” He tried to solve this problem by adopting the Saint-Simonian type of socialism, which “avant-garde artists” were called upon to popularize.

¹⁶¹ For a proposed list of such conditions, see Alexy 1990, 163-76.

¹⁶² “il y a une autocréation de la raison et c’est pourquoi ce que j’ai essayé d’analyser, ce sont des formes de rationalité: différentes instaurations, différentes créations, différentes modifications par lesquelles des rationalités s’engendrent les unes les autres” (STPS 441).

¹⁶³ “Je dis liberté de choix sexuel, et non liberté d’acte sexuel, parce que certains actes, comme le viol, ne devraient pas être permis, qu’ils mettent en cause un homme et une femme ou deux hommes. Je ne crois pas que nous devrions faire d’une sorte de liberté absolue, de liberté totale d’action, dans le domaine sexuel, notre objectif. En revanche, là où il est question de la liberté de choix sexuel, notre intransigeance doit être totale. La liberté de choix sexuelle implique la liberté d’expression de ce choix. Par là, j’entends la liberté de manifester ou de ne pas manifester ce choix.” (CS 332.)

¹⁶⁴ “[L]e problème à la fois politique, éthique, social et philosophique qui se pose à nous aujourd’hui n’est pas d’essayer de libérer l’individu de l’État et du type d’individualisation qui s’y rattache. Il nous faut promouvoir de nouvelles formes de subjectivité en refusant le type d’individualité qu’on nous a imposé pendant plusieurs siècles.” (SPO 232.)

¹⁶⁵ By this I do not mean that she merely applies Foucault’s theory to the feminist problematic. Her insights also differ from Foucault’s on some key points. One of the most significant differences is that Foucault presupposes a certain pre-discursive body, or the body as a blank page, which appears prior to signification and form, while for Butler, the body is merely a signifying practice. However, for my purpose here, it may suffice to concentrate on the positive aspect of women’s power over their selves and bodies in Butler’s genealogical work, and to try to grasp the similarities between her and Foucault’s late aesthetics.

¹⁶⁶ The term ‘assemblage’ refers to 1) the act of assembling, or the state of being assembled; 2) a collection of people or things; a gathering; 3) a fitting together of parts, those in a machine.

When referring to modern art, ‘assemblage’ means a sculptural composition consisting of an arrangement of miscellaneous objects or found materials. It is, thus, some sort of three-dimensional “collage.”

¹⁶⁷ On advertisement and resistance, see Leena-Maija Rossi 2002a and 2002b.

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