

Rethinking thinking and that which thinks:

Rationality and distributed subjectivity in the works of
Foucault, Deleuze and Malabou

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Introduction

In *What is Critique?* Foucault provides a general overview of the history of ‘critique’ in Western philosophy.¹ He defines this critique, and Butler seconds this in her commentary on this text,² as a ‘desubjugation of the subject’, i.e. ‘the will not to be governed thusly, like that, by these people, at that price’.³ Following Foucault’s analysis we see that a new claim to rationality appears in the critique of the ecclesiastic way of governing, a type of governing that demanded blind obedience of its subjects. He goes on to show that after *An answer to the question: What is Enlightenment?* (henceforth Kant’s *Aufklärung*) the ‘sapere aude’, dare to think for oneself, is used as the framework by Kant and post-Kantian thinkers to further developed a new way of governing focussed on the application of rational practices. By emphasizing the difference between Kant’s *Aufklärung* and his three critiques, Foucault shows that critique and the concept of enlightenment no longer necessarily coincide. This allows one to critically examine the Enlightenment project and the mode of governing that arose from it. Foucault mentions in *What is Critique?* some of the groups that criticize contemporary governing practices. Butler provides a concise summary of the current state of rational governing as depicted by Foucault:

‘Foucault asks, “How is it that rationalization leads to the furor of power?” Clearly, the capacity for rationalization to reach into the tributaries of life not only characterizes modes of scientific practice, “but also social relationships, state organizations, economic practices and perhaps even individual behaviors?” It reaches its “furor” and its limits as it seizes and pervades the subject it subjectivates. Power sets the limits to what a subject can “be,” beyond which it no longer “is,” or it dwells in a domain of suspended ontology.’⁴

This quote shows us two things worthy of note: (1) Power determines the limits of what a (legitimate) subject can be on an ontological level and (2) rationalization as an organizing practice (i.e. as power) has entered into most if not all social aspects of life (relationships, governments, economics, etc.).

The contemporary way of governing is one that uses rational practices of among others optimization and quantitative measurements as legitimization tools to evaluate life as a whole and the lives of individuals. Happiness, stress, life expectancy, health, are all seen as qualities that can be rationally optimized by quantifying them in some way: one has a good social life if one’s social network has at least x amount of people in it, a country is happier if the people living there give themselves higher averages on how happy they think they are, the longer one lives in good health the

1: Foucault (1997) [2007]

2: Butler (2001)

3: Foucault (1997) [2007] p.75

4: Butler (2001) para. 32

better, etc. This type of rational governing is seen for example in the exercise of bio-power, which Foucault defined in *The History of Sexuality volume 1* as ‘diverse techniques for achieving the subjugation of bodies and the control of populations.’⁵ The validity of the relation between contemporary application of rationalization and bio-power can be seen in the fact that Butler directly refers to bio-power as something which rationalization is currently in service of.⁶

Rationalization as application power combined with its wide-spread application to the social sphere of life has as effect that in our contemporary society the only legitimate mode of being is a rational one. We see this in the response of an onlooker when one flies into a fit of rage or suddenly bursts into tears. The response will most likely amount to something like ‘what’s going on?’ or ‘is that person alright?’ even if the onlooker does not express this thought. This shows what I believe to be the internalization of our contemporary rational form of governing which amounts to a constant demand to legitimize oneself via rationalization. When one feels sad, one is required to rationalize this sadness (one is sad because one’s mother recently died) or lose one’s legitimacy as a subject (that person is just crazy/mentally unstable). This is what we will call ‘the demand for rationalization’.

As mentioned earlier, Foucault touches in *What is Critique?* on various criticisms to contemporary rational governing practices. He notes that in Germany criticism started from the Hegelian left. Think of philosophers like Feuerbach and his conception of religion as ‘falling in love’,⁷ Marx and his critique of the alienation found not only in industrial labour but in capitalist government,⁸ and the Frankfurter Schule, where thinkers like Adorno and Horkheimer criticize the ‘instrumental reason’ of the Enlightenment which lies at the foundation of the governments of their time.⁹ Add to this the Husserlian phenomenological critique of scientific rationality and Nietzsche’s attempt at showing how rational discourse is just another form of the will to power and we have a substantial German front from which the demand for rationalization has been besieged.¹⁰

In France a critique of rationalization began somewhat later. Bergson being somewhat of a precursor in his advocacy of ‘intuition’ as complimentary to intellect was only followed by thinkers like de Beauvoir and the critique of the legitimacy of ‘masculine’ rationality as superior to ‘feminine’ irrationality, Sartre and his critique of the ‘être en-soi’ and Merleau-Ponty’s critique that rationality ignores the contingent nature of the world and thus the contingency of thought.¹¹

All and all there has been nearly 200 years of rationality critique, each critique attempting to put an end to the contemporary conception of rationality. At the same time all of them proved the resilience of rationalizing processes like discipline, optimization and quantification to such criticism.

5: Foucault (1976)

6: *ibid.*

7: Feuerbach (1841)

8: Marx (1867)

9: Horkheimer and Adorno (1944)

10: Husserl (1913); Nietzsche (1886)

11: Bergson (1903), De Beauvoir (1949), Sartre (1943), Merleau-Ponty (1945)

The application of bio-power is at an all-time high, as seen in the mandatory health check-ups in elementary school, the illegality of drugs, underage smoking and underage drinking as attempts to forcibly optimize one's health and the gentrification of deteriorated communities to increase living standards. The aforementioned examples of bio-power arguably have very positive effects, not just on the populace at large, but on individual lives as well. However, they feed into the problem we earlier called 'the demand for rationalization'. If everything has to be approached rationally to be seen as legitimate, then these rationalizing approaches will be taken to legitimize rather weird things. We see this in the arguments of politicians like Donald Trump (though we could just as easily refer to Geert Wilders, Marine Le Pen, Jussi Halla-aho or Heinz Christian Strache) and their use of 'alternative facts'. Though often based on falsities or constructed using fallacies, these argumentations are attempts at rationalizing certain beliefs or feelings about for example immigration. When Trump says:

'The truth is our immigration system is worse than anybody ever realized. But the facts aren't known because the media won't report on them. The politicians won't talk about them and the special interests spend a lot of money trying to cover them up because they are making an absolute fortune. That's the way it is.'¹²

he is attempting to rationalize the feeling or belief that the governments before him have not tackled the 'immigration problem' the US supposedly has. In doing so he attempts to legitimize this feeling or belief. To put it banally, what Trump's speech amounts to saying 'you're not crazy for believing there is an immigration problem'. The popularity of populists can be seen as a result of the demand for rationalization, seeing how these politicians legitimize the beliefs, feelings and being as a subject of millions of people.

Another result of the current appreciation of rationalization is the loss of risk in rational practices. Foucault describes in *What is Critique?* how enlightenment rational thinking is initially formulated in terms of opposition to the ecclesiastic governing strategy. If we apply the idea that power sets the limits of legitimate being to the ecclesiastic government, we see that for a subject to be legitimized in its being it needs to be obedient (to the king, the church, the head of the family). Man was always subordinate to someone else (the king being subordinate to God) and the legitimacy of one's being as a subject was dependant one's obedience to this authority. Kings who go against the will of God are mad, those who go against the will of the king are traitors, who go against the church are heretics, who go against the family are immature, i.e. they are seen as illegitimate subjects, not worthy of being deemed a subject. In thinking for themselves, rationalizing, one displays

12: <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/09/02/us/politics/transcript-trump-immigration-speech.html?mcubz=0>

what Foucault calls ‘voluntary insubordination’¹³ and in doing so one risks the legitimacy of one’s being as a subject. This risk does not present itself in the possibility to be punished for this insubordination by the authority that was disobeyed, but in the fact that one is essentially ostracized, not from the community but from subjectivity altogether. Rationalization came with a risk because of its close connection to subjectivity, a risk that is completely lost in the contemporary use of rationalization.

The demand for rationalization implies a particular kind of subject that it legitimizes. First, it implies a certain distance between the subject from that which it acts upon. When rationalizing one’s thoughts, beliefs, feelings and actions there seems to always be something ‘over there’ which one perceives and acts upon. For example the death of one’s mother might make that person sad because they always did fun things together and now they will never get to do that again. There is a seeming separation between object and subject, which is extended to the separation between body and mind. One’s body is like a material counterpart of the mind, executing its orders and (often) interfering in this execution. Urges to have one more piece of chocolate, being easily agitated or involuntarily scratching one’s nose are addressed on the level of the pathological; it is our body acting on its own, regardless of mental objections. Second, common sense rationality seems to imply a self-contained autonomy of this subject. In the rational mode of being the nature of the separation between subject and object always seems to be defined in such a way that the subject only receives information from the object, the subject perceives the object, but ultimately it is the subject that acts upon that information. The death of one’s mom does not *make* one sad, ultimately one *gets* sad; one’s sadness is his/her action, it is perhaps triggered by something external (as is the reflex to dodge a ball) but in the end this sadness is derived from one’s subjectivity, not the event ‘death of mother’. Finally this presupposed subjectivity is seen as a given, something that is complete and not derived from something else. When one is born one might have to learn information, i.e. learn rules and facts, but one’s subjectivity is a given; we are born as subjects. We see that this is somewhat implied in the autonomous aspect of common sense subjectivity as well as in the presupposed separation between object and subject. If one’s subjectivity was in any way derived from something external to themselves, that would mean that the external world has determined one’s being as a subject which would mean that there is no separation between subject and object and deprive one of one’s autonomy.

This underlying subjectivity seems awfully similar to the somewhat infamous Cartesian subject, a conception of subjectivity that seems to be often targeted in later critiques of the rational form of governing. We see it in Foucault’s critique of the Cartesian moment in *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, in Merleau-Ponty’s critique of the object-subject distinction in *The Phenomenology of*

13: Foucault (1997) [2007] p. 47

Perception, in Sartre's critique of Husserl's conception of the ego in *The Transcendence of the Ego* and in Heidegger's deconstruction of Western philosophy in *Being and Time*.¹⁴ When looking at the Cartesian cogito it is easy to see that its characteristics managed to survive in the subjectivity that is implied by the demand for rationalization. Just like the subject implied by this demand, the Cartesian subject is self-contained: 'For, as a matter of fact, when I consider the mind, that is to say, myself inasmuch as I am only a thinking thing, I cannot distinguish in myself any parts, but apprehend myself to be clearly one and entire;¹⁵ as well as being separate from the objective world:

'although possibly (or rather certainly, as I shall say in a moment) I possess a body with which I am very intimately conjoined, yet because, on the one side, I have a clear and distinct idea of myself inasmuch as I am only a thinking and unextended thing, and as, on the other, I possess a distinct idea of body, inasmuch as it is only an extended and unthinking thing, it is certain that this I [that is to say, my soul by which I am what I am], is entirely and absolutely distinct from my body, and can exist without it.'¹⁶

It is important to emphasize that we are in no way suggesting that people who answer to the demand for rationalization consciously believe in a Cartesian subject. We are merely referring to the Cartesian subject as a philosophical parallel to the subject implied by the common sense conception of rationality. Much like how it does not matter if one is conscious of the absence of meat in one's food for one to eat vegetarian.

We mentioned that after 200 years of critique, the rationalizing mode of governing still stands strong, albeit almost unrecognizable from the use of rationalization propagated during the Enlightenment. The contemporary demand for rationalization has become self-subverting and devoid of risk due to its application as legitimization. Compared to the rationalization the Enlightenment project seemed to have in mind, our contemporary rationalization is almost unrecognizable. What we aim to do here is not propagating a return to a conception of rationalization as it was conceived by Enlightenment thinkers. We do, however, believe that in order to prevent rationalization to become self-subverting that it is important to reintroduce the element of risk and thus the close connection between rationalization and subjectivity. This is because bringing back the risk involved in rationalization might reduce people's willingness to apply rational practices to all facets of life, which leads to the self-subverting demand for rationalization and disrupt the idea that rationalization is the only legitimate form of subjective being, which further encourages such a demand for rationalization. The reintroduction of the risk into a notion of subjectivity that is similar to the Cartesian subject will,

14: Foucault (2001); Merleau-Ponty (1945); Sartre (1936); Heidegger (1927)

15: Descartes (1641) [2003] p.97

16: *ibid.* p.91

however, not amount to significant change. As long as the subject is seen as separate from the world it lives in and as completely autonomous, the act of rationalization cannot influence one's being as a subject. We will therefore look at subjectivities that distribute the origin and agency of the subject and thus 'embed' it into the world. Three such notions of subjectivity can be found in the works of Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze and Catherine Malabou.

Despite being very different philosophers, we believe that their conception of subjectivity is similar enough to seek to unite them, whilst being different enough from one another for them to each add something to both our conception of subjectivity and our conception of rationality. We will find that in the (implied) perspectivism that is advocated by these three philosophers we will be able to find a common ground based on which we can start conceptualizing a first general conception of an alternative rationalization. The goal of this thesis is therefore not so much to articulate a concrete different way to rationalize which will replace the contemporary inadequate one, as that it is to provide a first draft of a multifaceted conception of rationality that is at once singular and multiple, i.e. a multiplicity. In light of the failed attempts to slay our contemporary use of rationalization via a strongly formulated critique, a gradual transformation, similar to Nancy's conception of revolution in *Urbi et Orbi*, the first chapter of *The Creation of the World or Globalization*, might allow one to forgo the slaying altogether.¹⁷ Though conceptualizing the exact strategy to go about such a transformation is presently beyond the scope of this thesis, keeping such possibilities in mind will help us situate the work done here into a potentially larger project.

17: Nancy (2002)

Michel Foucault

Care and Constitution of the Self

In the works that we studied for this thesis, Foucault never explicitly states or formulates the aim of developing a concept of distributed subjectivity. He does, however, consistently imply that there is such a distribution, especially when dealing with ‘the constitution of the subject’ and ‘the care for the self’. The former is not the constitution of a subject by some external entity, for it might very well be that such an entity creates a complete and united subject at once. The reason we can assume a distribution of subjectivity in this ‘constitution of the subject’ is because Foucault uses it to denote the act by which one constitutes themselves, it describes a process of self-constitution. This implies a subjectivity with some sort of distribution of labour: there is something in subjectivity that gives it the ability to constitute and something that allows it to be constituted. A very similar distribution of labour in subjectivity is found in the aforementioned ‘care for the self’, a concept heavily discussed in lectures published in *The Hermeneutics of the Subject* and the aptly named third volume of *The History of Sexuality: The care of the self*. Self-constitution and self-care are discussed in relation to historical examples, however, these are not supposed to be directly transposed onto our modern times. How the Classical Greeks and Hellenistic Romans cultivated and cared for their ‘selves’ is not what is of significance, Foucault does not propagate a return to Greco-Roman ethics. The historical examples merely show that (1) these self-care and self-cultivation practices were at some point prevalent and (2) what it means to cultivate and care for one’s ‘self’. To us, especially the latter part is of interest. Foucault references this more passive self a lot directly, however, he never names the constitutive in subjectivity, always only describing the actual operation or process, without referring this back to a specific term. Perhaps intentionally left unnamed as to not create some closed concept for what seems to be an open and creative practicing force, for practical purposes we will call that which allows subjectivity to care for or constitute one’s self the ‘I’ (following the (post-) Kantian tradition that, as we shall see, Deleuze upholds as well). To further emphasize the ‘I’ and ‘self’ difference in the later works of Foucault and to show how the constitution of the self and the care of the self are related we will briefly elaborate on both concepts.

In the constitution of the self, the ‘I’ has a very particular relation to the ‘self’. Like a performative act, the constitution of the self is the bringing into existence of something (in this case the self) by acknowledging its existence. In the introduction to *The Use of Pleasure* Foucault claims to be looking for ‘the forms and modalities of the relation to self by which the individual constitutes and

recognizes himself qua subject.¹ Here we see the performativity of the act of the constitution of a self; the 'I' (or individual) at once constitutes, brings forth, creates, its self as subject and recognizes it as such. In the latter two of the volumes of *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault investigates two of such 'forms and modalities' by which people constitute themselves. In *The Use of Pleasure* the focus lays mostly on the Classical Greeks, in *The Care of the Self* it lays on Hellenistic Greco-Roman thought. For the Classical Greeks self-constitution was mostly concerned with practices of 'self-mastery' which were 'a way of being a man with respect to oneself; that is, a way of commanding what needed commanding, of coercing what was not capable of self-direction, of imposing principles of reason on what was wanting in reason; in short, it was a way of being active in relation to what was by nature passive and ought to remain so.'² This relation of the I as in control of the self is how, according to Foucault, the ethical Classical Greek subject related to his (for this was a male mode of existence) self. In Classical Greece, constituting the self as something one is in control over was thus the same as constituting oneself as an ethical subject. As such, constituting oneself as an ethical subject was 'contingent on a battle for power', one has to constitute themselves 'as a vigilant adversary who confronts them [= bodily urges/desires], and tries to subdue them [= these bodily urges/desires]'; one either triumphs over the assault of such desires or succumbs to them.³ This theme is to a certain extent continued in Foucault's analysis of the Hellenistic Greco-Roman culture, though there is much more emphasis on the problematization of constituting oneself as an ethical subject due to the emergence of a new political climate. In this new climate the political subject as manager of the household starts to become less uniform:

'Whereas formerly ethics implied a close connection between power over oneself and power over others [i.e. managing the household], and therefore had to refer to an aesthetics of life that accorded with one's status, the new rules of the political game made it more difficult to define the relations between what one was, what one could do, and what one was expected to accomplish. The formation of oneself as the ethical subject of one's own actions became more problematic.'⁴

One still ought to constitute themselves as an ethical subject, however this is no longer done in a relation of mere domination, but rather via one of reciprocity. Whereas Foucault describes the relation between the man and his spouse to be one of mastery in Classical Greece (like one masters one's body or masters one's household), spousal relations become more reciprocal in Hellenistic Rome.⁵ There is also an emphasis on the different ways in which one can go about constituting themselves as an

1: Foucault (1984a) [1990] p.6

2: *ibid.* p.82-3

3: *ibid.* p.66-7

4: Foucault (1984b) [1986] p.84

5: *ibid.* p.166

ethical subject in relation to love. The love for boys is no longer a different, purer love (as Foucault believes was the case in Classical Greece) but a different stylization of the same love one has for a woman.⁶ The contingency and particularity of self-constitution is not merely historical. Foucault states that ‘the constitution of this self-disciplined subject was not presented in the form of a universal law, which each and every individual would have to obey, but rather as a principle of stylization of conduct for those who wished to give their existence the most graceful and accomplished form possible.’⁷ This provides us with an initial idea of how Foucault envisions one should go about constituting oneself. However, before we explore this ‘self-stylization’ let us consider the other activity that shows the distribution of subjectivity: self-care.

Cultivation of the self, or self-care, is the maintenance of the constituted self. Just because one constitutes oneself as a creative person and sees oneself as such does not mean that one’s self already functions like a creative person’s would. What is needed is a cultivation of this particular self, the self that as it is initially constituted. This cultivation of the self is directly linked to the notion of self-care that Foucault focuses on in *The Care of the Self*: ‘This "cultivation of the self" can be briefly characterized by the fact that in this case the art of existence—the *techne tou biou* in its different forms—is dominated by the principle that says one must "take care of oneself.”’⁸ So what does it mean to ‘take care of oneself’? In the first lecture of *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, Foucault describes this principle in the relation it had to the well-known principle ‘know thyself’: ‘The *gnothi seauton* (“know yourself”) appears, quite clearly and again in a number of significant texts, within the more general framework of the *epimeleia heautou* (care for yourself) as one of the forms, one of the consequences, as a sort of concrete, precise, and particular application of the general rule: You must attend to yourself, you must not forget yourself, you must take care of yourself.’⁹ Foucault notes that ever since the ‘Cartesian moment’ we have heavily emphasized the *gnothi* as unrelated to the *epimeleia*. In antiquity, however, the function of knowing oneself was so one could better care for themselves. So for the continuation of the constituted self, the self needs to be cultivated, which means it has to be cared for. Knowledge of oneself, one’s current limits and capabilities, skills and faults is paramount in becoming the subject one wishes or believes one ought to become, i.e. in the caring for the cultivation of the constituted self. This emphasis on the self and the care for it might seem incredibly self-centred and isolated; however, as we shall see, cultivation of the self is a practice that depends on the social.

With this initial rough draft of self-constitution and self-care it becomes somewhat apparent by what means one constitutes and cultivates one’s self. However Foucault is interested in a very particular subjectivity: The ethical subject. But how does he envision constituting oneself as such an

6: *ibid.* p.197

7: Foucault (1984a) [1990] p.250-1

8: Foucault (1984b) [1986] p.43

9: Foucault (2001) [2005] p.4-5

ethical subject, especially when the ethics he is considering are not ‘codes’ that one is subjected to, but personal ‘rules of conduct’? Foucault proposes two important processes or activities through which one would constitute themselves as an ethical subject. The first of the processes through which one constitutes themselves as an ethical subject is the stylization of one’s life, the aesthetization of existence. The reader might have noticed that this term was already introduced in a quote we used above, to illustrate the difference in how people constitute themselves between the Classical and Hellenistic period. We will return to the exact nature of this relation between the constitution of the self and the aesthetics of existence presently. The second process is the ‘askesis’, the practice or challenge through which one both gains knowledge of themselves and cares for one’s self. Foucault is very adamant about the importance of askesis in the constitution of the ethical subject, as shown in *Care of the Self* where he says: ‘[...] through the exercises of abstinence and control that constitute the required askesis, the place allotted to selfknowledge becomes more important. The task of testing oneself, examining oneself, monitoring oneself in a series of clearly defined exercises, makes the question of truth – the truth concerning what one is, what one does, and what one is capable of doing – central to the formation of the ethical subject.’¹⁰.

The idea that subjectivity is not something one simply has, but something that is actively created radically changes the way one thinks about one’s ‘self’ and the world in which one lives. The inherent lack of finitude in this constitution of the self, arms us with a conception of subjectivity that is at once always personal (it is the result of a particular person’s life) and open to change. As we shall see this is a characteristic that is present in all three of the concepts of subjectivity that we will discuss in this thesis. For now, let us focus more on the relevance and contribution that specifically Foucault’s conception of subjectivity has to offer by delving deeper in the concepts of askesis and aesthetic of existence.

Askesis and the Aesthetics of Existence

In *The Use of Pleasure* Foucault defines askesis as: ‘an exercise of oneself in the activity of thought’.¹¹ The askesis is presented as a mental exercise, which was part of education or acquisition of techniques. The basic idea of exercise is not very foreign. If you want to ride a bike, only knowing what it is you need to do is not enough, askesis is the exercise, the practice, that complements knowledge: ‘Exercise was no less indispensable in this order of things than in the case of other techniques one acquired: mathesis alone was not sufficient; it had to be backed up by a training, an askesis.’¹² It is fundamental to not only passively learn about what ought to be done but that you learn

10: Foucault (1984b) [1986] p.68

11: Foucault (1984a) [1990] p.9

12: *ibid.* p.72

by doing what ought to be done. Practicing how to ride a bike or learning how to draw seems to make quite a lot of sense, but how exactly is askesis a mental form of practicing? Well, much like how one ought to develop and practice physical skills; the same is true of mental skills like self-conduct and determination. For the Greco-Romans that Foucault studies in his later works, this means that in order to be a 'good' or 'virtuous' person, one has to practice being good and being virtuous. Askesis is the process through which one practices the constitution of one's self, however, much like riding a bike, one practices by doing, or in Foucault's words: '[...] exercise [askesis] was regarded as the actual practice of what one needed to train for; it was not something distinct from the goal to be reached. Through training, one became accustomed to the behaviour that one would eventually have to manifest.'¹³ This is where the historical examples Foucault draws upon in his work come into use.

He gives among others, examples of Stoic exercises where, in order to prepare for possible future misfortune, a person would dine, dress and sleep like a servant or slave for some time every month. This would train one not to be reliant on luxury to be happy and allow one to find happiness in the minimal.¹⁴ Further down the same page Foucault retells how Seneca wondered whether or not he should attend the festivities of some sort of festival. Seneca considers not going, showing self-control by breaking with the conventions of the masses, but finally chooses to go and abstain from using any luxury food, drink or commodities. He sees this transformative affirmation of the custom as more triumphant than its negation. Of course the Stoics had very particular goals in mind when constituting themselves and these are themselves not of interest to us (nor to Foucault for that matter). It is the idea that the self is not some sort of ready-made, but something that had to be moulded, crafted or (as Malabou will describe it) 'sculpted' that is of interest.

Askesis perfectly highlights both the difference and the relation between the 'I' and the 'self'. The fact that one's 'self' is not immediately as one's 'I' wants it to be, but that it takes time and practice for this 'self' to take the desired form, shows that though the 'I' is relatively free, immediate and active, the self is more constrained, conservative and passive. However, it also shows that one's actions, one's 'I', not only constitutes its 'self', but that the 'I' is to a certain degree determined by the 'self'. The 'self' is not merely the 'I's' effect on the surrounding world, it is of the same thing as the 'I', of the same subjectivity. We can see that this corresponds with experience; whether one feels like breaking a bad habit like smoking or wants to start a good habit by becoming more ecologically aware, this desire on its own is not enough. And as the many people who failed to stick to their New Year's resolution will be able to testify, maintaining and cultivating a new attitude or good habit for longer than a month or two is harder than one initially thinks. The actions of the 'I' do not immediately change the 'self' in its entirety, this transformation is gradual and takes time and effort. Without a separation of 'I' and 'self' the common sense view on subjectivity usually either amounts

13: *ibid.* 74

14: Foucault (1984b) [1986] p.60

to something like ‘you can do anything you set your mind to’, or expressions along the line of ‘that is just the way I am’. A separation of ‘I’ and ‘self’ and a focus on the resilience of the ‘self’ as a result of the actions of the ‘I’, shows at once the possibility for change and the need for an askesis to achieve this change.

Another important facet of askesis is the importance of its practicality. Because askesis is supposed to be a practicing by doing, it should always aim to be pragmatic and tailored to the individual rather than adhering to a set of idealistic, universal rules, or as Foucault puts it in *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*: ‘We must train like an athlete; the latter does not learn every possible move, he does not try to perform pointless feats; he practices a few movements that are necessary for him to triumph over his opponents in the fight.’¹⁵ Or in *The Use of Pleasure*: ‘[...] in the texts of the classical period one finds relatively few details on the concrete form that the ethical askesis could take.’¹⁶ What is important is that the desired goal is reached. If stopping with smoking requires you start chewing gum, then this is sufficient, even though it is not the most radical or ‘strongest’ way to quit.

There is however, still the question of the self *before* one starts to actively constitute and cultivate it. Askesis is a tool for change, but where does the original self come from? Are we not still dealing with a preformed subject, but merely one that is more malleable? This is where it helps to understand askesis as ‘self-discipline’. This allows us to contrast askesis with the discipline Foucault describes in *Discipline and Punishment*. Here is explicitly stated that: ‘Discipline ‘makes’ individuals.’¹⁷ Foucault describes in detail how (among others) soldiers are ‘produced’, describing the person as formless clay that can be moulded into the desired fighting machine by making him go through certain motions, practices, i.e. by being disciplined.¹⁸ Military generals are not the only ones exerting disciplinary power to produce individuals; teachers, doctors and nurses and of course parents are disciplinary entities par excellence. Central to disciplinary power are observation and the normative judgement. As long as one is possibly being looked at, corrective power is exercised over one. Though people with clear positions of power are the ones that might be doing the active correcting, fellow students, siblings or strangers on the street become extensions of that power, possibly observing and judging one’s actions. *Possibly* is here the crux. It does not matter if one is actually being observed. Foucault shows in his explanation of the panoptic prison model that the mere possibility that one is being observed is enough to entice one to adhere to the norm.¹⁹ Through disciplinary practices we are not only taught the ‘objective’ order of the material world, but also the ‘objective’ order of social norms and customs.

This shows us the extent to which our actions, even if they are not actions we actively or

15: Foucault (2001) [2005] p.498

16: Foucault (1984a) [1990] p.74

17: Foucault (1975) [1995] p.170

18: *ibid.* p.135-6

19: *ibid.* p.200

consider make voluntarily, constitute our 'selves'. As we saw with the production of the soldier, by acting as ordered, these actions start to produce a particular individual. Similarly by adhering to the norm, one constitutes a 'self' that is in compliance with this norm. Askesis is a way to differentiate from the norm, but it does not allow for a complete escape. Earlier we have already noted that the 'I' is in part determined by the 'self'. The constraints to the constitution of one's self are not merely the physical limitations external to subjectivity (one cannot become accustomed to breathing water); they are internal to subjectivity, the disciplinary powers in society, as well.

We now have an account of how, according to Foucault, subjectivity is produced and how one can produce one's subjectivity in a particular way. However, questions that are now raised are: 'what does it mean to constitute oneself as an ethical subject?' And: 'what is meant with ethical?' This is where the aesthetics of existence comes in. The self-subjectification that Foucault is interested in is not some sort of adherence to or internalisation of a universal code or set of rules. Instead, the 'ethics' in the constitution of the ethical subject are a more personal set of rules or guidelines, something he calls 'an aesthetics of existence':

'Now, while this relation to truth, constitutive of the moderate subject, did not lead to a hermeneutics of desire, it did on the other hand open onto an aesthetics of existence. And what I mean by this is a way of life whose moral value did not depend either on one's being in conformity with a code of behavior, or on an effort of purification, but on certain formal principles in the use of pleasures, in the way one distributed them, in the limits one observed, in the hierarchy one respected.'²⁰

Though such an aesthetics of existence, or stylization of one's life, means the formulation of a personal ethics, which is continuously emphasized by contrasting it with codified, universal, Christian values, one formulates such an aesthetics of existence in relation to one's environment.²¹ For example, concerning the attitude towards the love for boys in the Hellenistic period: 'Now the difficulty becomes the reason for seeing it as a taste, a practice, a preference, which may have their tradition, but which are incapable of defining a style of living, an aesthetics of behavior, and a whole modality of relation to oneself, to others, and to truth. Plutarch's dialogue and that of Pseudo-Lucian attest both to the legitimacy that is still granted to the love of boys and to its increasing decline as a vital theme of a stylistics of existence.'²²

Here we see the introduction of the social aspect of the constitution and cultivation of the self.

20: Foucault (1984a) [1990] p.89

21: On contrast Christian, universal code with aesthetics of existence see: *ibid.* p.10-; *ibid.* p.92; *ibid.* p.253; Foucault (1984b) [1986] p.67

22: *ibid.* p.192

Not only is the cultivation of the 'self' explained as a very interpersonal process, in which mentor figures and good friends are indispensable, but the reality of how other people might react to your actions and intentions plays a significant role as well.²³ Foucault describes this sociality by providing the example of how in Classical Greece it was advisory that a boy should not give in to a male suitor to eagerly or easily. This is because a boy would one day become a man and as a man should not be associated with feminine qualities like being submissive in the act of love. If one's peers came to realize that he takes pleasure in taking on an effeminate role, this was reason for him to believe that this person lacked virtue, which in turn might have detrimental effects for one's future career.²⁴ Of course if one has no ambition or does not care what one's contemporaries think of him and does not mind being seen as effeminate, that boy is free to eagerly give in to his male suitors. However, as we saw before, the power relations one grows up in construct one's self. The boy from Foucault's example does not choose not to care about being effeminate in a void, he does so in a society and company that have instructed his actions and actively influenced the formation of his self. The boy does not choose to cover himself with faeces or run around naked any more than he would willingly lose his masculinity.

The need to formulate one's aesthetics of existence in a society without universal morality is explicitly stated by Foucault in an interview he did with Alessandro Fontana for the Italian *Panorama*. In this interview Foucault states that 'the idea of morality as obedience to a code of rules is now disappearing, has already disappeared' and that in light of this 'absence of morality' we must 'search for an aesthetics of existence'.²⁵ However, the lack of universal morality is not the lack of local norms and contemporary codes of conduct. One is asked to a certain degree to formulate what one sees as right or wrong, but one does this in a world filled with disciplinary practices that effectively homogenize. Subjectivity in Foucault is not only distributed in its division of labour (the constitutor and the constituted) but also in its producers. Formulating an aesthetics of existence is a way to personally stylize one's life, but the stylizing subject is the result of (self-)disciplinary practices.

With this emphasis on askesis (the practice) and the aesthetics of existence (the personal values) the questions of truth and of rationality remain.

Formulating Perspective: a Rationality of Care

In the introduction it was mentioned we have lost a risk component in the relation between the subject and truth. To see how Foucault brings the risk back into rationality we will first have to understand subjectivity's relation to truth and rationality's role in this relation. Truth is a very

23: *ibid.* [1986] p.53

24: Foucault (1984a) [1990] p.223

25: Foucault (1990) p.49

important aspect of the constitution of the ethical subject and thus of both the aesthetics of existence and askesis, in fact as we can see in the quote used when introducing the concept of askesis and in the quote used when elaborating upon the aesthetics of existence Foucault speaks of the importance of truth in both of these concepts. However, what sort of truth is it that Foucault is advocating here? In the aforementioned interview with Alessandro Fontana, Foucault says: ‘I believe too much in truth not to suppose that there are different truths and different ways of speaking the truth.’²⁶ This seems to suggest that the truth Foucault talks about in the formation of the ethical subject is a personal truth, the truth from a particular perspective. That the truth Foucault is talking about is a perspectivistic truth becomes abundantly clear in his discussion of parrhesia.

Parrhesia is bluntly put ‘telling the truth’, however not as some sort of confession. Rather it has the form of setting someone straight, telling them ‘how it is’. In the example Foucault uses to analyse parrhesia, Dion displays parrhesia by telling his king, Dionysius, that under the rule of his predecessor the town flourished and was most beautiful to behold, whereas under the rule of Dionysius it is dreadful.²⁷ Taking this story as a model from which to understand parrhesia, Foucault defines three main aspects of the parrhesiatic act. The first is a close relation between the subject and the truth, i.e. truthfully speaking one’s mind even if this is at odds with what people want to hear.²⁸ Second is the aspect of the risk involved in speaking your mind. When Dion tells Dionysius the truth by saying how he is a poorer ruler than his predecessor, he formulates a perspective that is at odds with the status quo, thus risking the legitimacy of his subjectivity.²⁹ The parrhesiatic act is a confrontation. One confronts the truth of a person in power with one’s own truth. The truth of the parrhesiast challenges the truth of the establishment. Dion’s statement is not supposed to educate Dionysius to become a better ruler, or persuade him to see the error of his ways, it is a confrontation of perspectives instigated by the one who is not in power. This brings in the third aspect of the parrhesiatic act, the binding contract: ‘The parrhesiast, the person who uses parrhesia, is the truthful man (*l’homme véridique*), that is to say, the person who has the courage to risk telling the truth, and who risks this truth-telling in a pact with himself, inasmuch as he is, precisely, the enunciator of the truth.’³⁰ One basically says ‘This is what I think is true, even though it might seem mad, and I bind myself to this statement by being ready to face all potential consequences that might follow from the fact that this statement might be mad.’ Parrhesia as the confrontation of perspectives by articulating one’s truth, is exemplary of Foucault’s conception of truth as perspectivism.

Parrhesia further ‘socializes’ the care for the self. It is beneficial to know people who dare to set you straight, who challenge your perspective. This is because in the constitution and care of oneself as ethical subject, one does so in accordance with what one believes to be true. If it turns out

26: *ibid.* p.51

27: Foucault (2008) [2010] p.49-50

28: *ibid.* p.50-1

29: *ibid.* p.s56

30: *ibid.* p.60

that, according to others, you are in the wrong, their different perspective(s) can be beneficial for the constitution of oneself as ethical subject. In light of this conception of truth and subjectivity, what is the function of rationality? Well in respect to subjectivity, rationalization becomes an intrinsic part of self-care. The constitution of the self in accordance with an aesthetics of existence consists of constituting and cultivating this self as adhering to what one believes to be the truth; this is the mathesis or knowledge. We use rational practices to formulate a perspective on the world, i.e. a mathesis, a knowledge of the order of the world, and this allows us to constitute ourselves in accordance with said knowledge. Earlier on the mathesis was dismissed as being insufficient to constitute the self, however without mathesis there is no guided askesis, our perspective directs our self-constitution. If one is not to some degree explained what to do, one's attempts at riding a bicycle will be pretty disastrous. This makes rationalization, the process of acquiring a point of view on the world, and thus knowledge of said world, instrumental in care for the self; one needs to know what is healthy to be healthy, what is stimulating to the brain to continue developing one's mental capacity and if one wants to conceive a kid, what steps to take to improve the odds of getting pregnant. Foucault's conception of rationality follows the structure prior to the Cartesian Moment, that we discussed earlier in this thesis and reintroduces the element of risk that was lost after the enlightenment by linking the self-constitution of subjectivity to one's perspective. This means that if one's perspective is at odds with that of others, we are not merely dealing with a disagreement between subjects but with an evaluation of one's functioning as a subject; are they just crazy or is there something to what they are saying? Rational practices allow us to 'know ourselves', i.e. formulate our perspective on the world and use this knowledge to care for ourselves, i.e. constitute and cultivate our subjectivity in accordance with how we believe we ought to live. Foucault formulates the know yourself as dependant on knowledge of one's view on the world quite explicitly: 'What is involved in this knowledge of the self is not something like an alternative: either we know nature or we know ourselves. In fact, we can only know ourselves properly if we have a point of view on nature, a knowledge (*connaissance*), a broad and detailed knowledge (*savoir*) that allows us to know not only its overall organization [mathesis], but also its details.'³¹

This is where we return to the current state of affairs, rationality after the Cartesian moment in the age of bio-power. This is the point where rationalization stopped functioning as the articulation and constitution of a perspective and where we lost the risk involved in the use of rational self-constitution. Our contemporary rationality, which is completely separate from our 'selves' as subjectivity, needs to be fed back into subjectivity if we want to reintroduce the risk Foucault found in the Kantian rational critique of ecclesiastic governing. Foucault's conception of rationalization is rationalization as conversion, as the articulation and constitution of the perspective and not as the legitimization of being.

31: Foucault (2001) [2005] p.278

Conclusion

Though rational being is in our contemporary society the only legitimate mode of being, this rational being is completely dissociated from the subject in its being, i.e. rationalization no longer has a direct impact on one's being as a subject. The subjectivity that Foucault seems interested in re-evaluating, i.e. the subjectivity that underlies the historical examples he analyses, embeds the subject in a field of subjectivity producing power relations. Before one consciously constitutes themselves in a particular way, i.e. forms a particular perspective on the world, the self is constituted through disciplinary forces in the world it lives in. This alternative conception of subjectivity makes a harsh external-internal division unsustainable and demands a rationalization that considers the subject as a being-in-the-world. Conceiving rationalization as a means to constitute a perspective on the world, and thus as knowledge of the world according to which we constitute our subjectivity, is a good initial step towards conceiving of a new rationalization. Foucault gives us a conception of rationalization that is engaged with the articulation and constitution of perspectives but despite describing that when two clearly defined perspective clash the need to re-evaluate one's perspective arises, he does not adequately help us understand why this presents a need, why we cannot simply go on believing the same thing we used to believe. Nor does he allow for something other than another human perspective to create the need to re-evaluate one's current perspective. However, when looking at something like scientific practice (though it is something we encounter in day to day life as well) it becomes hard to maintain that when a scientist finds data incompatible with the hypothesis that it is an already established perspective, represented by a different person or group of people that has challenged his/her perspective and created the need to re-evaluate it. Though his conception of rationalization as the constitution of a perspective is very useful, Foucault is unable to provide us with a complete understanding of what causes one to change one's perspective. This is where we require the addition of Deleuze's conception of rationality, which will be somewhat unintelligible without his conception of subjectivity. Deleuze will provide us with a more metaphysical understanding of the point of view, as well as help us relate it more precisely to the 'self' and the 'I'. Furthermore, Deleuze's understanding of rationality will allow us to further limit the totalizing tendency the demand for rationalization has in contemporary society, something Foucault has been unable to completely do away with.

Gilles Deleuze

Three Syntheses of Time

Deleuze is, in his own way, quite clear about his view on the distribution of subjectivity. He upholds a separation between the active 'I' and a passive 'self', following Kant and post-Kantian philosophy. However, the 'I' of Deleuze is a fractured, germinal 'I' and the 'self' an amalgamation of tiny little 'souls'. In Deleuze we see that not only the subject fractures, but the established components of the subject (the 'I' and the self) are further distributed as well. Deleuze best explains his conception of the 'I' and 'self' in the second chapter of *Difference and Repetition*. Here he discusses the three 'passive syntheses of time' that constitute or are undertaken by the self and the I: The first synthesis of time of the present and Habit, the second synthesis of time of the past and Memory and the third synthesis of time of the future and Eternal Return. Each of these syntheses of time – past, future and present – relate to a different aspect of Deleuze's conception of subjectivity. Before delving into these different conceptions it is probably best to expand upon the notion of time.

If subjectivity is the result of synthesizing time, then Deleuze's conception of time differs from the everyday more common sense use of the term. Following Kant, who introduces time to solve the disparity between the determined, active and thinking 'I' and the undetermined, passive and persisting 'self' as the determinable that allows the determined to guarantee the undetermined, Deleuze's own notion of subjectivity is closely related to time. However, following Bergson's reading of time, time is not merely subjective, subjectivity in its pure form *is* time:

'Bergsonism has often been reduced to the following idea: duration is subjective, and constitutes our internal life. And it is true that Bergson had to express himself in this way, at least at the outset. But, increasingly, he came to say something quite different: the only subjectivity is time, non-chronological time grasped in its foundation, and it is we who are internal to time, not the other way round. That we are in time looks like a commonplace, yet it is the highest paradox. Time is not the interior in us, but just the opposite, the interiority in which we are, in which we move, live and change. Bergson is much closer to Kant than he himself thinks: Kant defined time as the form of interiority, in the sense that we are internal to time (but Bergson conceives this form quite differently from Kant).'¹

We do not have subjectivity: 'Subjectivity is never ours, it is time', rather we move in

1: Deleuze (1985) [1989] p.82

subjectivity, i.e. in time. Each individual being has its own corresponding piece of time, however, before we get into the ‘carving’ of time and the relation of time as a whole to individual durations, we will focus on the three syntheses of time. Seeing time as subjectivity makes it immediately clear how it is possible for Deleuze to conceive the constitution of the ‘I’ and the ‘self’ as synthesizing time. The exact way subjectivity is synthesized out of time is what will be discussed next.

The first of the three syntheses of time forms what Deleuze initially calls ‘the lived present’.² In the lived present, the past and the future belong to the present as its dimensions. The lived present is synthesized from the past presents (moments which were at one point present) which function as the particulars from which we draw a generality used to anticipate the future: ‘[T]he living present goes from the past to the future which it constitutes in time, which is to say also from the particular to the general: from the particulars which it envelops by contraction to the general which it develops in the field of its expectation (the difference produced in the mind is generality itself in so far as it forms a living rule for the future.’³ From the past experiences with fire one learns that one burns themselves every time one gets too close to it. All these particular instances allow one to infer a generality: Fire is hot. In our lived present this amounts to an anticipation of the future based on the past.

Deleuze calls this the formation of ‘Habit’.⁴ These habits are not mental, I do not consciously learn to associate fire with warmth and potentially pain. This means that this synthesis of time is both passive (one does not actively form the habit) and unconscious, as in ‘not-conscious’ (one is not aware of the vast majority of one’s habits).⁵ The formation of Habit (the capital letter is used to indicate the Deleuzian term) is therefore not limited to humans. Rather the formation of Habit happens at the level of the rat in the maze who finds its way out, the heart that beats, the muscles that move, the nerves that send information, the cells that create proteins... all have Habit acquired by the synthesis of time (of the first kind). The process of the first synthesis of time is likened to the motion of contraction, a local solidifying of past and future in the present; Deleuze also calls this process ‘contemplation’ and it is through contemplation, through a contraction of time, that the ‘self’ is constructed.⁶

This immediately clarifies the statement made earlier about Deleuze’s conception of a scattered self, our self is made up of countless other selves consisting of and made up of our cells and organs. Every ‘system’ in one’s body is a contraction of time, a tiny little self with its own Habits; one’s cells produce RNA from DNA and produce hormones and other proteins from this RNA, one’s

2: Deleuze (1968) [2001] p.73

3: *ibid.* p.71

4: *ibid.* p.74

5: *ibid.* p.70

6: *ibid.* p.75

heart beats, one's chest muscles contract and relax to fill the lungs with air, etc. For Deleuze, one's self consists of nothing more than these contemplations, these contractions of time into habits: 'It is simultaneously through contraction that we are habits, but through contemplation that we contract. We are contemplations, we are imaginations, we are generalities, claims and satisfactions.'⁷ However, Deleuze soon recognizes that his first synthesis of time on its own runs into some problems. If there is only the lived present with its anticipation of the future based on previous presents, then what causes one present to pass and another to follow, where do these presents that pass go and how are a series of consecutive presents related to one another? Deleuze calls this a paradox of the present: 'to constitute time while passing in the time constituted.'⁸ And from this he draws the following conclusion: '*there must be another time in which the first synthesis of time can occur.*'⁸ (DR p.79), which is the second synthesis of time.

The second synthesis of time is the time in which the first synthesis of time occurs. This second synthesis is what Deleuze (following Bergson) calls 'Memory'.⁹ In Memory, the future and the present are dimensions of the past; it is in the past that present presents pass which allows for future presents to occur. Memory, or past in general, deals with different notions of difference and repetition than the lived present. Whereas the present is created by contracting repetitions of particular events into a difference, i.e. a general anticipation towards the future, the past is a generality that allows the particular presents to pass.¹⁰ We need this general conception of the past to ascribe what Deleuze calls 'Destiny' to presents that follow each other:

'Nevertheless, however strong the incoherence or possible opposition between successive presents, we have the impression that each of them plays out 'the same life' at different levels. This is what we call destiny. Destiny never consists in step-by-step deterministic relations between presents which succeed one another according to the order of a represented time. Rather, it implies between successive presents non-localisable connections, actions at a distance, systems of replay, resonance and echoes, objective chances, signs, signals and roles which transcend spatial locations and temporal successions.'¹¹

To help understand this, take the example of reading. One's ability to read is a Habit, based on repeated encounters with words in the past we have a certain expectation about their meaning in our future encounters with them; the repetition of past particulars contracted into an anticipation of the future. However, given our ability and only this ability to read, we are not yet capable of reading a

7: *ibid.* p.74

8: *ibid.* p.79

9: *ibid.*

10: *ibid.* p.82

11: *ibid.* p.83

sentence. What we need is a past in general that sort of collects, organizes and connects the particular words we read in the present, so we can evaluate them in relation to one another. Reading not only requires Habit, it requires Memory as well. This Memory is not mental but ontological, Deleuze explicitly mentions this in *Bergsonism*.¹²

As it is that in which particular presents pass, Memory predates these presents, we need Memory as pure past so we can form Habits and have lived present. Not only does it predate the lived present, it is coexistent with it, for the past in general needs to ‘be’ in order for the present present to pass into the past. These are two of four ‘paradoxes’ (qualities of the past that contradict its common sense relation to the present) concerning the past that Deleuze discusses in the second chapter of *Difference and Repetition*. The former is called the paradox of pre-existence, the latter the paradox of coexistence. The other two paradoxes of the past are the paradox of the contemporaneity of the past with former presents and the paradox of the present as infinitely contracted present.

It is here that Deleuze introduces the Bergsonian ‘inverted cone’ a metaphor that Deleuze adopts not only to explain Bergson’s philosophy in *Bergsonism*, but also in *Cinema II* to explain both the use of time and the use of the point of view in film, as well as using it in *The Fold* to visualize his perspectivism. The past in general as constituted in the second synthesis of time is thus not a past in the sense that it once ‘was’; rather as Deleuze says it: ‘We cannot say that it was. It no longer exists, it does not exist, but it insists, it consists, it is. It insists with the former present, it consists with the new or present present. It is the in-itself of time as the final ground of the passage of time. In this sense it forms a pure, general, a priori element of all time.’¹³ Much like how the lived present never stops being present (as a particular present passes a new present reveals itself to the lived present), the past in general never stops being. The past in general, a past coexistent with and pre-existing the lived present, is the past that never ceases to be. In *Bergsonism*, Deleuze therefore equates the past in general with ontology: Memory *is* Being.¹⁴ If it is the past in general that gives our lives Destiny (in the Deleuzian sense) than it makes sense to make such a move. Though we are contemplations, what gives these separate contemplations being is our past; our particular being is our particular past as being in general is past in general.

We now have two syntheses of time and it is important to remind oneself that the present that is coexistent with the past is the present of the second synthesis of time, whereas the lived present that is the synthesis of past and future is the present of the first synthesis of time. Following Bergson, Deleuze gives real qualitative differences to these separate syntheses of time, attributing materiality, actuality to the first, while the second belongs to spirituality, virtuality.¹⁵

12: Deleuze (1966) [2002] p.55

13: Deleuze (1968) [2001] p.82

14: Deleuze (1966) [2002] p. 56-6

15: Deleuze (1968) [2001] p.84

The overlap between Foucault's notion of the self in subjectivity and that of Deleuze should already become somewhat apparent; both are created in the act of repetition (discipline). However, Deleuze seems to extend this notion of self further than what we have seen Foucault do, ascribing it to 'systems' like nerves and muscles that we would usually not ascribe subjectivity to. By understanding the formation of Habit as contemplation, Deleuze comes very close to some sort of 'panpsychism'. In doing this, questions about how the 'external world' of objects influences the 'internal world' of subjectivity become mute. Everything that is in time in general, i.e. has duration, and contracts this time into Habit is subjectivity and thus on the same level as we humans are. There is no hierarchical difference between my being and the being of a table. Deleuze calls this the 'univocity of being'.¹⁶ This univocity of being embeds the subject into the world and answers questions about how objects, when taken as completely foreign to subjects, are able to have an effect on subjects even when the subjects in question do not have clear perceptions of these objects. In short it allows us to meaningfully discuss the subconscious influences the world has on us and the limits of one's autonomy. Is a consumer responsible for the effects their purchases have on the environment? What is the responsibility of marketing agencies that attempt to get people to purchase things? What about the companies that hire these marketing agencies? Questions like this fall on mute ears as long as people understand themselves as autonomous subjects. In order to achieve any change in the way people deal with these issues we will have to change the way people think about themselves and how they apply rationalization. Of course Deleuze's subjectivity is not the only answer, but his notion of univocity of being is a very useful, albeit somewhat radical, way to achieve this. The entire notion of change, however, is yet to be discussed. With the current syntheses of time we have seen the emergence of difference from repetition (Habit) and the repetition of a same in different presents (Memory), but there is nothing that guarantees a change of events, i.e. as long as there is only one and the same Habit synthesised in Memory, everything would always remain the same. This is where the third synthesis of time comes into play.

The third synthesis of time is effectively Deleuze's reading of Nietzsche's eternal return of the same, now interpreted such that the same is difference. For Deleuze this is not an imperative to live by but a real metaphysical aspect of time. What repeats in the eternal return is not the past, nor the present but the future: 'Repetition is never a historical fact, but rather the historical condition under which something new is effectively produced.'¹⁷ Like Habit is the synthesis of time of the present and Memory is the synthesis of time of the past, Eternal Return is the synthesis of the future. Like Habit and Memory, past and present are in the case of the eternal return dimensions of the future.

16: *ibid.* p.36

17: *ibid.* p.90

18: *ibid.* p.93

19: *ibid.* p.90

The relation of the past and the present to the future as Eternal Return is respectively that of condition and agent.¹⁸ Past and present function in the Eternal Return as dimensions of the future. The eternal return is the production of something new, the repetition of difference: ‘We produce something new only on condition that we repeat - once in the mode which constitutes the past, and once more in the present of metamorphosis. Moreover, what is produced, the absolutely new itself, is in turn nothing but repetition: the third repetition, this time by excess, the repetition of the future as eternal return.’¹⁹

Take for example Monet’s *Olympia*. This is not the repetition of Titian’s *Venus of Urbino*, however the *Venus* clearly functions as its condition, the past based on which the new is created. Monet himself functions as the agent in the present, he who starts the process of metamorphosis of the condition into something new, his *Olympia*. He creates something independent of both himself and the *Venus: Olympia*. *Olympia* discards both its past condition (the *Venus of Urbino*) and the agent of the present (Monet), in the creative process of the eternal return; the future that is created sheds itself from the past and the present. We can see how this makes the third synthesis of time radically different from the first and the second. In the formation of Habit we do not lose the past and the future, we create something additionally by contracting the two in lived present. In Memory we maintain both the present (as contracted past) and the future (as mode of reflection on a past present). But in Eternal Return we discard the past and the present, after the transformation, the past as condition and the present as agent have fulfilled their task and are lost: ‘Eternal return affects only the new, what is produced under the condition of default and by the intermediary of metamorphosis. However, it causes neither the condition (past in general) nor the agent (lived present) to return: on the contrary, it repudiates these and expels them with all its centrifugal force.’²⁰

We have seen that the first synthesis of time constitutes the self and the second synthesis of time is the condition of this constitution. The remaining element of subjectivity that we have yet to touch upon is the ‘I’, which is constituted in the eternal return. However, unlike the self, which is the product of contemplation, the ‘I’ is not so much the result of the third synthesis of time as that it is like the third synthesis of time. The active ‘I’ contains all three dimensions of time in the Eternal Return, the past as condition, the present as agent and the future as new:

‘We may define the order of time as this purely formal distribution of the unequal in the function of a caesura. We can then distinguish a more or less extensive past and a future in inverse proportion, but the future and the past here are not empirical and dynamic determinations of time: they are formal and fixed characteristics which follow a priori from the order of time, as though they comprised a static synthesis of time. The synthesis is necessarily static, since time is no longer subordinated to movement; time is the most radical form of change, but the form of change does not change. The caesura, along with the before

20: *ibid.* p.90

and after which it ordains once and for all, constitutes the fracture in the I (the caesura is exactly the point at which the fracture appears)'.²¹

The active 'I' in Deleuze's work is a creative entity. It produces a new future from its past in a moment of metamorphosis. The condition is time as bigger than oneself, the past in general, the transformative moment happens when one equates themselves with time after which there is a new which overturns the past and goes beyond the actor of the present, giving rise to something independent (the French revolution has become distinct from the revolutionaries).²² This is why the 'I' is fractured, as creative force, as producer of a 'new', it belongs both to the past, the present and the future. When there is 'I', there is the creation of something new out of the old via a process of metamorphosis in the present. What is important to understand here is that the active 'I' is *always* creative. The French revolution is the product of the transformation of the Roman Republic the revolutionaries based themselves on, but also the transformation of the Ancien Régime into the Republic of France. The metamorphosis of the creative 'I' is not an instant but a continuous event, an endless fracturing of time. 'I' is not a nice compact synthesis of past and present created in the future, it is a rampantly spreading, decentred movement in time.

The active component ('I') of Deleuze's notion of distributed subjectivity is also far more radical than that of Foucault. Where Foucault's 'I' is still rather centralized and consistent, Deleuze considers the 'I' to be in something like a constant flux, somewhat bogged down and contained by its corresponding 'self' (the creative act still depends on the past and the present). However, here there is also significant overlap between the two conceptions. In both cases the 'I' is a creative force, producing something 'new' and the concept of transformation is central to their notions of subjectivity. The 'I' presents the possibility for self-governed change. Distributed subjectivity is, as Malabou would say, situated between determinism and freedom; it introduces change into what would otherwise be monotonous, 'bare' repetition.

Now that we have an adequate view of the three syntheses of time, their relation to one another and their relation to the self and the 'I', we will give some more attention to the actual-virtual distinction and the metaphor of the inverted cone.

The Actual, the Virtual and the Inverted Cone

As mentioned before, the pure past and the lived present each have their own respective field to which they belong, the former being virtual, the latter being actual, the one spiritual, the other

21: *ibid.* p.89

22: *ibid.* p.90-1

23: Deleuze (1985) [1989] p.69

material. This relation of virtuality and actuality is quite important to understand the conception of what might be considered an ‘individual subject’ in the totality of time as subjectivity. We have seen that the pure past is the condition of the lived present: without Memory, we would be unable to form Habits. However, the relation is not this one-sided. In *Cinema II* Deleuze explicitly states that there is no virtual without a corresponding actual.²³ To understand this take for instance the virtual as pure past, i.e. as being. The past in general is the condition for the passing of presents, if there is no lived present through which presents pass into the past, there would be no need to conceive of a past in general.

What is of importance to note here is the idea of *a* virtual corresponding to *an* actual. Though the past in general is the transcendental a priori that enables presents to pass, and though the past in general belongs to the virtual, there are also virtual pasts of particular actualities. This is where it becomes useful to turn towards the metaphor of the inverted cone:

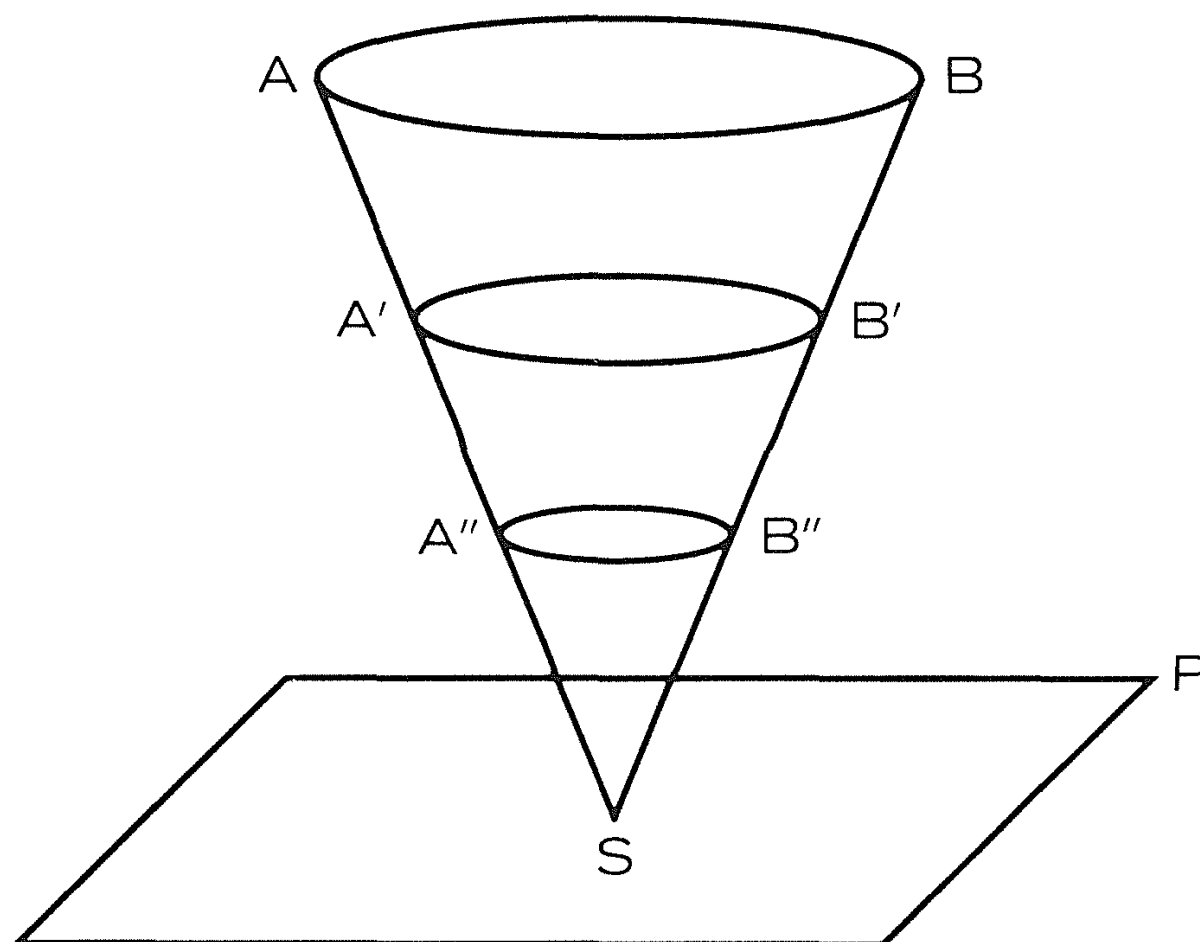


Figure 1 (Taken from *Bergsonism* p.60)

The inverted cone is a visual metaphor that shows the coexistence of someone’s entire past with one’s actuality, one is the apex in actuality, but also one’s entire virtual past. It is for this reason that, according to Deleuze, Bergson comes to the conclusion that the present as dimension of the past in

general is nothing but the infinitely contracted form of this past.²⁴ However, what is of importance to note is that the past as a whole does not only coexist with the current present, it coexists with all past presents as well: 'The idea of a contemporaneity of the present and the past has one final consequence: Not only does the past coexist with the present that has been, but, as it preserves itself in itself (while the present passes), it is the whole, integral past; it is all our past, which coexists with each present.'²⁵

To make sense of this, let us first look at the present present, i.e. the lived present. In the lived present one's self is a contraction of contemplations, of collections of past presents based upon which they have formed the habits that one's self consist off. In the present, as Habit, one's self is nothing but an infinite contraction of the past. Thus it makes sense to say that not only does one's past in general coexist with the present, but so do the past presents. How then should we conceive of the coexistence of one's entire past with a particular past present? Well, when thinking back to a particular moment, one cannot see that moment in its actuality anymore, i.e. in its undetermined relation to its immediate future. Like a movie that one knows the ending of, you cannot see the events that transpired without placing them in relation to the events that will follow it. The memory of a former lover will always be that of the lover that is no more, the event has passed and we know what follows. Thus the whole of one's past is not only coexistent with the current present but with all past presents as well. The sections higher up the cone are therefore not further back in the past, but each section is the whole past in its proper level of contraction. The AB section is not closer to one's birth than the section A'B'' (see *figure 1*), it is less contracted, more relaxed. If it can be said that it is less close to the actual present than this is only true in the sense that it is less relevant in the current present. The memory of that one time the store was out of peanut butter is, when one is discussing a movie one saw that one time, in a very relaxed level of contraction in the cone. Even if the memory of the lacking peanut butter was more recent than the actual watching of the movie, through active recollection the virtuality of the movie is now actualized and in a far more contracted state than the memory of the peanut butter. In fact, as long as the memory of the lacking peanut butter is not in any way actual, one could even say that it isn't, because it does not insist, for the virtual is only virtual as long as it is actualized: '[T]he subjective, or duration, is the virtual. To be more precise, it is the virtual insofar as it is actualized, in the course of being actualized, it is inseparable from the movement of its actualization.'²⁶ In sum, the relation of the virtual past and the actual present is one of reciprocity, there is no actuality without a corresponding virtuality; this applies to Memory and Habit in general, but also to particular habits and their corresponding memories.

We have introduced the idea that there are not only individual contractions of time, but that there are individual corresponding pasts in general as well. Similar to a Leibnizian monad, this

24: Deleuze (1968) [2001] p.82; Deleuze (1966) [2002] p.67

25: *ibid.* p.59

26: *ibid.* p.42-3

individual past in general contains the ‘Whole ‘of time, much like how a particular memory contains the whole of Memory. This does not mean that these individual ‘durations’ are ‘complete concepts’, the active process of transformation seems to indicate the exact opposite. We, however, have yet to present a convincing argument for the differentiation of this past in general. If subjectivity is time, then how do particular subjectivities distinguish themselves from time as a whole? The virtual becomes particular to an actuality precisely as this virtual is being actualized: ‘In short, the characteristic of virtuality is to exist in such a way that it is actualized by being differentiated and is forced to differentiate itself, to create its lines of differentiation in order to be actualized.’²⁷ In *Bergsonism*, Deleuze, approaching the coexistence of the past en the present from a different angle than he does in *Difference and Repetition*, states that the ‘virtual coexistence of all levels of the past’ is ‘extended to the whole of the universe’²⁸ and that this virtual ‘Whole’ divides itself ‘by being acted out.’²⁹ Virtual past in general is thus, while being one, always also multiple. The term Deleuze adopts from Bergson to denote such a state of fractured unity is ‘multiplicity’. Time is a multiplicity and thus so is subjectivity. Because the virtual is only to the extent that it is actualized, we can see that this multiplicity is not something like a set, a collection of entities that have certain criteria. Instead it is more like the Pando, a tree that, like a fungus, spreads a network of roots underground and sprouts trees that are technically all the same entity. Each particular tree is still part of the whole of the Pando, while being distinct in its particular way of growing and sprouting of branches and in its relative position to the other trees. And in this constantly changing actuality, the corresponding virtuality is also constantly changing, both on the level of the whole and in the carvings of the Pando in its individual trees. The multiplicity of Pando is radically different from the set of ‘trees sprouting from the same system of roots’, just like time as subjectivity is a multiplicity of the actualization of virtualities and not a set of actualized virtuality.

In such a pure and metaphysical understanding of subjectivity, how does Deleuze, if at all conceive of rationality? Well despite not being all to articulate on the subject of rationality, by referring to his second use of the metaphor of the cone, the cone as point of view, we should be able to get at least a partial understanding of Deleuze’s take on rationality and his contribution to our conception of a new rationalization.

27: *ibid.* p.97

28: *ibid.* p.77

29: *ibid.* p.104

The theorem and the problem

Rationality as a concept has been discussed as such in only one of the works of Deleuze that we have taken into consideration for this thesis. In *Cinema II*, Deleuze describes the ‘rational cut’ as something opposed to the ‘irrational cut’. The rational cut belongs to what precedes and follows it, the irrational cut being independent from the shots that precedes it.³⁰ The concept of the rational cut as such is not of much interest to us here, however, that which makes the cut rational as opposed to irrational very much is. The rational cut is a cut that is very much in line with expectation, the cut shows ‘the end of one [scene] or the beginning of another’.³¹ If one cuts rationally from one face to another in a shot-reverse-shot sequence as seen in most every conversation in film, one cuts either to show the end of one person’s lines, or the beginning of the other person’s reaction. Within the bounds of the scene, the camera acts rationally if it cuts in line with the interiority of the scene. This means that it can even cut away from the conversation to someone interrupting it to designate the end of the conversation or it can cut to what someone is thinking about during the conversation, all while remaining rational. It all follows from what we expect from a conversation, that two or more people partake in it and that it eventually ends. In light of our discussion of the syntheses of time, the rational clearly belongs to Habit, the lived present.

The irrational cut cuts to something unrelated to the preceding and following shots, it cuts not to designate the end of something or the beginning of something else, but to something foreign, non-chronological. A great example of this is seen in the 1995 animated movie *Ghost in the Shell* (or *Kôkaku Kidôtai* in Japanese). In this film there is a scene that stands out from the rest consisting of a sequence of shots that show us parts of the city our main character resides in: shots of the canals, the stores, masses of people, etc. The sequence is devoid of temporality, you can rearrange the shots in any way you want without disrupting the actions seen on screen and they do not necessarily follow one another; they are not rationally cut. This particular sequence is not in any way announced in the preceding moments nor is it referred to later on in the movie, at least not as an event that took place. For the events that actually take place in the story of the movie the sequence could easily be removed without any impact on the narrative of the movie. It is completely irrational, not because it doesn’t make any sense (though it might not on a purely intellectual level) but because it is an ‘interstice’, a break in the continuity of rationality. Deleuze also calls this the ‘unthought in thought’, or the introduction of the ‘problem’ into the ‘theorem’.³²

Deleuze puts the distinction between the problem and the theorem as follows: ‘The problematic is distinguished from the theorematic (or constructivism from the axiomatic) in that the

30: Deleuze (1985) [1989] p.181

31: *ibid.* p.181

32: *ibid.* p.175

theorem develops internal relationships from principle to consequences, while the problem introduces an event from the outside — removal, addition, cutting — which constitutes its own conditions and determines the ‘case’ or cases: hence the ellipse, hyperbola, parabola, straight lines and the point are cases of projection of the circle on its secant planes, in relation to the apex of a cone.³³

Here get to really develop to the second use of the cone in Deleuze’s work: The cone as point of view and not so much as metaphor of the coexistence of the past and the present, but as visualization of his notion of perspectivism.

He develops this notion of perspectivism in relative detail in *Cinema II* and *The Fold*. This perspectivism supposes that the theorem aligns with our conception of the object that we are looking at. The object, or ‘objectile’ as Deleuze calls it following Whitehead, is here not something static that has something like an essence or an objective truth to it, it is the object taken as an event, i.e. as something modular that changes over time. It doesn’t change in the sense that our conceptions of it change, but in the sense that we are now looking at something completely different than before; the object is in a constant state of becoming.³⁴ Like the Pando rhizome we described above, the objectile is at once multiple (it has various modes of existence) and singular (it remains the same objectile), i.e. the objectile, like subjectivity, is a multiplicity.

Perspectivistic truth is here relativistic, but not in the sense that one’s perception on something might differ from someone else’s, where either we are both equally wrong because we cannot know the ‘real’ truth, or we are both equally right because there is no real truth. Perspectivistic truth is true in the relation between the point of view and the objectile.³⁵ Space as objectile used to be mere extension, its corresponding point of view was Newtonian dynamics or Cartesian physics. However, from the perspective of Einstein’s theory of relativity, the objectile space is not merely ‘extension’ but is affected by objects and in turn has an effect on these objects as well. Both perspectives, Newtonian dynamics and the theory of relativity, can make certain truthful claims about particular modes of space’s being from their respective points of view. However, what is true from the Newtonian perspective is not true from the perspective of the theory of relativity. This is not because one is more true than the other, nor because they are looking at something different, but because they are looking at it in different stadia of its being. After the theory of relativity we cannot return to a Newtonian view on space, space has entered a different mode of being.

In *Cinema II* Deleuze likens this to the aforementioned conic sections, from a singular point of view we can see circles, parabolas, hyperbolas, ellipses, straight lines and points.³⁶ The point of view itself is the theorem: it bases itself on axiomatic principles, generalities with which it anticipates

33: *ibid.* p.174

34: *ibid.* p.143; Deleuze (1988) [1993] p.19

35: *ibid.* p.20

36: Deleuze (1985) [1989] p.143-4

the future. The problem on the other hand, is likened to the projections in the point of view, the conic sections. The theorem on itself would be nothing but bare existence, endless repetition of the same. This is the passive existence of the self, the lived present of Habit, continuous insistence. However with the introduction of the problem we go beyond the self and the need for the active 'I' arises. The problem requires us to create something new, to adjust our point of view, a creative act, this is why Deleuze says that the problem introduces 'life' into the theorem: 'A problem lives in the theorem, and gives it life, even when removing its power.'³⁷ This is where also the point where 'belief' as the complementary to 'knowledge' finds its entrée as that which knowledge orients itself towards, as does what we believe is Deleuze's concrete conception of the role of rationality in thought.

Throughout the latter part of *Cinema II* there is a reference to the need to believe in this world. This belief is linked to the unthinkable which belongs to the problem, the active I and creation.³⁸ Opposed to belief is knowledge, which is here also opposed to problem, life and creation and belongs to the theorem and rationality.³⁹ The problem problematizes a Habit and requires it to reorient itself in a creative act, the production of something new which goes beyond the conditions of the theorem and shifts the point of view. Rationality and irrationality, belief and knowledge, interiority and exteriority, unthought in thought... in life it seems that we constantly encounter both sides. Though the theorem is lifeless without the problem, the problem can only introduce life into a theorem, it does not function on its own. We see a similar conclusion in the *A Return to Bergson* chapter of *Bergsonism*: in life the multiplicity of matter (physics) needs to be complemented by the multiplicity of memory (metaphysics).⁴⁰ Time as subjectivity has two sides, one rational the other irrational, one we know and one we believe in. Rationality in Deleuze does not have a specific purpose as much as it has a specific field. It is perfectly at home in science, but has a limited, if any, role to play in sociability, or as Deleuze says in *Bergsonism*: '[S]ociability (in the human sense) can only exist in intelligent beings, but it is not grounded on their intelligence: Social life is immanent to intelligence, it begins with it but does not derive from it.'⁴¹

This conception of rationality as belonging to the point of view and the reorientation of this point of view also causes Deleuze to (perhaps unintentionally) return the notion of risking oneself into the process of rationalization. In the reorientation of habits and the formulation of a new area of rationality, i.e. a new perspective, we are reformulating ourselves as subjects as well. The close link to subjectivity and the point of view (and thus to rationality) means that one cannot reorient oneself without risking being deemed an illegitimate subject. Take for example the realization that something one deems important is being threatened by governmental policies of a ruling party. In the

37: *ibid.* p.174

38: *ibid.* p.170-1

39: *ibid.* p.94/p.172

40: Deleuze (1966) [2002] p.116-7

41: *ibid.* p.108

reorientation of their perspective on the government one might come to believe that this government will not change unless one actively acts against the government (the point of view of some political anarchists). However, in acting against the government one risks being put away as a mere troublemaker, being seen as an illegitimate subject, one that is not worthy of consideration. In the reorientation of one's perspective one is constantly potentially risking the legitimacy of their subjectivity.

Conclusion

Our contemporary rational governing demands of all of life that it adhere to a rational structure. Deleuze, however, provides us with an account of rationality that is strictly linked to the interiority of the perspective, the point of view. We saw this movement in Foucault as well. The main difference, and thus also the main contribution, that we find in Deleuze is the articulation of the cause for change as the irrational, i.e. as that which lies outside of the point of view and thus outside of one's expectation. It is only when Habit is obstructed, when something that falls outside of the realm of expectations, and thus outside of what is deemed rational, upsets the theorem that we begin to articulate a new perspective. The kind of political critique that Foucault is mainly concerned with in his examination of the formation of a point of view is no exception to this. It requires dissatisfaction, an intrusion of the irrational into the rational point of view that allows one to articulate and thus constitute a perspective that differs from the status quo. Foucault gave us an adequate conception of how to go about articulating and changing one's perspective, but he never adequately developed the need for change, which is why we need Deleuze if we want to understand rationality as belonging to the point of view.

The changing of perspective is something most of us already do multiple times throughout our lives, this despite the fact that this is anything but facilitated by our contemporary use of rationalization as legitimization. Yet this is basically what learning entails, we are presented with something that does not match our expectations and (perhaps after repeated encounters) requires us to adapt, to quite literally look at it differently. It is also the manner in which scientific discovery happens, as Thomas Kuhn describes very thoroughly, though not in such terminology, in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. The changing of paradigms is very similar to the changing of perspectives as it is also encouraged by encountering phenomena or results that do not follow from the axioms on which the paradigm, or point of view, is based. The problem intrudes from outside and forces change, introduces life. This latter description might be the most apt way of putting it. Without the need to change up one's perspective even just slightly we would not 'live' as much as we would 'exist'. We would be like robots, following a set program from the day we are born to the moment we die. Dostoyevsky perhaps illustrates the same point best in his *Notes from the Underground*:

‘And indeed, well, if one day they really find the formula for all our wantings and caprices – that is, what they depend on, by precisely what laws they occur, precisely how they spread, what they strive for in such-and -such a case, and so on and so forth; a real, mathematical formula, that is – then perhaps man will immediately stop wanting; what's more, perhaps he will certainly stop. Who wants to want according to a little table? Moreover: he will immediately turn from a man into a sprig in an organ or something of the sort; because what is man without desires, without will, and without wantings, if not a sprig in an organ barrel?’⁴²

The emphasis on free will is exemplary of Dostoyevsky’s own position and not of equal importance to us here, but the underlying point is very clear: The moment our actions fall completely within expectation, when we become reducible to a mathematical equation, is the moment we stop being human and become nothing but heaps of organs, regardless of whether we were ever truly free to begin with. We need to believe in the possibility of change, belief as opposed to knowledge. True change, as the reorientation one’s perspective is facilitated by that which lies it, outside the rational, and thus we cannot know it, we can only believe in it.

Deleuze’s conception of rationality is a nice addition to a Foucaultian view of rationality as conversion, i.e. as process through which one constitutes one’s perspective. By developing a concrete demarcation of the limits of rationalization and formulating an irrational that intersects the rational as coming from outside, Deleuze is able to provide us with an understanding of the nature of changing one’s perspective. This understanding is, however, still somewhat limited. Though it allows us to understand our current point of view as having come about after the need for a change, rationalization is limited to the present point of view and the constitution of a future point of view; we have no real understanding of how rationality ought to deal with past points of view. In the example we discussed concerning space as objectile it became clear that we cannot simply return to a past point of view, we assess the past retrospectively. However, this would mean that all change can merely be understood as ‘at some point people believed something, then something irrational happens and now we believe something else’. Even though Deleuze does not close the door on historicity and historical understanding completely he leaves it awfully underdeveloped. Yet it seems that in understanding our current point of view, drawing on the past can be incredibly useful, if not necessary. In fact, this is precisely how Foucault tackles most subjects in his research; in his evaluation of contemporary sexuality he deems it necessary to write three books on the history of sexuality, in his understanding of disciplinary practices in contemporary society he finds it necessary to relate the birth of the prison, etc. With the understanding of rationalization we find in Foucault and Deleuze we are currently

42: Dostoyevsky (1864) [1993] p.17

unable to account for such a historicity of rationalization. It is precisely at this point that Catherine Malabou is able to provide us with an addition to the conception of rationalization by emphasizing the historicity inherent to rationalization. How we are to understand this historicity and how this rationality is related to subjectivity is something we will discuss in the following chapter.

Catherine Malabou

The Plastic Subject

In an interview with Noelle Vahanian for the *Journal for Cultural and Religious Theory*, Malabou gives a concise and precise description of how she envisions the distribution of subjectivity:

‘In the Phenomenology of Spirit, Hegel show[s] that the subject is plastic in the sense that she or he is able to receive form (passivity) and to give form (activity). I certainly do not intend to show that these modes of being of the subject represent the masculine/feminine relationship. I am interested in showing that this relationship between form and itself is not founded on a difference. The two modes of being of the subject are not different from one another, but each of them transforms itself into the other. With plasticity, we are not facing a pre-given difference, but a process of metamorphosis. In other words, the Hegelian subjects trans-subjects itself constantly. Its form is its matter.’¹

Similar to what we saw with Foucault and Deleuze, Malabou is interested in the relation between the passive and the active in subjectivity. Where Foucault introduces self-constitution and self-care to understand this relation and Deleuze introduces the three syntheses of time, Malabou’s understanding of this relation is based on the notion of plasticity.

The term plasticity is very interesting because it itself already denotes both activity and passivity. When we say of something that it is plastic this can mean either that it receives form, or that it gives form. The term in Malabou ascribes both active and passive qualities to the same thing. Because of this it is probably best, following the approach of Malabou in both *The Future Of Hegel* and *What Should We Do With Our Brain?*, to first expand upon respectively plasticity’s passivity and activity separately. One has to keep in mind, however, that this is a somewhat artificial break in the concept of plasticity. Something is truly plastic when it shapes itself, so we will see when emphasizing certain passive or active characteristics that the same entity is at once active and passive.

In the more passive sense, plasticity should be thought of as the opposite of elasticity or flexibility. Where the latter is able to return to its previous form after receiving an imprint, any imprint on something plastic has a certain permanence to it. However, this malleability of the passive aspect of plasticity knows two extremes that Malabou seeks to maintain rather than relinquish. On the

1: Malabou (2008) p.4

one hand plasticity is like a piece of sculpting material – Malabou uses the example of marble.² In the process of sculpting the removal of material is permanent, one cannot undo an action. This limit of the concept of plasticity is what Malabou calls its ‘closed’ or ‘determined’ limit, it is plasticity as opposed to endless change (eventually all marble will be chipped away) and as the retainer of the imprints made upon the material.³

On the other end of the spectrum is the ‘open’ or ‘unrestrained’ notion of plasticity. This aspect of plasticity emphasizes the possibility of change and more importantly the displacement of this change. Malabou explains this by using the example of ‘adult stem cells’:

‘Adult stem cells are nonspecialized cells found in specialized tissues (the brain, bone marrow, blood, blood vessels, the retina, the liver, etc.). They renew themselves, and most of them specialize, in order to produce all the types of cells in their tissue of origin that normally die. This is how, for example, immature blood cells are made out of bone marrow stem cells. But while the majority of adult stem cells generate cells similar to those of the tissue they come from, it has been discovered that some of them (notably skin stem cells) can transform themselves into different types of cells (for example, nerve or muscle cells). One then says that they "transdifferentiate" themselves, that is, literally, that they change their difference.’⁴

Like these stem cells, open plasticity is the property to ‘change one’s destiny’, even if one starts out in one way, plasticity allows it to radically change the way it is (skin stem cells maturing to become nerve or muscle cells).⁵ This does not mean that the cell is elastic, it cannot return to being a stem cell after becoming a muscle or nerve cell, nor that it can become every cell conceivable, it will never become the cell of a tree to give one example, but contrary to the closed notion of plasticity it has at its limit complete freedom in regards to the future, i.e. it is not completely determined by its past form. Plasticity thus contains at once within it both the conception of rigidity, of resilience to change, and the conception of malleability, of being open to change.

‘Thus, with plasticity we are dealing with a concept that is not contradictory but graduated, because the very plasticity of its meaning situates it at the extremes of a formal necessity (the irreversible character of formation: determination) and of a remobilization of form (the capacity to form oneself otherwise, to displace, even to nullify determination: freedom). It is this complex, this synthesis, this semantic wealth, that we ought to keep in mind throughout our analysis.’⁶

2: Malabou (1996) [2005] p.9; Malabou (2004) [2008] p.15

3: *ibid.* p.15

4: *ibid.* p.16

5: *ibid.* p.17

6: *ibid.*

Plasticity in relation to freedom and determinism can thus be seen as the freedom to become within the confines of the predetermined. Our subjectivity is not completely predetermined, but cannot become something radically other. Within the execution of the ‘genetic program’ of the self there is room for improvisation, adaptability and difference.

Plasticity’s active component of giving form is completely turned onto itself. As mentioned in the quote above, Malabou does not see the active and the passive as two distinct things that differ from one another from the onset, but rather that they transform into one another. Plasticity denotes a ‘process of metamorphosis.’⁷ For the stem cells in the previous example this means that they are the ones changing themselves to become a different type of cell. The primer for this transformation is external (it is the environment that causes the cell to instigate a change), but the agent of the change and the object it changes are both the stem cell. We see this again in *The Future of Hegel*, the work in which Malabou first develops her notion of plasticity:

‘Self-determination is the movement through which substance affirms itself as at once subject and predicate of itself. In the *Encyclopedia’s Science of Logic* Hegel defines the “relation between substantiality and accidentality”, or the “Absolute Relation”, as the “activity-of-form” (Formtätigkeit). Indeed it is this “activity” that clearly indicates the very plasticity of substance itself, its capacity both to receive form and to give form to its own content. With this consideration of self-determination, seen as the “originary operation of plasticity”, we arrive at the very heart of the present study.’⁸

Plasticity of the subject in the active sense is thus closer to Foucault’s constitution of the self, than it is to Deleuze’s creative act in the production of the future, because for Deleuze the constitution of the self is a *passive* synthesis, whereas for Malabou and Foucault the self is *actively* created. This is where we have to mention that the plastic subject goes beyond the single transformation towards a definitive end goal that we saw in the example of the adult stem cell. As mentioned above, plasticity denotes a process of metamorphosis and a constant one at that. In all our acting we are constantly producing our ‘self’, either by reinforcing certain aspect of this self (a continuation of what we with Deleuze called ‘Habit’) or by transforming this self (i.e. a reorientation of the point of view, the formation of a new habit).

This emphasis on both resilience and transformation in relation to our acting also shows another aspect of our subjective plasticity. Much like how the individual both sculpts itself and is sculpted by itself, in the world at large the individual is acted upon and acts. Experiencing a car crash

7: Malabou (2008) p.4

8: Malabou (1996) [2005] p.11-2

as a passenger can hardly be seen as being ‘active’ yet the act of being in the car crash still very much influences or ‘sculpts’ ones personality. Closed and open notions of plasticity in regards to respectively being irreversibly formed from by a predetermined ‘destiny’ (not in the Deleuzian sense) and being formed contrary to such a determination can be extended to one’s ‘acting’ in general as well: Acting in the closed sense would mean that life overcomes one; acting in the open sense would be that one takes charge.

In day to day life one sculpts one’s subjectivity, in a dance of both resilience and transformation, in acting one defines themselves. One lives in a state both constant change and permanence, but where does that change take place? Does the production of the self through acting, as we find in Foucault, lead to the formation of a particular kind of subject (aesthetics of existence), or is it, like Deleuze, the individuation of a metaphysical element (time)? Malabou’s answer is similar too, yet at the same time completely different from both Foucault and Deleuze. Though for both Deleuze and Malabou our conscious subjectivity (i.e. our mind) is located in our brain, Malabou, inspired by contemporary neurosciences, heavily emphasizes the role of the brain in the form of thought and the relation between the physical and the mental. This is, besides the notion of plasticity, what Malabou offers to our conception of subjectivity. Where Deleuze makes subjectivity almost omnipresent by invoking his univocity of being and ascribing subjectivity to non-conscious entities, Malabou pins our own ‘thinking’ down to a tangible organ; we can see a brain, touch it. It is something people very clearly have and therefore far easier to appeal to than some abstract notion of subjectivity. It is therefore of importance that we understand Malabou’s conception of the brain (one she develops following contemporary neuroscience) and the brain’s plasticity.

“We are our Synapses”

For Malabou the brain is not some sort of ready-made organ that controls our actions like a control centre, or processes our experiences like a computer processor processes data. It is plastic in its development and decentralized in its organization. Malabou explains four ways in which the brain can be said to be plastic: The brain has ‘developmental plasticity’, ‘modulational plasticity’, ‘reparative plasticity’ and an ‘explosive plasticity’.

Developmental plasticity focuses, as the name suggest, on the plasticity in the development of the brain. The plasticity in question here lies between the closed and open conceptions. There is part of the development of the brain that is the execution of a genetic code; one’s brain is not merely the result of absolutely contingent factors coming together in the moment of development. However, the development of the brain is not the mere execution of this program; certain aspects of brain development are left ‘open’ and require further external stimulation. Developmental plasticity is thus

the plasticity of the execution of the genetic code. The formation of the brain is kind of like working towards a certain general ‘goal’ (the constitution of a functioning brain), and a set of ‘tools’ (genetically programmed operations) and ‘materials’ (neurons) to make this happen. A ‘functioning brain’ is not uniform, a brain that is able to keep the time of a song while sending different actions to the different arms and legs is great for playing drums or dancing, but this faculty is not at all useful in solving a maths problem or swimming. So when creating a ‘functioning brain’, what is understood as functioning depends on the environment the brain operates in. There is naturally a limit to what can be made, how many neurons can be activated, how many connections can be made, but the production of the brain both rigorously follows the genetic rules that govern it and is relatively open to external influences:

‘The genesis of the brain, through the two phases of establishing connections and their maturation under the influence of the surroundings, thus makes evident a certain plasticity in the execution of the genetic program. In both cases, the brain appears at once as something that gets formed – progressively sculpted, stabilized, and divided into different regions – and as something formative: little by little, to the extent that the volume of connections grows, the identity of an individual begins to outline itself. But the more time passes, the more this "first plasticity" loses its determinist rigor. The sculptor gradually begins to improvise.’⁹

Like a tree’s branches are programmed to reach for the light of the sun, the brain constructs itself by following a genetic code. However, much like how the actual availability and location of the light determines the growth of the tree, so too is the development of the brain determined by the environment it functions in.

Modulational plasticity concerns the modification of already existing relations between neurons. The brain is able to do this in two ways: the long-term potentiation of particular neural pathways (LTP) and the long-term depression of neural pathways (LTD).¹⁰ The long-term is what is especially important here. Potentiation and depression based on stimuli is something most people will probably grasp, after all, apart from epileptic attacks we do not use our entire brain at once. Seeing how particular neural connections are involved in particular actions and thoughts, there is no reason to activate neural pathways involved in, for example the recollection of the memory of an awkward moment in elementary school when one is solving a maths problem. However, the point of LTP and LTD is that over time the potentiation of particular neural pathways and the depression of others alters the structural makeup of the brain.¹¹ This is directly linked to, amongst others, the process of learning.

9: Malabou (2004) [2008] p.20

10: *ibid.* p.22

11: *ibid.* p.24

By repeatedly thinking or doing the same thing, the same pathways are potentiated, reinforcing their connection and thus also the corresponding action. Repeatedly playing an instrument will make you better at playing the instrument that way. This does mean that we not only learn ‘good’ things. One can develop bad posture, or problematic hand positioning if one keeps repeating the ‘mistake’. This would be the long-term potentiation of a set of neural pathways, so how should one envision the long-term depression of a set of neural pathways? Well the example of learning an instrument actually lends itself quite well for LTD as well. In fact, Malabou uses the example of a pianist herself:

‘In the course of learning to play the piano, for example, the mechanism for depressing entry signals corresponding to incorrect movements ("mistakes") makes possible the acquisition of the correct movements.’¹²

So as long as one actively corrects ‘mistakes’ when learning, it seems that your brain will actively correct itself as well, by deliberately depressing the activity in the neural pathways corresponding to those mistakes. Much like how the increased use of neurons changes the structure of the brain, so does the ‘falling out of use’ of neurons. The connections between these neurons are seemingly broken down, meaning that ‘a little-used or "depressed" synapse tends to perform less well.’¹³ The effects of LTP and LTD on the brain show how not only in the development, but also in its use the brain is plastic.

The reparative plasticity, as the name suggests, has to do with the brain’s response to damage and its ability to recover from this damage. Malabou notes that there are two types of reparative plasticity: ‘Neural renewal’ and ‘the brain’s capacity to compensate for the losses caused by lesions’. Neural renewal shows the brain’s plasticity on the anatomical level; not only are the connections between existing neuron’s influenced by their use, the actual neurons themselves can be renewed in the process of learning.¹⁴ The brain is effectively not only a self-sculpting sculpture, but one that is capable of ‘self-repair’.¹⁵

A ‘brain lesion’ is severe damage to (part of) the brain due to illnesses (like Alzheimer’s and Parkinson’s) or physical trauma (like a head injury or a stroke). A lesion basically means that part of one’s brain is damaged to the point that it no longer functions. Yet even here the brain is able to do some damage control, being able to fulfil the function of the lost neuron’s by outsourcing it to a different part of the brain as in the example of the brain’s reaction to the early stages of Alzheimer’s disease:

12: *ibid.* p.23

13: *ibid.* p.24

14: *ibid.* p.25-6

15: *ibid.* p.27

‘The encroaching amnesia is compensated for in part by a capacity to recuperate stored information. The deactivation of certain regions (the region of the hippocampus) is balanced by a metabolic activation of other regions (the frontal regions). Thus after certain circuits are affected, there is a modification in strategies for handling information, a modification that again attests to the functional plasticity of the brain.’¹⁶

What is of some importance to note is that this reaction to lesions should not be seen as an elastic property; the brain activity does not recover to its former state after being severely damaged as a return to a past form. It is in the attempts to use the brain as one originally did that the brain attempts to find a different way to come to the same functioning. This is why we are still dealing with plasticity: after receiving a particular imprint (like brain damage) the brain does not attempt to return to the state it was in before (elasticity), but it tries to continue functioning despite this new imprint.

The final form of plasticity of the brain, explosive plasticity, cannot be understood unless we first focus on the relation between the mental and the neural. Malabou’s reading of the brain is the brain as a network without single governing centre; the brain is not a control centre (unlike popular belief in the west) but a map, with multiple entrée ways and a variety of different routes: ‘Cerebral organization presupposes the connection of neurons in networks, which are also called "populations" or "assemblies." In a network, there cannot be, by definition, a privileged vantage point. The network approach is necessarily local, never centralized or centralizing.’¹⁷ This is why, when arguing that mental activity all proceeds on a biological basis, the conclusion that follows is not phrased as ‘we are our brain’, but instead ‘you are your synapses’.¹⁸ This shows the emphasis on the differentiated self, the self not as a nice united organ, a control centre, but as a network. However, how then do all these individual brain functions, all these networks, still lead to a brain functioning as if there is a single self?

This is where Malabou follows neuroscientist Damasio in the conception of a proto-self. On a strictly neurological level the brain represents itself to itself as a united entity. Though its functioning is not governed by some central system, at the end of the day the brain still functions presupposing a unity; this is the proto-self. The brain is thus what with Bergson and Deleuze could be called a multiplicity: multiple yet singular. According to Malabou, Damasio argues that the consciousness of self, the understanding of one’s actions as belonging to him/her actions (*I am who walks*) and extended consciousness, the understanding of one’s past actions as belonging to him/her actions (*I graduated high school*), follow from this proto- self as interpretations.¹⁹ Malabou accepts the

16: *ibid.* p.28-9

17: *ibid.* p.42

18: *ibid.* p.69

19: *ibid.* p.69

difference between the strictly neural proto-self and the mental consciousness, however she does not believe that these follow from one another via a process of interpretation. Instead she argues that the gap between physical and mental is bridged by the last form of plasticity, the one we alluded to earlier: explosive plasticity, a plasticity of radical metamorphosis of the one into the other.

This metamorphosis requires not just the giving of form, we do not add onto the preconscious proto-self to get to a conscious understanding of self. Rather what is needed aside from the forming of oneself is the annihilation of form; this is explosive plasticity. Unlike the previous three forms of plasticity we discussed, this is not a way in which the brain is plastic, i.e. situated between determined and free. Instead this notion of plasticity is an addition to the conception of plasticity as a whole: ‘Plasticity is situated between two extremes: on one side, the taking on of form (sculpture, molding, fashioning of plastic material); on the other, the annihilation of form (plastique, detonation). Plasticity deploys its meaning between sculptural modeling and deflagration – in other words, explosion.’²⁰ All plastic forms contain within them the possibility of their annihilation, all statues can be smashed, spirits can be crushed, brains can be destroyed. The plastic subject finds itself in a constant state of contradiction, between two radically opposing ends. It is this position that holds within it the possibility of transformation:

‘The transition from the neuronal to the mental supposes negation and resistance. There is no simple and limpid continuity from the one to the other, but rather transformation of the one into the other out of their mutual conflict. We must suppose that mental formation draws its being or identity from the disappearance of the neuronal, born of a sort of blank space that is the highly contradictory meeting point of nature and history. Only an ontological explosion could permit the transition from one order to another, from one organization to another, from one given to another.’²¹

Malabou offers us a conception of distributed subjectivity where there is no distinction between the ‘I’ and the ‘self’. In plasticity, all activity is accompanied by passivity. Subjectivity finds itself at the meeting point of two radically opposed modes of being, between freedom and determination, the physical and the mental. We find a similar position of subjectivity in Deleuze, however, Malabou places more emphasis on this contradictory position of the subject. This acceptance of the contradictory state one lives in is potentially a very helpful teaching tool. When explaining distributed subjectivity, people will immediately bring up the seeming contradictions inherent to this concept. Emphasizing this contradictory state to explain subjectivity and its relation to the rest of the world might help one make sense of certain statistical facts in relation to one’s being

20: *ibid.* p.70

21: *ibid.* p.72

(certain genes make one more prone to become a psychopath, but the genes alone are not definitive): one is at once free and determined..

Besides a contribution to our understanding of distributed subjectivity, Malabou adds to our conception of a new rationality by emphasizing another aspect of the brain: its epigenetic development.

Epigenetic rationality

Epigenetics, a term derived from the Aristotelian use of epigenesis, is concerned with the relation between the genetic code and its expression. Like plasticity, it functions at the juncture of two radically opposed fields, the strictly deterministic genetic code and its apparently not so deterministic expression in relation to contingent external factors.²² Not only does epigenetics function at this in-between, it remains at the surface as well:

‘The prefix “*epi*” is illuminated in an entirely remarkable manner at this point since epigenetics studies the mechanisms that modify the function of genes by activating or deactivating them. *Insofar as these modifications never alter the DNA sequence itself, epigenetics is said to work on the “surface” (epi) of the molecule.*’²³

The epigenetic development of the brain is best understood by understanding ‘Neural Darwinism’. This is the conception that Darwinian selection functions at a neural level. The neural pathways that are more fitting to do the job are the ones that survive: ‘During the development of the nervous system, the networks’ activity leads either to stabilization or to the elimination of the synapses of which they are formed. Among all the possible neuronal pathways that exist between two areas of the brain, the most efficient will be chosen and consolidated with a view to subsequent solicitations.’²⁴ Epigenetic Neural Darwinism seems to follow a similar process as modulational plasticity. The difference between the epigenetics and the plasticity of the brain is, however, that plasticity explains how the brain is at once resilient (closed) and malleable (open), which can also be seen in how it develops, whereas epigenetics is solely concerned with the development of the brain.

We mentioned earlier that epigenetics comes from the Aristotelean epigenesis. In Malabou’s exploration of the concept in *Before Tomorrow*, she explains epigenesis as a middle position between two theories of development: ‘preformation’, the idea that the something is structurally finished from the moment of conception, and ‘equivocal generation’, the idea that differentiation happens

22: Malabou (2014) [2016] ch. 7, sec. 1, para. 2

23: *ibid.*

24: *ibid.* ch. 7, sec. 5, para. 1

spontaneously.²⁵ If preformation designates absolute determinism, then equivocal generation is absolute freedom. Epigenesis, taking a middle position, is based on the idea that something develops by gradually becoming more and more complex.²⁶ Think, for example, of the growth of a language system. A language is not at some point established and then remains the same throughout the course of time, nor does it change randomly in any direction. Instead its development is dictated by the pre-established structure of the language (determinism) and the external demands made of the language (contingency). For example, new concepts require new words, words from different languages might be incorporated into everyday use, slang might catch on and make its way into the official language, etc.

As we saw in the epigenetics, the functioning at the surface is another important aspect of epigenesis. Malabou draws parallels between the use of the prefix ‘*epi*’ in the geological term ‘epicentre’ and its function in epigenesis. Based on this parallel Malabou shows that much like how the epicentre of an earthquake is not so much the point of origin of the earthquake, but rather its point of impact on the surface, epigenesis is a surface development as well:

‘If we follow the epicentric logic, as we must, we then conclude that the seat of the “system of the epigenesis of pure reason” should not be sought *below*, in the shadows of a burying as if the circularity of the *a priori* and the transcendental needed to explain something more ancient and deeper than itself. The spontaneity defined by Kant refers precisely, and conversely, to the idea of a founding by the epicenter. *I suggest here that this founding at the point of contact – unlike the founding by the root or focus – corresponds exactly to the Kantian conception of the origin.*’²⁷

Before Tomorrow is a book on the position of the Kantian transcendental, something that is presently not of interest to us. However, the question of the Kantian transcendental is raised in relation to the problem of the correlation between the physical and the mental. This correlation between mental and physical is a minimum requirement for rational thought; one cannot make inferences about the cause or intention behind something if one’s mental perception does not correspond with the physical reality. Malabou answers to this question in the same way she answered to the problem of the interaction between the mental and the physical: she places the brain at the point of contact. The epigenetic nature of the development of the brain allows her to come to the following conclusion:

25: *ibid.* ch.1, sec. 2, para. 4/3

26: *ibid.* introduction sec. 2, para. 4

27: *ibid.* ch. 3, sec. 1, para. 6

‘Physical neuronal reality is subject to epigenesis. The constancy of mental objects comes from stabilization more than from stability. Their physical reality emerges constantly from a range of possibilities and their selection is highly contingent. But this contingency does not only belong to the form of the mind. Brain epigenetics is not a production apparatus of the sole “holding-true” that concerns only subjectivity. Brain activity is the natural and material capturing of nature and matter; the contingency of its epigenesis thus also engages the contingency of the world concretely. The brain is no more a subject than the world is an object. The epigenetic development of the brain affects the totality of the real.’²⁸

The brain contains the possibility of further development, metamorphosis and with it the relation between the physical and the mental worlds are subject to constant development as well. We see that this comes very close to Deleuze’s points of view, which know some constancy, but have to reorient themselves in light of change. We mentioned before that Deleuze ignores the development from past to current points of view, Malabou on the other hand provides us with a conception of rationalization of which historicity is an inherent quality.

According to Malabou, Riccoeur defined epigenetic meaning as meaning given to the past in relation to the present.²⁹ However, this means that we cannot give meaning to our contemporary point of view in an epigenetic way, we would need to wait for a future to come so we could give meaning from that future to what is now our present. This is why we still need genesis, the explanation of the present from its origin in the past. Mere genesis, however, presupposes the preformation of the present in the past; had one looked hard enough one would have been able to predict the current state of affairs ten, a hundred, a million years ago, heck at the beginning of the universe, one would have known the entire past, present and future. Because of this, rationality needs to concern itself with both epigenesis *and* genesis, i.e. with the continuity of the past in respect to the present and with the difference of the present in relation to the past. This is why Malabou calls her conception of rationality epigenetic (in the sense that it functions at the level of the *epi*), it should function at the surface level between genesis and epigenesis, positioned between two contrary conceptions of meaning: ‘In this way we can define the core of rationality as the mobile middle between constitution and relinquishing of itself: archaeology [i.e. the understanding of the present as the result of the past] and teleology [i.e. understanding the past as the condition of the present].’³⁰ In the face of processes of the of the metamorphosis of the plastic subject and the epigenetic relation between the mental and physical world, rationality needs to be conceptualized as a mobile response unit, to keep track of both the metamorphosis of meaning and its constancy.

The historicity of rationality also reinforces the notion of risk into the use of rational

28: *ibid.* ch. 12, sec. 4, para. 12

29: *ibid.* hf. 13, sec. 2, para. 10

30: *ibid.* hf. 13, sec. 2, para. 11

judgement. We are always framing our understanding of the past from our current point of view which is inextricably linked to our subjectivity and the understanding of this current point of view is exactly from our past perspectives. The close relation to subjectivity and rationality means that one is constantly risking themselves in these judgements of past and present because one is bound to one's current point of view. One lays themselves bare in such judgements, an implication resembling the binding contract in the parrhesiastic act.

Conclusion

Epigenetic rationality provides us with the means to meaningfully assess both our present point of view in relation to the past and our past points of view in relation to the present. Situated between genesis and epigenesis it allows us to understand our current perspective as emerging from a past one (genesis), while allowing us to dissociate our present from this past by understanding the past perspective as differing from the present one (epigenesis). This position of the in-between is of utmost importance, without it we would have to use *either* genesis or epigenesis. This would mean that we either understand the present completely in terms of the past, making the past the bearer of the present, which would indicate some sort of preformation, or we understand the past in terms of the present, meaning that we would not have a way of meaningfully assessing the present itself. Conceiving of rationality as a mobile being in-between genesis and epigenesis, transforming the one into the other, arms our conception of rationality to not only deal with the constancy of the present point of view, but to also meaningfully deal with past changes. This is something we already do quite often, we explain how certain things got to be, while acknowledging that this past did not contain the present in some sort of infantile state. We were not the same person we were when we were seven that we are now and the experiences we have had ever since then changed us into something radically different. In fact, this is how Foucault (perhaps without being aware of it) presented his understanding of the history of critique in the West in his *What is Critique?*.

Rationality has thus gained historicity. Not in the sense that it has, like most everything, a history, but in the sense that its constitution and its evaluation of past and present perspectives are in part determined by its history. Rationality is, as we have seen with Deleuze, determined by its present point of view, both our genetic and our epigenetic judgements are fundamentally rooted in our current understanding of the world, our current mathesis. It is for this reason that, as we noted earlier, Malabou says that rationality is situated between the constitution of itself (by forming new perspectives) and the relinquishing of itself (by leaving behind old perspectives). Though the historicity of rationality might be implied by Foucault and Deleuze, Malabou, perhaps due to her loyalty to Hegel, provides us with a very precise and detailed account of this historicity of rationality.

Now that the pieces have been gathered it is time to see if we can stitch them together into something coherent, something resembling an understanding of rationalization that at once applies to

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all three conceptions of subjectivity and is preferable to the contemporary use of rational practices as legitimization of one's being.

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Towards a New Rationality

We have analysed three conceptions of subjectivity and three respective conceptions of rationality. How then, do we combine these into a conception of rationalization and a corresponding subjectivity that remain true to each of the three philosophies discussed? The answer we present is as follows: By constructing a concept of distributed subjectivity that is befitting of all three the conceptions of subjectivity we discussed we are able to constitute a general draft of a conception of rationalization that contains aspects of all three conceptions of rationalizing practices.

Starting with the most general and moving to more and more defined qualities of our general conception of distributed subjectivity the first and most obvious commonality between the three subjectivities discussed is precisely the fact that they are all *distributed* subjectivities. This might seem like a moot point, but it is worth mentioning seeing how they all conceive this distribution differently. Their conceptions of this distribution have however three things in common.

First these subjectivities are *split in both an active and a passive aspect*. For Foucault the passive self is the result of the (rational) act, for Deleuze the passive 'self' is what is changed in the creative act of the 'I' and for Malabou the plastic subject is always both active and passive.

Secondly, all three subjectivities are *embedded* in the rest of the world, meaning that they are in part constituted by things external to it. With Foucault we saw that our subjectivity is in part produced by our socio-political world. Deleuze provided us not only the univocity of being, but also explained the formation of Habit as the process of contracting a repetition of what it is not. Malabou showed us that subjectivity as in-between mental and physical is physically influenced by mental perceptions and mentally altered by physical alterations.

Thirdly, *the passive component of subjectivity is constructed in the practice*. For Foucault the deliberate activity that constitutes the self is askesis, the practicing in doing. However, *all* acting constitutes the self, even when this is a non-conscious process. Deleuze's activity is something he ascribes to what he believes is passive in subjectivity. The synthesis of Habit, though not a conscious (and thus in that sense passive) activity is very much an activity, i.e. the result of action. The conscious reorientation of Habit is even very similar to the concept of askesis, if we see the latter as a deliberate constitution of repetition. In Malabou's description of long-term-depression and long-term-potentiation we see a process that is ostensibly exactly the same. It is in repeating an action that the corresponding correct neural pathways get strengthened and the incorrect ones lose their efficacy. For all three it seems that practice makes perfect and that this practice is not only a conscious activity but already found at the level of everyday life.

However the similarities between these different conceptions of subjectivity do not end with the obvious. Besides their distributed nature, these conceptions of subjectivity share a mobile outlook on the world, i.e. all three conceptions of subjectivity adhere to perspectivistic conception of truth. In

Foucault this is seen in the individual truth that determines one's aesthetics of existence and thus how one constitutes themselves as an ethical subject; for Deleuze this is the literal point of view, the theorematic, habitual outlook on the world as objectile; in Malabou this is both the epigenetic development of the brain and its overall plasticity, allowing subjectivity to change in relation to the world around it and vice-versa. It is from this shared conception of the relation between subjectivity and truth that we can justify a general conception of rationality that applies to all three conceptions of subjectivity.

Following the format of this thesis, the first aspect of our new rationality is found in Foucault. Rationality functions in the conversion of subjectivity, particularly in relation to the constitution and care of the self. Rationality is no longer the only legitimate form of thought, but a process through which one constitutes themselves, it is a method of conversion. As an effect, the rationality one employs now has a direct link to the subjectivity that employs it and as such reintroducing the risk of one's subjective being in rationalization. We saw an example of risking one's subjectivity in the parrhesiastic act. Speaking the truth as a means of challenging the establishment is an articulation and constitution of one's subjectivity in such a way that one risks being deemed an illegitimate subject when being put away as a troublemaker. In feeding rationality back into subjectivity, subjectivity is now once again at risk in the rational act.

In Deleuze we find an aspect of rationality that allows us to limit the totalizing tendency of contemporary rational practices. The rational belongs solely to the theorematic, the axiomatic, i.e. is in line with expectation. Whenever we approach something rationally we expect that we can draw from past experiences or past knowledge, we expect a certain amount of constancy and generality. However, as most of us experience on a near daily basis, life hardly ever falls completely within the expected parameters. We do not choose who we fall in love with or when, who become our friends, which relations end, etc. Such events disrupt our habits even though we know they will be sudden because they cause us to reorient ourselves. For example, if one does not love outdoor activities, but falls in love with a person who loves mountain climbing and hiking, despite 'knowing' that they have no control who they fall in love with, the fact that they ended up falling in love with someone who is so different from what they expected forces them to reorient themselves. There is an entire side of life that forces us to re-evaluate our stance on something or someone because a surprising event presented itself to us and defies our expectations. The moment in Kafka's *The Judgement* where Georg's father refuses to be put to bed and starts telling him all the things he knows about Georg's relation to his unnamed 'friend' is a perfect example of the unexpected event problematizing the view Georg has of his father and introducing life into the habitual exchange between the two.¹ If Foucault helps us

1: Kafka (1912)

understand rational practices as the development of a perspective, Deleuze provides us with an attitude towards these rational points of view. The general expectation towards the future is useful and an intrinsic part of life, but it is not all there is to it; our lives are littered with moments that require us to adjust our perspectives and re-evaluate our points of view.

Finally in Malabou we find a means to arm our conception of rationality with a way to meaningfully relate past points of view to the present one and vice-versa, i.e. with a historicity. This is possible due to its position as a mobile response unit, situated between the epigenetic evaluation of the past and the genetic understanding of the present. To return to the aforementioned event in Kafka's *The Judgement*, after Georg's father starts ranting about the supposed betrayal of his son, our understanding of the past perspective changes in relation to this new revelation. At the same time we are only able to understand the present being derived from this different past point of view. If we are not able to understand the past in relation to the present, all our thoughts about this past perspective would be meaningless. And conversely, if we are not able to understand the present in relation to the past our understanding of the present would be meaningless until a future event causes us to change perspective once more. Rationality as belonging to both genesis and epigenesis, as functioning on the in-between, allows us to meaningfully deal with a variety of perspectives without falling into a complete 'anything goes' variant of relativism.

This conception of rationalization as instrumental to the constitution of, attitude towards and meaningful comparison of perspectives is still far from a precise and well-defined philosophical concept. However as we mentioned in the introduction, the scope of this project does not lend itself to conceive of a definitive way to do away with the contemporary demand for rationalization. Moreover, this alternative conception of rationalization functions best in its generality. As a way of transforming the subject in the formation of a new perspective on the world and a means to meaningfully place this perspective in relation to former points of view, rationalization should not be conceived as some uniform practice. Instead, like Foucault's *askesis*, Deleuze's 'I' and Malabou's conception of the brain, rationalization should function both as singular and as multiple. There is no single definite form rationalization should take, but instead it functions as a map we can plot our perspectives on. How one should go about starting the process of transforming the contemporary rational governmentality and the demand for rationality that derives from it is something that might be worthy of future consideration. Education is the first thing that comes to mind, perhaps due to the lingering remnants of my initially idyllic conceptions of 'Bildung' and rather privileged upbringing (being a white male who can afford to go to university in a relatively peaceful country), perhaps because with my limited knowledge I have yet to be exposed to more realistic alternatives. For now I will release my franken-rationality into this world and hope it will not return to me in the future demanding I make another just like it.

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