

Identity, Subjectivity and Politics:
Political Theory in the Simple Limits of Practical Reason

by


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B.A., Université Laval, 1997

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in the Department of Political Science and the
Contemporary Social and Political Thought Program

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ABSTRACT

My aim in this thesis is to offer an interpretation of the widely discussed phenomenon of the contemporary fragmentation and pluralization of identities. I make the argument that the ‘modern’ conceptions of personal narrative and authenticity must be reconceptualized, rather than discarded, in tune with the fragmentation and pluralization of identities. I also suggest that the concept of *dépaysement* is now central to any understanding of community and culture. In my second Chapter, I go against the bulk of the scholarship on Foucault and argue that we can find in Foucault’s late writings some rarely explored paths for thinking about subjectivity in a context of fragmented identities and of incredulity towards master narratives. Finally, I argue in Chapter three that an agonistic conception of democracy, the roots of which we can find in Foucault’s thought once again, is congruent with the accounts of identity and subjectivity previously discussed. Throughout the thesis, I underscore the necessity to bring political and social theory back to the ‘simple’ limits of practical reason.

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Acknowledgements

Thinking and writing, seemingly the quintessential private activities, are thoroughly dialogical. Many persons, consequently, deserve my deepest gratitude. I will only name a few here. Guy Laforest, my mentor at Université Laval, is the first person who comes to mind. He is the one who first made me believe that I could be a successful Graduate Student and he also encouraged me to undertake a Master's degree at the University of Victoria under Jim Tully's supervision. Now I understand why. Jim was more than everything a Graduate Student can expect from his/her supervisor. His generosity, friendship, availability, rigour, scholarship and curiosity (in Foucault's sense) constitute a great fund of memories. I am also greatly indebted to Eddy Vo-Quang. More than being my favorite partner in the game of "reciprocal elucidation" and the best editor a francophone student writing in English could have, he has become a much appreciated friend. For different reasons, Nigel DeSouza and Rob Walker deserve special mention. In their own ways, they made my stay in Victoria an enriching experience. I also wish to thank Gerald Alfred, Toby Foshay, Smaro Kamboureli, Erin Kuyvenhoven, Bill Little, Warren Magnusson, David Owen and Kara Shaw. Finally, a *clin d'oeil* to Henri, Amy, Nigel, Bekka, Eddy, Dan, Justin and Santo who made my life in Victoria not only intellectually stimulating, but also socially enjoyable. Merci.

Introduction

Identity, Subjectivity and Politics: Political Theory in the Simple Limits of Practical Reason

In philosophy, social and human sciences, cultural and literary studies, *identity* has become a theme of common concern. Individual, cultural, national, spiritual, political identities are all analysed from different standpoints. For example, Canadian political theorists, under the influence of Québec and Aboriginal nationalisms, strong regional identifications, several cultural communities and a variety of social movements, have developed some strong scholarships in the analysis of cultural and national identities. Few Canadian theorists, however, focus on what can be depicted as the *pluralization* and *fragmentation* of contemporary identities. One of the main objectives of this thesis is thus to problematize the analyses which take for granted that we can think about identity strictly from an overarching standpoint and that we can keep on theorising, as it has been assumed in the canon, ‘man’ and citizen separately. In order to do so, I will endeavour to, on the one hand, offer an interpretation of the pluralization and fragmentation of identity and, on the other hand, draw the implications of these contemporary phenomena on theories of subjectivity and democracy.

Theories of modernity and identity go hand to hand. Identity, a modern invention according to some authors that I will examine in this thesis, fluctuates with modernity’s perpetual tribulations. The thread linking together the various sections of my first chapter is a constant contrast between the ‘modern’ and contemporary understandings of such concepts as identity, community, narrative and authenticity. Rather than abandoning these normative notions which are constitutive of the ethical substance of many contemporaries,

I will tentatively sketch out alternative understandings, hopefully more attuned to our time, of such concepts. In the first section of this chapter, I explore the story told by many theorists about the rise of modern identity and about the narrativization of human existence. Modern identity is often viewed as a *pilgrimage* and as a *quest*. The linearity and cohesiveness assumed in these narratives, however, is seriously disrupted by the movement inherent to the contemporary era. I therefore attempt, in my second section, to offer an extended reading of the (rarely fully articulated) assumption that identities are plural and fragmented. I focus more particularly on the potential conflicts and dilemmas faced in the articulation of complex and sometimes discrepant practical identities. And this fragmentation and pluralization also penetrate communities and cultures, and change radically how cultural identity should be conceptualized. By dwelling on the *dépaysement* lived and felt by many contemporaries *inside* their own culture, and on the ‘diasporic experience’, I try in the subsequent section to understand what the notion of collective authenticity could mean in our time. Individual authenticity also needs to be refigured and rethought in relation to the contemporary fragmentation of identity. This is what I attempt to do in section 1.4. The last part of Chapter One is devoted to what could be an epistemological shift in the interpretations of identity. Philosophy and science, operating in the realm of theory, can no longer ascribe identities to finite and concrete beings. We ask and define what we are, as Foucault suggests, as we go along and in relations to the situations that we are facing. Consequently, practical, rather than theoretical, identities fall increasingly within the scope of political, social and cultural theorists.

This interpretation of contemporary identities is the cornerstone of my thesis. Chapters Two and Three follow from the account of identity, authenticity and community

given in Chapter One. For some past and contemporary political theorists, human experience can be separated in two different and heterogeneous spheres: private autonomy and public autonomy. This split is, however, vehemently contested by most of the writers who constitute the theoretical backdrop of this thesis. In Chapters Two and Three, I paradoxically reaffirm this dichotomy in order to show its obsolescence. Chapter Two is devoted to a 'counter-hegemonic' reading of Michel Foucault's work. Against the bulk of Foucault scholarship and by focusing primarily on the 1976-1984 period, I seek to offer a new narrative, mainly based on Paul Patton's, James Tully's and David Owen's interpretations, about Foucault's non-systemic philosophical project. This move enables me, I believe, to sketch out a notion of the subject which is congruent with the account of plural and fragmented identities given in the first chapter.

In the first part of the second chapter, I survey the textual evidence - found in Foucault's work - which demonstrates that we can think about notions such as subjectivity, resistance and freedom from a Foucaultian standpoint. In the two subsequent sections, I explore the evolution of Foucault's 'analytic of power'. From a subject seen as a mere effect of power/knowledge relationships, to a resilient subject struggling to be free in the articulation of her identity, Foucault did not espouse a static and dogmatic analytic of power. In section 2.4, I stress out the importance, in the context of the *agonic* relationship between subject and power, of Foucault's genealogical mode of investigation. We will see how genealogy, and Foucault's broader mode of reflection on the present, can enable subjects to "think and act differently" (Tully 1999c). In the final section of Chapter Two, I dwell on the later Foucault's concern with the *rapprt a soi*. By focusing on Foucault's ethic of creativity, which can be reconstructed from a parallel reading of his

answer to the question “what is Enlightenment?” and of his treatment of the Greco-Roman Antiquity, I make the argument that Foucault, slightly more optimistic than Robert Musil, theorizes a ‘man’ without *transcendental* qualities.

The conception of the subject springing from Foucault’s developments on subjectivity and practices of freedom is antithetical with the private ‘man’ theorized by some political theorists. The same can be alleged about the portrait of the citizen that I draw, once again from a Foucaultian perspective, in my final chapter. For Foucault, and many feminist theorists, the subject and the citizen cannot be splintered through the use of theoretical reason. The frontier between the public and private realms, for performative subjects bearing polysemical identities, is porous and constantly shifting. In Chapter Three, I analyse Foucault’s profound discontent with politics and explore how he empowers us to think and act politically in a different fashion.

Although I want to suggest in my final chapter that Foucault’s agonistic conception of politics is a more compelling way to theorize democratic politics in an age of plural identities than the paradigmatic models of democracy, I do not intend to draw an exhaustive comparative analysis of these models. I will rather seek to ‘reconstruct’ Foucault’s thought from his various political criticisms and experimentations. I will argue that the sources of Foucault’s political agonism lie in his deep dissatisfaction of what it meant to be a political subject in his time. As an alternative, Foucault puts forward the idea that we can both *work with* various groups and people and *be recalcitrant*. This is what Foucault calls the politics of the “experience with...rather than the engagement in...” In section two, I situate Foucault in a trajectory of thinkers who envisage philosophy and politics as a practical and dialogical activity. Foucault’s turn to intersubjective

philosophy, even if less straightforward than Arendt's, Habermas' or Taylor's, can be extracted, I will argue, from his notion of "reciprocal elucidation". In section three, I try to answer the question: "what is agonistic democracy?" Building on Foucault's thought, I suggest that an agonistic conception of democracy entails two main facets: (1) in an age of plural identities, political transformation calls for the formation of *ad hoc* communities of action, that is, the constitution of revocable associations, which strive for the modification, alteration of a given *practical system*; (2) political freedom lies in the capacity to test the rules, laws and conventions which constitute the stepping stones of a political society. As a corollary to these two features, Foucault, following Nietzsche once again, directs our attention to the importance of competition and deliberation in the processes of identity formation and reformation.

In conclusion, I modestly and tentatively try to take a stance in the so-called 'modernist-postmodernist' debate and, more importantly, I sketch out why I believe that it is important that we patriate political theory in the simple limits of practical reason.

Chapter One

Identity, Authenticity and Community

Introduction

Identity is now one of the interdisciplinary themes *par excellence* in academia. Philosophy, social and political theory, comparative politics, cultural studies and literary theory are all coming to terms, in different ways, with the concept of identity. Mainly because of the insights put forward by postmodernism, poststructuralism and postcolonialism, it has become increasingly difficult to theorise identity from an essentialist perspective, that is, a perspective that disregards the historicity of a given identity and tries to pinpoint within it an immutable essence, content or substance. Now that Marxism is seriously damaged, liberalism vehemently contested and nationalism inwardly and outwardly transgressed, peoples and cultures fall back on *identity politics* in order to cast their struggles for recognition and political resources.

For some theorists, identity is now such an important theme because of the very nature of our time. One hundred and fifty years after Alexis de Tocqueville described the concomitant development of democracy and individualism, French Tocquevillians such as Gilles Lipovetsky and Marcel Gauchet claim that we have entered into a “second individualistic revolution” (Lipovetski 1983: 10).¹ Hedonism, narcissism, quest for authenticity, consumerism, the domination of instrumental reason and the erosion of traditional allegiances are, according to these authors, the main phenomena which define our “late” or “post” modern time. Echoing these thinkers, I will argue that questions of identity cannot be ignored because they are intimately related to modernity’s incessant tribulations. However, in opposition to the “Neo-Tocquevillians”, I will not attempt to

sum up the so-called “contemporary personality” to a set of substantively defined traits. In contrast, I will argue that a contemporary subject’s process of identity formation contains more tension and dilemmas than presumed by these authors. I will thus aim at interpreting contemporary identity without encapsulating it in a pre-defined theoretical scheme.

After having been deconstructed, says Stuart Hall, the concept of identity cannot be thought “in the old way”.² However, The poststructuralist problematization of subjectivity sometimes leadsto a *disqualification* of related concepts such as self-identity, personal narrative, authenticity or collective identity. Although I am well aware that the critique of normative notions like identity and subjectivity should not be conflated with the negation of such notions (Butler 1995: 36, 42, 49), we still have to admit that some authors, associated with postmodernism, take this problematization a step further. According to David Harvey, for instance, the “most startling” fact about postmodernism is “its total acceptance of the ephemerality, fragmentation, discontinuity, and the chaotic that formed the one half of Baudelaire’s conception of modernity” (1990: 44). In this paper, I will ask if the erasure of the concepts enumerated above is necessary and desirable. To do so, I will take seriously the hermeneutical position which states that “to see the full complexity and richness of the modern identity is to see, first, how much we are all caught up in it, for all our attempts to repudiate it; and second, how shallow and partial are the one-sided judgements we make around it” (Taylor 1989: X). I will thus try to adumbrate an “ambivalent” framework where identities are at the same time de-essentialized and affirmed as indispensable.³

Following different authors in cultural, social and political theory who write about questions of identity, I will argue that identities are, at least potentially, plural and

fragmented. After a brief exposition of what has been called “modern identity”, I will meditate on what is at stake in the commonplace observation that identities are fragmented and pluralized. I will then dwell on the relationship between (fragmented) identities and (hybrid) communities. I will subsequently explore some paths leading to a reconfiguration of notions such as ‘authenticity’ and ‘personal narrative’ in a context of multiple identities and pluralized communities. Finally, I will briefly examine the contrast between *theoretical* and *practical* identities, and what could become an epistemological shift in the analysis of identity. In sum, I endeavour to tell in this paper various *fables of identity* that I hope can help -at least partially- to make sense of the contemporary *indétermination identitaire*.

1. Life as a Narrative: The Rise of Modern Identity

There is a common line of argument which postulates that a new conception of identity emerges with the rise of the modern era. Modernity, seen as a distinct temporal period, puts an end to the hierarchical societies where identities are a matter of heredity and social status. Living in a holistic (where the whole is bigger than the parts) and stratified society, the “pre-modern” person is assigned to a particular position that s/he has to occupy in the great chain of being. The attributes relevant to one’s identity are thus largely fixed. In reaction to this preordained setting, modernity initiates an era of *identity-building*. The modern subject, deprived of a socially derived identity, has to take upon itself the burden/challenge of the construction of its identity. S/he becomes an individual rather than an heir. Charles Taylor and Axel Honneth argue that this shift, in Western societies, occurred with the fall of the *ancien régime* and the dissolution of the code of

honour as the dominant social paradigm. Honour, says Taylor, is only valuable if reserved for a privileged minority and not attributed to everyone. In the pre-modern cosmology, honour is acquired when one acts in conformity with the ethical values intrinsic to one's social status. As it is posited by Honneth, "[t]he personality traits towards which the social evaluation of a person is oriented are thus not those of a biographically individuated subject but rather those of a culturally typified status group" (1995: 123). In modern societies, according to this historical narrative, the paradigm of *equal dignity*, best embodied in Kant's moral philosophy, and the corresponding principle of democracy, succeeded the hierarchical societies based on honour (Taylor 1992b: 43-46). One of Alexis de Tocqueville's main concerns in *De la démocratie en Amérique* is to capture the implications of man's (literally) new "passion" for equality. The democratic individual even feels an "immortal hatred" of privileges attributed to individuals of equal status. This "durable" and "ardent" love for equality is strong enough to jeopardize individual freedom, which is modernity's most precious jewel in Tocqueville's view (Tocqueville 1981: 119, 361, 383).⁴

In the era of equality, identities cannot be matters of *a priori* assigned social positions. Identity becomes something that has to be created rather than 'passively' accepted.⁵ As Nietzsche suggests, these identity formation processes occur in a (moral/epistemological) world in constant transformation where certainties and values are contested and eroded by the modern will to truth. Modernity is embodied in a process of creative destruction: it "not only entails a ruthless break with any or all preceding historical conditions, but is characterized by a never-ending process of internal ruptures and fragmentations within itself" (Harvey 1990: 12). In the modern era, uncertainty and

liberty become the two sides of the same token. However, modernity, refusing this alliance between freedom and risk, becomes a “continuous and uncompromising effort to fill or to cover up the void” left by the dissipation of certainties (Bauman 1992: XVII). Based on the firm conviction that freedom could anticipate and master the unpredictable, modern subjectivity is figured in terms of the possibility of a *perfect correspondence* between human actions and the order of the world (Touraine 1992: 9).⁶ However, as we know today, this dialectic of Enlightenment did not yield the anticipated results.

In a world more preoccupied with movement and progress than with the preservation of order and stability, identity becomes an invention that one elaborates in and through dialogue with others - since “we are never more (and sometimes less) than the co-authors of our narratives” (MacIntyre 1981: 199) - in order to situate oneself spatially and temporally. As Bauman argues:

Identity as such is a modern invention. [...] One thinks of identity whenever one is not sure of where one belongs; that is, one is not sure how to place oneself among the evident variety of behavioural styles and patterns, and how to make sure that people around would accept this placement as right and proper. ‘Identity’ is a name given to the escape sought from that uncertainty. [...] Though all too often hypostasized as an attribute of a material entity, identity has the ontological status of a project and a postulate (1996: 18,19).

Identity is thus a position that one adopts in a moral and cultural universe which offers a variety of (discrepant) becomings. Furthermore, it is from this identity positioning that a subject is able to evaluate and determine what is significant and meaningful in his/her life. As Taylor points out, “my identity is defined by the commitments and identifications which provide the frame or horizon within which I can try to determine from case to case

what is good, or valuable, or what I endorse or oppose. In other words, it is the horizon within which I am capable of taking a stand” (Taylor 1989: 27).

Identity becomes a *personal narrative* and a *biographical project* written by a reflexive and dialogical self. According to the anthropologist Mikhaël Elbaz, identity is more a “persuasive fiction” than a “primordial and objective condition” (Elbaz 1996: 8).⁷ For that fiction about ourselves to be persuasive, it has to be cast in what psychologists call a “life history” (Freeman 1992). Differently put, self-identity has to be framed in a temporal horizon where progress and development can be reflexively measured. The modern subject aims for biographical continuity and progression. This explains why some people believe that the metaphors of the *quest* or of the *pilgrimage* are the most appropriate to represent modern life (MacIntyre 1981, Bauman 1996). Early in its life, the modern subject has to choose a destination or a *telos*. The reflexive self can subsequently orient its daily actions and decisions toward the *telos* attainment. “Living-towards-project”, the pilgrim renders the present more tolerable and makes sense of the past by projecting itself into the future. Life is envisaged as a gradual and continuous quest leading to an ultimate fulfilment and deeds are seen as “episode[s] in a possible story” (MacIntyre 1981: 201).⁸ As Bauman argues once again, “the world of pilgrims -of identity-builders- must be orderly, determined, predictable, ensured; but above all, it must be a kind of world in which footprints are engraved for good, so that the trace and the record of past travels are kept and preserved” (1996: 23).

According to the analysis briefly sketched out here, the modern subject constructs an identity in order to answer the questions: “Who am I?” and “Where am I going?”. The answers to these questions take the form of a personal narrative and of a biographical

project that the modern subject seeks to sustain and fulfil in various intersubjective spaces. Against the essentialist account of identity, identity-as-narrative cannot be seen as a *substance* always identical to itself. On the contrary, identity in a ‘horizontal’ -rather than ‘vertical’- world is a *form* or *process*. Identity, in a more Heraclitian than Parmenidian perspective, does not refer to sameness (*mêmeté*), but to a form which enables us to live with change and movement (Miguelez 1998: 61). However, as I will argue in the following section, the contemporary self might be the locus of multiple and sometimes discrepant identity formation processes, and the continuous narrative (seen as a “life history”) which is at the heart of the modern identity is now seriously troubled and disrupted.

2. On the Contemporary Fragmentation of Identity

The idea that identities are plural and fragmented is one of the most widely shared assumptions among postmodern, poststructuralist, postcolonial and other anti-essentialist theories. This assumption is, surprisingly, rarely fully articulated. It is, in a sense, taken for granted. Far from denying that identities are fragmented or claiming that contemporary studies on identity are trivial, I want to pursue the more modest objective of offering an extended reading of the phenomenon at stake here.

The fragmentation and dissemination of personal narratives is now more intense and acute and has become an unavoidable theme for intellectuals working in contemporary social and political thought. This is partly due to the logic of what some call “late/post modernity” and/or “global capitalism”. In an era affected by the erosion of national boundaries and by a proliferation of transnational networks, both paving the road

to the emergence of post-Keynesian societies, modern forms of identity are disrupted and transgressed. As proposed by Homi Bhabha, this disruption of traditional forms of identification could explain the sense of disorientation and vertigo felt by some people in their daily life. “[I]n the fin de siècle, we find ourselves in the moment of transit where space and time cross to produce complex figures of difference and identity, past and present, inside and outside, inclusion and exclusion,” says Bhabha (1994: 1). From the compression of both space and time produced by late-capitalism there originates a new dynamic between the local and the global (Harvey 1990, Giddens 1991, Hall 1997, Dirlik 1997). What occurs at the global level increasingly structures how the local is defined and we assist at the erosion of the nation-state’s capacity to interfere in this two-way process. National identifications are increasingly troubled (rather than dissolved), and the contemporary subject is confronted with a multiplicity of sources and references in the difficult elaboration of his/her identity. Furthermore, the rapid tempo of life, the domination of transnational mass-media and the constant movement of individuals and populations all contribute to what William Connolly calls the “desanctification” of our own identities. Put differently, the logic of globalisation exhibits and renders more discernible the contingent and historically constructed elements that shape our identities.

Since national identifications are transgressed, the reductionist Marxist class analysis repudiated and the liberal politically neutral and culturally blind notion of equality vehemently contested, the contemporary self has to dig in its memory *and* imagination -in its physical *and* virtual communities- in order to create idiosyncratically its self-identity. For the sake of this essay, the notion of plural identity simply means that the subject has to take into consideration a plurality of *partial* affiliations and

identifications in the making of its identity. One has to consult a multiplicity of overlapping *référents identitaires* in the writing of one's personal narrative. It is now very difficult to sum up a given identity and confine it to an all-encompassing and paradigmatic horizon. Moreover, as James Tully puts it, "identity is multiplex or aspectual" (1999a). Life is seen and lived from a variety of perspectives rather than from an overarching standpoint. When one dimension of identity serves as a site of performativity, "it becomes difficult to formulate the other dimensions" (Sarup 1996: 38). The fragmentation of identity refers to something slightly different. Identities are fragmented and fragmentary because the conditions under which an architectonic and fully integrated identity could be sustained have been seriously eroded. The modern identity narrative, as a symbiosis made of different sources of identity, is contested. As a result, one can hardly limit oneself to one of the contemporary subject's fragments of life in order to capture the complexity and polyphony of one's identity. Sexuality, gender, nationality, ethnicity, origins, profession and/or class belonging, confessionality and/or spiritual beliefs, lineage, marital status, militancy and political commitments, lifestyle or generational positioning *might* all have to be taken into consideration in the articulation of one's personal narrative. This is why Ernesto Laclau argues that it is perhaps no longer possible to refer "the concrete and finite expressions of a multifarious subjectivity to a transcendental center" (1995: 93). In the same vein, Rajagopalan Radhakrishnan believes that the notion of a 'politics of identity' needs to be reimagined, "for identity could not any longer be a matter of a single master identity code [...] subsuming and speaking for all the other codes" (1996: XXI).

A fragmented identity can therefore be the site of internal dissonances and personal strife. Identities overlap, interact and often interfere with one another. Indeed, different aspects of one's identity can be partially incompatible and sometimes even incommensurable with one another. As James Clifford remarks, "these elements [defining one's identity] may, in some conjunctures, cross-cut and bring each other to crisis" (1997: 46).⁹ Many personal stories could exemplify this potential discrepancy between one's different practical identities. Thus, for example, some gays and lesbians, and some immigrants as well, strictly dismiss the 'ghettoisation' that reduces the complexity of their identity to a single horizon (sexuality and ethnicity in these cases).¹⁰ For instance, Michel Foucault argues that if sexual identity has been undoubtedly useful, it can also be limiting. Gays "have the right to be free" in the articulation of their complex identity (Foucault 1984: 739). Hence the current debate between *queer* theorists about the status of sexual identity. Various gays are now rebelling with some *queer* theorists' propensity to see sexuality as an all-encompassing identity.¹¹ We cannot think about sexual identity, writes Robert Schwartzwald, without considering questions of class, race, nationality and so on (1998: 160).

In the same vein, someone can be both a woman *and* an aboriginal person, and fight with all her heart both against patriarchy *and* neo-colonialism. A native woman living in Canada could thus militate for the application of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms in her own community, while at the same time fight for the aboriginal peoples' right to self-determination and self-governance. As Lilanne Krosenbrink-Gelissen expresses it: "Indian women encounter special conflicts and dilemmas in trying to reconcile, as aboriginal persons and as women, their self-government aspirations and their

sexual equality aspirations” (1993: 208). Identity is thus a contested and problematic site of personal - yet dialogical - formulation.

We have to envisage identity as a practical construction based on an interplay between complementary and oppositional loyalties, which is held in “human-all-too-human circumstances” (Tully 1999a). One’s multiple subject-positions are organised relationally and in ways which leave room for rearticulation. Cultural politics, according to Clifford, is all about reconfiguring and reinterpreting different fragments of life: “what components of identity are ‘deep’ and ‘superficial’? What ‘central’ and ‘peripheral’? [...] How these elements interact historically, in tension and dialogue? Questions like these do not lend themselves to systematic or definitive answers; they are what cultural politics is all about” (1997: 46).

One can turn to Taylor’s work in moral phenomenology in order to theorize this intense self-questioning about the different aspects of our identity (which leads most often to non-categorical answers). For Taylor, a structure of *strong evaluations* lies at the core of the modern self. By “strong evaluation”, Taylor means “a background of distinctions between things which are recognised as of categoric or unconditioned or higher importance or worth, and things which lack this or are of lesser values.” A person’s strong evaluations are thus the discriminations or qualitative distinctions that she makes in order to define the kind of human agent she wants to be. According to Taylor, it is through self-interpretation and articulation -that is, through the casting of inchoate and blurred emotions or thoughts into language- that the modern self is able to hierarchise its personal horizons. In the context of this essay, where I try to articulate the notion of the pluralization of identity (which is not Taylor’s agenda), “strong evaluations” have to be

translated as the reflexive attempt by the self to organise relationally its fragments of identity. Indeed, Taylor's integral concept of qualitative discrimination seems too strong for my purposes. Even if he sometimes argues that strong evaluations are "contestable answers to inescapable questions" (1989: 41), he still wants to affirm the "categoric or unconditioned or higher importance or worth" of some of the subject's loyalties, commitments and identifications. Indeed, the inescapable frameworks of human agency described by Taylor are "qualitative discriminations of the *incomparably* higher" (1989: 26, my emphasis).

In a context of fragmentation, it is more than likely that the "incomparability" of certain horizons has been relativized, and that the very notion of "hypergoods" becomes problematic. As I mentioned earlier, the framework elaborated here problematizes categorical answers given to the question of self-identity and emphasises the extreme difficulty of referring to any master codes in the evaluation of one's personal narratives. Taylor, when arguing that one ought to seek *reconciliation* between one's strongest aspirations (1989: 106), is perhaps imposing an 'impossible responsibility' on the contemporary subject. The notion of strong evaluation must be translated as the non-definitive (re)evaluation of various identities exercising unequal and mutable normative force on the subject. As I stated at the outset, it seems more fruitful to say with Tully that processes of identity formation are practical constructs where congruent *and* oppositional loyalties are organised relationally. Consequently, "the priority granted to one identity, the way and by whom it is articulated, and the form of recognition and accommodation demanded are always open to question, re-interpretation, deliberation and negotiation by the bearers of that identity" (Tully 1999a).

One of the enabling conditions for rendering more discernible the contemporary fragmentation of identity is the treatment of *difference* by poststructuralist thinkers. The interpretation of difference, found, for example, in the work of Thomas Hobbes, associates difference with what is external to the self. Identity constitutes itself in opposition to a constructed and reified difference. The same/other and inside/outside oppositions are seen as sharp and non-porous dichotomies. Indeed, the constant reaffirmation of the alleged ontological difference between self and other is the condition of possibility for the stabilization of the self's integrity. Identity creates itself homogeneously by inventing a heterogeneous outside. This is what Connolly describes as the "self-reassurance of identity through the construction of otherness" (1991: 9).¹² We can find in the Hegelian dialectic a somehow 'refined' version of this treatment of difference. To cut short a long and complex story, the stage of "abstract right" (where the self negates its limitations and invalidates its predetermined content) and the stage of "subjective morality" (where the 'empty' will is mediated through the encounter with external subjectivities) reconcile in the last moment of Hegel's dialectic (the moment of synthetization or "objective morality") (Hegel 1940). Difference is thus dissolved in identity. The important issue here is that identity either absorbs difference (Hegel's 'identity of identity *and* difference') or creates and maintains itself in opposition to a hypostasized otherness. Both resolutions frame and encapsulate difference and leave no space for *alterity*.

Now that various authors have tried to deconstruct these binary oppositions, it seems possible to think 'differently' about difference. Difference can be seen as internal, yet not synthetized, to a given identity. Difference cannot always be *decanted* from

identity. As it is argued by Stuart Hall, differences are conditions of possibility for the shaping of any identity: “identities are constructed through, not outside, difference” (1996: 4). In the same vein, Tully writes that “otherness and sameness are both internal and external to any identity” (1999a). This irreducible trace of alterity constitutive of any identity enables us to understand the Derridean claim that identities are not quite identical to themselves. When taken seriously, this awareness, which helps one to notice the contingencies and ‘fissures’ of one’s own identity, problematizes and renders incoherent the attempts for homogeneity and purity led by majority or dominant peoples. Individual and collective identities, as I will explore in the following section, cannot be seen as “transparent” (Bhabha 1990: 208).

3. On Being *dépaycé*: the Pluralization of Communities

The fragmentation of identity does not leave intact the way communities are conceptualized. Cultural identities also have to be reconceptualized. Since the French Revolution, nationalism has been the most powerful source of collective allegiance and the most widely shared ‘ideology’ in Western societies. Accordingly, Benedict Anderson makes the argument that nationalism, as a social signifier which ensures the continuity of an imagined community through time, has more to do with “religious imaginings” than with other modern political ideologies (1991: 10). Even in an age of radical globalisation and integration, formerly muffled nations struggle for recognition and political agency. However, what Anderson and Bhabha call the “homogeneous, empty time of nations” (following Benjamin’s theorising) is now disrupted. For Bhabha, the writing of the nation stems from a split between a “continuist, accumulative temporality” (the *pedagogical*)

and the constant reformulation and transgression of this historical narrative in the present (the *performative*) (1994: 145). The nation is thus an ambivalent site created by the encounter of different *authenticities*. Nationality is no longer an all-encompassing collective identity structuring the citizen's other identifications and allegiances.¹³ In late modern societies, nationality is one important source of collective identity among many others. And considering the pluriethnicity of existing nation-states, many subjects identify primarily with a culture rather than with, or as well as, a nation.

Cultural agents bearing plural identities make their way from within and through cultures which are not marked by static and immutable codes, but are rather living and evolving processes. Cultures are not those homogeneous sites described by communitarian thinkers, where subjects come to terms with their selfhood by 'discovering' their community, but "strange multiplicities" where identities are made and re-made. As Tully puts it:

cultures are not internally homogeneous. They are continuously contested, imagined and reimagined, transformed and negotiated, both by their members and through their interaction with others. The identity, and so the meaning, of any culture is thus aspectival rather than essential. [...] Cultural diversity is a tangled labyrinth of intertwining cultural differences and similarities, not a panopticon of fixed, independent and incommensurable worldviews in which we are either prisoners or cosmopolitan spectators in the central tower (1995: 11).

Similarly, James Clifford argues that a culture is "a multiply authored invention", "an enactment", "a shifting paradox", "an ongoing translation" and "nonconsensual negotiation of contrastive identities" (1997: 24, see also Appadurai 1996). Hence, cultures are constituted and constitute themselves relationally and through translation. Difference is also internal and external to any cultural identity. The historical narratives of a culture

are produced through conscious and unconscious dialogues with otherness. As I will discuss later, this points out the highly problematic status of a representative “we” in our time.

The diasporic experience discussed by many postcolonial writers might be helpful for illustrating the contemporary pluralization of communities and cultures. By using the diasporic experience as a trope, I do not want to ‘banalize’ diaspora’s historical singularities. Each diaspora has its own peculiar lived experience and it is very difficult to elaborate a thick theory of diaspora which would apply to every spatio-temporal context. However, ‘diasporic experience’ refers to some more general traits that are not unknown to the ‘national subject’ who lives with difference inside its own culture. Diasporic subjectivities subvert the common wisdom about what constitutes a ‘community’, and force us to re-imagine how different peoples relate to each other and create new ‘insides’. Diasporic discourses, by articulating both *roots* and *routes*, disturb the unproblematic association between space and community. As Clifford puts it, diasporic networks and relationships exemplify how “separate places become effectively a single community ‘through the continuous circulation of people, money, goods, and information’” (1997: 246). Diasporic subjectivities offer various examples of *detrterritorialized* communities and render highly contestable any exclusivist and all-encompassing model of collective identities. Hardly compatible with aboriginal and nationalist claims to cultural purity (and with liberalism’s neutrality and diversity-blindness), diasporic subjectivities tend toward the practice of “nonabsolutist forms of citizenship” (Clifford 1997: 9).

Diasporic *and* national subjects potentially bear multiple identities and evolve in pluralized communities (to different degrees and in uneven material conditions). Cultures

are constituted through difference and the sources of one's identity are various and disseminated. One of the most important consequences that can be drawn from this fragmentation is the impossibility of a perfect coincidence between the part and the whole, or between the individual and the group. Organic notions of community are disrupted by the multiplicity of codes lying at the heart of one's personal narrative. Persons who share the same gender and nationality might feel partially alien to one another because of their contrasting sexual orientation or political engagements. Even from within the (evanescent) boundaries of a collective identity, memories are too plural and possible futures too numerous and discrepant, for the community to speak in unison (Maclure 1998). As posited by Denis-Constant Martin, political spaces are filled up by a variety of identity narratives and "several versions of the same narrative may be uttered [and] the same narrative may comprise several levels, because it aims at different targets" (1995: 170).

Tzvetan Todorov's self-description as an *homme dépaysé* might be an appropriate metaphor to illustrate the potential astonishment/alienation that one might feel even when s/he is at 'home'. The phenomenon of *transculturation* described by Todorov (1996) concerns not only the immigrant who acquires a new cultural identity *without* leaving his/her previous one in a suitcase, but (translated in my current project) refers also to a process experienced by the insider who belongs to various imaginary homelands and "translocal" communities. According to Arjun Appadurai, people now live, through global mediation and mass migration, in various "imagined worlds", that is, "the multiple worlds that are constituted by the historically situated imaginations of persons and groups spread around the globe" (1996: 33). However, being *dépaysé* doesn't (necessarily) mean

being an apatriote at home. Rather, it suggests that insiders and compatriots might live the same reality at different paces and levels. Bhabha might have something like this constant ambiguity in mind in his frequent references to ‘liminality’, ‘in-betweenness’, ‘interstitial agency’ and the equivocal ‘third-space’. Implicit in Bhabha’s writing is the idea that the ‘present’ of people belonging to the same nation no longer coincides, thus leading to their sense of contemporaneity becoming troubled (1994: 150). As Clifford remarks, “[n]o one can be an insider to all sectors of a community” (1997: 86). The contemporary subject is often amazed and disturbed by the complexity of her fellow citizens, of her communities and of her own identities. Identity, observed from a non-Hegelian standpoint, exceeds the capacity for synthetization:

Each time the encounter with identity occurs at the point at which something exceeds the frame of the image, it eludes the eye, evacuates the self as site of identity and autonomy and -most important- leaves a resistant trace, a stain of the subject, a sign of resistance. We are no longer confronted with an ontological problem of being but with the discursive strategy of the moment of interrogation [...] (Bhabha 1994: 49).

As it was alluded to earlier, it is now very difficult (and maybe disabling) to think about community from within an Hegelian perspective. The subject, for Hegel, is not a *monad*. The subject can only self-actualize in her different roles and gain in self-knowledge by being a part of a higher ethical order. Criticizing the “empty formalism” of Kant’s categorical imperative, Hegel believes that it is through the fulfilment of a set of moral obligations defined by its community that the self finds a content to orient its practical reason. These duties form the Hegelian *Sittlichkeit*.¹⁴ Ethical life (*Sittlichkeit*) is embodied in the state and is made of the particular norms, customs, mores and institutions that give form to a particular political community. Simply put, the subject actualizes her

liberty by fulfilling duties and respecting norms that she helped formulate in the exercise of her subjective will (the first moment of the dialectic). The Hegelian state is thus not despotic, even if we can find in the *Philosophy of Right* some paragraphs which might frighten classic liberal thinkers (see for instance paragraphs 100 and 258), but rather is the locus of a reconciliation between individual freedom and social obligations. However, it is this ultimate reconciliation which is debilitated by the contemporary fragmentation of identities. As Taylor puts it, the ethical community in Hegel's framework deserves "ultimate allegiance" and "the norms and ends expressed in the public life of a society are the most important ones by which its members define their identity as human being" (Taylor 1979: 80, 90). Contemporary subjects, potentially *dépaysés*, bearing polysemical identities and disseminated affiliations, might suffocate in such an organic conception of the community. A community is a site of deliberation and articulation, not of subsumption.¹⁵

This rearticulation of community, however, does not dispense with Hegel's argument that ethical communities, no matter how tenuous they might be, are still indispensable for identity. Practices of identity formation are dialogical or intersubjective processes. In the framework adumbrated here, there is no priority or privilege granted to the individual or to the community. Identity, Sarups suggests, might be envisaged as a "mediating concept between the external and the internal, the individual and society" (1996: 28). As we will see in chapter two, there is a relation of mutual constitution between the subject and her 'practical systems'. *Contra* Hegel, however, we have to recognise that these indispensable intersubjective spaces are now plural and, more importantly, not confined to physical communities. It is also worthwhile noting that the

idea stating that the community can hardly be a site of synthesis between different subjectivities *does not* force us to write an ode to displacement and acculturation. On the contrary, it invites us to understand movement and plurality as *potential* figures that can be found in various identities. It also invites us to be aware of the possible complexity and polyphony that can be found in the origins, memories, communities of sentiments, and visions of the future of any (voluntary or not) ‘static insider’. Hence, Clifford, even while trying to refute the binary opposition between the travelling ethnographer and the static native, claims that he is not writing “nomadologies”:

I’m not saying there are no locales or homes, that everyone is -or should be- travelling, or cosmopolitan, or deterritorialized. This is not nomadology. Rather, what is at stake is a comparative cultural studies approach to specific histories, tactics, everyday practices of dwelling and travelling: travelling-in-dwelling, dwelling-in-travelling (1997: 36).

Authenticity, as I will argue in the next section, can no longer be embodied in the self’s perfect attunement with her/his culture. There is a plurality of ways of being an ‘authentic’ subject. The political sphere can give a content to a particular citizenship, but authenticity -linked to the broader domain of identity- cannot be defined substantively anymore. Approaching identity in a difference-sensitive manner might prevent ‘authentic subjects’ from drawing the boundaries of authenticity around the content of their personal idiosyncrasies. The reflexive articulation of the ambiguities constitutive of individual and collective identities can lead, according to Connolly, to an “ironization” of sanctified fragments of identity, and to a “politization of established naturalizations of identity” (1991: 159).¹⁶ From this genealogical stance toward identity (fostered by the unavoidable encounter with difference), might unfold an “ethical sensibility” where otherness is not

‘evilized’ or annihilated in identity. More positively, this difference-awareness can also lead to the creation of a new identity shared by the members of a hybrid and heterogeneous culture:

That is, these practical conversations foster a new, shared identity among the interlocutors: an identity that consists in the awareness of and respect for the diversity of respectable identities of their fellow citizens and of the place of one’s own identity among the diversity of overlapping identities. [...] This shared identity of diversity awareness is precisely the citizen identity appropriate to, and capable of holding together, multicultural and multinational political associations (Tully 1999a).

As it will be argued in chapter three, this respect for identity-related differences leads, to a certain extent, to a *democratic agonism*, where different authenticities meet in the public sphere and recreate endlessly the distinctiveness of a given culture. This ethical sensibility, even if it undoubtedly leads to a radical critique of the nationalist and communitarian struggles for homogeneity and purity, does not conceal an implicit plea for cosmopolitan identities. The fact that ‘home’ can no longer be thought of as a comfortable and self-identical site does not mean that one will feel the same degree of disorientation and *dépaysement* wherever one lives. Cosmopolitan ontologies, stating implicitly that rational human beings feel at home in reason rather than in particular cultures, are also disrupted by an anti-essentialist approach to identity. We can still be deeply attached to some of the multiple personalities of our culture, and especially to its possible futures, while having at the same time an agonistic relationship with it. Moreover, ordinary communities and nations are still for many the most important intersubjective spaces where their identity is defined.¹⁷ Once again, the diasporic experience can enable us to think of home neither as a locus of perfect coincidence nor as a useless myth, but

rather as a site that seeks to ‘hyphenate’ and co-ordinate the plural allegiances and identifications of complex subjects. As Radhakrishnan argues, “[h]ome’ then becomes a mode of interpretive in-betweenness, as a form of accountability to more than one location” (1996: XIII, XIV).¹⁸

4. Living with Existential Insecurity: The Status of Authenticity

Car l’habitant d’un pays a toujours au moins neuf caractères: un caractère professionnel, un caractère de classe, un caractère sexuel, un caractère national, un caractère politique, un caractère géographique, un caractère conscient, un inconscient, et peut-être même encore, un caractère privé; il les réunit dans sa personne, mais s’en trouve dissocié, et n’est plus finalement qu’un petit vallon creusé par cette multitude de cours d’eau [...]

Robert Musil, *L’homme sans qualités*

Many authors who recognise and attempt to theorise the contemporary fragmentation of identities argue that one of the implications of this phenomenon is the *impossibility* of authenticity and personal narrativity. Since identities look more like trajectories than linear life stories, and difference lies at the heart of identity, such notions as personal narratives and authenticity would be of no use in a postmodern context. Indeed, it is no longer possible (if it ever was) to envisage self-identity as a gradual quest which covers the entire life span. Furthermore, collective authenticity, defined as a static form of cultural purity, is antithetical to the analysis presented heretofore. The Romantic notion of personal authenticity also seems, to a certain extent, obsolete. Authenticity, for philosophers like Rousseau and Herder, is embodied in one’s fidelity to one’s essence and intuitions; it is, in other words, a sort of attunement between one’s behaviours and inner nature (Taylor 1992b). This is what Michel Foucault describes as the “adequacy to itself” (*l’adéquation à soi-même*). Foucault is one of the first writers to contest the very concept of authenticity. He believes that a notion of authenticity cannot do otherwise than refer to

a metaphysical conception of human essence.¹⁹ Lacan and Derrida are the authors of equally powerful critiques of the normative concept of authenticity. As a result, it has become a quasi-heresy, since the emergence and proliferation of poststructuralism, to think about authenticity.²⁰

A similar assault is also orchestrated against the hermeneutical idea of casting human existence into a narrative. This charge is mainly driven by a ‘different form’ of postmodernism, which postulates that the logic of late-capitalism fosters a type of society dominated by hedonism, narcissism, fashion, ephemerality, void, etc. Living in both a moral and social space not suited for long-term projects, commitments and the practice of an “ethic of conviction”, the contemporary self leads a life of instantaneous consumption. According to Bauman, for instance, “the world is not hospitable to the pilgrim anymore” (1996: 23). Day after day, the wind of postmodernity erases the footprints the pilgrim leaves behind. Moreover, the smog of a society of ‘risk’ and uncertainty prevents the pilgrim from constituting far-reaching horizons. Daily life is seen as a “succession of minor contingencies” and, following Christopher Lasch’s analysis of the narcissistic self, “identities can be adopted and discarded like a change of costume” (quoted in Bauman 1996: 24). Living an episodic existence in a continuous present, the postmodern self does not feel the need to have a sense of the past or a vision of the future. Time and *durée* no longer have a structuring capacity over the subject’s life. This is what Harvey calls the “collapse of time horizons” (1990: 59). As a result, theorists such as Harvey and Frederic Jameson take the schizoid personality as a trope and argue that lived experience is reduced to “a series of pure and unrelated presents in time” (Jameson, quoted in Harvey 1990: 53). The contemporary subject thus epitomizes Tocqueville’s great anticipation

about men who are ready to live just for one day since they learned that they could not be eternal.²¹

To affirm ourselves, writes Gauchet, is to detach ourselves (1998: 173). As a *flâneur*, a vagabond, a tourist or a player (following Bauman's taxonomy), the postmodern self only wishes to avoid fixation. Mobility and flexibility, as so-called "postmodern life-strategies", are consequently the subject's most important assets (Giddens 1991).

The argument that I want to outline here goes against the systematic erasure of the notions of authenticity and personal narrative that we can find in this postmodern ontology. Contrary to Robert Musil's belief stated at the outset, the bearer of a fragmented identity is not necessarily overwhelmed and unable to cast her/his life into a narrative. Illustrated differently, it seems highly contestable, for instance, that the main character of Albert Camus' *L'étranger*, who is surely not a 'strong evaluator' (he is indifferent to his mother's death, to love, success, etc.) and lives in a continuous present, is the paradigmatic figure of our time.²² In a disenchanted world, deprived of grand narratives, meaninglessness has become increasingly difficult to avoid. As it is forcefully argued by Gauchet, radical questioning on the meaning of life has entered the sphere of intimacy.²³ The consequence of this phenomenon is not that everyone's life *is* actually meaningless (as it is sometimes assumed in the postmodern ontology), but that it is unlikely that meaninglessness will *never* be an issue in someone's life. In brief, many among us have to cope with *existential insecurity*. The issue of meaninglessness is not a distinctive feature of our time. As a reaction against medieval cosmology, modernity unsettles and often shatters traditional meaning-giving values and beliefs. However, as I stated earlier,

the logic of globalisation exhibits and renders more discernable the contingent and historically constructed elements that shape our identities. While the palliative ‘myths’ of the Enlightenment can no longer serve as secure social signifiers, the issues of the contingency and meaninglessness of existence appear to be even more acute today.

One way for people to avoid a complete loss of horizons is for them to remember the past through the present’s gaze, to project themselves into the future, to establish priorities, to hope and work for the materialisation of certain becomings.²⁴ Social life might have been detotalized, but human beings, as Heidegger puts it, are still “living-toward-death” -that is, they are conscious of their own finitude.²⁵ Internal dissonances and existential discontinuities are tentatively and partially structured through a process of visualization of time. A personal narrative does not have to be seen as a river perpetually flowing. Alternatively, narratives are contestable and tentative answers to the challenge raised by the intrusion of contingency into daily experience. More than ever, “unpredictability and teleology coexist as part our lives” (MacIntyre 1981: 201). As Martin puts it, “[n]arrative identity, being at the same time fictitious and real, leaves room for variations on the past and also for initiatives in the future. It is an open-ended identity which gives meaning to one’s practice, which makes any one act meaningful” (1995: 169). In sum, there might be only a *trace* of linearity left in one’s personal narrative, but that might help one to face the disconcerting problems of orientation. Despite uncertainty, disorientation and ephemerality, narrative identity can be seen as a way of handling personal disjunctions.

Authenticity, in this context, can refer to the type of person that one wants to be(come). As a *creation* rather than a *discovery*, authenticity becomes an immanent and

subjective landmark that empowers one to “weave [one’s] webs of existential meaning” (West 1996: 16). This reworked notion of authenticity might enable the subject to articulate the relations between her being-in-the-world and her potential becomings. Authenticity would therefore be a fluid and shifting answer to the problem of direction and orientation in an opaque world. Instead of being synonymous with an essence that one has to dig out from an inner depth, authenticity shall be seen as an ‘evasive quality’ or as a ‘vanishing horizon’. As it is accurately captured by Alessandro Ferrara, authenticity has more to do with “governance” than with “transparency” (1998: 59). This problematization of the concept of discovery does not disqualify one’s attempt to be in tune with something *experienced* as natural (like the notions of history, environment, solidarity and spiritual beliefs in Taylor’s work). It does, however, seek to test the necessity and ‘naturalness’ of these horizons and, conversely, to “de-transcendentalize” it. History, solidarity, ecologism and faith, in this framework, become immanent and subjective markers fostered through self-interpretation. Refigured rather than dissolved, authenticity might help the contemporary subject to keep some sense of direction in the maze of late/post modernity.²⁶

Personal narratives are contested sites and cannot be linear as they used to be seen. While Taylor is right to emphasize the importance of casting our life into a narrative, his ‘fear’ of fragmentation incapacitates him from recognising the difficulty of doing so in our time. In a context of fragmented identities, his insistence on notions such as ‘unity’, ‘fullness’ and ‘integrity’ seems too strong:

We want our lives to have meaning, or weight, or substance, or to grow towards some fullness, or however the concern is formulated that we have been discussing in this section. But this means our *whole* lives. If necessary,

we want the future to ‘redeem’ the past, to make it part of a life story which has sense or purpose, to take it up in a meaningful unity (1989: 50, 51).

Following Stuart Hall, we have to recognize that the conditions of late modernity render highly difficult a fully linear and teleological personal development.²⁷ Moreover, authenticity can no longer be associated with cultural purity or with a metaphysical human essence. However, authenticity, as a self-generated and potentially evanescent foundation shaped historically/subjectively, in conjunction with a type of narrative which does not try to annihilate fragmentation, can foster the *ontological security* that one requires to avoid meaninglessness in a disenchanted and rapidly moving world.²⁸ In this framework, identities are fragmented yet not balkanised and disintegrated.

5. From *Theoretical* to *Practical* Identities: An Epistemological Shift?

The recent literature that I have covered seems to suggest that we have started to think differently about identity. On the one hand, anti-essentialist approaches to identity formation disqualify any attempts to reduce self-identity to a stable substance lying in one’s inner depth. The very notion of *depth* is suspect. On the other hand, we are becoming more interested in individuals’ *practical identities* and less in what some call *theoretical identities*. A theoretical identity is a form of subjectivity which transcends the subject’s embeddedness, and structures its practical identities. The Kantian autonomous self and the Utilitarian subject (who always seeks to maximize his/her happiness) are both “programmed” by theoretical identities. A theoretical identity is thus a disembodied form of subjectivity or, differently put, a *meta-identity*. In contrast, practical identities are the modes of subjectification used in an intersubjective space. In other words, it is the

terms people use to interpret, redescribe and represent their lived experience. Christine Korsgaard gives a clear definition of the concept of practical identity:

The conception of one's identity in question here is not a theoretical one, a view about what as a matter of inescapable scientific fact you are. It is better understood as a description under which you value yourself, a description under which you find your life to be worth living and your actions to be worth undertaking. So I will call this a conception of your practical identity. Practical identity is a complex matter and for the average person there will be a jumble of such conceptions (1996: 101).

Korsgaard, as a Kantian, still believes that human beings are animated by some conception of autonomy which transcends time and space. Indeed, she argues that “[t]he agent must think of herself as a citizen of the Kingdom of Ends” (1996: 100). However, the important shift for my purposes is that even a strong Kantian *has* to come to terms with practical identities and cannot solely focus on universal principals.²⁹ Relationally organized fragments of identity have more to do with practical reasoning than with categorical imperatives. Practical reasoning does not aim at proving the validity of certain conceptions in the absolute, but rather at showing that one position is more appropriate than another in the *here* and *now*. The articulation of several practical identities is a matter of “first-person normative practices of self-consciousness and ethical formation” (Tully 1999a).

Perhaps we are not witnessing an epistemological shift in the interpretation of identity. The debate will probably keep on going between the theoretical and the more phenomenological accounts of identity formation. However, many theorists now focus, to use the Kantian dualism, on “phenomenal identities” rather than “noumenal identities”. It is in this trajectory that this thesis is situated.

Conclusion

In this first chapter, I have tried to make the, perhaps, paradoxical point that identities are simultaneously dangerous and indispensable and that they therefore need to be both deconstructed and reimagined. As Connolly suggests, it is hard to imagine life in the absence of a “social ontology”, but we can still work on the “enlargement” of this ontological space (1991: 33, 226). Identities, especially in our time, enable subjects to live with existential insecurity. Modern identity formation processes have nevertheless fostered exclusion and oppression. The strong proclivity to ‘evilize’ difference ought to be kept in mind in any attempt to reconceptualize the notion of identity. Hence, since we now think that difference is both internal and external to identity, the former *inside/outside* paradigm (where the inside is seen as homogeneous and the outside as what is different) is hardly sustainable. The approach adumbrated here, however, makes no pretense to thinking outside, above or below the *inside/outside* paradigm and the corresponding principle of political sovereignty. As Robert Walker summarizes it, contemporary political imagination is often unable to come up with radically different alternatives because “the spatiotemporal resolutions through which early-modern accounts of political community were constituted, and then formalised by the principle of state sovereignty, have become so firmly rooted in modern thought and practice” (1993: 17).

This modern “spatiotemporal resolution” is nevertheless transformed by the “pluralist imagination”. The reflexive awareness that elements of our identities are partial and contingent -that is, historically constructed through dialogues and exchanges with

difference- can contribute to an ironisation and ‘desanctification’ of our identity. Moreover, seeing authenticity as an ‘impure’ and ‘evasive’ quality, taking different forms in different contexts, might prevent ‘insiders’ from drawing sharp boundaries around the content of their own identity. Put differently, this reworked notion of authenticity can enable us to notice the hybridity of our own identity. Finally, in light of the previous discussion on the contemporary fragmentation of identities, it is now obvious that the frontier between the ‘good side’ and the ‘other side’ in some battles might shift in the context of other struggles. All-encompassing allegiances, as well as clear-cut antagonisms, are harder than ever to sustain. It is more than likely that an ‘insider’ and an ‘outsider’ share some fragments of identity. As I will argue in Chapter Three, this explains why coalition-building and politics based on affinities are now efficient ways to gain recognition and political resources. The pluralist imagination, in brief, does not confine itself to opening and “oxygenating” bounded communities (which is already an important move), but works also on the elaboration of various political frameworks where sovereignty is *shared* rather than *defended*.

Political theory is working under an explicit split between Man and Citizen; or, differently put, between private autonomy and public autonomy. Under political theorists’ gaze, human beings are “Men” (the same “Men” which has been deconstructed by feminist theorists) in their private life and citizens in their public life. Needless to say, this split is hardly compatible with an analysis of the contemporary pluralization of identities. Traditional political theory casts a shadow over the polyphony of late-modern identities. I will nevertheless examine, in the following chapters, the status of the subject and of the citizen in an era of fragmented identities. In Chapter Two, I will explore Michel

Foucault's late work on subjectivity and suggest that his (rarely discussed) reconfiguration of the subject opens up promising paths for thinking about practical identities.

Chapter Two

Foucault, Subjectivity and the Practice of Freedom

Introduction

Even if the owl of Minerva flies at dusk, it is probably not premature to argue that the status of the subject was and still is one the dominant themes in twentieth century philosophical thought. Affirmed, erased or deconstructed, the notion of the subject is discussed and conceptualized in most approaches to philosophy. Phenomenology, existentialism, structuralism, hermeneutics, critical theory, poststructuralism and postmodernism all have a different understanding of the subject. The status of the subject is now problematic. Philosophies of the subject, like theories of identity, can hardly rely on essentialist and *a priori* postulates anymore. The poststructuralist critiques are so powerful and radical that the very notion of the subject sometimes seems like a useless (modernist) illusion. We thus find ourselves in a time where various theorists attempt tentatively to reconstruct a subject stripped of its transcendental ambitions, yet not fully dissolved.

The account of contemporary identity given in Chapter One asks for a theory of the subject which leaves room for various becomings. It is my hypothesis that Michel Foucault's ethic of creativity, which relies on a "thin" conception of subjectivity,³⁰ casts the (post)modern practices of identity formation in a better light than the approaches mentioned above. This enterprise might, however, seem paradoxical. Foucault is seen as the theorist of power *par excellence* and the author of the most powerful assault on the idea of the human subject.³¹ For many critics, Foucault's legacy lies in his work on disciplines, procedures of normalisation and various modes of governmentality. As the

author of books such as *L'histoire de la folie*, *Surveiller et punir* and *La volonté de savoir*, Foucault shows how individuals are constituted as “mad”, “abnormal” and “sexual” subjects. In *Surveiller et punir* and his various lectures at the Collège de France, he also exhibits the complexity, omnipresence and normalising capacity of power/knowledge relations. Accordingly, Edward Said believes that Foucault’s “major positive contribution was that he researched and revealed technologies of knowledge and self which beset society, made it governable, controllable, normal, even as these technologies developed their uncontrollable drives, without limit or rationale” (1998: 10).

Having vehemently criticised modern humanism, showing the exclusion and violence fostered by the Enlightenment’s epistemology and politics, and solemnly proclaiming the “death of Man” in his groundbreaking book *Les mots et les choses*, Foucault is also read as a convincing dismantler of the concept of subjectivity. Some commentators even argue that there is “no subject” in Foucault’s work (Taylor 1986 : 84, Radhakrishnan 1996: 46). As a corollary, it would be paradoxical and aporetic to think about positive notions such as freedom, autonomy or emancipatory politics in relation to Foucault’s writings.³² Very tellingly in this regard, Rey Chow, after having efficiently translated Foucault criticism of the ‘repressive hypothesis’ in her meditation on the uses (and abuses) of the concept of ethnicity, argues that one has to ‘depart’ from Foucault in order to theorise the conditions of possibility of resistance for the ‘ethnic’ subject:

While Foucault, Althusser, and Said would move our reading toward mechanisms of institutional control, networks of subjective manipulation, and other devices of the exercise of panoptical power, their insights must also be reciprocated by a form of reading that would (re)discover in the various systems of surveillance traces of resistance that survive in what Michel de Certeau calls a “proliferating illegitimacy”. We need, in other

words, to supplement the overtly Foucaultian, anti-Orientalist reading with one that attends to some of the peculiarities of the film itself (1998: 106)

My aim is not to invalidate these readings of Foucault's project. There is no singular and comprehensive Foucaultian narrative. Rather, I intend to demonstrate that these readings are limited and that one does not have to "depart from" or "supplement" Foucault to think about possibilities of transgression and reconfiguration of heteronomously imposed identities. Quite the opposite. I believe that the later Foucault opens up promising paths for theorising an *immanent* and *effective* subject who struggles against domination in the difficult articulation of her fragments of identity. I will proceed in five steps. First, I will survey the textual evidence which shows that this project is plausible. Second, since Foucault never embraces an *a priori* conception of subjectivity, I will briefly describe the context in which Foucault's subject evolves. Then, I will try to find out what is at stake in Foucault's genealogical method of investigation. Fourth, the *agonic* relationship between the subject and power will be addressed. I will conclude with an exposition of Foucault's ethic of creativity and practices of freedom.

1. Textual Evidence

The first step one might take when trying to put forward a new reading of an author is to find textual evidence which can back up this interpretation.³³ Accordingly, Foucault states on several occasions in the last years of his life that the subject, rather than relations of power, is the main theme of his research:

je voudrais dire d'abord quel a été le but de mon travail ces vingt dernières années. Il n'a pas été d'analyser les phénomènes de pouvoir ni de jeter les bases d'une telle analyse. J'ai cherché plutôt à produire une histoire des

différents modes de subjectivation de l'être humain dans notre culture; j'ai traité, dans cette optique, des trois modes d'objectivation qui transforment les êtres humains en sujet. [...] Ce n'est donc pas le pouvoir, mais le sujet, qui constitue le thème général de mes recherches (1982a: 222, 223).

In the same vein, Foucault resists the widespread idea that we can find in his work the assumption that the omnipresence of power/knowledge relations *negates* the liberty of subjects: “on ne peut pas me prêter l'idée que le pouvoir est un système de domination qui contrôle tout et qui ne laisse aucune place à la liberté” (Foucault 1984: 718).³⁴

Moreover, the death of Man announced and never repudiated by Foucault does not rule out attempts to theorise subjectivity and resistance from a Foucaultian perspective. The funeral procession of 'Man' is an assault against the grand categories of modern humanism which are constitutive of modern forms of knowledge. In *Les mots et les choses*, Foucault tries to render manifest the historicity of certain “modern humanist” assumptions such as the transcendental and self-identical self, dialectical reason, human “nature” or “essence”, universal autonomy, and so on. The alleged “human authenticity”, assumed in modern humanist thought, has never been found. On the contrary, the intense investigation lead by human sciences did not disclose a Kantian or Hegelian subject, but rather the existence of the unconscious, of economic, linguistic and mythical structures, and of other correlations which render illusive attempts to think human freedom *in abstracto* (Foucault 1968: 663). Hence, says Foucault, there is no need to “cry” since “la mort de l'homme, c'est un thème qui permet de mettre à jour la manière dont le concept d'homme a fonctionné dans le savoir” (1968: 663). The death of Man is the dissolution of a God-like subject, of a subject unable to mourn or overcome the death of God.

Consequently, the later Foucault, in his reconceptualisation of subjectivity, never comes back to a sovereign and self-sustaining subject which possesses divine-like attributes.

If it is clear that subjectivity is in the scope of the later Foucault, one still has to acknowledge that his view of the topic significantly changes after the publication of *Discipline and Punish*. From a 'passive' subject almost entirely fashioned by norms, disciplines and modern categories of knowledge, to a 'restive' agent who 'impatiently' struggles to reverse asymmetrical relations of power, Foucault did not defend a static and immutable conception of subjectivity. As James Tully comments, "the focus of analysis consequently shifted from the background 'strategy without a strategist' to the foreground of those who exercise power and those over whom power is exercised" (1999c). It is not without reason that the majority of Foucault's commentators focus on docile bodies, internalisation of panoptical power and normalisation of behaviour. As we will see, the early Foucault stated more than once that subjects were mere effects of power/knowledge relationships. However, to confine his thought to these themes is to close and systematise Foucault's work, and to refuse to see it as an evolving process. This move has to be done against Foucault's will:

I wouldn't want what I may have said or written to be seen as laying any claims to totality. I don't try to universalize what I say; [...] What I say ought to be taken as 'propositions', 'game openings' where those who may be interested are invited to join in; they are not meant as dogmatic assertions that have to be taken or left *en bloc*. My books aren't treatises in philosophy or studies of history: at most, they are philosophical fragments put to work in a historical field of problems (1991: 73, 74).

Since Foucault tries to free philosophical thinking from its systematising and totalizing proclivity (which is proper, according to him, to nineteenth-century philosophy), it seems

justified to show some ‘interpretive charity’ towards Foucault’s oeuvre. As Foucault invites us to do, I will take his developments on subjectivity and practices of freedom as “game openings” which can contribute to the articulation of a new understanding of the subject.

2. Foucault on Power (Part one)

Since Foucault never espouses a theory of the disembodied subject, it would be fallacious to think about subjectivity in his work without addressing the conditions in which subjects are constituted and constitute themselves. Since the themes of disciplinarisation, normalisation, forms of governmentality, bio-power, pastoral power and political technologies have been widely discussed, my aim is not to provide an exhaustive synthesis of Foucault’s analytic of power. Rather, I want to give an overview of the various social, cultural and political processes in which practical identities are constructed.

As Foucault mentions on several occasions in his interviews, his work before the 1980s has to be inscribed within a multifarious reaction against the domination of phenomenology and existentialism in the post-Second World War French thought: “je dirais que tout ce qui s’est passé autour des années soixante venait bien de cette insatisfaction devant la théorie phénoménologique du sujet, avec différentes échappées, différentes échappatoires, différentes percées, selon qu’on prend un terme négatif ou positif, vers la linguistique, vers la psychanalyse, vers Nietzsche” (Foucault 1983b: 437). Foucault demonstrates in various ways the collapse of the transhistorical/phenomenological subject. For example, he attempts, in *Surveiller et punir*,

to render explicit the role of the norm in the process of identity formation. According to Foucault, the guilt sentence pronounced by the judges does not stem from an autonomous and disengaged judicial sphere, but rather from a normalising power which insidiously colonizes individual consciousness and segregates ‘abnormal’ from ‘normal’ subjects. As Foucault puts it, the verdict carries with it an evaluation of the subject’s normality and a “technical prescription for a possible normalisation” (1975a: 28).³⁵ The judicial authority’s sentencing of a subject does not compromise the existence of a sovereign subject capable of actualising its will. Judges, in the contractualist tradition, are the pure effects of the majority’s will. In contrast, norms, emanating from a complex jumble of social interplays (and not from an identifiable intentionality), *objectify* the juridical subject behind its back. Normalising powers do not rest on a corpus of juridical rules, but rather on various disciplines which compartmentalize and order (*quadrillent*) society, and train (*dressent*) individuals. Norms and disciplines, to use Nietzsche’s words, render subjects “calculable” and “predictable”.

Normalising and disciplinary power is, as Gilles Deleuze puts it, “transversal” (1986: 32). Rather than emerging from a sovereign authority, normalising powers link, prolong, supplement and transvest public institutions. Based on the human sciences and clinical knowledge, norms are brought to bear between an “exuberant civil law” (“*un droit bavard*”) and “obscure disciplines”:

Les disciplines vont donc porter un discours qui sera celui de la règle, mais non pas de la règle juridique dérivée de la souveraineté; elles porteront un discours de la règle naturelle, c’est-à-dire de la norme. Elles définiront un code qui sera celui, non pas de la loi, mais de la normalisation, et elles se référeront nécessairement à un horizon théorique qui ne sera pas l’édifice du droit mais le champ des sciences humaines, et leur jurisprudence sera celle d’un savoir clinique. (Foucault 1977b: 188)

A normalising society is one where the “norm of discipline” and the “norm of regulation” intertwine and overlap (Foucault 1991b: 53). Against the common wisdom concerning Foucault’s “theory of society” (or, more properly, concerning Foucault’s analyses of the discourses of true and false which shape society), his argument is not that people have become more obedient since the seventeenth century. Rather, his point is that activities of production, networks of communication and power relations have been realigned in a more efficient way (1982a: 235). In his book on the birth of the prison, Foucault introduces a concept of *anatomo-politics* and shows how techniques of training produce “utile” and “docile” bodies. However, from his first volume of his *History of Sexuality* on, Foucault switches the locus of his analysis and focuses on *bio-politics*. The target of these new political technologies are not bodies, but, beginning in the eighteenth century, ‘populations’, and their aim is to reach a “global equilibrium” rather than to create docile bodies (Foucault 1991b: 42). A “population”, in Foucault’s framework, is not only “un groupe d’humain nombreux, mais des être vivants traversés, commandés, régis par des processus, des lois biologiques” (1981b: 193). Consequently, this new form of power must not only discipline, but also manage life, control birth, increase forces, postpone death, check diseases, etc.³⁶ Various modes of governmentality are used in these processes concerned with the regulation and fostering of life.

To a certain extent, Foucault’s analytic of power seems to be congruent with the hypothesis put forward by some members of the Frankfurt School stating that from the triumph of instrumental reason emerges a new type of individual. For theorists like William Reich and Herbert Marcuse, for instance, personal identity is totally subsumed

by the consumer/producer role assigned to individuals in advanced capitalist societies. Logically, the aim of theory and practice is thus to liberate individuals from this objectifying propensity. For Marcuse, since one cannot have an active sexuality and be an effective producer (the 'life-instinct' has to melt with the forces of labour), this process of re-subjectivication requires the liberation of a perpetually repressed sexuality.³⁷

As we saw, Foucault recognises the late-capitalist societies' strong objectifying proclivity. However, Foucault, as a genealogist, cannot accept the "repressive hypothesis" and the discourse about the liberation of sexuality. In analysing how it has become a category of knowledge, Foucault posits that sexuality has not been quelled and perpetually repressed, but on the contrary verbalized, affirmed, confessed, medicalised and "undressed" (*mise à nue*). In other words, sexuality was and still is the object of an insatiable will to truth which stems from an indiscreet pastoral power. The idea of liberation *qua* sexuality is thus misleading, since sexuality is the correlation of a "field of knowledge", a "form of normativity" and a "mode of *rapport à soi*" (Foucault 1984b: 579). Even as *sexual subjects*, contemporary individuals are still caught up in various power/knowledge relations. Furthermore, Foucault is critical of the extended use of "liberation", which tends to refer to an immaculate essence buried under economic, social or political processes (Foucault 1984h: 710).³⁸ Hence, as it was stated earlier, Foucault cannot embrace an essentialist conception of the subject and believes that a power-free society is an utopia.

2.3 The Agonic Relationship between the Subject and Power: Foucault on Power

(Part two)

One of Foucault's goals in his conceptualisation of power is to show how the "juridico-discursive" representation of it is limited. In the juridico-discursive interpretation, power is seen as a thing held by a sovereign authority (state, Prince, judicial authority, institutions, people, standing above its exercise). Moreover, the negative representation of juridico-discursive power as repressive overlooks the creative and productive efficiency of power relations. Power, for Foucault, is not a faculty that one does or does not possess, but is (a form) embodied in a multiplicity of *rappports*. As Deleuze puts it, "[l]e pouvoir n'a pas d'homogénéité, mais se définit par les singularités, les points singuliers par lesquels il passe" (1986: 33). Power/knowledge relations circulate through a complex network of intersubjective relationships. Moreover, power only exists in actions: "il n'y a de pouvoir qu'exercé par les 'uns' sur les 'autres'; le pouvoir n'existe qu'en acte, même si bien entendu il s'inscrit dans un champ de possibilités éparses s'appuyant sur des structures permanentes" (Foucault 1982a: 236). Further, in "Le sujet et le pouvoir", Foucault explains that there are power relations only when (individual or collective) subjects try to orient, influence, steer, manage or "conduct" the conduct of other subjects. The fluidity of power is embodied in the asymmetrical attempts of subjects to structure the field of possibilities of other subjects.

One has to note that Foucault cannot be considered only as the theorist of docile bodies and constituted subjectivities. From *La volonté de savoir* and on, the relationship between subject and power is not a unilateral one where power is exercised directly on bodies. Quite the opposite, power can be exercised only on "free" and active subjects who

can react in many unpredictable ways, try to reverse their situation and seek to re-balance unfavourable *rapports de force*. In every power relationship lies a will to struggle and restive liberties:

Car il est vrai que, au coeur des relations de pouvoir et comme conditions permanente de leur existence, il y a une 'insoumission' et des libertés essentiellement rétives, il n'y a pas de relations de pouvoir sans résistance, sans échappatoire ou fuite, sans retournement éventuel; toute relation de pouvoir implique donc, au moins de façon virtuelle, une stratégie de lutte, sans que pour autant elles en viennent à se superposer, à perdre leur spécificité et finalement à se confondre. Elles constituent l'une pour l'autre une sorte de limite permanente, de point de renversement possible (Foucault 1982: 242).

However, one also has to acknowledge that a transition occurs in Foucault's treatment of power relations. In opposition to some theorists who are aware of the late Foucault's insights on subjectivity, but who see a linear and continuous development in Foucault's thought (Patton 1998, Falznon 1998), one has to recognise an important shift in his conceptualization of the power-subject relationship. In 1976, for instance, Foucault does not think that a relation of power is a 'game' played by partners. Quite the contrary, he argues that the subject is *not* an opponent (*vis-à-vis*) to power but a mere effect of it: "l'individu n'est pas le vis-à-vis du pouvoir, il en est, je crois, l'un des effets premiers. L'individu est un effet du pouvoir et il est en même temps, dans la mesure où il est un effet, un relais: le pouvoir transite par l'individu qu'il a constitué" (1977b: 180, my emphasis).³⁹

Foucault, a student of Louis Althusser in his preparatory year for the École normale supérieure, argues against the phenomenological/existentialist subject theorised by philosophes such as Sartre, De Beauvoir and Merleau-Ponty. Along with theorists such

as Lévi-Strauss, Althusser and Lacan, the early Foucault goes to the opposite end of the spectrum on subjectivity and freedom. Foucault himself admits that he had some “inadequate formulas” concerning the subject (1984h: 718). Envisaging his work as “game openings”, he does not, however, hesitate at the end of his life to switch the focus of his analysis. For Foucault, the pleasure of writing is to take unexpected paths, experiment with new forms of subjectivity and free ourselves from uncontested certainties (1984b: 584).

Hence, for the late Foucault, attempts to govern conduct or pinpoint identities find the “recalcitrance of the will” and the “intransigence of freedom” in their way (1982a: 239). Power and resistance find themselves in an *agonic*, rather than antagonistic, relationship. That is, the provocation between the two terms is not necessarily “face-to-face”, but rather fluid and permanent. Power and resistance are the necessary supports and the conditions of possibility for one another. The tension between them is insoluble and cannot be resolved through dialectical reason. In Foucault’s framework, there is no final or definite solution to this struggle (hence the *agon*). On the one hand, a “free-will” or a liberty thought *in abstracto*, that is, thought in a state free of power/knowledge relations, is a residue of the nineteenth century idealist philosophy. On the other hand, a relation of power which blocks effective resistance is in fact a relation of domination (Patton 1998).

In opposition to a common reading of Foucault’s work, I want to argue that the subject is not “trapped”. As we saw, if a power-free society is a ‘performative contradiction’, since “vivre en société, c’est, de toute façon, vivre de manière qu’il soit possible d’agir sur l’action les uns des autres”, the subject can still modify asymmetrical relationships or, at least, side-track the governance of her/his conduct. Indeed, in the later

Foucault's framework, power is exercised "at a distance": that is, on actions and conducts rather than on bodies and psyches. The subject's capacity to resist is not in a position of exteriority. On the contrary, Foucault considers that resistance is the starting point and the key-term of the agonistic relationship between subject and power:

s'il n'y avait pas de résistance, il n'y aurait pas de rapports de pouvoir. Parce que tout serait simplement une question d'obéissance. Dès l'instant où l'individu est en situation de ne pas faire ce qu'il veut, il doit utiliser des rapports de pouvoir. La résistance vient donc en premier, et elle reste supérieure à toutes les forces du processus; elle oblige, sous son effet, les rapports de pouvoir à changer. Je considère donc que le terme 'résistance' est le mot le plus important, le *mot-clef* de cette dynamique (1984i: 741, see also 1982a: 225).⁴⁰

The subject's "impatience for freedom" is at the core of the later Foucault's thought. Power is thus not omnipotent, but rather omnipresent (Laforest 1985: 87). Indeed, the omnipresence of power relations and the recalcitrance of the will are two irreducible poles of Foucault's analysis which cannot be reconciled dialectically. In the following section, Foucault's genealogical approach, one way by which the subject's resistance can be enhanced, will be examined.

4. Question of Method: Foucault's Mode of Reflexion on the Present

Genealogical thinking is, according to Foucault, one of the most efficient ways for the subject to resist oppressive relations of power. Genealogy implies a peculiar relationship between theory and praxis or, more precisely, between philosophy and the present. Foucault believes that Kant's answer to the question "What is Enlightenment?" confers a new role on philosophy. In his brief answer, where he makes the argument that Enlightenment is embodied in man's emancipation from his self-imposed immaturity,

Kant confronts philosophy with its own actuality. Kant's answer initiates, according to Foucault, a new mode of reflexion on the present. Kant tries to capture the originality and novelty of the present moment; he is looking for a difference: "quelle différence aujourd'hui introduit-il par rapport à hier?" (1984a: 564). The Kantian question "who are we, us *Aufklärer*, in the present moment?" is thus qualitatively different from the Cartesian ahistorical interrogation: "who am I?". For the first time, philosophy reflects on its own conditions of possibility and on its own "discursive presence". In other words, Kant initiates a philosophical trajectory where the philosopher has to dwell on the fluctuations and tribulations which structure his own situation. According to Foucault, this constant interrogation of the present opens up the possibility of a "critical ontology of ourselves" in which he situates his own work.

In a lecture that he gave, in 1969, to the Société Française de Philosophie entitled "What is Critique?", Foucault argues that the critical "attitude" found in Kant's essay is a continuation of early modern critique of practices of *governmentality*. In this lecture, Foucault defines governmentality as the social, cultural and political practices, grounded on various "regimes of truth", which seek to subject (*assujétir*) individuals. We can find in this lecture, predating "Le sujet et le pouvoir" by 13 years, the first seeds of the agonic relationship between the subject and power as previously described: Foucault locates the reciprocal critical attitude to governmentality in the subject's will to transform, displace, challenge and refigure the heterogeneously imposed modes of governance. Governmentality and criticism emerge together. The phenomena of governmentality cannot, according to Foucault, be dissociated from the critical question "how not to be governed this way?"⁴¹

Although he locates himself in a trajectory of critical thinkers which includes theorists such as Kant, Hegel and some members of the Frankfurt School, Foucault departs from them in an important manner. In attributing to philosophy a function of diagnosis, Foucault breaks with many philosophers in the French and German philosophical traditions. From Descartes to Habermas, *en passant par* Hegel and Sartre, French and German philosophy aims at totalizing social reality and at finding atemporal and comprehensive answers to the questions raised by finite human beings. In reaction against this approach to philosophy, Foucault argues that philosophers now have the more elusive task of articulating what is occurring in the present: “le philosophe a en effet cessé de vouloir dire ce qui existe éternellement. Il a la tâche plus ardue et bien plus fuyante de dire ce qui se passe” (1967: 581). Drawing punctual genealogies of particular elements which fashion the contemporary subject’s experience is the most common way, in Foucault’s work, to diagnose the present. For doing so, Foucault’s mode of reflexion on the present also borrows from Nietzsche’s genealogical method. Indeed, Foucault uses the genealogical approach in order to exhibit the contingency, historicity and arbitrariness of categories which parade as universal, necessary and obligatory. Genealogy “excavates” the moral, social and cultural grounds where the subject’s experience takes form.⁴²

The genealogical method strives to dig up and disclose the “networks of contingency” from which what *is* has emerged. Genealogy demonstrates the vulnerability of some assumptions shared by some metaphysicians and traditional historians (transcendental subject, eternal truth, purity of origins, immortality of the soul, history’s teleological unfolding, etc.) by disclosing history’s disparities, impurities and discontinuities. Effective history does so through an “endless erudition” and a

“meticulous reading” of forgotten and subjugated knowledge (Foucault 1971). As Foucault puts it, a genealogy is not a genesis of the primary causes, but an articulation of the singularities constitutive of a non-discursive formation:

Disons en gros que, par opposition à une genèse qui s’oriente vers l’unité d’une cause principale lourde d’une descendance multiple, il s’agirait là d’une *généalogie*, i.e. de quelque chose qui essaie de restituer les conditions d’apparition d’une singularité à partir de multiples éléments déterminants, dont elle apparaît non pas comme le produit, mais comme l’effet (1990: 51).

As it is argued by David Owen (against Habermas’ interpretation of Foucault’s work), genealogy is a form of *immanent critique* which is aware of its own conditions of possibility and which does not rest on universal validity claims (1994: 4). In contrast to Habermas’ project (1989), a genealogist wants to problematize the alleged universality of validity claims and render difficult what passes as self-evident.

By exhibiting the fragility of our deepest beliefs and the crumbly nature of the ground on which our practices, values and institutions lie, the genealogical approach produces historical investigations which test “the limits of the necessary” (1984a: 572).⁴³ In tracing back *how* the present became what it is, Foucault questions and contests forms of subjectivity which present themselves as indispensable horizons. Differently put, the genealogical method enables the subject to problematize and, *a fortiori*, to transgress limits imposed on her. As Tully remarks, Foucault’s approach is “context-transgressing” and opens up possibilities of thinking and acting differently (1999c). Far from considering that freedom is a phantasm or chimera, Foucault asserts that his role is to demonstrate to people that they are freer than they think, and he does so by showing them the contingency of what they take for granted (1988a: 778). Genealogy, as a work of

excavation, reaches one's most sedimented convictions. The genealogist's leitmotiv, however, is not to reject and disqualify every element which structures our experience. For Foucault, not everything is bad, but it is potentially dangerous (1983a: 386). Rather, the genealogist's project is to show how the frontiers which bind our reality are porous and can be transgressed. Foucault's "quiet optimism" lies in the fact that what has been made can be unmade and remade.⁴⁴ A genealogical perspective of the unproblematic limits of our experience can therefore be one of the conditions of possibility for autonomy in our time. Following Owen once again, we should see the Foucaultian critical ontology of ourselves as an investigation of the present which "discloses the limits of what we are and raises the possibility of being otherwise than we are" (1994: 141). Hence, the critical ontology of ourselves, by means of genealogies, has two facets (Dreyfus and Rabinow 1986: 112, Connolly 1993: 372). On the one hand, it requires a constant vigilance toward "today as difference in history". On the other hand, as I will argue in the following section, this response to one's time can take the form of various "practices of the self".⁴⁵

2.5. The Care of the Self: Foucault's Embedded Ethic of Creativity

For the later Foucault, identities are shaped through agonistic interactions between power/knowledge relations and various tactics of resistance. It remains extremely difficult, however, for the contemporary subject to resist the normalising propensity of "governmentalised" societies. As Foucault reminds us, power/knowledge relations seek to 'name', 'attach identities to' and 'classify' individuals.⁴⁶ The Foucaultian process of identity formation has thus nothing to do with an unfettered self-fashioning. It is only through a vigilance and an acute sensibility toward *today* that the subject can resist, *tant*

bien que mal, the confinement of its identity. As it was posited earlier, genealogies, as historical investigations, enable the subject to defy imposed limits and explore alternative identities. In locating the fissures of our regimes of truth, genealogical critique opens up spaces of and for “concrete freedom” (1983b: 449).

Despite this obvious opposition to the heteronomous ascription of identities, Foucault does not bring back to life the Kantian notion of autonomy, where the thinking subject can reach an autonomous status through the use of reason. If there is indeed a subject in Foucault’s framework, it is what Paul Patton calls a “thin” conception of human subjectivity. As Patton puts it:

Foucault’s analogue to the transcendental freedom which grounds Kant’s belief in the possibility of human progress is an historical conception of human powers and capacities. Given what they have become, human beings will resist attempts to set limits to the autonomous use and development of their powers. [...] This conception of the human material may therefore be supposed to amount to a ‘thin’ conception of the subject of thought and action: whatever else it may be, the human subject is a being endowed with certain capacities. It is a subject of power, but this power is only exercised through the diversity of human bodily capacities and forms of subjectivity (1998: 65).

Freedom, in the later Foucault’s thought, is the ontological precondition of politics and ethics. Unlike Kant, however, this ontological precondition is historical rather than transcendental (Patton 1998: 73). Foucault’s subject is thus not disengaged. In contrast with the modern “punctual” self, to use Taylor’s expression (1989: 161), the Foucaultian subject can only think and act differently by evolving in networks of pre-established conducts and in fields of possibilities and social imaginaries structured by his/her social, cultural, aesthetic, economic and political conjuncture. The self’s “strong evaluations” about the Good, the Just, the Beautiful and the True rely on norms proposed/imposed by

his or her environment. Identity formation, in a Foucaultian perspective, is embodied in practices of subjection/freedom which themselves emerge from the agonistic confrontation between a restive subject and a polysemical power. Once again, the later Foucault's subject, that he describes as a "form not always identical to itself" (1984h: 718), shares very little with the Kantian subject:

En premier lieu, je pense effectivement qu'il n'y a pas un sujet souverain, fondateur, une forme universelle de sujet qu'on pourrait retrouver partout. Je suis très sceptique et très hostile envers cette conception du sujet. Je pense au contraire que le sujet se constitue à travers des pratiques d'assujettissement, ou, liberté, comme, dans l'Antiquité, à partir, bien entendu, d'un certain nombre de règles, styles, conventions, qu'on retrouve dans le milieu culturel (Foucault 1984k: 733).

As Tully notes, Foucault's practices of freedom are twofold. On the one hand, they point out to the dialogical "games of freedom" played by collective subjects in various practical systems. On the other hand, the practices of freedom also refer to the more personal "practices of the self" (Tully 1999c). It is in the Greco-Roman Antiquity, where the moral emphasis is more on the "forms of subjectivation" than on the "codes of conduct", that Foucault finds the notions of *rapport à soi*, *pratique de soi* and *souci de soi*. The relation to the self (*rapport à soi*) is embodied in (1) the reflexive stand that one takes to oneself, and (2) in one's will to enter in a variety of practices and exercises devoted to the transformation of one's "ethical substance".⁴⁷ In other words, the *souci de soi* is a process of valorisation and intensification of subjectivity (Foucault 1988b: 800). Practices of the self imply both strong evaluations and practical formations. The subject takes herself as an object/project, tries to amend her identity and to acquire new virtues. A moral action, proposes Foucault, implies both a code of reference and a *rapport à soi*.

This relation to the self is not only a *conscience de soi*, but also the constitution of the self as a moral subject (Foucault 1983c: 558). Furthermore, the care of the self is not a *propédeutique*, or a temporary preparation, but a lifestyle and a “total accomplishment” (Foucault 1982b: 356). And this is a total accomplishment for *finite* beings who live here in this world. As Foucault puts it, the telos of *askêsis* is not to prepare the individual for a new reality, but to enable her to live a good life in this reality (1988b: 800).

The Greco-Roman care of the self ought not to be confused with the Platonist “decipherment of the self”, where the subject has to flush out immutable truths buried in the depth of its soul. The care of the self must also be distinguished from the Christian “renunciation of the self”, which compels the subject to confess its desires and purify an endlessly concupiscent soul. The Greco-Roman *souci de soi* is a morality oriented toward ethics rather than to a code (1983c: 559).⁴⁸ The care of the self dominant from the Hellenistic period to the beginning of the Roman Empire is not an hermeneutic of the self, but an *aesthetic of existence*. Freedom, for the Greeks, lies in the capacity to make of life a work of art. Much like the creation of a piece of art, the formulation of the self demands time, patience, work and dedication. As we see in *L’usage des plaisirs*, freedom requires self-mastery.⁴⁹ Sexual austerity, for instance, shows the subject’s superiority over its instincts and contributes to the stylization of its daily life. This “polemical attitude” toward oneself is not driven by the ‘evil’ nature of desires, but rather by the beauty of a life guided by temperance and self-mastery (1984i: 89).

In his determination to contribute to a fragmentary history of the present, Foucault reveals how certain aspects of our experience were historically constituted in order that they may be imagined differently. Genealogy, says Owen, is an ethical practice which

enhances “our capacity to engage in practices of freedom” (1999). Foucault does not undertake genealogies for the pure sake of erudition. Accordingly, it is rather plausible to suggest that the Greco-Roman “stylization of attitude” and aesthetic of existence are not complete strangers to the later Foucault’s concern with subjectivity and practices of identity formation. Indeed, the aesthetic of existence previously described (in its form rather than in its substance) is somewhat consonant with the *ethos* of modernity described by Foucault in “What is Enlightenment?”. As we saw, Foucault finds in Kant’s short answer the first articulation of a never ending “critical ontology of ourselves”. Foucault also puts forward the argument that modernity is more an “attitude”, an *ethos*, than a distinct temporal era. According to him, Baudelaire is the one who captures this modern attitude with most acuteness. Baudelaire recognises that modernity, as it was laid out in Chapter One, is “self-destructive”, that is, dominated by perpetual movement, rupture, overcoming, disorder, fashion and novelty. For the *poète maudit*, however, our modernity lies in the attitude we adopt vis-à-vis this endless flux, in our capacity to grasp glimpses of the absolute in a volatile present:

pour lui, être moderne, ce n’est pas reconnaître et accepter ce mouvement perpétuel; c’est au contraire prendre une certaine attitude à l’égard de ce mouvement; et cette attitude volontaire, difficile, consiste à ressaisir quelque chose d’éternel qui n’est pas au-delà de l’instant présent, ni derrière lui, mais en lui. La modernité se distingue de la mode qui ne fait que suivre le cours du temps; c’est l’attitude qui permet de saisir ce qu’il y a ‘d’héroïque’ dans le moment présent. La modernité n’est pas un fait de sensibilité au présent fugitif; c’est une volonté ‘d’héroïser’ le présent (Foucault 1984a: 569).

To “heroize” the present moment, for Baudelaire, is to not be apathetic and passive while facing the uncertainty created by a self-destructive modernity. It is rather to

take ourselves as the object of a complex and difficult elaboration, and practice our liberty in a fleeting present. The exercise of freedom, in a dandyst perspective, is embedded in a permanent self-criticism. The challenge raised by Baudelaire (and Foucault) is to fashion ourselves as works of art in the modern reign of the ephemeral. This is an *ethic of creativity* that Foucault contrasts with an ethic of authenticity which, from Plato to the psychoanalysts, has dominated ‘humanist’ thought.⁵⁰ Rather than discovering his/her authenticity, the contemporary subject, Foucault suggests, invents and reinvents forms of subjectivity which blur the boundary between normality and abnormality.

The ethic of creativity Foucault elaborates does not prescribe to the subject how to define its identity. For Foucault does not focus on the substance of the subject’s fragments of identity, but rather the formation/reformation process, or the dandyst attitude of seeing our life as an incomplete creation. Foucault evaluates as beautiful a life of constant self-problematization. Identity, in Foucault’s view, is a constant bringing into play. Resisting normalisation is not purely a negative task, but also an act of creation.⁵¹ This explains why Foucault believes that philosophy’s task is, among other things, to enable the subject to “modify” and “free” itself from itself (1980: 110, 1984m: 15). What gives value to love, work and life is that they enhance the development of a “curiosity” and a “sharp sense of the real” (*un sens aiguisé du réel*) which allows us to “think and act differently” and explore new forms of subjectivity.

We can see Nietzsche’s self-overcoming self standing out in profile of Foucault’s “self-problematizing self”. Indeed, the Nietzschean subject, deprived of moral landmarks and universal truths to orient/constrain her actions, has to take upon herself the task of transforming her own subjectivity. Nietzsche offers a clear description of his ethic of

creativity in *The Gay Science*. In his aphorism 295, for instance, Nietzsche uses the metaphor of the tyrant to describe the effects of permanent habits on human life. Dwelling in these durable habits means living a sedimented life where oxygen is “thick”. In the following aphorism, he despises the valorisation of the “immutability of our opinions and aspirations” and of the “fidelity” we pay to ourselves. Advocating against fixation and for the exploration of new identities, Nietzsche ironizes about man’s proclivity to discredit personal changes, reorientation and metamorphosis. To be the “poets of our life” means to look at a distance and from various perspectives the elements of our own subjectivity (aph. 299). And the Nietzschean ethic of creativity is not only about self-overcoming; it also includes an element of self-governance (aph. 290). Indeed, the activity of self-overcoming is an exercise of, or a means to enhance, self-governance. A subject who acts according to a universal law is, for Nietzsche, a subject unable to generate his/her “own ideal” (aph. 335). “[A]u moyen d’un long entraînement et d’un travail quotidien”, the Nietzschean subject ought to “give style to its character” and act according to its own aesthetic and moral criteria (aph. 290).

In Foucault’s analytic of power, individuals evolve in complex practical systems where their identities are sometimes tied to certain categories. In contrast with Nietzsche’s self-overcoming self, the Foucaultian subject does not strive for radical and fully self-referential autonomy. In a context where the subject has to laboriously define itself while power/knowledge relationships seek to impose an identity, Foucault believes that autonomy lies in the fragile capacity to untie suffocating identity.⁵² As it is convincingly argued by Owen, Foucault theorises a more political self-overcoming self. While Nietzsche calls for a subject capable of thinking and acting beyond good and evil,

and according to self-generated aesthetic criteria, Foucault sketches out a subject struggling for partial and effective freedom in various social and political spheres. As Owen puts it, “[t]his ‘politicization’ of self-overcoming implies that the activity of self-overcoming takes the form of transgressing social practices and rationalities, that is, self-overcoming is thoroughly situated within relations of intersubjectivity” (1995: 497). Foucault’s interpretation of autonomy is consonant with Hannah Arendt’s understanding of *virtuosity* (the will to act in an intersubjective space), that she contrasts with *sovereignty* (a free and disengaged will) (1972: 212). Foucault politicizes what Nietzsche internalizes: the will to struggle. In contrast with Zarathustra who takes refuge in the mountain’s height or in the cave’s depths, Foucault’s subject practices her or his freedom through agonistic relationships with others in the public sphere and through various practices of the self. Despite these differences, Nietzsche and Foucault both theorize a “man without *transcendental* qualities”. As the will to truth erodes the universality and necessity of such modern foundations as God, Reason, Science, Subject, Being, History and other meta-narratives, Nietzsche and Foucault think of a subject as carrying the burden of judgement and *tragically responsible* for his/her becoming (Owen 1994: 67). The tragedy is that the Nietzschean/Foucaultian subject is responsible for his/her own autonomy in a world which constantly undermines the very possibility of full autonomy. Foucault, for his part, conceives a lucid, plural and precarious subject who problematizes its own limits, takes upon itself the responsibility of its resistance and struggles for concrete freedom.

Before ending this section, it is important to note that this ethic of mitigated creativity opens up the possibility to dissociate the subject’s autonomy from the technical

mastery of nature. As we know from Foucault's analytic of power, freedom is weak and fragile. The various forms of 'medicalisation' of knowledge (psychiatry, psychology, criminology, socio-biology), and the Marxist and psychoanalytic models of "liberation", tend to involve an intensification of power/knowledge relations in practice. Hence, what is at stake is how to "déconnecter la croissance des capacités et l'intensification des relations de pouvoir" (Foucault 1984a: 576). Foucault's ethic of creativity, relying on "politico-aesthetic", rather than epistemic, criteria, does not require the peremptory intervention of an expert.⁵³ The techniques of the self (as non-universalizable ethics) can enable subjects to partially bypass or modify normalisation. According to Foucault, the very idea of an aesthetic of existence may come back into vogue because of the failure of universal moralities (1983a: 385). Moreover, in his refusal to link the project of maturity to a quest for authenticity (an authenticity, ironically, defined by psychologists, psychiatrists and priests), Foucault couches the process of identity formation in the possibility of becoming someone or something else, rather than in the discovery of an authentic essence. One should not, Foucault suggests, try to be loyal to or act in conformity with an identity (1984i: 739).⁵⁴ The subject's dignity, as Owen puts it, does not lie in what she is (fatally and authentically), but in her capacity to maintain (creatively) a plural and non-static identity (1994: 207).

Conclusion: Foucault's Subject in a Context of Fragmented Identities

Foucault's 'thin' notion of subjectivity implies a "self-questioning" self who problematizes the limits of its time and tries to avoid the sedimentation of its identity by practising its freedom from within various intersubjective/practical systems. The later

Foucault's subject, caught up in agonic relationships with polysemical forms of power, has the potential to think and act differently and to explore different forms of subjectivity. As stated in Chapter One, the contemporary fragmentation of identity implies that the subject has to take into consideration a plurality of partial affiliations and identifications in the making of its identity. It is now very difficult to confine an identity to a master-code or to an all-encompassing and paradigmatic horizon. Moreover, the interaction between aspects of one's identity is not fixed and immutable, but opened to question and reinterpretation. One's multiple subject-positions are organised relationally and in ways which leave room for rearticulation. Identities are thus not always identical to themselves, can be evaluated and ranked differently, and can therefore exert variable normative influence on the subject in different contexts. Hence, as Foucault puts it, the idea is not to be "faithful" to an identity or to see this identity as "a code for existence" or as "a universal ethical rule" (1984i: 739). Rather, subjects think and act, in Foucault's framework, not from a transcendental center where they can see their identity at a distance, but they reflect on one aspect of their identity from the perspective of another aspect. In Foucault's terms, the *rapport à soi* one has changes in relation to the practical systems in which one evolves. Contesting the universality and necessity of any theoretical identities, Foucault is concerned by the articulation of the subject's overlapping and contrasting practical identities:

Vous n'avez pas à vous-même le même type de rapport lorsque vous vous constituez comme sujet politique qui va voter ou qui prend la parole dans une assemblée et lorsque vous cherchez à réaliser votre destin dans une relation sexuelle. Il y a sans doute des rapports et des interférences entre ces différentes formes du sujet, mais on n'est pas en présence du même type de sujet. Dans chaque cas, on joue, on établit à soi-même des formes de rapport différentes (1984h: 718, 719)

Foucault's fluid and minimal conception of the subject, I want to argue, dovetails neatly with the contemporary processes of identity formation. The contemporary subject, potentially *dépaysé* and bearing a plural identity, does explore several forms of subjectivity. Indeed, the critical ontology of ourselves is a highly plausible *ethos* for subjects for whom the articulation of their identities is an endless task. Furthermore, Foucault's conception of subjectivity does not confer on the subject the impossible responsibility of fighting against the fragmentation and *indétermination identitaire* which characterize our time. On the contrary, we can even see the perpetual tension between the subject's fragments of life as one of the conditions of possibility for the subject's resistance.⁵⁵ Changing positions (that is, moving from foreground one aspect to another, or from another) can be a way for the subject to resist the ascription of an identity.

Foucault's ethic, in this context, is to play the game of articulation, affirmation, modification and refusal of some practical identities with the minimum of domination. He wants to create a space for the "indefinite labour of freedom" in the practices of identity formation and reformation. Hence Foucault's position on gay identity, which ought to be affirmed when necessary but silenced, bypassed or recreated when suffocating or constraining. Sexual identity, for Foucault, is both useful *and* limiting. Homosexuals, therefore, have to right to be "free" in the affirmation of their identity (1984i: 739). The same could be said about a woman, a Québécois(e), a socialist, a baby-boomer, a Christian. The type of freedom at stake here is thus not exactly the same as defended by liberal thinkers. Some liberals locate, *grosso modo*, freedom and autonomy in the capacity to choose between various visions of the good, to make choices without the interference

of external constraints (state intervention for Nozick, disadvantaged economical situation for Rawls, cultural insecurity for Kymlicka). For Foucault, the aim is not to free ourselves from external constraints (for some are enabling conditions and capacities), which would be utopian, but to alter these constraints and develop the reflexive capacity, through practices of freedom, to call ourselves into question. Freedom consists in the constant bringing into play of our own subjectivity.

The practices of freedom include an intense care of the self which can easily be confused with contemporary forms of individualism, narcissism and hedonism. A subject engaged in various practices of the self apparently validates the postmodern ontology discussed in Chapter One. Foucault, however, refuses the association, suggested by Dreyfus and Rabinow in an interview, between an aesthetic of existence and the contemporary “cult of the self” (1983a: 402, 403). On the one hand, a practice of the self, even if applied on the self by itself, is not “un exercice de solitude, mais une véritable pratique sociale” (Foucault 1984m: 72). Personal work on our ethical substance is supported by a multiplicity of social relations (1982b: 358). I will address this idea in more detail in the following chapter, where I will try to situate Foucault’s work within an intersubjective tradition. On the other hand, the care of the self has little to do with narcissism since it does not imply a fixation on ourselves and it should not be confused with “self-fascination”. Quite the opposite, the very notion of ‘*souci*’ connotes the idea of concern and anxiety. Care, says Foucault, is a “loaded” word: “Il décrit une activité, il implique l’attention, la connaissance, la technique” (1983a: 400). To put it bluntly, the care of the self is not a rest cure (*sinécure*) (Foucault 1984m: 71). Consequently, the Foucaultian subject should not be confused with the flâneur, vagabond, tourist and player

described by Bauman. As we saw, the *ethos* of modernity, best exemplified by Baudelaire, is not a frivolous or transient curiosity, but a “difficult game between the truth of the real and the exercise of freedom” (1984a: 570). It calls for action and a certain degree of asceticism.⁵⁶

Foucault, as we know, is also trying to do without a normative notion of authenticity. The notion of authenticity that Foucault criticizes, however, has strong romantic overtones. It is embodied in an attunement between one’s acts and inner nature (*adéquation à soi-même*). In contrast, the authenticity at stake here -defined in Chapter One- is an immanent and created marker which enables the subject to orient her *praxis*. It is more about orientation and direction in an opaque world than about discovery or attunement. This alternative concept of authenticity sketched out above has very little to do with the spiritual quests Foucault likes to criticize. In fact, since couching our life in an ethic of creativity does not necessarily lead to living an episodic existence, or to a life of *flânerie*, authenticity as a dissoluble horizon can very well find its place in a Foucaultian perspective.

The Foucault presented here is neither a nihilist, anarchist, young conservative, nor a modernist or postmodernist. As he says himself, he has to be included in a tradition of theorists who reflect critically on the present and seek to test the unproblematic limits of their time. Moreover, I want to argue that Foucault must be situated within a trajectory of thinkers who see autonomy and maturity as the *tragic responsibility* of giving a sense to our life in a post-metaphysical/mystical world. This trajectory, I believe, cuts across modernism, postmodernism and critical theory. With intellectuals such as Nietzsche, Weber, Dostoïevsky, Sartre, Kundera and Castoriadis, Foucault confers to the

subject the burden of judgement while undermining universal or transcendental foundations for the exercise of this faculty. Foucault's antihumanism, Falzon aptly notes, is not an "inhumanism", but rather "a return to the concrete human being existing in the midst of this world, an affirmation of human beings in their finitude" (1998: 14). As a result, autonomy, freedom and resistance ought not to be founded or morally grounded. For the edification of a moral or rational foundation implies an unconditioned subjection to this foundation.⁵⁷ Autonomy, in a Foucaultian perspective, is not the submission to a context-transcendent rule, but the contestation and problematization of accepted norms. As a person who practices and recommends a permanent self-criticism, Foucault would perform a contradiction should he try to found his ethic. Conversely, Foucault leaves open-ended and refuses to give categorical answers to the Kantian question "are we mature?". As he puts it, "[j]e ne sais pas si nous deviendrons jamais majeurs" (1984a: 577). The transition from immaturity to maturity is seen as an endless task.

Foucault, as a "specific intellectual", does not want to be a 'legislator'. Accordingly, his ethic of creativity is not a universal code of existence that each and every mature individual ought to adopt, but rather an *example* of one way to live with the least amount of domination possible. As Owen argues, Foucault exemplifies his critical *ethos* and tries to conduct the conduct of others by performing his ethics in various intersubjective spaces. The later Foucault "recommends but does not seek to legislate [his] orientation in thinking" (Owen 1999).⁵⁸

However, one criticism must be addressed to Foucault before concluding this chapter. If it is true that, as a general approach to philosophical thinking, Foucault does not legislate or moralize, he sometimes seems to 'advocate' an ethic of perpetual

overcoming and refusal. For instance, Alain Touraine argues that even if Foucault almost embraces, at the end of its life, what he repudiated earlier, he still has to be categorised as a theorist of the “grand refusal”.⁵⁹ To support the plausibility of this reading, Foucault does write that the main objective today is to “refuse what we are” (1982a: 196). In the same vein, Foucault writes that it is “very tedious to always be the same” (1984i: 739).⁶⁰ Hence, a reflexive subject willing to *affirm* one fragment of her identity might feel at odds with Foucault’s position. However, the spirit (and often the letter) of Foucault’s later writings suggest that the important thing for the subject is neither to discover or refuse her identity, but rather to question and problematize it. Furthermore, the ‘refusal’ of a particular practical identity can be achieved, in Foucault’s framework, through the maintenance of other aspects of identity. To free ourselves from ourselves does not necessarily mean to refuse all of what we are, but to put ourselves under scrutiny, examine the alleged necessity of what we have become and thus gain self-awareness of the “fissures” of our own identity.

Foucault’s practices of freedom are dialogical; that is, they have to be located within a social dialogue. In the next chapter, I will therefore try to demonstrate that Foucault, with other philosophers in the second half of the twentieth century, took the intersubjective and dialogical turn. This will lead me to analyze the relationship between Foucault’s thought and different conceptions of *agonic democracy*. Hence, after examining the status of the subject, by offering an upstream reading of the later Foucault’s thought, I will linger on the status of the citizen in a context of fragmented identities.

Chapter 3

Theorising Agonic Democracy: An Experience with...Foucault

Introduction

In my first chapter, I attempted to find out what is at stake in the contemporary fragmentation and pluralization of identity. In so doing, I put forward the argument that the sources of identity are plural and disseminated and that, therefore, we must take the perspectival character of identity into consideration in our interpretation. I also suggested that identities are, at least potentially, fragmented. The fragmentation of identity refers to the extreme difficulty of sustaining, in an opaque and rapidly moving world, a fully integrated and architectonic identity. These two features encourage theorists, I believe, to focus on how people talk about and act on themselves (their *practical* identities), rather than to elaborate *theoretical* identities which transcend time and space.

In Chapter Two, I tried to think about subjectivity without falling into the common dichotomy between the modernist affirmation and the postmodernist erasure of the subject. In order to do so, I challenged the quasi-hegemonic reading of Foucault's work and I focused on his late insights on ethics and freedom. Stemming from this interpretation is a *situated* subject who seeks to resist normalisation by practising her freedom in various intersubjective spaces. As a corollary, I suggested that an embedded ethic of creativity dovetails neatly with the contemporary processes of identity formation and reformation.

The anti-essentialist account of both identity and subjectivity presented so far calls for a reconceptualisation of how we think about *politics*. We might have witnessed, in the last fifty years, a democratic revolution in Western politics. A number of peoples fight,

tant bien que mal, against the determination of their fate behind their backs.⁶¹ However, we are still waiting for a theory of democracy based on a non-outdated account of identity and subjectivity. Even when they try to put the “fact of pluralism” at the core of their theory, the models of liberal, deliberative and communitarian democracy fail to come to terms with a post-colonialist/imperialist take on identity. In the limited scope of this thesis, I will not attempt to elaborate an exhaustive comparative and critical analysis of the paradigmatic models of democracy. Rather, I will sketch out a conception of *agonic* democracy, which appears to be a more compelling way to theorise democratic politics in an age of plural identities. Agonic democracy is, I will argue, the only model which takes seriously the fragmentation of identity. The contemporary subject, in her attempt to be free in the problematization, modification, affirmation and refusal of her identity, experiences multiple subjective positions and calls for a ‘fluid’ notion of politics. As we will see with Foucault, the “heroism of political identity” had its time. A conception of agonic democracy offers to the subject the possibility of being free in the articulation of her congruent and at times incompatible practical identities.

In order to reconstruct Foucault’s political thought, I will first trace Foucault’s critique of the form taken by political activity in his time. Then, I will situate Foucault in a trajectory of thinkers who envisage philosophy and politics as a practical and dialogical activity. In the last section, I will expand on what I consider to be the two main features of Foucault’s agonic conception of democracy. Finally, in conclusion, I will present a short contrast between Foucault’s vision and the models of deliberative and communitarian democracy.

1. The Sources of Foucault's Political Agonism

Foucault's life was very intense politically. As one of his biographers reminds us, Foucault was both a spectator of and an actor in the various political struggles of his time (Eribon: 1991). From the Gaullist France of the Post War to the renaissance of the left under Mitterrand, through the events of May 68, Foucault's life was inherently political. Living in an era where Marxism was seen as an "impassable horizon" (Sartre), Foucault also had to come to terms with Marxism as both a theoretical framework and a political project. Furthermore, one can say that if his philosophical *ethos* (philosophy as critical ontology of the present) is not a political philosophy so to speak, it is nevertheless inherently political.

Foucault was thus well aware of the national and international politics of his time and never hesitated to comment or act on them. It is relatively safe to argue that Foucault elaborates his own 'political ontology' in reaction against what it means to be a political subject in his time. As it was stated in the previous chapter, Foucault is looking for ways which can enhance the contemporary subject's resistance to the late modern society's normalising propensity. He is also trying to exhibit the fragility of our deepest certainties, so that we can think differently about what we consider to be universal, necessary and obligatory. This position leads Foucault to a twofold critique of what it means to be a subject who engages with politics. On the one hand, Foucault rebels against the fact that each and every political engagement must be channelled through the logic of the party system. He strongly feels that the type of commitment and loyalty required by a political party is both authoritarian and counterproductive. For Foucault, who thinks that one can avoid normalisation, in part, by upholding a multifarious subjectivity, a party fosters

conformity and intellectual sclerosis. Foucault's situated ethic of creativity is antithetical to the hegemonic conception (shared by both liberals and Marxists) which makes of politics a total, definitive and unconditional engagement. The politics of the "all or nothing", argues Foucault, is ill-adapted to subjects bearing overlapping *and* contrasting loyalties. Foucault's self-problematizing subject cannot elaborate her practical reason in the confines of a closed and suffocating system.⁶² As we will see, Foucault argues that we should not act in conformity with a political conception, but that we should rather present various practical problems to politics. Partisanship, however, puts the allegiance to the party before the ideas/causes defended. Hence Foucault's opposition to "political programs", which produce abuses and political domination (1984i: 746). In consequence, Foucault concludes that we must strive to avoid the political blackmail: "we are for or we are against". According to him, one can both *work with* and *be recalcitrant*. Political engagement does not have to imply complete subjection nor total acceptance: "[i]l faut sortir du dilemme: ou on est pour, ou on est contre. Après tout, on peut être en face et debout. Travailler avec un gouvernement n'implique ni sujétion ni acceptation globale. *On peut à la fois travailler et être rétif*. Je pense même que les deux vont de pair" (Foucault 1981a: 180; my emphasis).

On the other hand, Foucault's dissatisfaction with politics originates from the alleged equivalence between progressivism and revolutionary politics. Revolutionary projects are undertaken on behalf of a "new man": that is, a 'man' created in accord with a theoretical identity elaborated by the revolutionaries. Foucault, however, states on several occasions that he refuses to fight for an abstract conception of 'man' (1975c: 817). As we saw, Foucault recommends ways to fight for concrete freedom and puts forward a mode

of orientation suited for subjects who think and act in the midst of this world. Moreover, radical and global projects also require an all-encompassing allegiance and identification. Revolutionary projects call for an “heroic” conception of political identity. Foucault, well-aware that there is a fine line between ‘true’ and ‘false’, ‘good’ and ‘evil’, does not feel “capable” of overturning every aspect of a culture and creating a new society out of a vacuum:

its quite true that I don't feel myself capable of effecting the ‘subversion of all codes’, ‘dislocation of all orders of knowledge’, revolutionary affirmation of violence’, ‘overturning of all contemporary culture’ [...]. My project is far from being of comparable scope. To give some assistance in wearing away certain self-evidences and commonplaces about madness, normality, crime and punishment; to bring it about, together with many others, that certain acts no longer be spoken so lightly, certain acts no longer, or at least no longer unhesitatingly, performed; to contribute to changing certain things in people's ways of perceiving and doing things; to participate in this difficult displacement of forms of sensibility and thresholds of tolerance - I hardly feel capable of attempting much more than that” (1991: 83).

Foucault's political ontology is thus of a different scope than the revolutionary projects and hardly fits in a form of militancy based on a party system. In opposition to many commentators, and as we can see from the second half of the last quote, the late Foucault does not, however, embrace an aesthetic and a-political life. On the contrary, he believes that we have to fight against the individuals' integration into a totality, through the correlation of an intense “individualization” and of a “consolidation of this totality”, inherent to our “political rationality” (1988c: 827). Foucault's political ontology, as he states it himself, can be embodied only in a “new form of politics”.

2. Foucault and Social Dialogue

Foucault's critique of the total identification and definitive loyalty intrinsic to the game of politics is probably more relevant in an age of fragmented identities. It has been stated on several occasions throughout this thesis that subjects act from a variety of perspectives and that strong evaluations concerning which identities ought to be prioritised are tentative, non-definitive and context-bound evaluations. Thus, one's militant identity can hardly stand above and trump one's other aspects of life on a permanent basis. Even if political identities are not as strong as they were in the seventies, membership in a party or a social movement is still not always compatible with a fluid notion of politics where complex citizens are not expected to agree on everything. Since the contemporary subject might have to act politically for causes and ideas which cut across parties and social movements, Foucault's political ontology is far from being outdated today.

As it was alluded to earlier, Foucault's main insight is that we should not analyse and act on a practical issue *from* a pre-defined political scheme, but rather *bring to* politics the problems we encounter in our practical existence. Foucault's "ethico-political position" is to identify the main 'danger' and then present it to politics (1983a: 386). Talking about his own experience, Foucault says: "[j]e n'ai jamais cherché à analyser quoi que ce soit du point de vue de la politique; mais toujours à interroger la politique sur ce qu'elle avait à dire des problèmes auxquels elle était confrontée" (1984d: 595). The elaboration of a field of facts, practices and thoughts which need to be brought to politics is what he calls a "problematization" (593). Foucault's pragmatic approach is thus poles apart from a blind application of a doctrine. On the contrary, he proceeds through a

cautious and demanding experimentation where what is thought is confronted with what is said, and what is said with what is done (1984c: 585). This is why the heroism of political identity had its time. What we are fluctuates with the various problems that we are facing. The corresponding form of political association, argues Foucault, is not a total *engagement in* a movement or party, but an *experience with* people who struggle with the same problem, who are confronted by the same ‘danger’: “[l]’héroïsme de l’identité politique a fait son temps. Ce qu’on est, on le demande, au fur et à mesure, aux problèmes avec lesquels on se débat: comment y prendre part et parti sans s’y laisser piéger. Expérience avec... plutôt qu’engagement dans...” (1979: 785).

How to take part in a political struggle without being trapped and pigeonholed is thus Foucault’s main political interrogation. Although Foucault does not formulate it explicitly, some commentators, reconstructing Foucault’s political thought, argue that he answered his question by laying out a form of *agonic* activity which can be redescribed as a kind of democratic politics (Owen 1994, 1999, Tully 1999b, 1999c, Falzon 1998, Osborne 1999, McNay 1998). But before entering into the details of Foucault’s view on democracy, it has to be proven that his thought contains democratic seeds. For Foucault does not offer a comprehensive theory of democracy, nor does he discuss at length or criticize other conceptions of democracy. However, Foucault’s thought is, I will argue, democratic ‘in essence’. As a tenacious critique of the subject-centred philosophies, Foucault puts forward a dialogical or intersubjective approach to philosophy. It is thus possible, as I will try to demonstrate, to extract from Foucault’s philosophical *ethos* an agonic conception of democracy.

The work of many philosophers, in the second half of the twentieth century, has incited philosophy to take an “intersubjective turn”. It has become extremely difficult for a philosopher to elaborate a monological conception of consciousness and identity formation. Even someone like Jean-Paul Sartre, who was and still is (erroneously I believe) considered to be the author of a radically individualistic conception of freedom and autonomy, points toward, in his last major philosophical treaty (*Critique de la raison dialectique*), an embedded and dialogical vision of human freedom.⁶³ More conventionally, Hannah Arendt is seen as one the pioneers of the intersubjective tradition. Rising up against philosophers’ proclivity to think about human freedom *in abstracto* (free-will) and to valorize *la vita contemplativa*, she argues that freedom lies in our interaction with others in a common public space. Freedom is, for Arendt, political in essence:

Avant de devenir un attribut de la pensée ou une qualité de la volonté, la liberté a été comprise comme le statut de l’homme libre, qui lui permettait de se déplacer, de sortir de son foyer, d’aller dans le monde et de rencontrer d’autres gens en actes et en paroles. [...] Être libre exigeait, outre la simple libération, la compagnie d’autres hommes, dont la situation était la même, et demandait un espace public commun où les rencontrer - un monde politiquement organisé, en d’autres termes, où chacun des hommes libres pût s’insérer par la parole et par l’action (1972: 192).

In his theory of communicative action, Habermas also gives a dialogical spin to his philosophical framework. Communicative reason is, according to him, the most efficient way out of the subject-centred philosophies. One of Habermas’ main arguments is that we ought to replace the paradigm of the (monological) knowing subject with the one based on the agreement reached by subjects capable of speaking and acting (1988: 350). From Habermas’ standpoint, mutual understanding (*intercompréhension*) must

succeed consciousness as the dominant philosophical paradigm. From a hermeneutical perspective, Charles Taylor might be the contemporary philosopher who has done the most to exhibit the dialogical character of the processes of identity formation and, *a fortiori*, to reveal the inadequacy of the unencumbered or “antecedently individuated” self. Building on theorists such as Mead and Bakhtin, Taylor suggests that the formation of human spirit is not monological, but rather proceeds from the encounter with others (1992: 48). It is only through the intersubjective sharing and use of a language that one can claim an identity and take a stance on existential issues. To put it differently, human beings evolve in various “webs of interlocution” where they seek recognition from others (Taylor 1989: 36). For all these philosophers, the practices of identity formation are dialogical, and democracy - where people can deliberate about how they will be governed (in the broad, Foucaultian, understanding of governance) - is the corresponding form of politics. In these various frameworks, identity and politics proceed from what Falzon calls “social dialogues” (1998: 5).

Foucault’s turn to intersubjective philosophy and politics is less straightforward. It has to be reconstructed from his account of the relationship between the subject and power sketched out in Chapter Two. As we saw, power only exists in actions and is embodied in the relations among subjects who seek to structure the field of possibilities of other subjects. Power relations are omnipresent but constantly challenged, channelled, altered or repelled by restive subjects who rebel against certain forms of governance. “The fundamental encounter with the other”, suggests Falzon, “is an encounter with that which does not simply yield to us, which does not simply fall into line with our beliefs and fancies, but which has an independence from us, resists us, and is able to affect us in

return” (1998: 36). Alterity, for Foucault, does not vanish in identity. A social space is an encounter between different subjects who seek to orient the conducts of others. A given form of order thus emerges, in Foucault’s framework, out of the clashes of different subjectivities in a practical system.

Power is embedded in a ‘game’ played by various ‘partners’ (Foucault: 1982a: 233). The very notion of partnership implies that each and every participant ought to get to speak in her or his own terms. Foucault’s respect for alterity, if never overtly affirmed as it is by someone such as Emmanuel Levinas, is nevertheless tacit and palpable in his vision of the role of the intellectual - who should not be seen as a “representative consciousness” (1972: 309) - and in his “ethic of dialogue”. This Foucaultian ethic of dialogue is best displayed in an interview with Rabinow entitled “Polemics, Politics and Problematizations”. In this interview, Foucault states that he does not belong to the world of intellectuals who use polemical reason as an argumentative device. While the “serious game of questions-answers” is played by partners who possess an inherent right to speak out, the participants in a “polemic” are, in contrast, “opponents” who refuse to call their own positions into question (1984d: 591). Differently put, two different *telei* are at stake here: an ethic of dialogue strives for an unguaranteed “reciprocal elucidation”, while the polemist pushes for the elimination of a threatening adversary. As Owen remarks, to enter in a Foucaultian ethic of dialogue does not entail that we accept the other’s viewpoints uncritically. On the contrary, once the other has spoken in her own terms, the serious game of reciprocal elucidation implies that we redescribe, challenge and seek to modify the other’s statement (1999).

Despite the commonplace observations on the later Foucault's alleged retreat from politics, his thought remains dialogical even when he focuses on ethical practices. Foucault's notion of freedom *qua* practices of the self, as it was alluded to earlier, needs to be supported by a multiplicity of social relations (1982b: 358).⁶⁴ The human mind is not, for Foucault, a *tabula rasa* and, therefore, the practices of the self are based on conventions and norms that the subject finds in its culture. In contrast with Nietzsche, Foucault situates the activities of self-problematization and self-overcoming within the contingent and political realm of intersubjectivity. As a consequence, one can argue that our "becoming-in-the-world is always already a becoming-with-others" (Owen 1995: 497). Moreover, dialogue with difference might even be seen as one of the conditions of possibility for thinking and acting differently and, *eo ipso*, to free ourselves from ourselves.⁶⁵ Foucault's thought is thus thoroughly dialogical and fully respectful of alterity.

3. What is Agonic Democracy?

Foucault's thought is thus not by any means incompatible with democratic politics. Quite the opposite, it calls for a "new form" of democratic politics. Political transformations, from a Foucaultian perspective, are aimed through an *experience with* people struggling for political/economic resources or dissatisfied with a form of recognition. Unsurprisingly, political changes should not proceed from the will of a group of elites or political representatives deliberating behind close doors. Foucault's conception of democracy shares very little with executive democracy: "it seems to me that 'what is to be done' ought not to be determined from above by reformers, be they prophetic or legislative, but by a long work of comings and goings, of exchanges,

reflections, trials, different analyses” (Foucault 1991: 84). If to be politicized and to politicize means to choose between already existing and unchangeable mechanisms of power, Foucault believes that it is not worth it to engage with politics. The new form of politicization he has in mind calls for an exploration of new spaces and alternate public spheres. For Foucault, playing quietly in the already constituted political chess-board (*l'échiquier politique*) is not enough (1977b: 234). This new way of doing politics could be embodied in what Foucault sometimes calls a multifarious *nouvelle pensée de gauche*, which does not aim at perfect unity. For a very short time, he associated the unfolding of this new progressivist political thought with the beginning of Mitterand’s reign, where politicians, intellectuals and practitioners were working together, from their own individualities, on common practical issues (1983b: 453).

This form of politics can be retranscribed in a conception of agonic democracy. As Owen reminds us through Nietzsche’s reading of the Greeks, political agonism originates from the Greek *polis* and Olympics. Nietzsche sees, according to Owen, agonism as an “immanent feature of modern culture” (1995: 140). In a disenchanted world, deprived of universal landmarks, values such as the Good and the Right can only stem from the competition between various perspectives defended by anchored subjects. Hence Nietzsche’s interest in the character of the Greek culture, which is not based on *transcendental* judgements concerning the Good and the Right, but rather on *perspectival* judgements conveyed by citizens in the *polis*. As it is posited by Castoriadis, the Greeks’ great insight is the discovery of the arbitrariness and contingency of the *nomos*. This discovery, according to Castoriadis, opens up an endless discussion on what is just and unjust, and on what is a good political regime (1990: 128). The Greeks, says Castoriadis,

create truth as a *democratic philosophy*: that is, as a thought which endlessly contests its own limits. Thinking, adds Castoriadis as a corollary, is not the domain of God-like subjects, but of citizens who deliberate in the space created by the agonic/perspectival *ethos*:

Mais les Grecs *créent la vérité* comme mouvement interminable de la pensée mettant constamment à l'épreuve ses bornes et se retournant sur elle-même (réflexivité), et ils la créent comme philosophie démocratique : penser n'est pas l'affaire des rabbins, de prêtres, de mollahs, de courtisans ou de renonçants - mais de citoyens qui veulent discuter dans un espace public créé par ce même mouvement (1990: 127).

If Nietzsche's interpretation is correct, it is not only the game of politics, but also the practices of identity formation and reformation which have an agonal character in Greek culture. In '*Homer on Competition*', Nietzsche directs our attention to the (civic and personal) value of contestation and competition between fellow citizens. Competition and challenges are seen as means to channel or subsume envy in the acquisition of new virtues. An agonic mode of being-with-others intensifies, to put it in Foucaultian terms, one's practices of the self. Envy is transformed in the acquisition of new virtues rather than in the attempt to annihilate the other. Thus on Nietzsche's account, "the public culture of Greek society cultivated human powers through an institutionalized ethos of contestation in which citizens strove to surpass each other and, ultimately, to set new standards of nobility" (Owen 1995: 139). Ostracism, in this context, is therefore a means to maintain the ongoing competition between citizens by removing a pre-eminent individual (the "genius") whose perspectives appear to be unassailable. "For why," concludes Nietzsche, should nobody be the best? Because with that, competition would

dry up and the permanent basis of life in the Hellenic state would be endangered” (Nietzsche 1994: 191).

In Foucault’s time this agonic activity takes a different form. However, the idea that one increases one’s capacity through the encounter with difference remains. This is, as we saw above, what Foucault calls “reciprocal elucidation”. A reciprocal elucidation is not a dialectical fusion of horizons, but a willingness to take seriously and to ‘experience’ with contrasting (and sometimes incommensurable) perspectives. Agreement or reconciliation, albeit not impossible, is unlikely. The only normative pre-requisite assumed in Foucault’s reciprocal elucidation framework is that one is prepared to recognise the other as a free subject entitled to speak for herself, rather than as an illegitimate interlocutor (1984d: 591). The engagement in this type of critical dialogue forces us to articulate our ethical perspectives, renders patent the fact that our worldview is one among many (i.e. our worldview is perspectival rather than comprehensive) and, *a fortiori*, enables us to become more intelligible to ourselves and others. To put it in Foucault’s terms, the activity of agonism enhances the possibility of a critical ontology of ourselves. There is no guarantee, however, that the “force of the better argument” will mean the same thing to every participant at the end of a reciprocal elucidation.

This attitude brings Foucault to an agonic conception of democracy. As we saw earlier, Foucault is profoundly dissatisfied with the model of representative democracy and believes that revolutionary politics is ill-adapted to subjects bearing polyphonic identities. At this point, we can add that the critique he launches to politics is still highly relevant today. As Chantal Mouffe argues, even if “liberal democracy seems to be recognized as the only legitimate form of government, disaffection and discontent with

contemporary politics are becoming widespread” (1999). Moreover, we cannot presume, as I suggested in Chapter One, that the contemporary subject, facing intense dilemmas in the articulation of her practical identities, will choose in every situation to prioritise an aspect of her identity. Political transformation must therefore not be sought at the expense of the ‘free’ articulation of intertwined and oppositional practical identities. In other words, the activity of engaging with politics has to be reimagined in line with the contemporary fragmentation and pluralization of identity. Once we take this into consideration, a conception of agonic democracy then contains two elements which can enhance the ‘free’ articulation of plural identities. First, it enables the citizen to be many things, that is, to hold and defend multiple political identities. One, in Foucault’s framework, does not have to choose between being a socialist, a nationalist, a feminist or an ecologist. Unavoidably, these loyalties will be at times incompatible and, consequently, engender for the subject internal struggles and conflicts. The problem is not so much with the content of socialism, feminism, nationalism and environmentalism, but with their propensity and willingness to stand above or in the background of all other political identifications. Differently put, problems arise when a political identity parades as a *theoretical* identity. However, with Foucault, the citizen can decline its identity conjuncturally. We ask what we are as we are going along and in relation to the problems that we are currently facing (1979: 785). Indeed, adds Foucault, even if the struggles for economic and political resources are far from being outdated, most of the struggles today revolve around the question: “who are we?”. These struggles, that we now call identity politics, emerge from a categorical refusal of the ascription or external imposition of an identity by the state, bureaucracy, science, philosophy and the like. According to

Foucault, these struggles “sont un refus de ces abstractions, un refus de la violence exercée par l’État économique et idéologique qui ignore qui nous sommes individuellement, et aussi un refus de l’inquisition scientifique ou administrative qui détermine notre identité” (1982a: 227).

These “we”s that emerge from identity politics are, however, qualitatively different than what usually counts as a “we”. In its traditional understanding, the constitution of a “we” implies a definitive and all-encompassing identification to the community. For example, to join a nationalist, socialist or feminist movement implies that one’s citizen identity merges with the movement’s political activity, and that one will respect and embrace *ad nauseam* the movement’s values and positions. The “we” is thus the starting point of any political activity and the only political site from where one can act politically. As we know, this portrait is incompatible with the account of identity given in Chapter One. The contemporary subject potentially belongs to several - and sometimes discrepant - “we”s. The boundary between the ‘good side’ and the ‘other side’ in some battles might shift in the context of other struggles. All-encompassing allegiances, as well as clear-cut antagonisms, can hardly be sustained. It is more than likely that an ‘insider’ and an ‘outsider’ in a specific political struggle should in fact share some fragments of identity.⁶⁶ The constitution of a community who can act politically must consequently be rethought in line with the contemporary fragmentation and pluralization of identity.

Foucault’s political agonism provides us with a way to partially bypass these aporias without evacuating the very notion of political solidarity. Expanding on a comment made by Richard Rorty, Foucault argues that, in his framework, there is no

“we” prior to the problematization of a field of experience. Differently put, to engage with a political problem does not require the constitution of a community based on a consensus among the members of the group. Solidarity, for Foucault, can only be the provisory result or the endstate of the problematization: “le ‘nous’ ne me semble pas devoir être préalable à la question; il ne peut être que le résultat - et le résultat nécessairement provisoire - de la question telle que se pose dans les termes nouveaux où on la formule” (1984d: 594). To be fair, it seems that there must be a ‘proto-we’ that finds problematic or dangerous specific regimes of truth or certain relations of power for Foucault’s framework to be coherent.⁶⁷ For example, the citizens who fought with Foucault against the mental normalisation of individuals through psychiatric institutions have to share *some* concerns and values about how madness was treated in the 1960’s. The important thing, however, is that consensuality is not seen as the condition of possibility for political action and transformation.⁶⁸ People who disagree on various aspects of life can still act together on issues of common concern. A citizen can take up her identity as a socialist without giving up her commitments to the environment or to her nation. In other words, one’s engagement in a movement does not imply the endless subordination of one’s other aspects of identity. On the contrary, the only question that needs to be asked is: “what can we do for each other in the here and now?” Politicization must originate from the specific activities, the personal stories and grievances of the recalcitrant subjects involved in the struggle (1976b: 110). Foucault’s view on political transformation thus implies the *ad hoc* formation of communities of action, the constitution of revocable associations, who strive, *with* all their differences and for various reasons, for the modification, alteration or abolition of a given practical system. Facing fluid and polysemical relations of power,

centers of resistance also have to be mobile and transitory (Foucault 1976: 127). The success of some political reforms in psychiatry or in the penal system prove, according to Foucault, the efficacy and potency of “discontinuous” and “scattered” offensives (1977a: 162). The ‘politicisation of existence’, in Foucault’s conjecture, is not channelled through an obligatory reference to an ideology or a party affiliation, but rather takes form, *en passant*, in the citizens’ conjunctural practical struggles.⁶⁹ And the absence of long term objectives for a political movement is not, according to Foucault, a sign of weakness. Commenting on the Iranians’ short term goal of overturning the shah (which was in fact the only rallying point for the Iranian people’s revolt), Foucault points out that “l’absence d’objectifs à long terme n’est pas un facteur de faiblesse. Au contraire, c’est parce qu’il n’y a pas de programme de gouvernement, c’est parce que les mots d’ordre sont courts qu’il peut y avoir une volonté claire, obstinée, presque unanime” (1978b: 702). Political transformation has more chance to be successful if the scope of agreement between the participants is narrow and limited. This type of ‘realist progressivism’, which is content with partial victories and modest gains,⁷⁰ recognizes the mutable character of contemporary identities. In the recent years, this type of political solidarity has been called ‘coalition building’ or ‘affinity politics’. The “experience with”, which stresses the tentative, experimental and temporary character of political solidarity, appears to be a form of association more attuned to plural identities than the traditional “engagement in”.⁷¹ As Clifford remarks, “there is no guarantee of ‘postcolonial’ solidarity” (1997: 261).

This first feature of Foucault’s agonistic conception of democracy, where various *ad hoc* communities of action *compete* for power and recognition against other alliances and in relation with governments, political parties and social institutions, points to a broader

characteristic of Foucault's political agonism. As we saw, Foucault does not believe that we ought to be loyal and true to a given identity. Foucault suggests in his work that one's identity might change over time and space through one's various 'experiences with'. He does not attempt, in his reflections on identity and politics, to rule out the possibility that one feels the need to reinterpret, amend or discard a given aspect of one's identity. Accordingly, Foucault's agonistic take on political transformation is not driven by a will to find definitive political solutions and forms of recognition. For instance, he does not believe that there are any politics which could definitively resolve all the problems concerning madness or mental health (1984d: 593, 594). Moreover, Foucault realises, once again under Nietzsche's influence, that identities are likely to change *during* the very activity of political disclosure. Through competition and deliberation, citizens gain in self-knowledge and learn about contrasting comprehensive doctrines. As it is argued by Seyla Benhabib, "[i]t is the deliberative process itself that is likely to produce such an outcome by leading the individual to further critical reflection on his already held views and opinions; [...] the very procedure of articulating a view in public imposes a certain reflexivity on individual preferences and opinions" (1996: 71). Competition with others increases one's capacities and deliberation enables one to become more intelligible to oneself. As identities change through the experience in various intersubjective processes, political needs and forms of recognition change as well. As a result, the nature of struggles for recognition is not, as it is often assumed in negotiations between central governments and nationalist movements or First Nations, to lock a definitive form of recognition in a treaty or a constitution, but rather to elaborate a language, open to

amendment and alteration, in which the people who engages in identity politics can recognize and affirm itself (Tully 1995, 1999a).⁷²

Foucault's agonistic conception of democracy thus implies that the activity of politics is not bound by a set of immutable rules and norms. Politics is not only the struggle for resources and recognition within a given mode of governance, but also the game played by citizens who seek to modify the rules of the game. Politics, from an agonistic perspective, "is the type of game in which the framework - the rules of the game - can come up for deliberation and amendment in the course of the game" (Tully 1999b). The *agon* inherent to the game of politics lies in its mutable character; that is, in the freedom of diverse citizens, bringing into play various aspects of their identity (gender, nationality, generational belonging, militancy, and so on), to modify the rules in accordance with their mis/unrecognised identity-related difference(s). As we saw in the previous chapter, Foucault uses a 'broad' concept of agonism. As Tully remarks, Foucault's political agonism is embodied in a "permanent provocation" rather than in purely antagonistic and adversarial confrontation:

Rather than restricting 'agonism' to formal games and face-to-face contests, he extends its application to any form of activity or language game in which the coordination of action is potentially open to dispute, as a 'permanent provocation', and, within these manifold games, to any form of reciprocal interplay, or 'incitation and struggle', disputation takes, from sedimented games of domination where free play is reduced to a minimum at one end, through all the forms of negotiation and provisional agreements and disagreements, up to direct confrontations that break up game at the other end (1999b).

Political freedom, in this context, lies in the capacity to test the rules, laws and conventions which constitute the stepping stones of a political society. Rather than an

end-state free of power relations, freedom is the capacity to compete and deliberate with others, in a context of mutual respect, on the terms of the political association. In line with the broader practices of freedom described in Chapter Two, political freedom *is* the activity of struggle and deliberation in which subjects take up their ‘citizen identity’ and call into question modes of governance which are taken to be universal, necessary and obligatory.

Conclusion

Far from being a-political, Foucault has a conflictual, and yet important, relationship with politics. His politics of the “experience with” originates directly from his profound dissatisfaction with the association between political transformations on one side, and revolutionary politics and partisanship on the other. For Foucault, the formation of *ad hoc* communities of action which cautiously experiment how a given practical system can be modified is more attuned with subjects upholding multiple affiliations than the “heroism of political identity”. Moreover, Foucault’s agonistic conception of democracy also seeks to turn our heads around about what it means for politics to be the locus of mediation between contrasting interests. As Tully’s investigation of modern constitutionalism reveals, western societies have been driven, at least in theory, by the will to find definitive and a-temporal solutions, entrenched in sacrosanct constitutions, to the problems raised by citizens and peoples struggling for resources and/or recognition (1995). Foucault, who directs our attention to how identities change through the very exercise of citizenship, and tries to open up a space for the exploration of new forms of

subjectivity, believes that politics is the game where the rules are tested and altered in the midst of the game.

This democratic agonism stands in sharp contrast with the dominant models of deliberative and liberal democracy. Although my aim here is not to present a comprehensive comparative analyses of the paradigmatic theories of democracy, it remains important to point out how agonic democracy impels us to think differently about democratic politics. In contemporary political theory, John Rawls' political liberalism, embodied in the idea of an "overlapping consensus", and Jürgen Habermas' discourse ethic figure as the dominant theories of democracy. Even if they disagree on the specifics of what ought to be a procedural conception of democracy, the Rawls-Habermas quarrel remains family business. As Habermas puts it, the members of the Kantian tradition "[a]ll share the intention of analysing the conditions for making *impartial* judgements of practical questions, judgements based solely on reason" (1989: 43; my emphasis). This will to impartiality leads them to bring back practical issues in the realm of theory, where definitive sets of rules can be elaborated. For theorists such as Rawls and Habermas, a rational consensus concerning the source of authority and legitimacy can be reached through "some form of public reasoning" (Mouffe 1999), and freedom lies in the entrenchment of a set of rights in a constitution.⁷³ This is characteristic, according to Foucault, of the eighteenth century's juridical rationality, which could, in every conjuncture, decide between good and evil.⁷⁴ The problem with these conceptions of democracy, as Tully notes, "is that they disregard one of its central characteristics, one which always exceeds the grasp of theory and explanation: the freedom of speaking and acting differently in the course of the game and so modifying the rules or even

transforming the game itself” (Tully 1999b). Freedom, for people like Arendt, Foucault, Castoriadis and Tully, is the possibility to bring into play new worldviews, to describe our identity differently when we feel mis/unrecognised, to test the validity of the *nomos* constitutive of the political association, to get to speak in our own terms in agonic dialogues with diverse others who can also use the language best suited to the articulation of their identity. Practical reason, for these theorists, is enhanced by a set of entrenched ethical values that we find in our culture, but not closed at a frontier or bounded by impartial and universal rules.

This agonic conception of democracy, more modest than the “subversion of all codes”, “disruption of all orders of knowledge” or “overturning of all contemporary culture”, simply wants to create a space where diverse citizens can amend the framework of the political association while their identities change through the exercise of citizenship. However, if the ‘agonic democrat’ is not compelled to question and transgress everything, since parts of his or her experience constitute the very condition of possibility for the activity of problematization, s/he does not seek reconciliation and consensuality at any cost. In the so-called “modernism-postmodernism” debate, the issue of *fragmentation* is one of the main sources of disagreement. Theorists such as Taylor and Habermas, for example, believe that the phenomena of fragmentation threatens the integrity of contemporary cultures and societies. Translating Tocqueville’s fear of fragmentation in the context of contemporary societies, Taylor argues that the incapacity to create and uphold a collective project, a *projet de société*, has succeeded despotism as the main *malaise* of our time:

Le danger ne réside pas tant dans un contrôle despotique que dans la fragmentation - c'est-à-dire dans l'inaptitude de plus en plus grande des gens à former un projet commun et à le mettre en exécution. La fragmentation survient lorsque les gens en viennent à se concevoir eux-mêmes de façon de plus en plus atomiste, autrement dit, de moins en moins liés à leurs concitoyens par des projets et des allégeances communes (1992: 140).

And he continues:

La fragmentation peut se développer au point que les gens ne s'identifient plus à leur communauté politique, que leur sentiment d'appartenance se déplace ou périclite purement et simplement (147).

This fear of fragmentation leads Taylor to a communitarian conception of democracy. In his framework, he insists on the richness of sharing with others a common loyalty to a community which is not a mere aggregate of individuals. In contrast with Kymlicka (1989), for whom a community is a "context of choice", Taylor argues that our belonging to a community is inextricably tied up to our sense of who we are, to our identity. This position has not been completely ruled out by the reconceptualization of the notion of culture presented in Chapter One and by the agonistic conception of democracy adumbrated here. Our belonging to a community, however, has been 'de-transcendentalized'. We can no longer assume that the identification to a nation or a smaller community will, for diverse subjects who are potentially *dépaysés*, constantly trump the other sources of identification and loyalty, and that there will ever be a consensus on the identity of that community. As we saw, the rearticulation of the notion of community does not dispense with the Hegelian insight that ethical communities are indispensable for identity. It does, however, force us to recognize, against Hegel (and probably Taylor), that these indispensable intersubjective spaces are plural and not only

confined to physical communities. Contemporary subjects, bearing shifting identities and disseminated loyalties, might suffocate in an organic conception of the community. A community, as I write in Chapter One, is a site of deliberation, competition and articulation, not of subsumption.

As a corollary, it is possible to reject Taylor's claim that an agonistic conception of politics ineluctably leads to an atomist and anthropocentric vision of society where everything is reducible to the will of the individual. For Taylor deplores that "the individual has been taken out of a rich community life and now enters instead into a series of mobile, changing, revocable associations, often designed merely for highly specific ends. We end up relating to each other through a series of partial roles" (1989: 502). Despite Taylor's regrets, these partial affiliations are probably the price we have to pay to sustain complex and plural identities. However, the politics of the "experience with", elaborated by Foucault, does not rule out any communitarian, nationalist or environmentalist identification. It only suggests that these identifications will sometimes clash with other allegiances and that it is to the citizen herself, not to the political theorist, to decide how to organize these overlapping and contrasting practical identities. This is what a notion of 'strong evaluations' could mean in a context of plural and fragmented identity.

Conclusion

Mais si les Grecs ont pu créer la politique, la démocratie, la philosophie, c'est aussi parce qu'ils n'avaient ni Livre sacré, ni prophètes. Ils avaient des poètes, des philosophes, des législateurs et des *politai*.
Castoriadis (1990)

Despite the widespread concern for identity in academia, few analyses set out what is at stake in the contemporary phenomena of pluralization and fragmentation of identity. The inchoateness and incompleteness of current theories of identity is the main problem I was responding to in writing this thesis. I thus ventured, in Chapter One, to offer an extended interpretation of what it means to speak about plural and fragmented identities. As corollaries to this main objective, I attempted in my second and third chapters to draw the implications of my reflections on identity for the way we think about subjectivity and democratic politics. In Chapter Two, I arrived at the conclusion that a Foucaultian ethics of creativity (that is, an ethic thoroughly situated in the realm of intersubjectivity) casts the contemporary processes of identity formation and reformation in a better light than the conventional ethics of authenticity and autonomy, as well as the 'postmodern ontologies' described in Chapter One. In Chapter Three, we saw that an agonistic conception of democracy corresponds to the accounts of identity and subjectivity previously elaborated.

Throughout this thesis, I was also concerned with the less explicit objective of taking a stance toward what has been called the postmodernist and poststructural critiques of modernity. On the one hand, I took as fundamental and empowering the poststructural insight that modern humanist epistemology has lost sanction to ground theories of identity, subjectivity and democracy. If, as insightful social theorists like Harvey (1990) and Touraine (1992) stress, modernity is at first a vehement and merciless critique of the

medieval cosmology and essentialisms, it subsequently comes up with its own reifications and myths (Reason, Science, Progress, History, Subject, Class, Nation). As a result, identities could be defined and hierarchised through the exclusive use of theoretical reason. Subjects possessing various transcendental qualities were elaborated, and the superiority and necessity of liberal democracy was grounded in a metaphysical view of human agency. If we can still find attempts, in the work of contemporary theorists, to confer to philosophy a foundational role, the proliferation of, firstly, Wittgensteinian and Foucaultian approaches to philosophy, and, secondly, poststructuralism in both academia and the social imaginary (the academia being a part of the larger social imaginary) renders such accounts *at least* problematic and debatable.

On the other hand, the idea that epistemology can no longer ground theories of identity, subjectivity and democracy sometimes leads to the bolder claim that we can do *without* these concepts even if they were de-essentialized. Hence, for instance, the vast literature on the “death”, “dissolution” or “return” of the subject, and the alleged impossibility of generating a positive political position from a poststructural standpoint.⁷⁵ The disqualification of normative notions such as authenticity, freedom, nationalism or emancipatory politics (notions deeply ingrained in people’s ethical substance and lifeworlds) must, however, be channelled through - once again - the exclusive use of theoretical reason. These radical critiques, in my opinion, are opaque to the idea that our very capacity to contest and transgress convention-ridden ways of thinking and acting is fostered through a set of entrenched ethical values. I have consequently attempted to take up the early Foucault's problematization of modernity in a way that differed from these radical critiques. And so, I find in the work of Foucault (and Wittgenstein) the -not

always explicit- incentive to patriate social and political theory to the realm of practical reason.

My view on identity, subjectivity and democracy, sketched out in the thesis, is filtered through a particular approach to critical thinking. Philosophy, in my framework (and as the Castoriadis epigraph illustrates), cannot rely on a holy book, and theorists are not prophets. The political theorist, thinking and acting from within the public realm, reflects on and criticizes identity-narratives or political decisions through dialogues with other citizens. S/he, as a citizen, strives to conduct the conduct of others in various intersubjective spaces. As a corollary, the political theorist's redescrptions, to use Rorty's concept, gain sanction only to the extent that the alternative narratives or vocabularies s/he proposes win public assent. In other words, the political theorist, *qua* citizen, does not reflect from above on society and politics, but plays the agonic game of deliberation, competition and reciprocal elucidation in the *agora*. At a 'methodological' level, this approach to critical reflection attempts to bring back political theory to the confines of practical and dialogical reason.

As Tully notes, some contemporary political theorists hold the belief that certain modes of critical reflection must and can assume a foundational role (1989). Political theory, from that perspective, serves as a foundation for practical reasoning and elaborates the framework of the agonic activity. As an alternative to that way of seeing, I privileged a more 'modest' approach where political theory takes an important part of the game of practical reasoning. This standpoint explains the emphasis throughout this thesis on *practical* identities, *concrete* and *embedded* forms of subjectivity, *practices* of freedom

and *agonic* democracy. As Foucault points out, we are perhaps, in adopting this approach to philosophy, missing something universal and transcendental that is operating behind our backs (1976b: 111), but we are also avoiding making of those historically created elements of our experience, necessary and unpassable limits to our way of thinking and acting.

Endnotes to Chapter 1

¹ See Lipovetsky (1983: 10) and Gauchet (1998). In the Anglo-Saxon academia, the work of theorists like Christopher Lasch, Anthony Giddens (1991), Zygmunt Bauman (1996), Scott Lash and Jonathan Friedman (1992) is partially based on the idea that modernity is fundamentally individualistic and echoes the work of the French Tocquevillians.

² “Identity is such a concept -operating ‘under erasure’ in the interval between reversal and emergence; an idea which cannot be thought in the old way, but without which certain key questions cannot be thought at all” (Hall 1996: 2).

³ It appears to me that William Connolly is engaged in a similar project: “It seems even less possible to live with difference outside the space of identity, even if the identity one has were to become pluralized, that is, even if the self were to become the locus of competing identities. Even if a ‘way of life’ without identity turned out to be possible, it would still be undesirable” (1991: 158).

⁴ This historical supercession, which postulates a full shift from honour to equality, does not render the historical mutations of the past centuries in all their complexities. It eludes the multiplicity of conflicting ethical orientations and the overlapping or interweaving of ‘old’ and ‘new’ values in one’s ethical life. It would be hard, for instance, to argue that there is no residue of an honour ethic in the contemporary identity politics. Wittgenstein’s metaphor of the Ancient city, then, seems more appropriate than the Hegelian supercession argument. Thanks to James Tully for pointing that out to me.

⁵ The aim here is neither to unduly fix the pre-modern personality nor to confer full sovereignty to the modern subject. On the contrary, as Marx aptly notices, processes of identity formation for different individuals take place in uneven and asymmetrical social and economic contexts (and are based on different psychological backdrops, we should add). “[J]ust as they do not begin where they please”, identity narratives “cannot go on exactly as they please either; each character is constrained by the actions of others and by the social settings presupposed in his and their actions” (MacIntyre 1981: 200).

⁶ “La modernité est l’antitradition, le renversement des conventions, des coutumes et des croyances, la sortie des particularismes et l’entrée dans l’universalisme, ou encore la sortie de l’état de nature et l’entrée dans l’âge de la raison”, adds Touraine (1992: 262).

⁷ As Madan Sarup puts it, identity is “the story we tell of ourselves and which is also the story others tell of us” (1996: 3). For a telling illustration of the fictive character of identity building, where the boundaries between *rêverie* and reality are tenuous and blurred, see Milan Kundera’s last novel *L’identité* (1997).

⁸ As Taylor suggests, casting our lives in narratives is a way to “look for the time wasted”, in Proust’s sense. Since life has no inherent or pregiven meaning anymore, living a non-teleological existence might lead to sentiments of emptiness and idleness. “Another way the question can arise for us is whether our lives have unity, or whether one day is just following the next without purpose or sense, the past falling in a kind of nothingness which is not the prelude, or harbinger, or opening, or early stage of anything, whether it is just ‘temps perdu’ in the double sense intended in the title of Proust’s celebrated work, that is, time which is both wasted and irretrievably lost, beyond recall, in which we pass as if we had never been” (1989: 43, see also MacIntyre 1981: 202).

⁹ Furthermore, as Christine Korsgaard points out, “conflicts that arise between identities, if sufficiently pervasive or severe, may force you to give one of them up: loyalty to your country and its cause may turn you against pacifist religion, or the reverse” (1996: 120).

¹⁰ For an example of a Canadian born abroad who refuses ‘ghettoisation’, see Neil Bissoondath’s book on multiculturalism (1995). See also Ross Higgins’ comment on the perspectival character of homosexual identity: “[I]e sentiment d’appartenance à un groupe social sur la base de son orientation sexuelle est extrêmement mobile: il varie selon le cheminement de l’individu à travers les époques de sa vie et il est assujetti aux influences des autres facettes de son identité de même qu’au pur hasard de ses lectures, de ses explorations et de ses rencontres” (1998: 129).

¹¹ “La fragmentation de l’identité, son élasticité variable, cela a bien peu à voir avec le confort psychologique que les individus peuvent éprouver envers telle ou telle étiquette, bien moins encore avec le fondement ontologique d’un « nous » qui existerait indépendamment de la *praxis*” (Perron 1998: 154).

¹² Edward Said’s groundbreaking study of Orientalism is a perfect exemplification of this production and self-reassurance of identity through the reification of difference. Orientalists, in their “imaginative demonology of the ‘mysterious Orient’”, assume an “ontological and epistemological distinction” between “the Orient” (the strange) and “the Occident” (the familiar) (1994: 26, 2). *Orientalism* “tries to show that European culture gained in strength and identity by setting itself off against the Orient as a sort of surrogate and even underground self” (3). This gain in strength and identity is attained through the objectivation and containment of “the Orient”: “Yet what gave the Oriental’s world its intelligibility and identity was not the result of his own efforts but rather the whole complex series of knowledgeable manipulation by which the Orient was identified by the West” (40).

¹³ Accordingly, as Étienne Balibar puts it, “the nation as such, a political institution that is always virtually profane even when separation of church and state is not officially proclaimed, *is not sufficient* to totalize or hegemonize discourses, practices, forms of individuality (‘language games’ and ‘forms of life’ in Wittgensteinian terminology), even though it has shown itself to be incomparably more efficient than any universal religion in the reduction of ‘communitarian belongings’” (1995: 181).

¹⁴ “This set of obligations which we have to further and sustain a society founded on the Idea is what Hegel calls *Sittlichkeit*. [...] *Sittlichkeit* refers to the moral obligations I have to an ongoing community of which I a part” (Taylor 1979: 83).

¹⁵ William Connolly, in his forthcoming book, expresses very accurately why community in an age of pluralization and fragmentation cannot be thought in an Hegelian way: “For every individual simultaneously a) crystallizes a particular (perhaps unique) combination of identities made available by the socially established fund of possibilities, b) contains differences that mark it as *deviating from social norms* in particular ways, and c) embodies fugitive currents of energy and possibility *exceeding* the cultural fund of identities and differences through which it is organized.” (1999, my emphasis)

¹⁶ For Richard Rorty, the ironist is “the sort of person who faces up to the contingency of his or her own most central beliefs” (1989: XV). Translated in my project, the ironist is

the sort of person who is aware of the fissures of her/his own identity and of the proclivity to reify otherness.

¹⁷ Hence my problems with Appadurai's assumption that the nation is on its last legs and that a new, postnational, patriotism will succeed to national identifications. For Appadurai, the first meaning of the normative notion of 'postnationality' is "temporal and historical and suggests that we are in the process of moving to a global order in which the nation-state has become obsolete and other formations for allegiance and identity have taken place" (1996:168-9).

¹⁸ Bonnie Honig seems to plead for a refiguration of the notion of 'home' along the lines sketched out here, although her insistence on the idea that "there's no place like home" makes her position more ambiguous and problematic (Honig 1996: 258, 269).

¹⁹ Foucault argues that Sartre, who rejects *a priori* theories of the subject but not the moral notion of authenticity, is inconsequent: "À mon avis, la seule conséquence pratique et acceptable de ce que Sartre a dit consiste à relier sa découverte théorique à la pratique créatrice et non plus à l'idée d'authenticité. Je pense qu'il n'y a qu'un seul débouché pratique à cette idée du soi qui n'est pas donné d'avance: nous devons faire de nous-mêmes une oeuvre d'art" (1994: 392).

²⁰ For instance, see Asha Varadharajan's comment on the "impossibility of authenticity" in a postcolonial time (1995: XVI).

²¹ "il semble que du moment où ils désespèrent de vivre une éternité, ils sont disposés à agir comme s'ils ne devaient exister qu'un seul jour" (Tocqueville 1981: 188).

²² Taylor offers a similar critique about the potency of Camus' character for the interpretation of contemporary identity (1996: 148).

²³ "C'est l'irruption de ces questions dans la sphère d'expérience personnelle (je n'ai pas dit la sphère consciente), en fonction du nouveau statut social et politique des êtres, qui détermine, je crois - c'est en tout cas l'interprétation que je défendrai -, la rupture dans l'idée de l'humain qui se joue autour de 1900. Comme c'est l'irruption de ces questions qui est au foyer des déchirements individuels qu'atteste cette période de tensions exceptionnelles" (1998: 168). According to Gauchet, this phenomenon is responsible for the emergence of a new category of psycho-pathologies: "les pathologies du vide intérieur".

²⁴ This is roughly the position Alexander Nehamas attributes to Nietzsche. However, the "perfect narrative" Nehamas' Nietzsche cherishes seems impossible to create and sustain in a context of late/post modernity. According to Nehamas, "Nietzsche is clearly much more concerned with the question of how one's actions are to fit together into a coherent, self-sustaining, well-motivated whole than he is with the quality of those actions themselves" (1985: 166). See also: "[t]he self-creation Nietzsche has in mind involves accepting everything that we have done and, in the ideal case, blending it into a perfectly coherent whole" (188-9).

²⁵ "Recognition that life is short encourages the self to contribute to the crystallization of its own individuality. Since, as Heidegger says, no one, however rich or powerful, can pay or order another to substitute for him in this performance, foreknowledge of death can encourage a human being to establish priorities in life, to consolidate the loose array of

possibilities floating around and within one into the density of a particular personality with specific propensities, purposes, and principles” (Connolly 1991: 17).

²⁶ It seems to me that Clifford (with his notion of “hybrid authenticity”), Radhakrishnan (“the authenticity I have in mind here is an invention with enough room for multiple rootedness”) and Appiah in his “Identity, Authenticity, Survival” (1994) are all trying to reconfigure the notion of authenticity as a creative process. This take on authenticity is not completely at odds with Taylor’s view. For him, authenticity is a process of discovery/creation which seems to include an opposition to norms and rules, an element of creativity and an “exploration” of ourselves. I cannot, however, fully articulate what Taylor’s notions of “discovery”, “exploration” and “sincerity to ourselves” imply (1992: 65, 72, 86, 87, 115).

The interpretation of the concept of authenticity which shares the most with the one sketched out here can be found in Ferrara’s last book *Reflective Authenticity*. According to him, the concepts of postmetaphysical *phronesis* and *radical reflexivity* must complement the normative notion of authenticity. Postmetaphysical *phronesis* is defined as “the ability to choose between conceptual schemes embedding incompatible or differently ranked values in contexts where no a priori or external standards can be invoked” (1998: 70). Along the same lines, a postmetaphysical radical reflexivity is essential for the articulation of the relationship between our being-in-world and our possible becomings. “A philosophical account of why it is authentic for us – authentic in the sense of “exemplarily congruent with who we want to be” – to adopt the *authenticity-thesis* as a reconstruction of our intuitions concerning validity ought then to appeal only to a concrete narrative about our situated identity, about our unique cultural and historical identity of Westerners on the eve of the twenty-first century” (162).

²⁷ According to Hall, we have to accept “that identities are never unified and, in late modern times, increasingly fragmented and fractured, never singular but multiply constructed across different, often intersecting and antagonistic, discourses, practices and positions. They are subject to a radical historicization, and are constantly in the process of change and transformation” (1996: 4).

²⁸ For Giddens, ontological security is “a sense of continuity and order in events, including those not directly within the perceptual environment of the individual” (1991: 243). For a psychoanalytic and antipsychiatric interpretation of this concept, see Laing (1979).

²⁹ Hence, these very ‘universal’ theoretical identities are strongly contested by anti/post colonialist theorists. As Tully puts it, “[e]ven ‘autonomy’, which was taken by North Atlantic liberals to be an identity given by theoretical reason and so the universal political identity, was argued to be a thing of this world, one important practical identity among many” (1999a).

Endnotes to Chapter Two

³⁰ Throughout this chapter, I will use subjectivity as a complex arrangement of plural identities over time and space. And, as Sarup remarks, subjectivity “includes both

conscious aspects of private experience - reflection upon experiences, memories, etc. - and also the unconscious and its effects" (1996: 52).

³¹ For two different readings of Foucault as the author of a grand theory of power, see Baudrillard (1977) and Habermas (1988).

³² According to Radhakrishnan, for instance, "it is impossible for Foucault the genealogist to theoretically endorse the very principles (freedom, justice, equality, and so on) he would seem to be fighting for" (1996: 18). In Habermas' terms, Foucault is thus caught in a "performative contradiction" (1988). Sarup goes further and adds that "Foucault is rather weak and inadequate on the question of agency and the subject and finds it impossible to deal with identity as experienced" (1996: 74).

³³ Or course, I am not the first one to propose that there is something often neglected in Foucault's later work. My understanding of that subject is strongly influenced by Patton's (1998), Owen's (1994, 1999) and Tully's (1999) readings of Foucault.

³⁴ Along the same lines, Foucault replies to some interviewers that he "believes" in individual freedom and that he does not think that the human mind is made of "soft wax". "Je crois à la liberté des individus. À une même situation, les gens réagissent de manière très différente" (1988a: 782). "L'esprit n'est pas une cire molle, c'est une substance réactive" (1980: 108).

³⁵ "la sentence qui condamne ou acquitte n'est pas simplement un jugement de culpabilité, une décision légale; elle porte avec elle une appréciation de normalité et une prescription technique pour une normalisation possible" (1975: 28).

³⁶ While the monarchical power could "faire mourrir et laisser vivre", bio-power "fait vivre et laisse mourrir".

³⁷ This is how Marcuse sums up his own position: "[i]t was the thesis of *Eros and Civilization*, [...], that man could avoid the fate of a Welfare-Trough-Warfare State only by achieving a new starting point where he could reconstruct the productive apparatus without that 'innerwordly asceticism' which provided the mental basis for domination and exploration. ... 'Polymorphous sexuality' was the term which I used to indicate that the new direction of progress would depend completely on the opportunity to activate repressed or arrested organic, biological needs: to make the human body an instrument of pleasure rather than labor" (1966: XIV, XV).

³⁸ Foucault is only critical of the "extended use" of the concept of liberation because he recognizes that liberation, in anticolonial struggles for example, is sometimes necessary (1984h: 710).

³⁹ In the same vein, we can find in *Discipline and Punish* a similar account of the subject and power relationship: "[l]'homme dont on nous parle et qu'on invite à libérer est déjà en lui-même l'effet d'un assujettissement bien plus profond que lui" (1975: 38).

⁴⁰ This shift in Foucault's thought calls for a revision of the main interpretations of his view on the relation between the subject and power. For instance, since resistance is not in a position of exteriority, Judith Butler's claim that Foucault "suggests that power acts not only *on* the body but also *in* the body, that power not only produces the boundaries of a subject but pervades the interiority of that subject" and that "Foucault formulates resistance as an effect of the very power that it is said to oppose" need to be problematized (1997: 89, 98). In light of the reading of Foucault presented here, it seems

that interpreters of Foucault's work like Butler (and many others) need at least to address the later Foucault's insight in their interpretations.

⁴¹ As Foucault puts it, "je veux dire que, dans cette grande inquiétude autour de la manière de gouverner et dans la recherche sur les manières de gouverner, on repère une perpétuelle question qui serait: "comment ne pas être gouverné comme cela, par cela, au nom de ces principes-ci, en vue de tels objectifs et par le moyen de tels procédés, pas comme ça, pas pour ça, pas par eux" (1990: 39).

⁴² Foucault's genealogies are directed toward non-discursive formations which are 'dangerous', or problematic, in his time. A problematization is for the French thinker an elaboration of a field of facts, practices and thought which raise problems to politics (1984d: 593). Incarceration, for example, is one of the problems of his time. In *Surveiller et punir*, he shows how imprisonment dissimulates its legitimacy behind a will to rehabilitation and humanisation. In reality, penal law does not qualify acts but individuals, and confinement is used to segregate normality from abnormality (Foucault 1975: 26). For an illuminating distinction between the archaeological and genealogical perspectives, see Deleuze (1986: 38, 39, 40).

⁴³ According to Foucault, "chaque certitude n'est sûre que par l'appui d'un sol jamais exploré" (1979: 787).

⁴⁴ "Mon optimisme consisterait plutôt à dire: tant de choses peuvent être changées, fragiles comme elles sont, liées à plus de contingences que de nécessités, à plus d'arbitraire que d'évidence, à plus de contingences historiques complexes mais passagères qu'à des constantes anthropologiques inévitables" (Foucault 1981a: 182).

⁴⁵ As William Connolly argues, "[u]nless genealogy is combined with tactics applied by the self to itself it may well fuel the very resentment against the an-archy of being its advocates are trying to curtail" (1993: 372).

⁴⁶ "Cette forme de pouvoir s'exerce sur la vie quotidienne immédiate, qui classe les individus en catégories, les désigne par leur individualité propre, les attache à leur identité, leur impose une loi de vérité qu'il faut reconnaître en eux" (Foucault 1982a: 227).

⁴⁷ For Foucault, the "art of existence" is "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 faire de leur vie une oeuvre qui porte certaines valeurs esthétiques et réponde à certains critères de styles" (1984l: 18).

⁴⁸ Which does not mean that there are no codes of behaviours in the Greco-Roman *souci de soi*. Rather, it means that the codes of conduct leave room for a variety of ethical practices. For instance, Foucault argues that a Greek man, from within a code of conduct, could 'play' with the (1) determination of his ethical substance, (2) modes of subjection, (3) elaboration of his ethical work and (4) the selection of his teleology (1983c: 556, 557).

⁴⁹ "Le contrôle est une épreuve de pouvoir et une garantie de liberté: une manière de s'assurer en permanence qu'on ne se liera pas à ce qui ne relève pas de notre maîtrise" (Foucault 1984m: 89).

⁵⁰ More than once, Foucault opposes his Nietzschean ethic to Sartre's more Heideggerian ethic. It is however very difficult to contrast clear-cut and mutually exclusive ethics like

Foucault does (Cooke 1997, Ferrara 1998). For instance, Sartre's ethic sometimes sounds like one of pure creativity: "Qu'est-ce que signifie ici que l'existence précède l'essence ? Cela signifie que l'homme existe d'abord, se rencontre, surgit dans le monde, et qu'il se définit après. L'homme, tel que le conçoit l'existentialiste, s'il n'est pas définissable, c'est qu'il n'est d'abord rien. Il ne sera qu'ensuite, et il sera tel qu'il se sera fait" (Sartre 1970: 21, 22). Although I am not prepared to discuss this comparison in great detail, it seems to me that the Sartrean notion of the *salaud* (the inauthentic characters in Sartre's novel) is not an evaluation of the correspondence between one's acts and inner nature, but a "condemnation" of the subject who refuses to carry the burden of freedom. Differently put, the *salaud* is a person who refuses the *tragic responsibility* of being free in a Nietzschean world.

⁵¹ Interviewers: "Telle que vous la comprenez, cependant, la résistance n'est pas uniquement une négation: elle est un processus de création; créer et recréer, transformer la situation, participer activement au processus, c'est cela résister". Foucault: "Oui, c'est ainsi que je définirais les choses" (Foucault 1984i: 741).

⁵² For a corresponding notion of autonomy, see Castoriadis (1995).

⁵³ As Owen puts it, "by rupturing the politico-epistemic grammar of humanist judgement and displacing it with a politico-aesthetic grammar, Foucault's ethics of creativity undermines both the figure of the expert as legislator and the logic of legislation which denotes the 'double bind' of humanism - its simultaneous commitment to, and undermining of, the space of freedom" (1995: 497).

⁵⁴ In Foucault, Deleuze argues, la "[l]utte pour la subjectivité se présente alors comme droit à la différence, et droit à la variation, à la métamorphose" (1986: 113).

⁵⁵ We can find this type of argument in Alain Touraine's (who sees the subject as a "social movement") attempt to rethink the notion of subjectivity:

Le sujet associe le plaisir de vivre à la volonté d'entreprendre, la diversité des expériences vécues au sérieux de la mémoire et de l'engagement. Il a besoin que le Ça rompe les défenses du surmoi autant que d'être fidèle à un visage ou à une langue; parce que la force du désir comme celle de la tradition, l'appel de la consommation et du voyage autant que celui de la recherche et de la production libèrent des rôles et des normes qu'imposent les systèmes et qui objectivent le sujet pour mieux le contrôler (1992: 284).

⁵⁶ Interestingly, even Nietzsche who, as we saw, condemns the liquefaction of subjectivity in fixed and static habits, does not suggest *flânerie* and improvisation as compelling alternatives. He writes that durable habits are the worst things next to improvisation: "La chose sans conteste la plus insupportable, la chose vraiment terrifiante serait pour moi une vie entièrement vierge d'habitudes, une vie qui exige continuellement l'improvisation : - ce serait mon exil et ma Sibérie" (1997: aph. 295).

⁵⁷ As Castoriadis puts it, autonomy is not about finding an immutable law in reason, but to interrogate this law and act on it:

Cette autonomie n'a rien de commun avec l'autonomie kantienne pour de multiples raisons, dont il suffit ici d'en mentionner une: il ne s'agit pas, pour elle, de découvrir dans une Raison immuable une loi qu'elle se donnerait une fois pour toutes - mais de s'interroger sur la loi et ses

fondements, et de ne pas rester fascinée par cette interrogation, mais de faire et d'instituer (donc aussi, de dire). L'autonomie est l'agir réflexif d'une raison qui se crée dans un mouvement sans fin, comme à la fois individuelle et sociale (1990: 131).

⁵⁸ Consequently, Owen argues, "Foucault, like Wittgenstein, acknowledges that there are a plurality of ways in which one can be guided" (1999).

⁵⁹ However, Foucault's oeuvre is too rich, says Touraine, to leave it to the radical critics of modernity. Consequently, Touraine suggests that we rethink the subject with Foucault *against* his own will.

Foucault est resté constamment attaché à une vision purement critique, à la dénonciation du Sujet comme un effet de pouvoir, mais son oeuvre ne lui appartient pas complètement et elle est trop riche pour être doctrinaire; je la lis comme allant, dans sa dernière phase, jusqu'aux frontières de sa propre idéologie, là où s'impose la présence du Sujet au coeur des débats sur la modernité. L'importance de Foucault et sa supériorité sur ses contemporains doctrinaires vient de ce qu'il s'approche au plus près de ce qu'il rejette, comme un artiste religieux dont l'art n'est jamais plus réussi que quand il peint ou sculpte les péchés précipités en enfer. L'oeuvre de Foucault peut participer aussi, malgré Foucault lui-même, à la redécouverte du Sujet (1992: 218, 219).

Since my reading of Foucault is less conditioned by his earlier writings, it is not *against* but *with* Foucault that I attempt to rethink the subject.

⁶⁰ Along the same lines, Foucault writes in "Nietzsche, Genealogy and History" that the purpose of genealogy is not the discovery, but the dissipation of the roots of our identity. But it is rather difficult to determine if this statement is from Foucault's Nietzsche or from his perspective as a theorist.

Endnotes to Chapter Three

⁶¹ Tully (1999a) summarizes neatly this 'democratic revolution':

It is no longer assumed that the identities worthy of recognition, and so constitutive of citizen identity, are identical and can be determined outside of the political process itself, by theoretical reason discovering some transcultural and universal citizen identity, such as autonomy in the Kantian tradition. It is now widely assumed that the identities worthy of recognition must be worked out by members of the association themselves, through the exercise of practical reason in negotiations and agreements.

⁶² Hence the early Foucault's incapacity to stay in the French Communist Party. Although he spent more time in the PCF than he likes to admit (3 years), he could not conform with the party line. For example, homosexuality was for the PCF a bourgeois vice and a sign of decadence (Eribon 1991: 76). For a good illustration of the type of engagement required by the French Communist Party, see Jean-Paul Sartre's play *Les mains sales*.

⁶³ Hence, we are still waiting for an exhaustive analysis of the development of Sartre's philosophical thought from *L'être et le néant* to *Critique de la raison dialectique*. Such an analysis would enable us find out what can still be useful in his thought and would also prevent the one-sided affirmation or critique of his work.

⁶⁴ François Ewald, one of Foucault's former students, tries to show the practices of the self's intrinsic dialogical character by reminding us that to care for ourselves, for the Greeks, implies that we care for others: "[l]e souci de soi est éthique en lui-même ; mais il implique des rapports complexes avec les autres, dans la mesure où cet *éthos* de la liberté est aussi une manière de se soucier des autres ; c'est pourquoi il est important, pour un homme libre qui se conduit comme il faut, de savoir gouverner sa femme, ses enfants, sa maison. L'*éthos* 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" (1996: 25).

⁶⁵ This point has been convincingly demonstrated by Owen: "[i]ndeed, Foucault's concern with the hegemony of humanist structures of recognition may be located in part as a concern with humanism's desire to impose the law of the Same, that is, to institute a closure of our capacity for self-transformation through the elimination of alterity (i.e. its reduction to normality). In this context, our ontological 'thrown-ness' exhibits itself as a relation to the 'thrown-ness' of multiple others whose difference is a condition of possibility of our own self-transformation and whose multiplicity is constitutive of the field of possibilities disclosed to our aesthetic activity" (1994: 205).

⁶⁶ Li Peng's visit in the United States in 1997 is a good example of this phenomenon. Protesting against the greeting in the United States of a statesman for whom human rights were not inviolable, a coalition made up of the extreme-left (in the American context) and of the Christian right manifested loudly their disagreement. Obviously, this coalition could only be created and sustained if the respect for human rights was the only issue at stake (and questions such as the legitimacy of abortion silenced).

⁶⁷ I owe this point to a discussion with James Tully in a seminar on Foucault's work.

⁶⁸ Many theorists, like Habermas and Fraser, interpret Foucault's position as a theoretical *opposition* to the very concept of consensuality. However, Foucault's insistence is not that consensuality is in itself 'bad', but that an alleged consensuality often conceals elements of non-consensuality. For Foucault, consensuality shall be seen as a "critical principle", or as "vanishing point" in Mouffe's words (1995). As he puts it, "il ne faut peut-être pas être pour la consensualité, mais il faut être contre la non-consensualité" (1984c: 590).

⁶⁹ "Il y a une certaine moralisation de la politique et une politisation de l'existence qui ne sont plus aujourd'hui par la référence obligée à une idéologie ou à l'appartenance à un parti, mais qui se font par un contact plus direct des gens avec les événements et avec leurs propres choix d'existence" (1982d: 349, see also Osborne 1999).

⁷⁰ The 'realism' of this mode of political activity lies in its awareness of the ineradicability of power/knowledge relations. As Barry Hindess points out, "[t]he most that such reforms can hope to achieve is to substitute one set of powers for another" (1998: 54).

⁷¹ As usual, Foucault's personal *ethos* intertwines with his theoretical perspectives. For example, in his public intervention against the 1981 institution of the "state of war" in Poland (and the outlawing of *Solidarnosc*), Foucault calls for a "new form of political action". He is there trying to "work with" the French government (who has proclaimed its neutrality) without obeying to it. In doing so, he is both repudiating the "frontal" and "mulish" opposition of certain intellectuals to the government, and the total subjection in this same government: "[l]e problème est de savoir comment on peut, *non pas en obéissant* aux conseils du gouvernement, entretenir avec lui un dialogue, *amorcer un travail*, faire sur lui une pression nécessaire pour essayer d'obtenir qu'il fasse un certain nombre de choses" (Foucault 1982c: 267, my emphasis).

⁷² This is why Tully argues, in contrast with most liberal theorists, that a constitution "is more like an endless series of contracts and agreements, reached by periodical intercultural dialogues, rather than an original contract in the distant past, an ideal speech-situation today, or a mythic unity of the community in liberal and nationalist constitutionalism" (1995: 26).

⁷³ "Discourse theory", writes Habermas, "has the success of deliberative politics depend not on a collectively acting citizenry but on the institutionalization of the corresponding procedures and conditions of communication" (1996: 27). For a good exposition of the points of convergence between Rawls' and Habermas' theories, see Mouffe (1999).

⁷⁴ Answering a question concerning the possibility of a definitive charter of rights and freedom, Foucault responds that "[v]ous avez-là une perspective merveilleusement XVIIIe siècle où la reconnaissance d'une certaine forme de rationalité juridique permettrait devant toutes les situations possibles de définir le bien et le mal". Later, he adds that a theory or a politics of human rights is susceptible to institutionalizing the will of the majority and the exclusion inherent to it (1982d: 349). In recent years, theorists such as Taylor and Iris Marion Young (1996) demonstrated how formal theories of justice, allegedly neutral, foster exclusion.

Endnotes to Conclusion

⁷⁵ Asha Varadharajan, for instance, stresses the "failure of poststructuralism to appeal to the dispossessed" (1995: XIV) and Radhakrishnan tries to gap the "unbridgeable" breach between epistemology and politics opened by poststructuralism (1996: 2).

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Title of Thesis:

Identity, Subjectivity and Politics: Political Theory in the Simple Limits of Practical Reason

Author


Jocelyn Maclure

August 4th, 1999