

BEYOND RESISTANCE: A RESPONSE TO ŽIŽEK'S CRITIQUE OF FOUCAULT'S SUBJECT OF FREEDOM

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INTRODUCTION

In a brief introduction to his lively discussion of Judith Butler's work in *The Ticklish Subject*, Slavoj Žižek outlines the paradoxes which he believes haunt Michel Foucault's treatment of the relationship between resistance and power. Taking into account the trajectory of Foucault's thought from his early studies of madness to his final books on ethics, Žižek suggests that Foucault employs two models of resistance which are not finally reconcilable.

On the first model, resistance is understood to be guaranteed by a pre-existing foundation which escapes or eludes the powers that bear down on it from outside. We can see this conception of resistance at work in Foucault's exhortation in *Madness and Civilization* to liberate madness from medico-legal discourse and "let madness speak itself," and in his call in *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1* to "break away from the agency of sex" and "counter the grips of power with the claims of bodies, pleasures, and knowledges, in their multiplicity and their possibility of resistance."¹ Yet even in this latter work—and in *Discipline and Punish*—we find a second model of resistance. On this other model resistance is understood to be generated by the very power that it opposes. In other words normalizing-disciplinary power is productive, rather than repressive, of that upon which it acts. As Foucault explains in *Discipline and Punish*, "the man described for us, whom we are invited to free, is already in himself the effect of a subjection much more profound than himself."²

One way to distinguish between these two models of resistance is to point to the different conceptions of power underpinning each. The first model assumes a juridical conception of power as an imposition external to its field of application, the latter a conception of productive power which makes resistance its effect. When power is viewed according to the first model it gives rise to the idea of resistance as a struggle for liberation from oppressive external forces. However, as Žižek points out in reflecting on liberation struggles against colonialist domination:

What precedes colonialist domination is self-enclosed ethnic awareness, which lacks the strong will to resist and to assert its identity forcefully against the Other; only as a reaction to colonialist domination is this awareness transformed into an active political will to assert one's national identity against the oppressor.³

In other words, while the anti-colonialist movement conceives itself as liberating a pre-colonial cultural identity, both this identity and the will to assert it are in fact generated by the situation of oppression. Although this seems to reinforce colonialist domination by condemning the colonized to appeal to the very categories used to oppress them in their struggle against this oppression, Žižek argues that exactly the opposite case can be made. He suggests that resistance mounted in the name of a pre-existing ethnic identity is likely to be less effective than resistance which is conceived as immanent to the power edifice itself. In the first case the colonized people adopt the position of passive victims of imperialism, whereas in the latter they are able to see their own struggle as part of the dynamics of the imperialist system—a dynamic which, by virtue of its own internal antagonisms, produces an excess of resistance which may result in the system’s self-subversion.

It might appear here as if Žižek is describing and endorsing Foucault’s “mature” view of the relation between power and resistance; namely, that although resistance is entirely immanent to power this does not necessarily mean that we are always trapped in advance by a power that we can resist but never seriously undermine. This is the stance that Foucault adopts in the introduction to *The History of Sexuality* where he explains that:

by definition, [resistances] can only exist in the strategic field of power relations. But this does not mean that they are only a reaction or rebound, forming with respect to the basic domination an underside that is in the end always passive, doomed to perpetual defeat.⁴

Žižek claims, however, that although this might be what Foucault wanted to be able to assert, it is not what he is in fact entitled to assert. The problem, according to Žižek, is Foucault’s anti-Hegelianism. Rather than take the dialectical path which would have allowed him to break out of the vicious cycle of power and resistance by positing resistance as an effect which can outgrow its cause and overturn it, Foucault remains uncomfortably trapped within this cycle. Žižek sees the signs of this discomfort in the fact that Foucault is forced in his last works to resort to a “Romantic-naïve” view of discipline as self-fashioned which serves as a necessary supplement to the work on disciplinary power. For Žižek, Foucault’s writings on the self in Antiquity represent an attempt to retrospectively install a notion of the self-constituting, autonomous subject into his description of disciplinary power as a way of avoiding the conclusion that resistance is always co-opted in advance.

Žižek’s interpretation of the link between Foucault’s late return to the self-constituting subject and his earlier formulation of the constituted subject reiterates the familiar charge that Foucault oscillates between two fundamentally incompatible positions in his account of the relationship between power and resistance. On the one hand Foucault maintains that where there is power, there is resistance and, on the other, that the subject and its desires are not simply oppressed or repressed, but brought into being as an effect of subjection to disciplinary institutions and norms. But if disciplinary norms effectively constitute the subject and its desires, and can even be said to generate a desire for subjection in the form of an attachment to those identity-categories through which our subjection is secured,⁵ autonomy is exposed as chimerical and resistance becomes difficult to explain.⁶ If, as Žižek claims, Foucault’s late reintroduction of an autonomous subject is a way of avoiding this conclusion, it also represents a return to the first model of the relationship between power and resistance; that is, the view that resistance is grounded in an agency that precedes disciplinarity and can never be fully colonized by it. This interpretation finds support in an interview conducted in 1982 in which Foucault is asked to explain how he avoids the conclusion that we are inescapably trapped by power. Foucault asserts that:

We are not trapped. We cannot jump *outside* the situation, and there is no point where you are free from all power relations. But you can always change it. So what I’ve said does not mean that we are always trapped, but that we are always free—well, anyway, that there is always the possibility of changing ...[R]esistance comes first, and resistance remains superior to the forces of the process; power relations are obliged to change with the resistance. So I think that *resistance* is the main word, *the key word*, in this dynamic.⁷

In this passage Foucault seems to have reversed the relation between resistance and power precisely in the way suggested by Žižek. Here, it is the freedom of subjects that grounds resistance to power and ensures that mobile power relations do not congeal into states of domination.

On Žižek's reading, then, Foucault's late work on the self is a necessary supplement to his earlier view of the subject as an effect of subjection—a view which, as Žižek points out, effectively bypasses the question of how individuals “ideologically subjectivize their predicament, how they relate to their conditions of existence”.⁸ But while Žižek thinks that it is nonsensical to criticize Foucault for failing to consider the issue of subjectivization—since the whole point of the notion of disciplinary power is to show how individuals are constituted by it directly at the level of the body—he maintains that Foucault remains implicitly committed to the view that resistance to power requires a subject who is capable of actively and self-consciously fashioning its own identity. Foucault therefore remains trapped within the terms of a modern discourse which opposes the autonomous, constituting subject to the heteronomous, constituted subject. What makes him unable to move beyond these oppositions, Žižek claims, is that he lacks the appropriate notion of the subject; that is, he is unable to conceive of the subject as an effect which can outgrow its cause. Without allowing that disciplinary procedures can produce an unmasterable excess, Foucault is forced to ground resistance in a subject whose identity and desires mysteriously precede and escape construction by disciplinary norms.

In short, Žižek argues that the Foucauldian account of resistance is not only incoherent on its own terms but also that, in restricting oppositional political formations to the reactive gestures of refusal and resistance, Foucault embraces a profoundly pessimistic view of the possibilities for social and political transformation. Not surprisingly, these two claims are frequently linked in critical discussions of Foucault's work, since if one can show that the Foucauldian account of resistance is incoherent—that it simultaneously calls for and undermines the basis of resistance to power—one thereby establishes grounds for its rejection without having to engage with it at any deeper level. The advantage of Žižek's reading is that it does not pursue this path of purely negative criticism. Instead, it offers a diagnosis of the aporias in Foucault's presentation of the relation between power and resistance in order to demonstrate how they might be overcome. According to this diagnosis, Foucault's key problem is that his approach is insufficiently dialectical. Žižek claims that a dialectical account of the relation between power and resistance would allow for a more thoroughgoing transformation of the terms of social and political existence than Foucault is able to envisage, as well as accounting for the process of subject formation in a way that would enable Foucault to successfully answer the crucial question of *who* resists power.

While I appreciate the constructive spirit in which Žižek conducts his critique, I will argue that his analyses of the weaknesses of the Foucauldian position, while illuminating, are misguided. In the following section I outline the grounds for Foucault's preference for an “agonistic” over a “dialectical” model of the relation between resistance and power and, in the final section, I consider the issue of how Foucault navigates between the extremes of social determinism and self-constitution in his account of subject formation.

POLITICS-AS-RESISTANCE AND PRACTICES OF FREEDOM

Žižek's reading of Foucault rests on an elision of two different senses of the term “resistance.” In *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1* Foucault suggests that the existence of power relationships “depends on a multiplicity of points of resistance [that] ... play the role of *adversary, target, support* or *handle* in power relations”.⁹ In other words, resistance is an analytical category: it signals the presence of power and reveals its dynamic and relational character; but it is not inherently subversive of power. To generate the political category of resistance it would be necessary to add a moral evaluation of power as “bad” or as that which needs to be overcome, since it is only on the basis of this judgment that resistance can be associated with the emancipatory project of seeking an end to domination.¹⁰ When Žižek draws on Foucault's understanding of the immanence of resistance to power to illuminate the dynamics of resistance to colonialist domination, he is relying on a confusion of these two categories. This confusion allows him to criticize Foucault for having failed to draw the appropriate conclusion from his insights into this immanence; namely, that the colonialist system may generate forces of resistance

“whose excess it is no longer able to master and which thus detonates its unity”.¹¹

In itself this confusion of the different senses of resistance is not important and can, no doubt, be partly attributed to Foucault’s own lack of clarity regarding the distinction. What is important, however, is that in conflating these senses Žižek overlooks concerns that Foucault may have had about resistance as a political strategy, concerns which might have made him less optimistic than Žižek about the possibilities of a mode of resistance capable of overturning the system that generated it. We can begin to see the emergence of these concerns in comments made by Foucault in a late interview on ethics. Foucault has been asked about the theme of liberation in his work and responds that:

I have always been somewhat suspicious of the notion of liberation ... I am not trying to say that liberation as such, or this or that form of liberation, does not exist: when a colonized people attempts to liberate itself from its colonizers, this is indeed a practice of liberation in the strict sense. But we know very well, and moreover, in this specific case, that this practice of liberation is not in itself sufficient to define the practices of freedom that will still be needed if this people, this society, and these individuals are to be able to define admissible and acceptable forms of existence or political society. This is why I emphasize practices of freedom over processes of liberation; again, the latter have their place, but they do not seem to me to be capable by themselves of defining all the practical forms of freedom. ... liberation paves the way for new power relationships, which must be controlled by practices of freedom.¹²

In these comments Foucault is using the term liberation to refer to those forms of resistance to domination that are conceived as releasing a pre-existing identity from an oppressive external force. This passage, therefore, seems to confirm Žižek in his conclusion that Foucault is unable to conceive of a mode of resistance or a struggle for liberation capable of subverting the terms of the system that generated it. But it is possible to read this passage in a different way if we focus on the primacy that Foucault gives here to the notion of practices of freedom. What Foucault seems to be saying in this passage is that a politics of liberation or resistance is not enough, *in itself*, to guarantee freedom because freedom is neither emancipation from power nor mere rebellion against it. Rather, freedom is the careful and innovative deployment of a power which is exercised, Foucault suggests, in the effort “to acquire the rules of law, the management techniques, and also the morality, the ethos, the practices of the self, that will allow us to play these games of power with as little domination as possible.”¹³ We might think in this context of the recent war in Iraq and of the surprise expressed by Washington in the face of the resistance of the Iraqi people to being liberated by Coalition forces. When asked about this resistance by the Western media, one Iraqi resident of Baghdad responded that “you humiliate us more than our enemy.” This comment neatly captures the irony of the final justification for the war in Iraq. Premised on a view of the Iraqi people as powerless victims of oppression, “Operation Iraqi Freedom” adds insult to injury by making this powerlessness explicit in its rhetorical justifications for war. In doing so, it effectively reinforces this powerlessness, and the indignity associated with it, by casting the Iraqis as incapable of mounting their own resistance. From a Foucauldian perspective we might say that “Operation Iraqi Freedom” undermines the freedom it claims to defend precisely because it conflates liberation *from* power—from Saddam Hussein—with the attainment of freedom.

Reflection on the theme of practices of freedom in Foucault’s late work on ethics suggests a further sense in which political strategies of resistance might be both problematic and insufficient. Insofar as a politics of resistance, like the project of liberation, inevitably emerges in reaction to the injuries or constraints imposed by the system against which it struggles, it is likely to give rise to an attachment to the identity formed through the social injury suffered and, thus, to reinforce rather than question the terms of domination that generated it. For example, the contemporary trend to seek legal redress for injuries related to social subordination marked by race or sex tends, as Wendy Brown has noted, to fix the identities of the injured and the injuring as social positions and to cast the law and the state as protectors against injury and, thus, the injured as in continuing need of such protection.¹⁴ One of the risks contained in this demand for protection is that it may serve to

reinforce an economy premised on the distinction between victims and perpetrators by encouraging a politics of blame directed not at empowering the injured or vulnerable, but at punishing the perpetrators.

There are, thus, two related dangers to which politics-as-resistance is susceptible. The first derives from the manner in which those who are oppressed by power come to be invested in that oppression in so far as their self-identity becomes bound up with the terms through which they are marginalized, excluded and discriminated against. In other words, politicized identity becomes attached to its exclusion because its existence is premised on this exclusion. The danger, then, is that in reacting to domination through the defensive assertion of a subordinated or marginalized identity, a politics of resistance may fail to address the way in which oppressive structures are reproduced at the level of attachments to forms of identity which presuppose and support those structures. It is, perhaps, in recognition of this danger that Foucault worries especially about that mode of modern power “which categorizes the individual, marks him by his own individuality, attaches him to his identity, imposes a law of truth on him which he must recognize and which others have to recognize in him”.¹⁵ The other danger is that resistance to oppression may tend, by virtue of the suffering that undergirds it, to be transformed into a politics of resentment which reinforces social powerlessness by making that powerlessness the basis for political recognition and legal redress.

While Foucault gives little indication that he appreciates the complex psychological investments which might contribute to the transformation of a politics of resistance into one of recrimination, the privileging in his late essays of practices of freedom over resistance and liberation suggests that he is aware of the forces that may work against the emergence of a mode of resistance capable of definitively overturning the situation that generated it. There are two ways in which Foucault’s notion of practices of the self and freedom might be seen to respond to the dangers posed by politics-as-resistance. The first has to do with the kind of freedom such practices involve, and the second with the attitude towards identity it encourages.

The idea of practicing freedom is central to Foucault’s exploration and analysis of the ethical practices of Antiquity. It refers to the ways in which individuals in Antiquity were led to exercise power over themselves in the attempt to constitute or transform their identity and behavior in the light of specific goals. Although Foucault makes it clear that it is neither possible nor desirable to graft this ethical ideal onto a modern context without modification, he believes that we can learn from and use aspects of a Greco-Roman ethics in the present, in particular its emphasis on practices of self-formation. There will inevitably be differences between modern and ancient versions of these ethical practices, since to engage in the project of self-fashioning, the project of “taking oneself as the object of a complex and difficult elaboration,” the individual must learn to use the techniques of self-formation that “are proposed, suggested, imposed upon him by his culture, his society, his social group.”¹⁶ While these techniques will vary historically, what remains a constant, for Foucault, is the kind of freedom entailed in practicing the art of self-constitution. This freedom consists neither in resisting nor seeking to liberate the self from regulatory power; rather, it requires the active deployment of the power of regulation *by* the subject for the purposes of self-constitution.

In this insistence that freedom entails learning how to wield power, there is an implicit recognition of the tendencies which may subvert the emancipatory aims of political strategies of resistance. Insofar as a politics of resistance forms in opposition to power and is animated by a desire to be free from power’s excesses, it may, as Wendy Brown points out, result in “a tendency to reproach power rather than aspire to it, and to disdain freedom rather than practice it”.¹⁷ Both these tendencies are apparent in the conception of freedom as a state free from power and it is against these tendencies and this image of freedom that Foucault proposes his alternative notion of freedom as that which exists only in being exercised.

Thus, while Foucault acknowledges that liberation from an oppressive situation may be necessary to remove particular barriers to the exercise of freedom, he warns that liberation from power does not equate to freedom and that, unless the subject actively assumes the power of self-constitution, it will inevitably find itself constituted through practices of subjection.¹⁸ If practicing freedom is a permanent struggle against what will otherwise be

done to and for individuals, it is not simply misguided but dangerous to imagine it as a state of being that can be guaranteed by laws and institutions.¹⁹ From Foucault's perspective, then, political strategies of resistance that take the form of a protest against power and appeal to the state for protection from its more injurious expressions risk reinforcing powerlessness and unfreedom unless protection is understood as a temporary measure intended to create the conditions under which freedom can once again be exercised in the effort to constitute the self or to transform the terms of social existence.

It could also be argued, however, that the politicization of an identity premised on a history of violence, exclusion and discrimination is an extremely effective way of increasing one's power against opposing forces. Indeed, there is perhaps no political position more powerful than that of the victim whose demands for political recognition and legal protection are buttressed by the moral authority that attaches to having been wronged. As I suggested above, however, the danger of this kind of oppositional political strategy is that, in resisting oppression through the defensive assertion of a subordinated or marginalized identity, what fails to be addressed is the way in which oppressive structures are reproduced at the level of attachments to the forms of identity which both presuppose and sustain those structures. Foucault is well aware of this danger. In *Discipline and Punish* he chronicles the emergence of a form of modern power that regulates individuals by subjecting them to disciplinary practices and norms which produce them as certain types of subject. The efficacy of disciplinary norms as instruments of social control derives from the fact that they function, not by taking power away from individuals, but by generating skills, capacities and possibilities for action that depend on the maintenance of a particular social identity. Thus, on Foucault's analysis, investment in identity appears as one of principal vehicles of subjection in the modern period.

It is Foucault's recognition of the tendency of normalizing disciplinary power to tie individuals to their identities in constraining ways, and thus sustain relations of domination, that informs his own view about the kind of resistance strategy that might be appropriate in the present. In "The Subject and Power" he contends that:

the task nowadays is not to discover what we are, but to refuse what we are. We have to imagine and to build up what we could be to get rid of this kind of political "double bind," which is the simultaneous individualization and totalization of modern power structures. The conclusion would be that the political, ethical, social, philosophical problem of our days is not to try to liberate the individual from the state, and from the state's institutions, but to liberate us both from the state and from the type of individualization which is linked to the state. We have to promote new forms of subjectivity through the refusal of this kind of individuality which has been imposed on us for several centuries.²⁰

In this passage Foucault begins to outline the strategy of political resistance which he believes might be the most effective in the struggle against peculiarly late modern forms of domination. In the process he also implicitly reveals the grounds of his preference for this strategy over others. When Foucault tells us that in order to resist modern power structures we must not simply refuse identity, but actively perform that refusal through our attempts to produce new forms of subjectivity, he is once again evoking his conception of freedom as a practice which requires the active arrogation of the power of regulation by the subject for the purposes of self-formation or transformation. In doing so, however, he is at the same time warning us about the dangerous temptation to which a politics of resistance is most susceptible; namely, the temptation to equate freedom either with liberation from power or with pure rebellion against it.

In so far as a politics of resistance aims to promote freedom, Foucault suggests that it cannot afford to confuse emancipation from domination with the achievement of freedom. For Foucault, this confusion and the attitude of suspicion towards power that it expresses, may well serve to subvert rather than promote freedom to the extent that it encourages us to eschew power rather than aspire to it. While practicing freedom may require us to establish a certain independence from the powers that form us—the kind of independence that is afforded by a critical and problematizing mode of reflection which, as Foucault puts it in a late interview, "allows one to step back from this way of acting or reacting, to present it to oneself as an object of thought and to question it as to

its meaning, its conditions and its goals”²¹—the ultimate aim of such independence should be to enable us to take full account of the range of powers that simultaneously produce, constrain and enable us to act. The aim, in other words, should be to enable us to determine precisely what kinds of changes to existing power relations are possible and desirable, and what kinds of responses and inventions might be needed to bring about these changes. This emphasis on practicing freedom is, therefore, the positive counterpart of Foucault’s rejection of the utopian dream of a society without power relations. From a Foucauldian perspective, a society without power relations would be a society without freedom, since both the existence and experience of freedom depend on the constraints imposed by other actions.

It is because practicing freedom requires the careful and inventive enactment of power and is, therefore, that which is never finally realized or, rather, that which must be continuously reactivated in a relationship with power that takes the form of a “permanent provocation,” that Foucault rejects a conception of resistance as the overcoming or overturning of power.²² Thus, in response to Žižek, we can say that it is not a theoretical insufficiency that prevents Foucault from breaking out of the cycle of power and resistance, but his conception of freedom which commits him to an agonistic rather than a dialectical understanding of the relationship.

FOUCAULT’S SUBJECT OF FREEDOM

However, at this point we are forced to contend with Žižek’s other charge; namely, that the appearance of the self-constituting subject in Foucault’s late work on ethics is incompatible with his account of the immanence of resistance to power. In fact, Žižek argues that this appearance can be read as a tacit acknowledgement on Foucault’s part that the “absolute continuity of resistance to power is not enough to ground effective resistance to power, a resistance that would not be ‘part of the game’ but would allow the subject to assume a position that exempts him from the disciplinary/confessional mode of power.”²³ As I mentioned above, Žižek sees Foucault’s late account of the subject as an attempt to break out of the vicious cycle of power and resistance by resorting to the myth of a state before the Fall—a time in which self-discipline was an autonomous mechanism rather than a vehicle of subjection to disciplinary norms.²⁴ He suggests, however, that this attempt to ground resistance fails because there is no way—within the terms of Foucault’s theoretical framework—to explain the *emergence* of the capacities for autonomy, reflexivity and critique which are presupposed in the account of the self-constituting subject. The claim that Žižek is making, then, is that it is Foucault’s failure to explain how the subject produced by power may *exceed* the conditions of its production that forces him to revert to an earlier model of resistance which depicts it as grounded in a subject who is not merely a passive, determined effect of social forces, but who is capable of actively constituting itself.

The problem that Žižek identifies here needs to be distinguished from another, more common criticism of Foucault’s presentation of the relation between power and resistance; namely, that by insisting on the ubiquity and productivity of power, the possibility of resistance, transformation and the emergence of unforeseen possibilities is ruled out. As Judith Butler has persuasively argued, this criticism depends on a confusion of the notion of constitution with that of determination. She suggests that to be constituted by power in Foucault’s sense does not mean that the subject is completely determined by power.²⁵ To say that power relations constitute the subject is simply to point to the fact that our possibilities for action and thought are both constrained *and* enabled by the discursive frameworks which structure these possibilities, but this is not equivalent to saying that it is the framework itself which determines our choices or how we respond to the range of options that become available within it. But while it might be possible to explain the compatibility of productive power with free agency, this explanation only makes Žižek’s question about the genesis of the subject’s capacities for autonomy, reflection, critique and resistance more pressing.

In support of his claim that Foucault is unable to account for the genesis of a resisting subject, Žižek alludes to a passage in *Power/Knowledge* in which Foucault explains that, with respect to the operations of productive disciplinary power, what he wants to show is “how power relations can materially penetrate the body in depth, without depending even on the mediation of the subject’s own representations. If power takes hold on the body,

this isn't through its having first to be interiorized in people's consciousness."²⁶ As Žižek and other critics have pointed out, this analysis of power as the unilateral action of corporeal discipline on the body leads to a reductionist account of psychic processes as the mechanical by-products of social conditioning. The subject that emerges from this process is a mere "vehicle" of social forces which "converge and combine to yield some behavioral output."²⁷ Since this view of subject formation clearly fails to furnish us with a subject who possesses the capacities for autonomy or agency, Žižek can confidently assert that there is nothing more misguided than the view promoted by Butler which presents Foucault—in the first volume of the *History of Sexuality*—as opening "up the way for individuals to rearticulate-resignify-displace the power mechanisms they are caught in."²⁸

Is there, then, as Žižek and other critics contend, an irreconcilable tension between Foucault's early view of the subject as an effect of power and his late view of the subject as capable of resisting and reworking the powers that constitute it? And is the appearance of the subject of freedom in Foucault's late work on ethics therefore a necessary supplement to his work on productive power, a supplement which represents a belated and tacit admission on Foucault's part of the untenability of his account of the immanence of resistance to power and the need to revise his uncompromising social constructivism in order to make room for effective resistance? Or, on the other hand, is Žižek guilty of caricaturing and oversimplifying Foucault's constructivist position by refusing to consider the ways in which it negotiates and, perhaps, avoids the false opposition between determinism and voluntarism in its presentation of subject formation?

The key issue here is whether the Foucauldian presentation of subject formation includes some account of the how the subject formed by social power exceeds the conditions of its production. Žižek is surely right to argue that without this possibility Foucault must abandon or seriously revise his analysis of productive power in order to make room for the possibility of effective resistance. In other words, as Butler puts it, the analysis of subjection must be double, "tracing the conditions of subject formation and tracing the turn against those conditions for the subject—and its perspective—to emerge."²⁹ This idea of the reflexive turn that marks the becoming of the subject is explored by Deleuze in his study of Foucault. According to Deleuze, in his late work on Greek "techniques of the self," Foucault finds a way of rethinking productive power as simultaneously objectifying and subjectifying. This rethinking involves the discovery of the kind of relation the Greeks establish to moral codes or techniques for governing individual behavior. Rather than conceiving of moral conduct as a matter of obedience to an abstract system of rules, the Greeks concern themselves with the problem of how best to live a moral life. This concern with the self's mode of being or *ethos* requires the establishment of a novel relation to existing codes of conduct, codes which are treated by the Greeks, not as laws to be obeyed, but as "techniques of the self," that is, as "procedures ... suggested or prescribed to individuals in order to determine their identity, maintain it, or transform it in terms of a certain number of ends, through relations of self-mastery or self-knowledge."³⁰ In other words, Greek ethics places emphasis on the self's relations to itself and on the techniques of self-governance that enable individuals to practice liberty or "an arts of existence" in the effort to "transform themselves, modify themselves, and to attain a certain state of perfection, happiness, purity..."³¹

Deleuze describes the genesis of this kind of self-relation in terms of the folding of power relations back upon themselves. It is, he says, "as if the relations of the outside folded back to create a doubling, allow a relation to oneself to emerge, and constitute an inside which is hollowed out and develops its own unique dimension."³² This "fold" of power relations from which subjectivity and interiority derive should not be understood as a mechanical process by which the subject internalizes social norms, since there is no subject prior to the "folding" that produces a certain relationship of the self to itself. The dimension of interiority produced in this way, however, "assumes an independent status" to the extent that it isolates a subject "which differentiates itself from the code and no longer has an internal dependence on it."³³ According to Deleuze, then, "Foucault's fundamental idea is that of a dimension of subjectivity derived from power and knowledge without being dependent on them."³⁴ This interpretation suggests that the relationship between social norms and the subject should not be understood on the model of a univocal determination because, in acting on the body, norms at the same time produce an "inside" as an "interiorization of the outside."³⁵

Deleuze's presentation of Foucault's emergent subject helps us to understand how Foucault is able to maintain that there will always be an interaction between "techniques of domination" that work to transform individuals into "docile bodies" and technologies of the self by which individuals fashion themselves more autonomously.³⁶ For Deleuze, Foucault's ability to preserve the tension between social determination and subjective constitution derives from his commitment to the idea that "there will always be a relation to oneself which resists codes and powers".³⁷ This formulation implies that the production of the social individual is an essentially incomplete process or, in other words, that the subject can never be entirely reduced to an object which could be given in the mode of an essentialized social identity. And this is because, as a self-relation, the subject is able *to take itself as an object*, to disengage from, double and reflect on itself. The capacity to reflect on oneself as an other can also be described as a power of "disidentification." It is a power to distance ourselves both from what we are and from the mechanisms and norms which form us.

These two processes of self-reflection and disattachment are described by Deleuze in terms of a doubling of the self on the one hand, and as the creation of a dimension of interiority on the other. The doubling of the self opens up a space between the subject and its present desires, beliefs, experiences and self-understanding and, thus, establishes the possibility of distancing from and reflection on self and social identity. On the other hand, the hollowing out of an inside that forms an "outside" to the existing social order is what enables the subject to extract itself from immediate immersion in its surroundings and gain a perspective on the social world and on the conditions of its formation and action.

This account of the genesis of the subject's capacities for reflection and distancing makes it possible to respond to Žižek's criticism that Foucault's late presentation of the subjective constitution of the subject contradicts his earlier focus on subject formation as subjection. Deleuze's elaboration of Foucault's position demonstrates the way in which it avoids the false opposition between determination by social power and self-constitution by presenting the attributes of modern subjectivity as emergent properties, by showing how the process of subjection to disciplinary norms, or constitution by social power, produces the subject as a mode of reflexivity and, thus, creates a gap between the self and the social forces that constitute it. It is this distance from the conditions of its formation which opens up a minimal space of freedom and allows us to describe the Foucauldian subject as simultaneously constituted and constituting, both embedded and detached.

While this characterization of the Foucauldian subject destroys the appearance of contradiction in his thought, its significance goes beyond the issue of the internal consistency of Foucault's oeuvre. This characterization also enables us to clarify the kind of autonomy that Foucault attributes to the modern individual. There are two standard definitions of autonomy that are ruled out by this account: autonomy as self-realization and autonomy as radical self-determination. The model of autonomy as self-realization is ruled out by virtue of the fact that, for Foucault, there is no authentic or natural self that could be liberated from social conditioning. While we may be able to some extent to detach ourselves from, and reflect on, the relations of social power which form us, this does not amount to uncovering a true, power-free self since, as we have seen, there is no self outside of the power-contexts which constitute it. And if the self is, as Foucault contends, an effect of social power, then it is also impossible to attribute to it a capacity to determine itself entirely.

Rather than imagining autonomy as an innate capacity for self-determination or as the achievement of freedom from all forms of social constraint, Foucault holds that it consists in a more modest practice of self-formation which depends on cultivating an "artistic" approach to those codes of conduct, patterns of identification and regulatory norms which are the cultural sources of the self. Thus, the degree of autonomy one enjoys will depend on the extent to which one is able to use these cultural sources of selfhood as resources in one's attempts to intervene in the formation of one's own identity. Foucauldian autonomy, then, is not opposed to social regulation. Rather, it consists in the struggle to subvert the project of normalization by wresting the power of regulation from the ends of disciplinary control in order to deploy this power in the service of self-creation.

We are now in a position to address the final issue raised in Žižek's discussion of Foucault, namely the place of the Foucauldian subject in resistance. Does this subject furnish us with the conceptual resources needed to explain effective resistance to power? Butler thinks so. She locates resistance in the failure of the subject to ever successfully achieve the norm of identity. For Butler, this failure to fully coincide with the identity categories that define our social being reveals the incommensurability between the norm and any of its embodiments and so opens up the possibility for a rearticulation of the norm itself.³⁸ Butler believes that the subject's intrinsic resistance to identity explains the power of disidentification that must be deliberately enacted by us in our efforts to "invent new forms of subjectivity" and to change the terms of social existence. Yet surely it is this failure of identity that *also* explains why the self works *for* power through its conformity to norms and social roles. *It is because we are not what we are that we are attached to what we are.* It is this non-coincidence between the subject and its social identity that is the root of attachment to identity and, thus, the subject's complicity in its own subjection.

Paradoxically, if we follow Deleuze and Butler's characterization of the Foucauldian subject as resistance to identity, then the source of our autonomy and freedom is at the same time revealed as the source of our susceptibility to normalization. That is, this notion of the subject is the condition of possibility for both normalization and resistance to normalization. There is nothing, in other words, in the subject—no essential and irreducible desire for freedom, no primary capacity for autonomy—that necessitates or guarantees the exercise of freedom. On the contrary, Foucault has shown us that we will willingly submit to power, that we will work at obtaining our docility and conformity to social norms and that the capacity for self-discipline is one of the principal vehicles of our subjection to normalizing disciplinary power. We also know that Foucault rejects the appeal to some essentially recalcitrant material that power is unable to finally reduce as the guarantor of freedom, insisting instead that the resistant subject must be understood as an effect of power.

Having denied himself theoretical access to any conception of an authentic, power-free self who, as such, would be exempted from the disciplinary/confessional mode of power, Foucault must explain how the practical project of freedom develops from within the power contexts that constitute the subject. This means that he must account for the circumstances or mechanisms that might convert disciplinary techniques, by which our freedom is constrained, into technologies of the self, by which we fashion ourselves more autonomously. Commentators typically point to the activity of genealogical critique or problematization as the means by which Foucault responds to this kind of issue. For example, Jana Sawicki's characterization of Foucault's conception of freedom suggests a strong alliance between freedom and a mode of critical interrogation that calls our previous forms of existence into question. Freedom, she says,

lies in our capacity to discover the historical links between certain modes of self-understanding and modes of domination, and to resist the ways in which we have been classified and identified by the dominant discourses. This means discovering new ways of understanding ourselves and one another, refusing to accept the dominant culture's characterization of our practices and desires.³⁹

This characterization of Foucauldian freedom suggests that the mere recognition of links between certain modes of self-understanding and forms of domination is enough to ensure resistance to normalization and to found the project of self-governance. But surely this is both overly optimistic and too heavily reliant on a certain rationalist assumption about the self that Foucault would not accept, namely, the assumption that knowing the truth about power will set us free from its effects. Sawicki's interpretation gives the impression that the conscious practice of "disidentification" is sufficient to release us from the grip of constraining identity categories. In other words, it posits a direct link between a capacity for disidentification and the expansion of freedom. But is faith in this link justifiable? Surely not all forms of disidentification serve to trouble identity. We might think here of Žižek's thoughtful analysis of the way in which modern identity is increasingly experienced, not in the mode of unthinking attachment or commitment, but in the mode of ironic distance. We are, he argues, becoming increasingly adept at maintaining a certain critical distance from the identities assigned to us by the dominant culture. But although we might see through these identity-positions and play our various social roles with an

ironic awareness of their contingency, there is little gain for freedom in this mode of being. Why, after all, would one be bothered to challenge an identity only ironically inhabited?⁴⁰

These reflections bring us, then, to the question of what kind of problematisation could effectively dislodge the attachments which define our social being? What circumstances might motivate us to risk the security of identity or the smugness of ironic distance, for the sake of a difficult, undefined and experimental freedom? Foucault responds to these questions by suggesting that:

Actually, for a domain of action, a behavior to enter the field of thought, it is necessary for a certain number of factors to have made it uncertain, to have made it lose its familiarity, or to have provoked a certain number of difficulties around it. These elements result from social, economic, or political processes ... their role is instigation.⁴¹

So, it is only under the pressure of an event that makes our present identity, behavior and self-understanding problematic, intolerable or uninhabitable that we are forced to exercise our freedom. It is only when we experience events that provoke us into seeing the practices and thinking that have historically limited our experience that we become capable of thinking against ourselves and our present attachments.

In this characterization of problematizing thought as provoked by forces external to the subject we once again encounter the agonism between power and resistance that, I have argued, defines a Foucauldian approach to freedom. The project of autonomous self-formation which begins with the destabilization of entrenched ways of being and thinking is presented here as having its source, not in a primary and inviolable capacity for freedom, but in the power contexts within which subjects act and think. Thus, rather than imagining the practice of freedom as threatened or limited by power relations or determination from without, Foucault presents it as inescapably conditioned by power, both with respect to its emergence as a capacity and with respect to its exercise.

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NOTES

- 1 Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (London: Penguin Books, 1976/1978), 157.
- 2 Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (Harmondsworth: Peregrine, 1975/1977), 30.
- 3 Slavoj Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject: The Absent Centre of Political Ontology* (New York: Verso, 2000), 255.
- 4 Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1*, 96.
- 5 Foucault describes the process of subjectivization in terms of the subjection of individuals to constraining forms of identity: “This form of power applies itself to immediate everyday life which categorizes the individual, marks him by his own individuality, attaches him to his own identity ... It is a form of power which makes individuals subjects. There are two meanings of the word *subject*: subject to someone else by control or dependence, and tied to his own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge. Both meanings suggest a form of power which subjugates and makes subject to.” Michel Foucault, “The Subject and Power” in Hubert Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow, *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1982), 212.
- 6 Peter Dews sees Foucault’s late introduction of the subject of freedom as an attempt to overcome the limitations of his early emphasis on the constructed subject, limitations which had prevented him from giving a coherent account of emancipation. However, like Žižek, Dews argues that this theoretical shift merely reinforces, rather than solves, the intractable dilemmas of Foucault’s earlier position. On this point see Peter Dews, “The Return of the Subject in Late Foucault” in *Radical Philosophy* (Spring 1989), 37 – 41.
- 7 Michel Foucault, “Sex, Power and the Politics of Identity” in *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, trans. R. Hurley, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: The New York Press, 1997), 167.
- 8 Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject*, 253.
- 9 Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1*, 95.
- 10 On this point see Wendy Brown, *States of Injury: power and freedom in late modernity* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1995), 22.
- 11 Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject*, 256.
- 12 Michel Foucault, “The ethic of the concern of the self as a practice of freedom” in *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, 282-3.
- 13 Foucault, “The ethic of the concern of the self as a practice of freedom,” 298.
- 14 Brown, *States of Injury*, 27.
- 15 Foucault, “The Subject and Power”, 212.
- 16 Foucault, “The ethic of the concern of the self as a practice of freedom,” 291.
- 17 Wendy Brown, *States of Injury*, 55.
- 18 On this point Foucault remarks that “the subject is constituted through practices of subjection, or, in a more autonomous way, through practices of liberation, of freedom, as in Antiquity, starting of course from a number of rules, styles and conventions that are found in the culture.” Michel Foucault, “An Aesthetics of Existence” in *Politics, Philosophy and Culture: Interviews and Other Writings 1977-1984*, ed. Lawrence Kritzman (New York: Routledge, 1988), 452.
- 19 See Michel Foucault, “Space, Knowledge, Power” in *Politics, Philosophy and Culture*, 340.
- 20 Foucault, “The Subject and Power”, 216.
- 21 Michel Foucault, “Polemics, Politics, and Problematizations” in *The Foucault Reader*, translated by Lydia Davis, ed. Paul Rabinow (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1986), 388.
- 22 Foucault, “The Subject and Power”, 221-2. The whole passage reads: “At the very heart of the power relationship, and constantly provoking it, are the recalcitrance of the will and the intransigence of freedom. Rather than speaking of an essential freedom, it would be better to speak of an agonism—a relationship which is at the same time reciprocal incitation and struggle; less of a face-to-face confrontation which paralyses both sides than a permanent provocation.”
- 23 Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject*, 251.
- 24 *Ibid*, 251.
- 25 Butler argues that “to claim that the subject is constituted is not to claim that it is determined.” Seyla Benhabib, Judith Butler, Drucilla Cornell, Nancy Fraser, *Feminist Contentions: A Philosophical Exchange* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 46.
- 26 Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-77*, ed. Colin Gordon (Brighton: Harvester, 1980), 186.
- 27 David Weberman, “Are Freedom and Anti-Humanism Compatible? The Case of Foucault and Butler” in *Constellations* (Vol. 7, No. 2, 2000), 260.
- 28 Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject*, 253.
- 29 Judith Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 29.
- 30 Michel Foucault, “Subjectivity and Truth” in *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, 87.
- 31 Foucault, “Sexuality and Solitude” 177.

32 Gilles Deleuze, *Foucault*, trans. Sean Hand (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), 100.

33 Ibid, 101.

34 Ibid.

35 Ibid, 103.

36 See Foucault, "Sexuality and Solitude," 177.

37 Deleuze, *Foucault*, 103.

38 Butler explicitly links the practice of disidentification with the project of emancipation. For example, in the introduction to *Bodies that Matter* she suggests that "[a]lthough the political discourses that mobilize identity categories tend to cultivate identifications in the service of a political goal, it may be that the persistence of *dis*identification is equally crucial to the rearticulation of democratic contestation. Indeed, it may be precisely through practices which underscore disidentification with those regulatory norms by which sexual difference is materialized that both feminist and queer politics are mobilized." Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the discursive limits of "sex"*, (New York and London: Routledge, 1993), 4. These sentiments are echoed throughout Butler's writings.

39 Jana Sawicki, *Disciplining Foucault: Feminism, Power and the Body* (London: Routledge, 1991), 44.

40 Žižek's claim that disidentification is not necessarily subversive of the existing social order is developed in his discussion of Butler in *The Ticklish Subject*, and also in *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality*. Judith Butler, Ernesto Laclau and Slavoj Žižek, *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality: contemporary dialogues on the left*, (London: Verso: 2000).

41 Foucault, "Polemics, Politics, and Problematizations" in *The Foucault Reader*, trans. Lydia Davis, ed. Paul Rabinow (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1986), 388.