

**Ethics and the Resistant Subject
Levinas, Foucault, Marx**

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Abstract:

The present work essays a conception of human subjectivity capable of *effective* resistance to totalizing systems. The term “effective” distinguishes the absolute resistance of an ethical-subjectivity from the survival resistance of a for-itself subjectivity. It signifies a resistance that itself is neither rendered a new totality, nor assimilated within the old one.

Chapters One through Three draw on Emanuel Levinas’s separation between interiority and exteriority, between the I and the other, and on his conceptualization of subjectivity on the ethical plane as being-for-the-other. Through a material phenomenology of sensory deprivation and solitary confinement the human subject is comprehended as a corporeal-sensible being that is rendered a subject in response to exteriority, response that arises from both its (survival) needs for itself *and* its (ethical) Desire for the other.

The second Section, chapters Four and Five, presents immanent critical analyses of the conceptions of the human subject and resistance in Michel Foucault and Karl Marx respectively. These theorists exemplify opposable approaches to the notion of the human subject and subjectivity—and thus to an ethically-based resistance—which help elucidate the limits of the for-itself approach to theorizing effective resistance.

Arguing in the last section, chapter Six, that, though occluded, for-the-other subjectivity and effective resistance are to be found in the actual practices of human struggle. A Levinasian interrogation of resistance under torture and prison confinement presents the case for theorizing the subject as primordially an I-in-tension and for the indispensability of the ethical dimension for an effective resistance against totalizing systems.

*To stubborn life,
surpassing love...
and to those who care despite themselves.*

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INTRODUCTION

In an interrogation session the prison warden asks nonchalantly, “what is your motivation for resisting? What are you fighting for that is worth all of this?” By “this” he means the state of indefinite solitary confinement in one of his coffin-cells, the intermittent interrogations, and the physical and psychological torture. “Think about it” he says, “I have convinced many young people like you to stop their nonsensical opposition, to leave prison, go home, get married and have children.” He pauses for a reaction, “you can have your freedom too; you can have your life back. Aren’t you a mother? Why are you here; what are you resisting for?”¹

i) Resistance

Analysis of such a broad concept as “resistance” should perhaps begin with a delineation of parameters. Putting to one side the concept as it appears in the physical sciences, resistance, whether failed or successful, is a ubiquitous phenomenon of human life. Resistance to norms, traditions, rulings, authority, power of all sorts, is a cross-cultural/cross-historical phenomenon apparently immanent to human existence itself.² This phenomenon, however, is not limited to negation, for while resistance may initially appear as the enactment of a ‘no,’ a rejection of something, a state of being against, the same may not generally be said for its outcome. In fact, while it is not seldom that the initial ‘no’ is originally the only conscious objective of a resistance, it rarely remains so. However apparently indifferent to consequences it may appear, it

¹ Anecdotal reference to one of my interrogation sessions while confined in a ‘coffin,’ a semi-sensory deprivation state. Ghezel Prison, Karaj, Tehran, Iran, 1983; see Chapter Six.

² For a broad sociological review of scholarship on resistance across discipline see Jocelyn A. Hollander, Rachel L. Einwohner, “Conceptualizing Resistance,” *Sociological Forum*, 19, No. 4 (December 2004): 533-554. The authors develop a topology of resistance to clarify the meanings and sociological utility of the concept, arguing that resistance, whether individual or collective, is socially constructed and is interactional with and integral to power. For a philosophical review of the concept of resistance with an emancipatory dimension in post-structuralist thought see David C. Hoy’s *Critical Resistance: From Poststructuralism to Post-Critique* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2005).

will, except perhaps in some cases of total and abject failure, yield a position, a positing of an alternative to that which is resisted.³ And, whether it be an articulation of the originating sense of the violation one is resisting, an alternative formulated in the process of resistance itself or some combination of these and other elements, that alternative will emerge: consciously or unconsciously a resistance culminates in being against *and* for something. A theory of resistance, then, will entail a conception of emancipation.

The term resistance like the term emancipation –or, for that matter, revolution— does not of course carry by default any “progressive” connotation. There is no shortage of historical instances of regressive or reactionary forms of all of these.⁴ As considered here, however, resistance, no matter the ideology, is always engaged by human subjects and thus is left aside – to my mind – the unhelpful metaphors in which everything from corporations and other institutions through to and including history itself is substituted for the human subject and human agency. Be it third world liberation movements, working class movements, civil liberties, anti-racial and gender-apartheid movements, or identity-based movements, all have been carried out through and by subjects and subjectivities. That is to say, in short, that resistance is a process, an event, aroused as a response on the part of human beings *to* something and *for* something. In this sense, resistance as a response evoked by a human condition, a response *to* and *for*, is the manifestation of human’s respons-ability, a human capacity to respond. In fact, it could be said

³ Resistance, that is to say, is not restricted to reactions or responses intended to remove the ill effects of the imposition of power, but rather includes response to the status quo itself, the inadequacies, the deficits, the absences within the *is* as such. As Herbert Marcuse writes, “The absent must be made present....” Translating Paul Valéry, he quotes “...*thought is the labor which brings to life in us that which does not exist*,” and ends the thought again with Valéry: “*What are we without the help of that which does not exist?*” (“A Note on Dialectic,” in *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader*, 448, 9). One may respond to that rhetorical question by noting a consequent absence: Without that which does not exist, we would no longer be subjects, having been absorbed in the totality of the *is*. In short, an integral aspect of *resistance* is the capacity to imagine alternatives to the status quo that respond to those absences. However, this recognition by itself does not, of course, begin to be sufficient, capable as it is of providing itself with virtually any content or direction that may come to mind.

⁴ Nazis like to think of themselves as in need of emancipation from modernity itself, as resisters of the historical trend toward decadence; religious fundamentalists seek emancipation from a world dominated by Satan and sin. Then too there are others fueled by identity-based ideologies, *e.g.*, the Israeli/Palestinian conflict.

that, in a sense, the present analysis is intended in part as a resistance to precisely the various attempts and trends toward the denial of this human respons-ability, attempts to actualize totalizing systemic alternatives to human agency, totalizing systems intending to eradicate the human subjects, often with the further intention of replacing them with a system-compatible identity of the given system. Moreover – and this is one reason that emphasis on this human capacity is important –, resistance, I argue, is also immanently a *responsibility*. The very act of negating, positing an alternative as it does, entails a responsibility for that alternative: not only is it that the status quo should not stand, but that it should be replaced. We are “responsible” in the sense of “accountable” in that we have posited the alternative; it is our creation within the conditions of our existence at the time, and, by virtue of that creative act, we are responsible for it, both in principle and in its consequences. Failure to accept responsibility in this sense tends toward rationalization in terms of the contingent conditions, to vacillation between rationalization and guilt, neither of which is *responsible*. In the sense used here, responsibility is not essentially about blame but achieving reflexivity⁵ publically.

The twentieth century was marked by revolutionary movements demanding ‘equality’, ‘freedom’ and ‘social justice.’ Yet, at best, they may all be said to have reached an impasse; for the most part, progressively intended revolutions failed, the high hopes for humanity evaporated into thin air, hopes transformed into pessimism.⁶ Distrust and disgust and various forms of accommodation to and complicity with a totalizing, chameleon-like hegemonic capitalist mode of life triumphed. Revolutionary movement after revolutionary movement, even after initial

⁵ This responsibility is, of course, complex. But, to mention only one feature, it is not in my view limited to consequences, to learning from mistakes, but, more important even than this, it is about ‘owning’ them in the sense of acknowledging them as one’s own. It is that, by owning one’s response, one becomes capable of a reflection that was unavailable at the time of the response, thus opening a space for *dialogue* rather than apology. Through the communication of one’s efforts, for example, one enters an interlocution with the future generations and, because one can, one is obligated to do so—this is as true for the Iranian revolution as for the American civil war as for the Nazi disaster.

⁶ Twenty-first century movements are too undeveloped to consider here.

success and in spite of significant gains, capitulates for the most part to the dominant power relations, to the global mode of production and its social relations.⁷

It is with this tendency to capitulation in mind, then, that the present analysis is narrowed. Specifically, the focus is upon resistance to *totalizing* systems, to totalizing thought in general, and, as shall become apparent, I argue that this resistance must finally be founded in and as a resistance *for-the-other*, a conception I develop through reference to the work of Emanuel Levinas. It is this, what I call *effective* resistance, which has been the fertile ground for the research at hand. The term ‘effective’ is not indicative of the successful outcome, in part or total, absolute or relative, of a resistant act, movement or revolution against a totalizing system. It is not indicative of the particularity of the outcome, but rather it indicates what it is *for*. Clearly, not all resistance to totalities or totalizing systems is a resistance-for-the-other. On the contrary, even when successful in terms of hindering, fracturing or removing a particular totality or totalizing system, the overwhelming tendency is toward its ultimate replacement by another totality, albeit of a different stamp. It is this tendency that indicates the absence of effective resistance and it is elucidation of this effective resistance against totalizing trajectories that is sought here. Let us consider this conception of totalizing systems further.

ii) Totalizing Systems

As distinct from a ‘total system’, the complete and completely reproducible social object which totally constructs all subjects according to its requirements, a totalizing system is one characterized by a *systematic impetus* toward absorbing the subject as a function of the systemic object. The emphasis in the differentiation here is upon the fact that such systems are never (so

⁷ Thus, as we shall see, apparently conforming to Foucault’s argument that resistance is internal to power relations and there is no outside of power.

far) completely successful; there is a residue, of greater or lesser extent that resists construction and incorporation.

With the twentieth century, the global juggernaut of totalizing systems of domination came into its own. From the Nazis and Fascists, through the totalitarian ‘communisms’ of China and the Soviet Union, from the “iron cage” of bureaucratic capitalism through globalization of surveillance and consumerism, from the fundamentalist Islamic revolutions through the emergence of ethnic-identity based states and other such entities, these systems, through their personnel,⁸ have intended to incorporate all opposition, removing any and everything, from the broadest institutions to the deepest recesses of the individual human soul, that stands against, or more accurately, that stands outside of them. Whether attempting to install a single identity profile or a *range* of systems functional identity options, they would replace all that is not themselves with themselves, a process that may be called “saming.” Recognition of the need to resist these intentions has become so frequent that, were it not for the urgency of the situation, it would begin to appear almost banal.

The survival of such a system is geared to continuously saming that which is not it. Resistance to a totalizing system, however, even when apparently successful, and regardless of the changes it brings, does not necessarily result in the end of the totalizing impetus, but generally in replacing it with a new source of power relations with its own systemic imposition of identification. Regardless of its form, be it religious, ideological or scientific, socio-economic and political or philosophical and psychological, regardless of the scope of its reach and practice,

⁸ Of course a totalizing system with all its objective existence is not without its subjective dimension. It is the result of definite human activity, of definite human subjectivity articulated and represented and actualized as a system which in its own turn expresses the subjective-objective totalizing impetus toward annihilation of exteriority.

one constant target of such systems is the human subject, its⁹ imagination, thought and action, the subject whose (un)conscious resistance and capitulation is in and of its subjectivity. Effective resistance, then, is that resistance, with a *for-the-other* impetus in opposition to a totalizing system, which is neither satisfied with the opening of more breathing space within the flaccid boundaries of the system, nor with the transformation of one totality into another. The question of an effective resistance is necessarily imbricated with questions concerning the nature of human subjectivity itself, a question to which we now turn.

iii) Subjectivity

Historically our social imagination has dwelt within a space between categories of whole and part, of general and particular, swinging from the primacy of one to the other and back. We tend overwhelmingly to identify and designate a ‘One’, whether large or small, on one hand conceptualizing humans under such rubrics as ‘rational-man’, the ‘universal-subject’ or the ‘transcendental-ego’, or, on the other hand, dividing and subdividing humans into collectives, individuals and then individuals into many functions, attributes, roles, performatives and so on. Since the mid-twentieth century (apparently much in reaction to the failure, so far, of totalitarian socialist and communist political projects) we social and political theorists and activists have increasingly ghettoized ourselves, shedding universality by shaving off layers of the modern subject into multiple particular identities based on class, sex, gender, race, ethnicity, nationality, religion, ability, age, weight, sanity, normality or what have you. That is, we constantly fragment

⁹ Throughout the text I use all third-person pronouns randomly when referring to general notions such as the subject or the human. In response to any sense that the pronoun “it” is a reduction to the status of “object,” I emphasize here that I take “it” as the only non-gendered pronoun in the English language which has the ability to refer to living-beings, which, of course, I also do not intend to objectify in this way.

a ‘big One’ into a ‘smaller One.’ In all of this, however, we remain within the domain of the One.

Moreover –and this is a central problematic to be emphasized here—, that ‘One,’ as we know, has in the western tradition¹⁰ been overwhelmingly conceived as essentially a for-itself One, a One I shall refer to as the “*survival-ego*,” denoting, to use a Spinozan term, a *conatus essendi*, a being attached first and foremost to its own existence;¹¹ no matter how solid, fluid, contingent, multiple, different, singular, empty or bare it is conceived, human subjectivity is conceived as a for-itself One. Subjectivity, then, is of the for-itself self, whether that of a Cartesian *self*-presence, a Hegelian *self*-consciousness or one of the post-modern and post-Marxist, post-politics variety that is said to be *self*-identifying, -mastering, -filling, -negotiating, -constituting, -positioning¹² etc..

We have moved, then, from a samed universal to a samed fragmented-self interest; yet, at historical moments of crisis, in wars for example, we remain capable of reversion, folding back into a summation of similarities that constitute yet another ‘big One’ (e.g., the nation, the people, the Ninety-nine percent), a big One, needless to say, that remains predominantly a *conatus essendi* focused on this conception’s bottom line: *survival*. No matter, then, how solid or fluid the being of the One, the ‘self’, nor how general or particular its interests and rights, what matters is that the One (the ‘I’, the ego, the individual) remains primary as the origin of the

¹⁰ This is not, of course, to say that the West is absolutely unique in this regard.

¹¹ The literal meaning of the term, which I borrow from Emanuel Levinas who borrows from Spinoza, is “effort of being.” This effort to be, for Levinas, refers to “an insistence on being as if a ‘survival instinct’ that coincided with its development, preserving it, and maintaining it in its adventure of being, were its meaning” (*EN*, xiii). See, for example, the story of competing identity rights in the case of the Muslim barber who refused service to female costumers in Toronto, November 2012. “Woman denied haircut goes to Human Rights Tribunal of Ontario,” *Toronto Star*, 15 November 2012, http://www.thestar.com/news/gta/2012/11/15/woman_denied_haircut_goes_to_human_rights_tribunal_of_ontario.html.

¹² For debates on the necessity of the re-conceptualization of subjectivity, and the question of universality-particularity, among others, see, for example, Judith Butler, Ernesto Laclau, Slavoj Žižek, *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality: Contemporary Dialogues on the Left*. (London: Verso, 2000). Also, see “Forlorn Fort: The Left in Trialogue,” an insightful critical response by Simon Jarvis to the above book.

subject and the mediation with the non-I. The *being* of a self-referential 'I', its existence, its needs and its rights, remains and acts as the mediating category in relations with the Other (the human other) and with others (the exteriority in general including humans). Whether this 'One' grows, envelops and sames all others to itself, or it contracts, excluding and isolating itself from all others, the being of the 'I' remains constant. What remains constant is the persistence and permanence of the "same" in its dynamics of isolation and incorporation-annihilation, in its agonistic inclusion/exclusion relations with the non-I, or in its open-ended negotiating with and/or translating of its particularities in its relations to other particularities.

Fortunately, though both the 'big One' and the 'small One', as well as the conception of *conatus essendi* and its relations to existence, correspond to *aspects* of the human subject, it would be a mistake to conclude that this correspondence exhausts the scope of human subjectivity and its potentialities. This is fortunate because, were such representations exhaustive, resistance would indeed be futile, inasmuch as the conceptualization of the human subject within the boundaries of a *conatus essendi* is itself a totalizing notion.

With resistance as a human response both to and for something and with effective resistance a resistance against totalizing systems and for-the-other, the resisting subject must be capable of more than that which is allowed to it under its conceptualization as a for-itself self-referring being. Thus we are led back to the notion of subjectivity itself, and so, particularly in relation to its aspect as being-for-the-other, we enter the space of the ethical.

iv) The Ethical Dimension

Like many of his contemporary thinkers, Levinas is preoccupied with the question of human subjectivity, but unlike those who problematize the modern western subject ontologically

and politically – *e.g.* Arendt’s critique of the subject as “*animal labourans*” (1958) or Marcuse’s notion of “one-dimensional man” (1964) – he problematizes the ontological conceptualization of human subjectivity as conceived within the western philosophical tradition as a whole. His approach being complex both in his phenomenological analysis and its conceptual articulation, it will perhaps prove useful to dwell briefly on these aspects of his writing in advance. Levinas writes in his preface, that *Totality and Infinity* (1961) is a “defense of subjectivity... as founded in the idea of infinity” (TI 26). And the idea of infinity is produced in the sense of both effecting being and revealing its being, “in the relationship of the same with the other” (Ibid.).¹³ With this conception, Levinas opens a new dimension in conceiving the phenomenon of human subjectivity. Specifically, by bringing out the Other as always already present in and even before the constitution of the subject, he abrogates the exclusive derivation of subjectivity from self-knowledge, self-positioning, self-possession, self-representation and self-development, or from one initially and primarily produced and constituted by the exteriority, be it power or language or anything else. Subjectivity must be recognized as primordially “welcoming the other” (TI 27). The Levinasian subject is founded then on the ethical plane; prior even to the plane of ontology (TI 201): one is primordially responsible for the other.

Though Levinas himself does not draw a direct connection between the resistance of the ethical¹⁴ against totality and the praxis of resistance in the public/political realm, I argue that he

¹³ Levinas elaborates: “The production of the infinite entity is inseparable from the idea of infinity, for it is precisely in the disproportion between the idea of infinity and the infinity of which it is the idea that this exceeding of limits is produced. The idea of infinity is the mode of being, the *infinition*, of infinity. Infinity does not first exist, and *then* reveal itself. Its infinition is produced as revelation, as a positing of its idea in *me*. It is produced in the improbable feat whereby a separated being fixed in its identity, the same, the I, nonetheless contains in itself what it can neither contain nor receive solely by virtue of its identity” (TI, 26, 7).

¹⁴ For Levinas the ethical resistance is the resistance of that which has no resistance, the primordial expression of the ethical command “you shall not commit murder” in the face of the Other: “There is a relation not with a very great resistance, but with something absolutely *other*: the resistance of what has no resistance—the ethical resistance.” And he distinguishes between the ethical resistance and what he calls “real” resistance, arguing: “If the resistance to

lays out a theoretical foundation based on which we can comprehend the event of an effective resistance. Moreover, and contrary to western philosophy prior to Levinas, the possibility is opened up for recognition of an ethical *aspect* that is, like the for-itself aspect, original to human subjectivity as such. Hence, in this project I *work* with and through a constellation of Levinasian concepts in an attempt to elucidate the ethical subjectivity necessary to an effective resistance.

v) Chapter Organization

Levinas distinguishes between need and Desire as belonging to two different orders: need is the expression of a lack within the same, an inward-oriented relation to the exteriority, whereas Desire with its capital ‘D’ arises not from this ‘same’ but from the desirable, that is, an outward-oriented relation to, from and for the alterity. Need, therefore, corresponds to the necessities of the ‘ego’, be they corporeal, socio-historical or some combination. It is ontological, is of the *esse* of a *conatus essendi*, while Desire is of the metaphysical: it “is desire for the absolutely other” (TI 34). It is by recourse to this distinction, yet eschewing the metaphysical order (Chapters Two and Three), along with concepts adapted from Levinas’s oeuvre (particularly his phenomenology of absolute separation between interiority and exteriority,¹⁵ his phenomenology of *il y a* or “there is,” *i.e.*, the existence without existents, proximity, radical passivity, the face and the encounter with the other, and related concepts) that I propose my conceptualization of the human subject as an embodied *I-in-tension*, *i.e.*, as simultaneously a *survival* and an *ethical* corporeal-sensibility.

murder were not ethical but real, we would have *perception* of it, with all that reverts to the subjective in perception. We would remain within the idealism of a *consciousness* of struggle” (TI 199).

¹⁵ For Levinas, all human relations between interiority and exteriority, are, by virtue of being a relation with the other, always of the ethical relation. This actually corresponds to his notion that ethics is the first philosophy. It is within this condition that goodness is one of the possible responses, as is its absence.

Drawing out this conception in Section I with reference to experiences of solitary confinement and sensory deprivation (Chapter One) as I engage with what Levinas has ‘said’, I posit the subject as neither located in, nor a result of the ‘I’ or the ‘other’ separately, but rather as born and re-born in the proximity of the I and the other, proximity in the sense of the social space between, the I and the other. This proximity is the *khōra*,¹⁶ the space-time of the event of human subjectivity, the space of separation-relation. Here, developing Levinas’s concept, I emphasize proximity as the birth place of subjectivity as *respons-ability*. As this *respons-ability*, the subject is always already an ‘in-tension’; born in the space between the I and the other, it is always already both an imperial being for its own survival, a for-itself, and an ethical being-for-the-other, always already both a *survival-subjectivity* and an *ethical-subjectivity*. And, while the latter has been historically occluded within the quotidian and has thus left the former predominant both in everyday life and in theory,¹⁷ this ethical subjectivity is always present as a potentiality, and, moreover, one that occasionally obtrudes, sometimes under the most egregious conditions.

To argue that the human subject as an *I-in-tension* presents a locus for conceptualizing a potentially effective resistance beyond that available to the standard western model, I must

¹⁶ In *Timaeus* Plato explains the *khōra* as a third type of things in addition to the intelligible and the sensible. The *khōra* is a space which is neither of the other two but where the intelligible and the sensible happen: This “third type is space [*khōra*], which exists always and cannot be destroyed. It provides a fixed state for all things that come to be” (52b). In other words, “it is a *receptacle* of all becoming—its wetnurse, as it were” (49a). (“*Timaeus*,” in *Plato Complete works*, ed. John M. Cooper, 1251, 1255).

¹⁷ The Frankfurt School has certainly recognized core features of the process of such occlusion: “Through the countless agencies of mass production and its culture, the conventionalized modes of behavior are impressed on the individual as the only natural, respectable, and rational ones. He defines himself only as a thing, a static element, as success or failure. His yardstick is self-preservation, successful or unsuccessful approximation to the objectivity of his function and the models established for it” (*Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 169). Or, as Max Horkheimer puts it in *Eclipse of Reason*: “To survive, man transforms himself into an apparatus that responds at every moment with just the appropriate reaction to the baffling and difficult situations that make up his life. Everyone must be ready to meet any situation” (65). Though just what has been occluded remains obscure in their thought, the idea of occlusion is at least implicitly recognized and, in fact the scope of the survivalist tendency itself is extended beyond that claimed in the present work, as Horkheimer, for example, goes on immediately here to write that this transformation “...is doubtless not a feature characteristic of the modern period alone; it has been operative duping the entire history of mankind” (Ibid.).

elucidate limitations of resistance theorized on the basis of the latter, the conceptualization of human subjectivity as a for-itself survivalist/imperialist-subjectivity, the subjectivity of a *conatus essendi*. I approach this task in Section II, first, by addressing Foucault's conception of the western subject,¹⁸ his theory of power-subjectivity production and the ethic of the self (Chapter Four), and then on to Marx's conception of the human subject, need and labour (Chapter Five). I turn to Foucault and Marx since, as they theorize the human condition of resistance, its relations of power and socio-economic relations, they exemplify opposable approaches to the notion of the human subject and subjectivity—and thus to an ethically-based resistance—which nonetheless run up against and help elucidate the limits of the for-itself approach to the theorization of an effective resistance.

Foucault is critically important for his elucidation of the complexity of power relations, and so for freeing our perception of these relations from notions of linear dichotomous relations between fixed localities. As Adorno says of behavioral science, we do not know what determinants of unfreedom we are up against if no one articulates them. Like behavioral science, then, Foucault shows us how power is much more invasive and totalizing than we might otherwise suspect. For that, we are in his debt.

On the other hand, setting the subject as a derivative of power (Deleuze) or constituted by power (Butler), and resistance internal to power, Foucault conceptualizes the modern western human subject and its resistance from *within* the horizon of the totalizing system of capitalist-modernity.¹⁹ Thus, I argue in chapter four, that what he theorizes is the hegemonic survivalist

¹⁸ Foucault argues that “from the idea that self is not given to us... we have to create ourselves as a work of art.” Though initially he says that he intentionally avoids the concept of subjectivity, I draw from his later work the possibility of a resistant subjectivity, or a subjectivity capable of practicing freedom (*E* 284) from his idea of the care of the self and the ethic of the concern for the self.

¹⁹ As he says, if the docile body were a desired one up to a certain historical point, “one needs to study what kind of body the current society needs” (*PK* 58).

aspect of the human subject, first in its extreme passive receptivity, finding itself defined by the systemic requirement of a power diagram²⁰ working through institutions and discourses, and by its survival requirements within the system, *i.e.*, the docile body, and second, in its fantastic resistant form of authentic existence, *i.e.*, the aesthetic self, the self creating itself or the ‘sovereign’ self. What he does is important here because it articulates the parameters within which the subject defined through its hegemonic survivalist for-itself capacity can stretch itself, resist and practice ‘freedom’ *within* the boundaries of the totalizing system conceived as a totality.

If, for Foucault, resistance against forms of domination and subjugation finally comes down to the practice of the ethic of the self, a self-sovereign power exercised over one’s body necessarily practiced as freedom within the totalizing power game, Marx, presupposing a social ethic articulated in the famous maxim “from each according to his ability, to each according to his needs!” (GP 531), looks in the opposite direction pointing out the necessity for a total structural transformation of the socio-economic and cultural institutions of the modern world.

Marx is, of course, the political philosopher who recognized the fundamental importance of relations between social and material conditions, action and the constitution of the human subject, the very historicity of our subjectivity. For him the observable relations constituting the need-driven egoistic self-interested subject of his present context was sufficient evidence, not only of how that subject came to be, but also of its capacity to be otherwise. Conceptualizing the human subject as an objective historical being capable of “revolutionary, practical-critical, activity” (Thesis I), a dialectic of self-changing practice through the changing of circumstances (Thesis III), Marx conceives a resistance against the totality of those social relations that are based on division of labour and relations of private property whether capitalist or any other form.

²⁰ For the discussion of the power diagram, see Chapter Four, 137-140.

Crucially, he goes further: his conception of resistance includes a positive moment, the *creation* of a “*human society*” (Theses X and XI), a society that is distinguished from the existing “society of estranged man” as a “*true community*” (EJM 266).

Setting the nobility and desirability of Marx’s project to one side, however, yet remaining in my view in keeping with its deepest spirit, I argue that his theory of resistance through social revolution comes to an impasse insofar as it relies on a subject conceived solely from within a need-based for-itself subjectivity which remains within the paradigm of the *conatus essendi*. In fact, in the absence of a Desire-based aspect to his notion of the human subject, Marx develops a logical-ontological analysis which amounts to a historical phenomenology of the formation and development of what I have been calling the survivalist *aspect* of human subjectivity, one lacking necessary imaginative space and language for conceiving an effective resistance in the sense used here. This impasse, moreover, not only blocks the historical self-transformation of the subject, but contaminates the conception of the revolutionary project itself.²¹

In this regard, then, while both Foucault and Marx theorize the resistant subject in its social and political context – each in their contrasting directions – neither finally succeeds in leaving the traditional ground of its modern western conception as a *conatus essendi*. It is here that Levinas, despite his lack of direct engagement with the social and political dimensions of human resistance, becomes key: his re-theorization of human subjectivity cracks the exclusionary position of the *conatus essendi*. Through this crack his ethic of the other not only illuminates the impossibility of a closed subjective or social totality, but also makes it possible, *mutatis mutandis*, to imagine the possibility of an effective resistance, such as, for example, is essayed here.

²¹ In part, it is in order to contribute to the transcendence of this impasse and its consequences that the present intervention through Levinas is undertaken.

Finally, this imagining of an effective resistance founded in care-for-the-other may be supported and enhanced through analysis of the living experience of human subjects in the actual praxis of resistance. To this end, Section III presents imbrications of theory and experience through analysis and reflection on resistance in the context of political prisons.²² Through textual analysis of publically documented memoirs, interviews, letters and of my own experiences, I illustrate with Levinas not only the indispensability, however occluded, but also the living presence of ethics of the other. Through presentation on the planes of ‘being’ and ‘otherwise-than-being’, I argue that, while “the ethical exigency is not an ontological necessity” (*EI* 87), it is indeed a living reality.

Let me then finish here with a further clarification of what this research is intended to achieve, by contrasting it with some of the things I am not doing here. First, I am not addressing the question whether there could be, need be, or ought to be a resistance for-the-other. I take the existence of such resistance as an already present and long-standing human praxis. The practice of solidarity unencumbered by the pragmatisms of *conatus essendi* articulated in a for-itself survivalist-subjectivity—whether within private or public space, an individual or collective capacity—is already a resistance of the order of being-for-the-other,²³ and history is void neither of such resistance nor of the for-the-other subjectivity in which it is ensconced.

²² Here one might say with Freud that “the abnormal is the normal writ large.” Also in agreement with Foucault I find that prison is a good example of the totalizing practices of societies. Yet, counter to Foucault’s perception, prison also provides a privileged site for the elucidation of the life and resistance of an *I-in-tension*, the possibility of the resistance of a survivalist for-itself and ethical for-the-other subject. See Chapter Four.

²³ Edward Snowden’s ‘whistle blowing’ on the American government’s spying on its population may stand as a contemporary example.

Neither do I seek to enter the debate within the ‘post-modern’, ‘post-Marxist’, or ‘post-political’ theories of subjectivity that search for new universalities that preserve the particulars.²⁴ Nor, on the other hand, am I attempting to enter the debate among Levinasian scholars as to the possibility or impossibility of transposing the ethic of the other directly into the political realm. Since, on the one hand, I embark from Levinas’s defense of subjectivity through his criticism of the primacy of the ego (the ‘I’, the self, the individual) in western philosophy, the present project remains outside or other than these debates. On the other hand, because my point of entrance is located finally in the lived experience of effective resistance and the praxis of ethical response to the other, this investigation falls outside of the scholarly discourse on the problem of the arrival of the “third,” sometimes referred to as the “immanent impasse” of the Levinasian ethic of the other.²⁵ And, although I work with and through Levinas’s phenomenology I am not arguing here for a Levinasian theory of emancipation,²⁶ nor, for that matter, for an infusion of this ethic into any sort of identity politics.²⁷

In short, with the actual event of effective resistance as my compass, I work through a material phenomenological²⁸ investigation of already existing human subjectivity as corporeal-

²⁴ At risk of gross generalization and regardless of constant problematization, re-conceptualization and theorization of the notion of the subject and subjectivity—from its death as a universal to its re-birth as fragmented particular, to its appearance as void or Lack, to its relation to the other as in an inclusion/exclusion dynamic, and then the reemergence of the necessity for a universality and so on and on—the usual subject has tended overwhelmingly to remain throughout, underlying these after-the-fact interventions: first comes the subject and its subjectivity (no matter in what, if any, form) then comes the other and the question of what to do with it.

²⁵ That is to say that I am not formulating the possibility of a praxis through Levinas’s theory of ethical subjectivity, but rather through recourse to Levinas I am attempting to articulate an already existing praxis.

²⁶ For this discussion see Enrique Dussel’s *Philosophy of Liberation*, and Victoria Tahmasebi’s book *Emmanuel Levinas and the Politics of Non-Violence*.

²⁷ For this discussion see John Drabinski’s *Levinas and the Postcolonial: Race, Nation, Other*.

²⁸ I call this aspect of my research a material phenomenology in order to distinguish my investigation as a process of existential bracketing of actually existing human subjects as living corporeal-sensible beings from a more abstract theoretical bracketing. I came across this term through Simon Jarvis who takes it from the work of the French material phenomenologist Michel Henry. Without adhering to Henry’s phenomenology I adopt the term as it is representative of my investigation of the human subject in Section I.

sensibility, engaging from this perspective relevant *aspects* of the work of Foucault, Marx and Levinas. Thus I distinguish between a discourse unfolding primarily through its relations to other discourses and the sort of discourse I opt for here, one that is more directly centered in actual practices of saming/annihilating attempts of totalizing systems to eradicate in some form or another the *human* subject and on the actual praxis of being-for-the-other resistance. Born out of lived human subjectivity, then, the lodestone of this project directs analysis through experiences of isolation and sensory deprivation in settings such as psychological laboratories, hospitals and prisons.

SECTION I

A Materialist Phenomenology of Corporeal-Sensibility

CHAPTER I

Interiority as Sensible Corporeality

Introduction

Instead of exiling the ethic of the other from the realm of politics and abandoning it to the realms of metaphysics and ontological impossibility, on one hand, or confining resistance to the realm of being, on the other, I shall argue that the fundamental condition for the possibility of an *effective resistance* is neither a self-creating singular subject¹ nor a self-conscious for-itself social subject,² but a for-the-other ethical subjectivity.³ I argue for the impossibility of an effective resistance, whether to totalizing capitalistic modernity, or to a totalizing ideological and/or faith based pre- or post-modernity, without the ethics of the other. To resist totalizing tendencies in the course of resisting totalities, it is essential to avoid the Scylla and Charybdis of loss of the other for the sake of the social and loss of the other for the sake of the I. I argue, therefore, for the necessity of a human subjectivity capable of an ethical relationship with the other, of being-for-the-other in the realm of the politics and praxis of resistance, an approach to which is provided by Emanuel Levinas's ethical phenomenology.

However, if I am to argue for an ethical subjectivity as a *necessity* in the sense of uncircumventable for the possibility of an effective political resistance, I must first establish the

¹ See Chapter Four where I discuss Foucaultian resistance as an inward movement which, through his notion of the aesthetic-subject and the ethic of the care of the self, loses the other.

² See Chapter Five where I discuss Marx's conception of resistance, wherein, in direct contrast to Foucault, the other is lost in the *social* subject.

³ See Chapter Six.

possibility of such a subjectivity. Notwithstanding the seeming impasse Levinas's ethics of the other reaches with respect to the ever-presence of the third (party) in the face to face relation, and so notwithstanding the debate on the ontological impossibility of the ethics of the other in political praxis,⁴ I argue that being human necessarily entails an ethical subjectivity, however historically occluded by a dominant, *survivalist* subjectivity. *In this conception, then, the really existing subjectivity* is always already constituted within this tension between an "ethical" and a "survival" subjectivity, the latter of which I shall claim has been historically hegemonic and philosophically privileged.⁵ Humans, then, exist in the un-quiet space between and constituted

⁴ This relation has political implications, some of which are addressed in chapter six. Partly due to the hyperbolic language of Levinas in his search for a way of saying the ethical as the primordial relation, *i.e.*, the absolute responsibility for the other, and partly because of his theory of absolute separation between the ethics and politics, *i.e.*, ethics prior to consciousness, cognition, decision making, the dominant reading of Levinas argues for the impossibility of ethical relation in the order of being. For if one is absolutely responsible for the other, even for one's persecutor, and if the ethical relation is not just a dyadic relation but includes every human being (the 'third') how can one live? For a discussion of the position of the 'third' in Levinas's thinking see Robert Bernasconi's "The Third Party" in *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology* 30, no. 1(1999): 76-87. For a critique of Levinas's ethical subjectivity as unhistorical, overly burdened with guilt and incapable of political resistance, see Simon Crichley's *Infinitely Demanding: Ethics of Commitment, Politics of Resistance*; also, Gayatri C. Spivak "French feminism revisited: Ethics and politics" in *Feminists theorize the Political*, ed. by J. Butler; also, David Hoy's *Critical Resistance*, chapter four "Levinas and Derrida: 'Ethical Resistance'." For studies on Levinas's ethics and politics, see, Howard Caygill, *Levinas and the Political*; William Simmons, *An-Archy and Justice*; Richard Cohen, "Political Monotheism" in www.o-p-o.net; C. Fred Alford, "Levinas and political Theory" in *Political Theory*; Enrique Dussel, *Philosophy of Liberation*; Robert Gibbs, *Correlations in Rosenzweig and Levinas*; Horowitz and Horowitz, *Difficult Justice*. For a critical reading of the seeming rupture between Levinasian ethics and demands of justice see Asher Horowitz's "Beyond Rational Peace: On the Possibility/Necessity of a Levinasian Hyperpolitics," in *Difficult Justice*; see also Enrique Dussel's "'The Politics' by Levinas: Towards a 'Critical' Political Philosophy," in *Difficult Justice* where he discusses the necessity and the ambiguity of positive (liberating) politics in light of its entropic tendency toward a totalized totality. Also, see Victoria Tahmasebi's *Emmanuel Levinas and the Politics of Non-Violence*, in which she argues for an affinity between the non-violent politics of Mohandas Gandhi and Levinas's ethics; and see John Drabinski's proposal for a fusion between Levinasian ethical and post-colonial politics in *Levinas and the Postcolonial: Race, Nation, Other*.

⁵ I address this philosophical privilege in more depth with respect to Foucault's and Marx's conceptualizations of the human subject and subjectivity in chapters four and five respectively. But for now, and in the context of the contemporary theorization of our existing ontological state (avoiding the implications of "identity" in such terms as post-, second-, liquid-, etc.-modernity, which while helpful in distinguishing differences nonetheless creates boundaries that are potentially limiting for our imagination), I think Zygmunt Bauman's essay "Note on Society: Ethics of Individuals" testifies to the persistent hegemonic status of the survival aspect of human subjectivity in our imagination. In this essay, drawing on Levinas, Bauman starts with ethics as first philosophy and as the original condition prior to ontology, but sees it only as the "ethical casting" against which he sets the notion of "moral selves." He defines the ethical as sharing the world where our actions or abstentions "affect each other's lives. ... That circumstance has already made us responsible for each other and by the same token it has already made us ethical beings" (84). Being ethical, then, is limited for Bauman to *Mitsein*, being-with the other: "always already there"; however, "moral selves are not 'given'; they need yet to be made." The self turns *moral* for Bauman when

by the plane of being and the plane of *otherwise* than being, in the *khôra* of the survival *relation* and the ethical *relation* to exteriority rather than residing at either pole or, much less, within a synthetic unity; they remain, that is, *always in-tension*.

My argument must then demonstrate the conditions of possibility for such an ethical subjectivity, *i.e.*, the possibility of the same and the other *not only* as an original plurality, but as a plurality that, escaping the logic of the universal/particular dichotomy and the dialectical synthesis, has always already been and always already *is*. To this end, a phenomenological⁶ enquiry into the *death* of the subject and of subjectivity will illustrate what might be called the möbius⁷ experiences of the possibility of simultaneous conditions: absolute separation as the condition for the participation/relation of interiority and exteriority and absolute isolation as the condition for the 'saming,' *i.e.*, the appropriation and/or annihilation of interiority and exteriority. I begin by establishing the horizon for this essaying of both the possibility of—even the necessity for—an *effective* resistance in contradistinction to the resistance of a *survival* (hegemonically for-itself) subjectivity, a "survival ego" regardless of the latter's sometimes successful resistance or capitulation to the given totality. Here again, an effective resistance will

the self "takes up" the responsibility, "when *Mitsein* is lifted to the level of *Fürsein* ("pour-être," "being-for")" (84). By creating two categories of ethical being (being-with the other) and moral being (being-for the other), Bauman presents the possibility of ethical subjectivity as a byproduct of a proper social structure. According to Bauman (1) the possibility of the moral self "depends on the nature of *Mitsein*"; and (2) "that nature depends in turn on the character of the society in which humans live," which again (3) depends "on the way society is structured and the way it fashions individual lives" (84). Henceforth, as Bauman perceives only the birth of "ethically defused" individualized selves under the domination of the human condition of precariousness (94-95) and regardless of his earlier reference to Levinas, human subjectivity as such remains void of any ethical *aspect* beyond the institutionally instilled; in other words, the ethical aspect of the human subject remains occluded.

⁶ I follow Levinas's phenomenology which is not one bound to the subject's transcendental fore-structures but is one that removes the "experience" from the Husserlian limits of the phenomena of consciousness. Yet, unlike Levinas whose phenomenology is of an experience with alterity (See Jeffrey Dudiak's *The Intrigue of Ethics*, especially chapters one and seven), mine is more of a material phenomenology, that is, of the existential experience of the human subject as a corporeal-sensible being.

⁷ I came across and was inspired by the image of möbius strip in Asher Horowitz's article "Beyond Rational Peace" in *Difficult Justice*. In this article Horowitz brings forth this image to articulate a relation between the order of the ethical and political which cannot be defined and explained exhaustively as dialectical nor as paradoxical. See especially section 3, "Elliptically ... the Non-Negative ... a Moebius Strip," 34-37.

be recognized as one that—whatever else it may do—successfully resists a totalizing system such that it does not devolve into the production of a new totality.⁸ What follows, then, is a constellation of investigations into absolute *separation* as the condition for interiority and thought, and into absolute *isolation* as a *null*-condition, one that induces the death of an already formed subjectivity, of, in fact, interiority itself.

i) Absolute Separation: Participation/Relation

Separation is the very constitution of thought and interiority, that is, a relationship within independence (*TI* 104).

If western philosophy is rich with inquiries into human subjectivity, conceptualizing and deconstructing it, taking it through phenomenological reduction, setting it in its ‘material conditions,’ its ‘unconscious roots,’ the ‘body,’ its ‘responsibility-to-the-other,’ and so on, the political history of the west, in the broadest sense, is rich in attempts to manipulate, transform, or destroy individual subjectivity, most often in the name of a more desirable or exemplary one. If in the old world the undesired subjects, the others of politico-religious orders, were so often to be annihilated, the modern world constructed new and more totalizing methods aimed at incorporating its others through more subtle and systematic internal coercion. It sought to manipulate their interior being so to remove the undesired elements and create –however much they claim it is a ‘discovery’ – the ‘right,’ the ‘suitable’ or the ‘necessary’ subject. Ironically, one of the virtually universal methods of choice for the inclusion of the formerly excluded in the new

⁸Enrique Dussel is the first to take Levinas’s ethic to a politics of liberation (in his *Philosophy of Liberation*); Dussel recognizes the entropic tendency of states of “liberation” to devolve into new totalities. In “ ‘The Politics’ by Levinas: Towards a ‘Critical’ Political Philosophy,” however, he emphasizes the necessity of a “critical politics” for its positive contribution to a new totality, a “ ‘new’ Totality aimed at the ‘service’ (*abodah*) of the Other” (87). That is, he appears not only rightly to recognize an entropic tendency toward totality, but to envisage movement from one totality to another as the highest political form achievable.

totality has been total *isolation*. This isolation is to be distinguished emphatically from its radical opposite: absolute *separation*.

Levinas argues for an absolute separation between the Same and the Other, a radical separation that does not devolve into, or stem from opposition, negation or a sum of differences. Such separation is categorically distinct from any relation to isolation. The absolutely separated terms can only “maintain themselves in relationship and *absolve* themselves from this relation, [that is] remain absolutely separated” (TI 102). Separation is the condition of participation, “a way of referring to the other,” without losing “one’s own being” or the “contact” with the other (61). It is the *sine qua non* of the existence of interiority and exteriority; in fact, it is “the very constitution of thought and interiority, that is, a relationship within independence” (104). Isolation, in contrast, is a break with all participation, a bracketing of relation, of contact with exteriority—a bracketing of exteriority.

Levinas invokes the myth of Gyges to describe the “myth of the I and interiority” (61). With his ring of invisibility Gyges exists by bracketing himself from the world outside, erasing himself, erasing proximity with exteriority. Gyges is then “a being *no longer participating* and hence drawing from itself its own existence, coming forth from a dimension of interiority” (TI 90). To break with participation, to bracket relation, is to remove contact and receptivity, that is, to remove sensibility. In the myth, Gyges' invisibility reduces the world to ‘spectacle’; though unrecognized, he still has access to the world.

As empirical evidence suggests, however, in the social world beyond the myth, to break with participation, to remove the interiority from relating and participating, requires an extreme isolation, whether induced through physical isolation or through the introduction of chemicals. In isolation, the state of minimal contact, the sense of space-time itself inexorably dissipates. This

condition parallels Levinas's description of the classical statues of the gods “immobilized in the between-time of art, left for all eternity on the edge of the intervals, at the threshold of a future that is never produced, statues looking at one another with empty eyes, idols which, contrary to Gyges, are exposed and do not see” (*TI* 222).

These catatonic ancient gods present images reminiscent of the outcome of the modern effort to reach into the core of a sensing-thinking-being, attempting to turn that being inside-out in the hope of laying it bare. In reality (as we see in the discussion of solitary confinement and sensory deprivation below), the ‘thinking’ peels away as separation is eroded, leaving behind not the living beings but empty-eyed shells, what may be termed “lived-bodies”⁹ sunk in the abyss of what Levinas calls the *il y a*, the “there is,” a conception to which I now turn.

ii) Isolation: Melting into the *Il y a*

How might one elucidate the dynamics of separation/participation, to recognize separation as the condition of possibility for the existence of the same and the other, interiority and exteriority, and thus the encounter between the I and the Other, that is to say, for the possibility of the event of subjectivity itself? One way is to consider the coercive efforts of institutions of power to reduce actual living beings, already existing subjectivities, to empty them out, to ‘isolate’ them. That is, these dynamics are clarified by analysis of efforts to ‘reverse engineer’ subjects, to render them truly ‘isolates.’ To pursue this argument, however, it is necessary to briefly elucidate the space of *il y a*, for these attempts aim to induce reduction to this condition, a condition in which separation/participation is completely removed.

For Levinas, the term *il y a* (*there is*) “represents the phenomenon of absolutely impersonal being,” “being without object, in complete silence,” in “utter non-thought,” a

⁹ See Chapter Two, section i) “Living-being/Lived-body”.

“horrifying experience of annihilation” (*IR* 212). *Il y a* is faceless, impersonal and anonymous existence stretched behind the surface of the elements, beyond any “edge” to grab, any “side (visage)” to surf or tread on, an unforeseeable, menacing depth, an *apeiron* (*TI* 131,141-2).

In *Existence & Existents*, Levinas invites his readers to imagine all things and beings reverted to nothingness (*EE* 51). This imagined nothingness, is a state of no existents, no things or beings, yet it is a state; it is still something, he argues, even “if only night and the silence of nothingness,” an indeterminateness which resists a personal form. *Il y a, there is*, is “being in general,” existence without existents. To describe it he offers a phenomenological analysis of insomnia and the experience of the silence of the dark nights when, deprived of sleep, one is faced with the indeterminateness of the elemental.¹⁰ There, there is no longer “something” but a “universal absence” which “is in its turn a *presence*, an absolutely unavoidable presence,” one that is immediately there (*EE* 52, emphasis added). In insomnia one is there, *nowhere*, where the element has no edge/visage, no place to make contact (*TI* 142), where groping for sleep is seeking after that contact with a protective place (*EE* 67). And this ‘protective place’ is not an object of knowledge, but a “*condition*” that supports the subject, like the earth where one takes a ‘stand’ (*EE* 67-8). *Il y a*, however, like the nocturnal space, is filled with the presence of absence, the voice of silence. It frightens and is horrifying and the horror strips “consciousness of its ‘subjectivity’” (*EE* 52-55). “[D]ue just to the fact that nothing approaches, nothing comes, nothing threatens; this silence, this tranquility, this *void of sensations* constitutes a mute, absolutely indeterminate menace”; this nocturnal space becomes insecurity (53-4, emphasis

¹⁰ Presenting the concept “elemental” Levinas writes; “Every relation or possession is situated within the non-possessable which envelops or contains without being able to be contained or enveloped. We shall call it the elemental. ... The element has no forms containing it; it is content without form. Or rather it has but a side: the surface of the sea and of the field, the edge of the wind; the medium upon which this side [visage] takes form is not composed of things.” And yet again, “to tell the truth the element has no side at all. One does not approach it. The relation adequate to its essence discovers it precisely as a medium: one is steeped in it; I am always within the element” (*TI* 131). We can privatize nature, possess a river or a sea and so limit the access to it for others, but the river and the sea as elemental remain beyond such possessive grasping.

added). Under the weight of this ‘presence’ the I has no place into which to withdraw. “One is exposed. The whole is open upon us. ...[N]octurnal space delivers us over to being” (54). In this gush of *there is*, in the midst of the horror of being, *depersonalization* is the event. The subject is stifled, “stripped of his subjectivity, of his power to have private existence” (56).

To flesh out, extend and modify this Levinasian *il y a*, to render its conception both more tangible and more attuned to the argument here—that separation/relation rather than isolation/self-sufficiency *is* the condition of possibility for subjectivity—let us turn briefly to an examination of the literature on and the experience of coercive techniques of solitary confinement and of sensory deprivation where these are intended to modify, replace or eradicate subjectivity.

iii) Solitary confinement: The Reduction of the World

Unlike Levinas, the institutions of totalizing power and their actors do not exercise their mind to imagine an existence without existents, the space of disintegration of subjectivity. Rather, they utilize their imaginations in an attempt to create a space where subjectivity as such, may be disintegrated. Instead of the mental activity of bracketing, these institutions and their ideologues and rhetoricians plan and administer what might be called a “materialist *epoche*”: actually bracketing the material world of being.

Stuart Grassian, as part of his declaration, “Psychiatric Effects of Solitary Confinement,”¹¹ refers to reviews and observations of the effect of extreme isolation on prisoners. His report includes a body of examinations and reviews of the effects of isolation and sensory deprivation on nineteenth and twentieth century prisoners. All practices of isolation

¹¹ Stuart Grassian, “Psychiatric Effects of Solitary Confinement”. This declaration was submitted in September 1993 in *Madrid v. Gomez*. http://www.probono.net/prisoners/stopsol-reports/417726.Psychiatric_Effects_of_Solitary_Confinement_1993.

begin, of course, with removing the individual from the larger human society. This act of removal kicks off the process of isolation. In 1829, the Philadelphia Penitentiary administered the closest thing to a total isolation it could manage at the time. The new prisoner's vision was obstructed by a hood pulled over his head immediately upon entering the prison and he was then taken to his solitary cell. He could hear nothing but sounds of his own making, see nothing beyond the empty walls confining him and his own body; he could have no implements of any kind, nothing was made available to do or to read. The only thing to which he could have access was his "innate sentiments."¹² This "profound silence" within the prison's "vast walls," which de Tocqueville likens to the silence of death (Ibid.), was the innovation of the ruling powers, the politicians and the scientific and moral authorities of the nineteenth-century. The explicit intention was to destroy the old ('evil') being and to craft a new 'human person.' Charles-Jean-Marie Lucas (1803-1889), a nineteenth-century authority on French prison reform, held the silence of solitude to be the primary condition for achieving the prisoner's total submission to the governor who was to be the sole source of human contact. He enthuses, "just imagine the power of human speech intervening in the midst of the terrible discipline of silence to speak to the heart, to the soul, to the human person."¹³ From its inception solitary confinement was not perceived purely as punishment. As Foucault illustrates in *Discipline and Punish*, solitude was also perceived as a space of breaking through the prisoner's sense of being, his self-definition in relation to himself and beyond. The object was to achieve "[a] profound submission, rather than a superficial training; a change of 'morality,' rather than of attitude"; in short it was to create a

¹² D. Rothman, *The Discovery of Asylum*, pp 86-87 (Quoted in Grassian's "Psychiatric Effects of Solitary Confinement," 7).

¹³ Lucas, Charles. *De la Réforme des Prisons I.*, 1836, 167 (Quoted in DP 237).

space wherein “life [was] annihilated and begun again”¹⁴ (*DP* 238-239). Isolation is thus perceived and intended by its advocates as a place where the prisoner is “handed over to himself; [here,] in the silence of his passions and of the world that surrounds him, he descends into his conscience, he questions it and feels awakening within him the moral feeling that never entirely perishes in the heart of man.”¹⁵ The fantasy is that, by dipping the prisoner into total silence, a process is initiated in which there survives and/or arises a conscience in pure isolation.¹⁶ The institutional hope, then, is for a kind of soul surgery, removing one’s unfit, undesired subjectivity to make room for a ‘moral’ one. In other words, by isolating the interiority from the external world, by removing the exteriority as much as possible, and placing the individual “in the midst of the terrible discipline of silence,” the individual is cracked open; one’s ego-shell softens and is made ready to be dug into to its core: its ‘innate conscience,’ its ‘heart’ and ‘soul.’ It is in relation to this fantastic space that Charles Lucas imagines “the power of human (the governor, the instructor) speech” getting access to the ‘human person’ and causing “a change of ‘morality,’ rather than of attitude.” For the most part, according to Rothman and Grassian, however, the results of such attempts were insanity, disease and death.¹⁷ Charles Dickens, for example, describes a prisoner in Philadelphia’s total isolation cell as “a man buried alive. ... dead to everything but torturing anxieties and horrible despair.” Incapable of holding a thought, the prisoner falls into “a strange gaze,” another one “stare[s] at his hands and pick[s] the flesh, upon

¹⁴ Of course, the power concentrated in and transmuted through prison institutions to reduce a prisoner to an object of power with the desire of annihilating and replacing the prisoner’s subjectivity is neither exclusive to the nineteenth century, nor to western societies. For instance under the Islamic Republic of Iran political prisoners have been subjected to physical and psychological torture, including long term solitary confinement and versions of sensory deprivation to induce political and ideological/religious conversion. See Chapter Six.

¹⁵ *Journal des économistes*, II, 1842, (Quoted in *DP* 238).

¹⁶ This is a ‘fantasy’ in spite of the fact that there are those who submit, experience conversion and/or a visitation by a god or a saint. It is a fantasy because bracketing out exteriority through isolation does not disclose some eternal conscience—variations in individual instances, if nothing else, disclose the implausibility of that. The experience of conversion is still the interiority’s response to exteriority, an exteriority coming to the prisoner out of her own past and the impositions of the institutions and their personnel.

¹⁷ Rothman, 87, in Grassian, “Psychiatric Effects of Solitary Confinement,” 8.

the fingers, and raises his eyes for an instant ... to those bare walls”¹⁸ Dickens is bewildered as he ponders the prisoners’ self-mutilating acts as they stare vacantly at those bare walls.

Similar to Dickens’ observations, Grassian reports of prisoners “grossly disorganized and psychotic, smearing themselves with feces, mumbling and screaming incoherently all day and night, some even descending to the horror of eating parts of their own bodies”;¹⁹ such are the effects of extreme isolation in the Special Housing Units (SHU) at Pelican Bay State Prison, California, as reported in 1991-2.²⁰ He concludes: “The restriction of environmental stimulation and social isolation associated with confinement in solitary are strikingly toxic to mental functioning, producing a stuporous condition associated with perceptual and cognitive impairment and affective disturbances”.²¹ His report echoes Nitsche’s report in 1912 on the practice of prolonged absolute isolation between 1854 and 1909: “The gaze is staring, vacant, indefinite ... consciousness becomes more and more clouded ... and later there is amnesia for all events during this time”.²² Nitsche reports apathy, a progressing inability to concentrate, incapacity to think, and “even catatonic features, including negativism, stupor and mutism”.²³ Citing a number of turn of the nineteenth-century sources, Grassian constructs a list of psychiatric syndromes associated with solitary confinement which include such symptoms as massive free-floating anxiety, fearfulness, disturbances of the sensorium, vivid hallucinations (auditory, visual, olfactory), persecutory delusions, acute confusional states, dissociation, dream-

¹⁸ Dickens 1842, quoted in *ibid.*, 7.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 12.

²⁰ The battle over changing the conditions of these Special Housing Units (SHU) is ongoing, both inside and outside of the Pelican Bay State Prison: “On May 31, 2012, the Center for Constitutional Rights (CCR) filed a federal lawsuit on behalf of prisoners at Pelican Bay State Prison who have spent between 10 and 28 years in solitary confinement. The legal action is part of a larger movement to reform inhumane conditions in California prisons’ Security Housing Units (SHU), a movement sparked and dramatized by a 2011 hunger strike by thousands of SHU prisoners” (“Ashker v. Brown,” <http://ccrjustice.org/pelican-bay>).

²¹ Grassian, “Psychiatric Effects of Solitary Confinement,” 13.

²² *Ibid.*, 20.

²³ *Ibid.*, 21.

like states, amnesia, catatonic features and violent destructive outbursts.²⁴ Not surprisingly, the reports also testify that “in many cases, [there is] rapid subsidence of acute symptoms upon termination of solitary confinement”.²⁵

What is this process of isolation? Why is it that again and again, across time and space, solitary confinement, this place of bracketing out layers of exteriority, bears out the break-down of the I instead of the production of an unencumbered self? No matter how hard it is to imagine oneself devolving into playing with one’s feces or eating one’s own flesh, is hardly surprising. For in the erosion of exteriority, what is one’s flesh, one’s excrement, but something outside of one’s self, something with edges, graspable, and thus the possibility of contact?

The reduction of the exterior world to the bare minimum of one’s cell and one’s own body, then, gnaws at the subject’s sense of self, at subjectivity itself. Thought and memory float through the interiority, dispersing into incoherent fragments. In the horror of the silence, one oscillates between hiding inwardly, crumbling into oneself, and bursting outward to destruction. The inward hideaway, however, becomes more and more slippery, moving away as the boundary between inside and outside blurs into hallucinations. In a prolonged absolute solitary confinement one stands at the threshold of the space of *il y a*, tasting it, sensing it and sometimes melting into it.

After more than a century of failed attempts to permanently destroy a given subjectivity and replace it with another intended to conform to the given social totality,²⁶ the totalizing powers and their institutions remain ever faithful to the possibility of accessing the core of the

²⁴ Ibid., 21-22.

²⁵ Ibid., 22.

²⁶ A replacement facilitated by religious and ideological doctrines and panoptical-type surveillance. On panoptical surveillance and its intended effect –transforming a prisoner into her own guard –see Jeremy Bentham, *The Panopticon Writings*. Ed. Miran Bozovic (London: Verso, 1995) and Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*. (New York: Vantage Books, 1979). Also see Chapter Four below.

human being through isolation. The motive is no longer the salvaging of the (dis)eased soul—though that is the façade under which totalizing regimes such as those of Iran under the Islamic Republic and China and Russia under ‘socialist’ doctrines have justified forced conversion or annihilation of their ‘un-fit’ citizens. Rather, the motive is more obviously political: to secure the power structure from the threat of political dissidents and/or social delinquents. Be they ‘Socialist’ or ‘populist-Islamic’ states, ‘modernized’ dictatorships, or ‘liberal-capitalist-democracies,’ the object is to overcome resistance to the regime by installing a compliant subjectivity.

The record of the history of institutionalized isolation, then, illuminates the aspects of the *il y a* presented above. The failure of this technique, however, brought medicine, psychiatry and behavioral psychology to the rescue of the project. A brief look at this history of material *epoche*, in its application of sensory deprivation, provides further elucidation of isolation as erosion of separation, as a process of melting into the *il y a*.

iv) Sensory Deprivation: Melting into the There is

(1) The deprivation of sensory stimuli induces stress; (2) the stress becomes unbearable for most subjects; (3) the subject has a growing need for physical and social stimuli; and (4) some subjects progressively lose touch with reality, focus inwardly, and produce delusions, hallucinations, and other pathological effects. ... The deprivation of stimuli induces regression by depriving the subject’s mind of contact with an outer world and thus forcing it in upon itself (CIA Manual, “Coercive Techniques,” section LX, p. 89-90).

If solitary cell confinement is mainly an attack on one as a social and thinking being, sensory depriving containment is a direct attack on one as a sensible being. In the case of political prisoners, for instance, solitary cell confinement is aimed at reducing a human being to

an isolated individual, deprived of the human other—excepting, of course, one’s aggressors—and represented as simply being left to herself outside of any sociality, instigating the illusion that the (in)action, silence or speech are self-imbued and self-chosen phenomena. Though much knowledge and many social applications have been produced on human functioning and adaptation in different isolating social and natural environments – from small groups to space travel –, a sensory depriving containment in itself functions to drive one further away from the alterity by reducing one’s ability to sense the exterior world. One is pushed deep down into one’s interiority, where the ‘self,’ rather than being exposed, is rendered an illusion. This achievement of what may be called the “*null-condition*” of sensory deprivation is a product of the renewed scientific version of the old attempt to erase the already formed subjectivity and encourage the formation of a desired one, building it anew. Regardless of any temporarily sustained successes or general failures, a complex imposed period of sensory deprivation works, to the extent that it does, through chipping away the human-being in order to arrive at a merely alive body, not a living-being but what I called above a *lived-body*,²⁷ that is, borrowing from Levinas, an “ataraxy,”²⁸ a “pure existing” without happiness or unhappiness (*TI* 113). As sensory deprivation targets the sensibility, it erodes the absolute separation between interiority and exteriority, throwing the *I* into the midst of the *there is*.

Encouraged by the threat of Chinese “brain washing” of prisoners of war during the Korean War (1950-53), the United States’ Department of Defense and the Central Intelligence Agency funded psychological and psychiatric research and experiments primarily at McGill

²⁷ This distinction between a living-body and lived-body draws attention to the significance of the sensibility of a human subject as a corporeal-sensible being. A *living-body* (or living being) as opposed to a *lived* one is a living sensibility, an actively alive being: the gerund form here connotes its participatory role in its acts of life; this is a non-indifferent being, one capable of happiness and unhappiness. Whereas, a sensory deprived being is a being kept alive without ‘living from’ Sensory deprivation is a process eliminating to the extent possible the very ability to receive and respond.

²⁸ See below 37-44.

University and Harvard, on the effects of sensory deprivation. As a side-product of a 1938 experiment on a group of elderly people who slipped into nocturnal delirium, Dr. Ewen Cameron, head of research at the McGill project infers that, “in order to maintain a time and space image, we ordinarily rely upon two major factors: (a) our continued sensory input, and (b) our memory.”²⁹ This experiment consists of placing the subjects (individually) in a quiet room during the daytime and bandaging their eyes. The reduction in sensory stimuli creates a simulation of nocturnal space, triggering confusion, extreme anxiety and a breakdown “in the synthesis of the various sense impressions of the objects in the room which they had gained at the time of entry.”³⁰

According to Cameron, the integrity of the functioning human being relies on three interlocking images: body-image, self-image and time-space image. A serious reduction in sensory input disrupts these images, putting the subject in a state of anxiety and fear.³¹ Across location and time whether in John Lilly’s lukewarm water tank, in various universities’ laboratories, mental hospitals, at the Control Unit at Wakefield prison in Britain, or in counter insurgency operations in Malaya, British Guyana, or El Salvador, whether in counter anti-Islamic revolution operations in Iran or counter terrorism in Guantánamo Bay, bracketing the exterior world discloses processes of depersonalization, loss of reality and a free-falling into a state of horrifying anxiety.

In the sensory deprivation condition, efforts are made to reduce sensory stimulation to as low a level as possible. This is usually accomplished by the use of a dark, soundproofed chamber in which the subject, wearing gauntlet-type gloves, is instructed to lie quietly on a cot or mattress. Earplugs or earmuffs may be used to reduce further the level of sensory stimulation. ... An even more severe procedure to produce “total” deprivation is the water-immersion technique (Lilly, 1956; Shurley 1963, 1968) in which the subject,

²⁹ D. Ewen Cameron, et al., “Sensory Deprivation: Effects, upon the Functioning Human in Space System,” in *Psychophysiological Aspects of Space Flight*, ed. B. E. Flaherty (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961), 226.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid., 234-35.

wearing nothing but an opaque mask, is immersed in a large tank of slowly flowing water (90° F) and instructed to inhibit all movements. Because of its severity, this procedure can only be used for short-term deprivation experiments (Maximum 8 hours).³²

These settings, as well as cases of chemically reduced sensory conduction within the body,³³ are founded on the effects of denying a human being sens-ability: the sensing of the exterior world and one's own body.³⁴ By covering one's eyes, ears, and skin, by denying one the opportunity to stand, move, or touch or use one's vocal cords, one is essentially denied corporeality. One is prevented from maintaining the positing of oneself corporeally on the earth (*TI* 128); the earth is not only removed from under the feet, but also the corporeal edge³⁵ of the interiority itself is erased. Here, like Levinas's immobilized gods, one is blind and deaf, and also steeped in "[t]he absolute void, the "nowhere" in which the element loses itself and from which it arises ... [and] on all sides beats against the islet of the I who lives interiorly" (*TI* 147). But, as the boundaries, the edges, of "the islet of the I" disappear, it is the separation itself that is eroding. Less and less is there an edge to the exteriority, less and less does the subject have any interior in which to live, less and less is there a separated being.

³² John P. Zubek, "Behavioural and physiological effects of prolonged sensory and perceptual deprivation; a review," in *Man in Isolation and Confinement*, Rasmussen, J. Ed, (Chicago: Aldine Pub. Co., 1973), 11.

³³ Cameron, "Sensory Deprivation," 233.

³⁴ Of course it never gets to a level of total sensory deprivation, unless one is kept in such condition to the point of total disintegration, as happened in prisons such as camp Delta in Guantanamo Bay or with E. Cameron's patients. Dr. Cameron, for instance, combined three methods in order to maximize isolation: "At the Allan Memorial Institute, the effects of reduced sensory input upon human behavior have been studied in three different ways: (1) by reduction in the amount of stimulus coming from the environment and received by the individual through his eyes and ears, and an attempted reduction of some of the tactile stimuli by limitation of the use of his hands; (2) by reduction of input achieved through interference with the conduction of stimuli from the external receptors to the central nervous system; and (3) by reduction of the responsiveness of the individual to stimulation" (Cameron, "Sensory Deprivation," 230).

³⁵ Following Levinas I use the terms 'edge' and 'side' to refer to the inconvertibility of a phenomenon's depth to its surface. Referring to elements he writes: "The element ... has a side: the surface of the sea and of the field, the edge of the wind; the medium upon which this side takes form is not composed of things. It unfolds in its own dimension: depth, which is inconvertible into the breadth and length in which the side of the element extends" (*TI* 131). For instance in the case of existence in a condition of sensory deprivation it is as if the (corporeal) edge, side or face of an interiority is dissolved. See Levinas's discussion of the "side" and "edge" of the elemental in *Totality and Infinity*, 130-132.

The irony is that, as the isolation becomes more total, the porous contact between interiority and exteriority, that is closed and opened, that has kept an I separated and related “so that exteriority could speak to it, reveal itself to it” (Ibid.), is dissolved, and with it the separation. In comes insecurity; out goes the ability to respond: ‘respons-ability.’ It is insecurity not because of “something” threatening but precisely because “nothing approaches, nothing comes, nothing threatens; this silence this tranquility, this void of sensations constitutes a mute, absolutely indeterminate menace” (*EE* 53-4, *TI* 142-4). In “this void of sensation” there is no respons-ability as there is neither exteriority, nor receptivity.

However, in contrast to Levinas’s nocturnal space of insomnia where there is a *one*, a subject who faces the anonymous burden of *there is*, the heaviness of the unforeseeable presence of existence, one who gropes for *contact*, “a base, a *condition*,” in the sensory depriving *null*-condition one loses the sense of one’s own extremities, the edges, as though one has oneself dissipated into the *there is*. The reduction of the subject’s sens-ability, then, eats into the interiority’s integrity, inducing a state which corresponds to Dr. Cameron’s finding that one’s self-image dissipates when one’s other interlocking images –time-space and body—are materially bracketed. The *null* condition thus induced produces, in the words of the experimenters themselves, “feelings of floating in outer space,”³⁶ of “unreality” and “loss of identification”; the subjects of one experiment, writes J. Lilly, “did not know where they were, or who they were, or what was happening to them.”³⁷ One does not “know” anything as one does not live “sensible qualities: the green of these leaves, the red of this sunset” (*TI* 135). The very possibility of knowledge disappears.

³⁶ Cameron, “Sensory Deprivation,” 234.

³⁷ J. Lilly, “Mental Effects of Reduction of ordinary Levels of Physical Stimuli on Intact Healthy Persons,” in *Psychological Research Report*, 5, (1966), 1-9; quoted in Armen Victorian, “United States, Canada, Britain: Partners in Mind Control Operations,” in *MindNet*, 1. No. 81, (1996).

Sensory deprivation is an attempt to simulate a condition of no-space and no-time, a *non-condition* condition in which one is forced out of living sensible and social time and space: here time and space are contracted such that the here and now is stretched to the infinite.³⁸ Here one is burdened by the indeterminateness of ‘presence’ and ‘here.’ Here one is deprived of one’s sensory edges, the ambiguous edges of the interiority which are simultaneously “open and close[d]” to the exteriority. One loses one’s contact with the edges of being. One loses one’s *own* edge of being. Being exiled from exteriority, the *previously* formed interiority corrupts, molds: interiority without separation is an oxymoron.

Reduced to a *lived-being* with its survival needs met (being “fed and toileted in the room”), one lives without enjoyment, but still harboring traces of a memory of enjoyment,³⁹ and so long as these traces have not yet disappeared into the space of the *there is*, one also experiences anxiety, restlessness, anger and panic.⁴⁰ Cameron notes “increased introspection and

³⁸ This is an example of the “bad infinity” of which Levinas speaks (*TI* 158, 9); see below Chapter Two, subsection v) “The Bad Infinite and Fear.”

³⁹ In the case of Montreal’s sensory deprived mental patients, massive EC was administered to erase their memory, taking away the past as well as the future. See for example N. Klein’s interview with Gail Kastner in *The Shock Doctrine*, Chapter One. Also, see Ann Collins, *In the Sleep Room: The Story of The CIA Brainwashing Experiments in Canada*.

⁴⁰ “These symptoms included perceptual distortions and illusions in multiple spheres, vivid fantasies, often accompanied by strikingly vivid hallucinations in multiple spheres, derealization experiences, ... cognitive impairment, massive free-floating anxiety, extreme motor restlessness, emergence of primitive aggressive fantasies which were often accompanied by fearful hallucinations and with decreasing capacity to maintain an observing, reality-testing ego function” (Brownfield, 1965; Solomon, et al., 1996, In Grassian, “Psychiatric Effects,” 9). Also, in the following D. E. Cameron details his observation of the erosion of space-time image and its effects on the ‘self’s’ relation to memory: “In the first stage of disturbance of the space-time image, there are marked memory deficits but it is possible for the individual to maintain a space-time image. In other words, he knows where he is, how long he has been there and how he got there. In the second stage, the patient has lost his space-time image, but clearly feels that there should be one. He feels anxious and concerned because he cannot tell where he is and how he got there. In the third stage, there is not only a loss of the space-time image but loss of all feeling that should be present. During this stage the patient may show a variety of other phenomena, such as loss of a second language or all knowledge of his marital status. In more advanced forms, he may be unable to walk without support, to feed himself, and he may show double incontinence. At this stage all schizophrenic symptomatology is absent. His communications are brief and rarely spontaneous, his replies to questions are in no way conditioned by recollections of the past or by anticipations of the future. He is completely free from all emotional disturbance save for a customary mild euphoria. He lives, as it were, in a very narrow segment of time and space. All aspects of his memorial function are severely disturbed. He cannot well record what is going on around him. He cannot retrieve data from the past. Recognition or cue memory is seriously interfered with and his retention span is extremely limited” (“The Depatterning Treatment of Schizophrenia,” *Comprehensive Psychiatry*, 3. No. 2, [April, 1962], 67).

fantasy production,”⁴¹ which, according to Grassian is “often accompanied by strikingly vivid hallucinations in multiple spheres.”⁴² Under the burden of floating on a *null*-condition, eventually the memories implode; recede to match the presence of the organism. Materially secure and safe in her own bubble, the *human* recedes, the subjectivity dissipates. Without the capacity to sense the edges of elements in our encounter with the exteriority there can be no enjoying being. Sinking down into *there is*, one is no longer “living from ...,”⁴³ but is reduced to a “bare existence”⁴⁴ (TI 111), one is only *lived*, “fed and toileted” without the possibility of happiness or unhappiness.

To underscore this crucial point: where there is only *il y a*, an existence without existents, separation *is* null. The I spills out as “presence” spills over without having any place or any temporality to spill into. The human being, a sensible-corporeal thinking-being, a sociality, diminishes into a *lived*-being, an ataraxy. In the absence of exteriority there is no inwardness and no living being; in the absence of separation there is no sensation, no need or enjoyment; in the absolute absence of sensory experience, one is devoid of conscious sensibility, of sensible consciousness; there is in short no sensibility as awareness to be consciousness of.

In this oxymoronic situation, without sensibility, without being a ‘being,’ a separated being, there is no ego, nor any *living* being ‘living from’ Robbing one of his sensibility leaves behind what may be likened to an edgeless open womb,⁴⁵ alive, yet not *living*, not living from, without the possibility of creation, incapable of Eros, of giving life. The “bare” existence is

⁴¹ Cameron, “Sensory Deprivation,” 232.

⁴² Grassian, “Psychiatric Effects,” 9.

⁴³ See Chapter Two.

⁴⁴ “The life that I earn is not a *bare* existence; it is a life of labor and nourishments; these are contents which do not preoccupy it only, but which “occupy” it, which “entertain” it, of which it is enjoyment”(TI 111).

⁴⁵ A womb is a radical receptivity of and responsivity to the other, a living condition for life. It is open, and it is closed; it has boundaries. Thus it receives and responds to and for that which it receives. Whereas an edgeless womb would be one that had none of these. Without edges, it is nothing.

a barren existence. “On the ground of the *there is*” a being implodes rather than “arises” (*EE* 83).⁴⁶

In the absence of separation, then, there is no living being. “To be separated is to dwell somewhere; separation is produced positively in localization” (*TI* 168). Extraction of spatiality, through quasi-elimination of sensibility erodes localization and separation. Sensory deprivation attacks spatiality, the contact with location, the space of living and the space of being. Exiled from the spatial dimension, one folds inward as the inward crumbles. The distortion of the distinction between the interiority and exteriority, on one hand, leaves the self wide open, while, on the other hand, it drives it down into its core. Isolation is not separation: absolute separation between interiority and exteriority is the *khôra* of relation-participation; absolute isolation is the *null*-condition of interiority and exteriority, is the *khôra* of annihilation. This is the paradox of the imposition of total isolation: it seeks to reach the core of the self itself by taking the subject through an existential *epoche*, peeling away the external world and rendering one an ‘isolate’ exposing her inwardness, but *the erosion of exteriority is finally the erosion of separation*. The ‘inwardness’ is naught without its ‘ward.’ With the nothing to respond to, the responding self decays in upon itself. Thus it all comes back to separation.

⁴⁶ In his first book, *Existence and Existents*, Levinas develops his concept of ‘hypostasis’ in the context of his discussion of the *there is* and the experience of exiting from it: “Hypostasis, the apparition of a substantive, ... signifies the suspension of the anonymous *there is*”; he continues: “[o]n the ground of the *there is* a being arises” (*EE* 83). Later however, in an interview in 1986 he describes the *there is* as being “unbearable in its indifference” an “anonymous ‘nonsense’” the exit from which starts “from something in itself,” *i.e.*, a hypostasis. “Getting out of the anonymousness of being—of the *there is*—by beings, by the subject who is bearer and master of being, of his being” (*IR* 45). Although, he continues, saying that “the true exit from the *there is* is in obligation, in the “for-the-other,” which introduces a meaning into the nonsense of the *there is*.” (45-46). Contrary to Levinas, however, I argue that when and so long as one is sunk into the *there is*, only the *there is* is; there remains no location from which a subject “who is bearer and master of being, of his being” could arise. The exit, “true” or not, does not start “from something in itself” (*ibid.*), but from absolute separation, the *condition* for the “something,” for the possibility of a posited body—a sensible corporeality—and the world of being. As elucidated with regard to sensory deprivation, the erosion of separation is the erosion of the condition for a subjectivity, or a subject in itself. To my mind, this distinction is an essential difference between the phenomenology of an *il y a* taken from the experience of insomnia and one taken from sensory deprivation. In the former, there remains a ‘one’ to experience the insomnia.

As Levinas says, “a being that *inhabits* the world” locates its physical being, its corporeality, by reaching out from an interior and groping for the contents of the exterior world that is its home. “Groping reveals the position of the body which at the same time is integrated into being and remains in its interstices, always invited to traverse a distance at random, and maintains itself in this position all by itself. Such is the position of a separated being” (TI 168). Take the groping away and the body falls into being’s interstices, unable to maintain itself. It loses its position as a separated being. Without its delineation against that which is non-I, the I loses its historical identity (its temporal being)—its memory seeps out, disperses into the element’s unforeseeable future, “the fathomless depth of the element, coming from an opaque density without origin, the bad infinite, or the indefinite, the *apeiron*” (TI 158-59). *Il y a* is the breach of separation.

v) Conclusion:

Let us consider the circumstances of sensory deprivation from the point of view of the *Il y a* as the breach of separation intended by the psychologists and torturers. What happens in the ‘white room’? Nothing. ‘Nothing’ is what *happens*. And yet *one* is there and ‘*there is*’ is there too. As *one* slowly dissolves to nullity, the *there is* remains. Psychologists and torturers have hoped to flood the human being situated in the ‘white room’ – or the ‘dark room’ – with this ‘nothing.’ They have hoped to disintegrate the differentiated system—the separation, the porous wall between the subject’s interiority and the exterior worlds—of their living human being under the weight of de-sensing, becoming de-sensitized; they have hoped to force open the subject’s subjectivity, to make it accessible to the experts of mind control, to ‘de’ and ‘re’ pattern it.

Yet the experience of the subject of sensory deprivation is one of particular trauma: the interiority itself begins to melt down. The meltdown takes effect and is experienced through the loss of space-time image, hallucinations, loss of self-image, distortion and limitation of memories, as well as loss of body image culminating finally in detachment from the body. Panic, free-floating anxiety and restlessness are accompanying emotional experiences. One senses one's corporeal disappearance; one is witness to one's own vanishing into the indeterminate void of mere presence.⁴⁷

We rely on memory for our sense of presence, but memory loses its form and re-forms, slips away and slowly disintegrates in the absence of sensory input. One loses one's sense of one's body: the memory says you have had a hand but you have no sense of it, of course, when it is not in some way sensed.⁴⁸ Even a partial sensory deprivation plays games with memory here. Without encountering exteriority, or at least a memory of an already encountered exteriority, consciousness is reduced to a shell without content, which soon crumbles under the weight of *Il y a*. As one slowly loses all senses and memory of time and space, one becomes numb, indifferent and uninterested: "depersonalized," a state fitting the "impersonal[ity] and anonymity" of *there is*.⁴⁹ Here the subject is turned into a lived being.

So far I have argued that sensory deprivation shows us that, without separation there is neither thinking-being, nor sensible-being, that without exteriority there remains no interiority. The existence of the 'self-identical,' outside of, prior to, separation and encounter with alterity,

⁴⁷ See Lilly's experiments (pp 35-37, note 37 above); also see D. Hebb, "The American Revolution" in *The American Psychologist*, 15 (1960), 735-745; W. Bexton, W. Heron and T. Scott, "Effects of Decreased Variation in the Sensory Environment" in *Canadian Journal of Psychology*, 8. No. 2 (1954), 70-76.

⁴⁸ Dr. Cameron notes: "Reference was ... made to disturbance in the body image. One subject reported that he felt as if his head were detached from the body; another reporting that his mind seemed to be a ball of cotton wool floating above his body" (Cameron, "Sensory Deprivation," 227).

⁴⁹ Dr. Cameron observes the development of "feeling of depersonalization" among his patients, described as a process where "repression and aggression turned against the self led to the depersonalization syndrome" ("Sensory Deprivation," 231).

time and the other, is nonsensical. With the experience of the meltdown, we come back to the initial position: interiority is neither the simple absence of exteriority nor the mere opposition to exteriority, but a complex and dynamic process of receiving from and responding to exteriority. The first *experience* is sensible experience of separation. This first experience is a trauma, but a trauma from which a sensuous consciousness arises, unlike the trauma of melting down into *there is* which is the dissipation of consciousness as such.

CHAPTER II

Corporeal-sensibility and Living From the Elements

Introduction

We turn now to analysis of human subjectivity with the intention to further elucidate the claim that the *possibility* of resistance to totalizing systems (and to totalities as such) is, like the tendency to create totalities, inherent in being human. Putting the emphasis on ‘possibility’ is intended to indicate the overall direction of the argument here, proposing subjectivity as a respon-ability of the subject as *I-in-tension*. What is inherent, then, is the ‘-ability’; the resisting ‘respons-’ is born in the tension.

Chapter One began by positing separation as primordial experience, the always already presence of separation between interiority and exteriority. It defined the experience of interiority as first and foremost a finite sensible-corporeality encountering the other – exteriority in general – through the porous sensory wall, which is itself the condition in which the finite – the *living-being* as opposed to the *lived-body* – faces not only the infinite, but also its own finitude.

Here I maintain that ‘actual’ human subjectivity at any moment of its manifestation is always a positive signifier of an underlying negative condition, a magma of tension and contradictions. That is, an assumed and posited identity is a ‘positive’ presentation of an instance

of negativity¹—an ongoing living tension between an ethical and a survival response to the Other, to others, to exteriority tout court.

The process of considering the phenomenology of isolation through a Euclidian illumination of the myth of the unencumbered subject—the apagogical² presentation of attempts to disclose it through the removal of exteriority—presents us with further questions. What is it about a finite sensible-being that enables it to remain qualitatively different from a *lived*-body and in what does this difference consist? A key aspect of a response to this question may be drawn from Levinas’s conceptions of “living from the elements.” In this chapter, then, I examine the conditions and ambivalences of the experience of a *finitude* “living from” the *infinite*, an examination in support of the *a priori* status of the being-in-tension of the subject as such.

i) *Living-being/Lived-body*

To be a *living-being* instead of a *lived-body* presupposes the participation of the corporeal being in its existence. This is a participation which is neither an active nor merely its opposite, a passive participation, but rather what Levinas calls a “radical passivity,” more passive than passive participation.³ This is a participation prior to any deliberation or decision making, prior to any pause or break in the immediacy of the sensibility, a participation, I argue, by virtue

¹ If “positive” is taken to mean a unified, resolved condition (whether on the basis of positivistically conceived ‘facts’ and ‘reason’, dialectical opposition, faith or whatever), negativity in the sense used here signifies an unresolved and irresolvable *tension* (rather than opposition or negation). Maintenance of this existential and epistemological condition, rather than any resolution (which would necessarily be false) requires what John Keats called “negative capability”, the capacity to *be* in “uncertainties, mysteries, doubts...” (John Keats’ letter to George and Thomas Keats, 22 Dec. 1817, in *Letters of John Keats to His Family and Friends*, ed. Sidney Colvin, (London: MacMillan and Co., Limited, 1925), 48.

² Apagogical argument, *reductio ad impossibile*, or proof by contradiction is an argument wherein one shows the validity of one’s claim by illustrating the absurdity or impossibility of the contradictory argument.

³ As noted in the “Introduction”, I work through and develop Levinasian concepts in order to elucidate the possibility of an ethical aspect to the actual-historical human subject and the presence of responsibility-for-the-other in human praxis. That is, without distorting their meanings, I extend the range of Levinas’s concepts and terms, terms such as Desire, radical passivity and proximity in order to conceptualize subjectivity as an event occurring in the encounter between the I as a *sensible-corporeal-being* and the Other.

of simply being *in* and *of* life. This participation itself presupposes a separation between the existent and existence, as the existent is *in* and *of* existence. The immediacy of the sensibility is the immediacy of proximity to the other: a state of exposedness, a primordial openness to the other (*OB* 74). The material reduction of exteriority in sensory deprivation, on the other hand, renders a human being a corporeality-without-sensibility, an organism with its survival needs satisfied—breathing, drinking, eating, excreting and sleeping—a *lived*-body, an “ataraxy without the possibility of happiness or unhappiness, void of tension.” (*TI* 113) To a *lived*-body, air, water and food are like gasoline, oil, and water to an automobile: only means or instruments necessary for the body to its survival and functioning as a body. Whereas a living-being *lives* from life, *is* from being; in its immediacy it experiences joys and pains of life and existence beyond its sustenance. A *lived*-body, a purely surviving corporeality, is a *posteriority*, merely a consequence. Even in the womb the fetus lives in relation to and participation with the outside of itself and its home. The womb’s walls and the mother’s body, which being porous, act as simultaneously open and closed doors separating and connecting interiority and exteriority. It would be reductive to hold that, in a state of pure immediacy, the fetus is completely unreceptive and unresponsive to that which exceeds its survival needs and surroundings. Cradled inside the mother’s body, the fetus is in tune with the rhythms of the internal functioning of its own and its mother’s body; like a fish in water, the fetus is in the sound and feeling of its environment, its own and its mother’s heart beat, her breathing, internal body temperature and pressure, etc.. However sporadically, the outside world stimuli reach inside the womb; a change of pressure, a loud noise or music, entices the fetus’s sensations and brings forth responses. In short, the distinction between the internal and external is presaged in the distinct experiences of the constant and the rupture of the constant even prior to birth. Life overflows bare existence; in the

simplest form it reaches into the womb and the fetus takes it in and responds in as much as it becomes a sensibility. Here lays the original corporeal separation preliminarily discussed above: the dance between the living and life, the finite and the infinite, begins in the womb.

The sensory surface of the living-being, before any *doing*—acting, functioning, performing—is a porous wall maintaining the separation between the existent and the exteriority while relating it to it; affected by and responding to exteriority, it allows for an interiority that is more than a negation and more than an extension of exteriority. The attempt to remove the condition of sensibility through reducing the world of existents—the sensory stimuli—and the interiority’s sensing capability, discloses, however inadvertently, the ambivalent nature of the sensory walls, which bears and delivers the possibility of separation from and encounter with the other.⁴ Here lies the ground of that which Levinas deems “the very act of individuation” (*TI* 299), the possibility of a “posited” entity defined not “by its references to a whole, by its place within a system, but *starting from itself*” (*TI* 300; my emphasis). “Individuation,” or being posited, is separation “and separation itself can be produced in being only by opening the dimension of interiority” (*Ibid.*) In other words, as the posited body holds itself in-itself, i.e., “*is implanted in itself* as a body and keeps itself in its interiority” (299), it is yet autochthonous: a living-finitude enrooted *in* that which is beyond and more than itself (*TI* 143). It is *of* and lives *from* life and being. Like an undulating sea, this posited being moves outward and inward: interiority emitting outward and exteriority seeping inward. Prior to knowledge, it always already receives inwardly and reaches outwardly for more than its subsistence. “Life is *love of life*,” Levinas argues, a relationship which is more than “a naked will to be, an ontological *Sorge* for this life” (*TI* 112). Life is “living from ...” the contents of life which are beyond mere being. One lives from earth, air, water, food, light... but also, one lives from thinking, reading, speaking and

⁴ Cf., *OB* 75-81.

making love; one lives from life and being, before and beyond reducing them to fuel for survival,⁵ before and beyond reducing itself to a pure surviving-being⁶ (110).

However, as “the bare fact of life is never bare” (112), to be a living-being is also never unequivocal. The being that is “living from ...”, that is, ... is always more than a will to be and to live,⁷ is a temporal being, a finitude exposed to the violence of death (224). The body is, Levinas shows, “a cross-road of physical process, body-effect,” in the “ever possible inversion of the body-master into body-slave, of health into sickness” (164). As it is exposed to death, tied to its own corporeality, its sickness and health, the body is also a sensibility, exposed to others “like an inversion of the *conatus* of *esse*, a having been offered without any holding back...” (*OB* 75). Here lies the heart of ambivalence, a *conatus essendi* tied to its body and its effort to preserve its being, yet also an inversion of being-for-itself; its being is exposed, is an always already offered without a holding back. In fact, it is that which any protection or absence of protection presupposes: “vulnerability itself” (*OB* 75). It is vulnerability, precisely, because it is finite; it is a mortality which lives from the sides of that to which it is exposed and in which it is rooted— an indefinite and unforeseeable elemental (*TI* 130-135). As corporeality, the body is susceptibility: it is exposed, among other susceptibilities, to sickness, suffering, and death (*OB* 109). It therefore lives its needs: it *fears* their hunger and *enjoys* their satisfaction. The ebb and flow of living from ..., like the air moving in and out of our lungs, the expansion and contraction, the

⁵ The reduction of life and Being to a pure means of survival for the sake of a “naked will to be” is an instrumentality which presupposes an awareness of death and nothingness prior to sensing and living life and existence. No doubt such diminution is possible, both in theory and practice—and has been a dominant praxis historically—nonetheless, as a sensibility, one lives from, and “one exists from pains and joys” (*TI* 111) even when busy reducing both life and being to a means to survival and security.

⁶ “To say that we live from contents is therefore not to affirm that we resort to them as to conditions for ensuring our life, taken as the bare fact of existing. The bare fact of life is never bare. ... Life’s relation with the very conditions of its life becomes the nourishment and content of that life” (*TI* 112).

⁷ Of course in conditions such as concentration camps and labour camps, in prisons and laboratories as well as extreme natural conditions, a human being can be reduced to the level of a barely living-body. As a living-being, of course, we are clearly capable of such reduced existence.

enjoyment of its flow and the ominous possibility of its cessation, the contentment and fear, the possibility of life and death: they simultaneously bring one another, follow one another. “Life enjoys its very life” (*OB* 73) and accomplishes happiness in the satisfaction of all its needs (*TI* 115). But again, a living-being is also a dying-being. To be a corporeal-sensible finitude is to be steeped in ambivalences: it is thirst quenched and hunger fed, exhaustion slept through, and asphyxiation replaced with breath; every satisfaction is intrinsically related to a potential or actual suffering. The enjoyment of living from is thus a double-edged sword, or, better, enjoyment as contentment in the gratification of needs and fear in relation to the tenuous possibilities of the satisfaction of deficits are of the same plane, intrinsically intertwined like a möbius strip.

ii) Corporeal Need and Desire

Let us ... note the difference between need and Desire: in need I can sink my teeth into the real and satisfy myself in assimilating the other; in Desire there is no sinking one's teeth into being, no satiety, but an uncharted future before me (*TI* 117).

Through the phenomenology of isolation I have presented subjectivity as a responsibility and the subject as an I-in-tension. I approach the argument through an apagogical elucidation of a non-autochthonous interiority, a corporeal and sensible being, separated and related to the exteriority. Now if the subject is a corporeal-sensible being, a finitude living from elements, it lives in and of life and existence; an independent dependent being, it is a being of ambiguities.

In this regard, it is necessary before moving on to the central argument, to distinguish Levinas's conception of the enjoyment *of* need satisfaction, of enjoyment *as* need satisfaction, from the view to be presented here. In a word, the conception of the relation between need and

suffering here is neither precisely that of Levinas nor a reversion to the notions of Plato's 'lack' or Kant's pure passivity, both of which Levinas rejects (*TI* 114). In fact, Levinas's notion of need is close to Marx's when, in *Totality and Infinity*, he writes: "The human being thrives on his needs; he is happy for his needs" (*Ibid.*); or, "need is also the time of labor: a relation with an other yielding its alterity." (116) "To live is to enjoy life" (115); to enjoy life is the satisfaction of needs; to have needs is to *live from* life, and finally for Levinas there is the enjoyment of egoism, for "*living from* ... is the dependency that turns into sovereignty, into happiness—essentially egoist." (114) However, as he notes only briefly in the context of his discussion of the liberating aspect of need and labor, this enjoyment does not mean that need is free or even separable from threat and fear:

A being has detached itself from the world from which it still nourishes itself! The part of being that has detached itself from the whole in which it was enrooted disposes of its own being, and its relation with the world is henceforth only need. ... Animal need is liberated from vegetable dependence, but this liberation is itself dependence and uncertainty. An animal's need is inseparable from struggle and fear; the exterior world from which it is liberated remains a threat (*TI* 116).

In the following I go beyond Levinas's cursory treatment of the threat from the exterior world by including fear as a need-based response in my analysis of the human subject. The inclusion of fear and threat experienced by interiority will allow me to bring attention to the primordial ambivalences of the subject at the level of its sensibility and corporeality. Paradoxically enough, extending the need-based response to exteriority to include fear – in addition to enjoyment of need satisfaction – makes it possible to expand Levinas's definition of happiness from a need-based enjoyment to that which includes a *corporeal-desire*-based response, an insatiable ecstatic *joy* as a corporeal-desire for-the-other.

In *Totality and Infinity* Levinas describes “enjoyment” as an “involution” a “withdrawal into oneself” (TI 118), an “each for himself”, a for-itselfness prior to any self representation. It is described in *Otherwise Than Being* as movement toward oneself, like the “winding of a skein”, a “coiling back upon itself” (OB,73). Enjoyment is seen as a moving inward as it is “exploitation of the other” (TI 115). The body stands up on its feet through saming the exteriority, removing its alterity, Levinas explains: “the alterity of the other the world is is surmounted by need, which enjoyment remembers and is enkindled by; need is the primary movement of the same” (115-116). Enjoyment of need-satisfaction indeed remembers and is enkindled by needs; however, it is only *one* primary movement of the same. The body’s relation to the world other than itself is not primed from this involution, this inward movement. Prior to inward withdrawal there is an opening up and a capacity to move outward. Without the opening towards the outside and receptivity, the withdrawal remains empty-handed. The human being in its corporeality, it must always be recalled, is not an isolate but always a separated being within porous sensory walls, enclosed yet open. Thus, one is always open to the world with its alterity; it is a receptivity of the *other*, i.e., receiving without there being anything or anyone to “allow” the reception. One is a finitude and open, therefore one is vulnerability. As one receives from that which it is beyond its own being, it also responds *from* itself and *to* that which is coming from outside. As finitude responds *from its needs* it moves outward, “possessing” the other without appropriation, removing its alterity, pulling it inside the interiority: consuming, devouring, saming.

Nourishment, as a means of invigoration, is the transmutation of the other into the same, which is in the essence of enjoyment: an energy that is other, recognized as other, recognized ... as sustaining the very act that is directed upon it, becomes, in enjoyment, my own energy, my strength, me (TI 111).

With regard to the equivocal nature of sensible-corporeality as a *living-finitude* which is of and in *life* and *existence*, this definition of enjoyment only describes a corporeal need-based response to the exteriority, *i.e.*, it is limited to the inward movement, bringing in that which is not-itself but for its self. It describes *only the saming aspect of living from* The corporeal need-based response restricts the interiority's encounter with the other, precluding the corporeal Desire-based sensing and responding. Even the naïve for itself, as “the famished stomach that has no ears” (*TI* 118), is already a curbed sensible-being, restricted to its need-based participation and relation to that which it is “steeped in”; it is a constrained receptivity and response, a constricted openness, a vulnerability in touch with its own limitations and its needs as a finitude. It is a “body indigent and naked” (*TI* 129). “To be sure, in the satisfaction of need the alienness of the world that founds me loses its alterity: in satiety the real I sank my teeth into is assimilated, the forces that were in the other become *my* forces, become me (and every satisfaction of need is in some respect nourishment)” (*Ibid.*). It is for a need-based corporeality that a sense datum “always comes to gratify a need” (136), for sensibility reduced to the limits of its corporeal finitude, “to sense” then becomes to be satisfied, and enjoyment is to be contented, is contentment: “the simultaneity of hunger and food constitutes the paradisaal condition of enjoyment” (136).

Then again, this inward movement, this possession through enjoyment, is not a “withdrawal” or a “coiling back on itself.” A contenting, need-satisfying inward movement still corresponds to an interiority reaching out, grasping the other, bringing in and saming it, enjoying the possession and again “filling itself with these lacks for which contentment is promised, satisfying itself already with this impatient process of satisfaction, enjoying its own appetite (*OB* 73).

Involution, however, is a withdrawal from participation; a coiling back on itself is a retreat from that which is not-it; a withdrawal signifies disengagement. These are responses, not of enjoyment, but to fear of the threat coming from the world beyond. On one hand, that which contributes to a folding back on oneself is the vulnerability and the finitude-ness of the sensible-being, and, on the other hand, it is the ungraspable and unforeseeable depth of the exteriority. The fear of that which is beyond the possessable side of the elements, which is beyond and larger than the extent and scope of the finitude, and the need to survive, signifies (and triggers) the process of this withdrawal.⁸ The significance of this corporeal-fear, and the complexity in which this survivalist fear floats, can be developed through consideration of what was termed above the corporeal-Desire in living from... and the joy of moving outward for that which is not-for-the-body.

iii) Corporeal Desire

Living from elements, as we saw, is not in itself a relating to air, water and food as means to an end, not a cause and effect relation to need in which I sleep and eat and breath in order to live. A living being is *in* and *of* life prior to any instrumentalization of life. In this sense the enjoyment of contentment in 'living from' cannot be reduced to relating to happiness as a way to have a long life.

An existence that has this mode [living from ...] is the body—both separated from its end (that is, need), but already proceeding toward that end without having to know the means necessary for its obtainment, an action released by the end, accomplished without knowledge of means, that is, without tools (*TI* 136).

⁸ This involution as an inward movement of the same is, then, a process of withdrawal and of building a defensive fortification, of fear-triggered totalizing.

To be prior to instrumentality, however, is not to be without receptivity or respons-ability. A sensible corporality lives from life as it is *in* and *of* life: being porous, it is open and receives the outside, it senses more than itself, it senses the life beyond its own. In sensing, it is pulled out from its walls without leaving them, without merging with the other. It is separated but related, always already in the space of participation. Here we are once again in the möbius strip of separation-relation/participation as an *a priori* condition, outside of conscious/reflective intentionality. It is not because of its own needs and limitations that the living being is pulled out toward infinite existence; it is not its self-insufficiency that invokes and allows the finite sensible-corporeality to open, receive and sense more than itself, but primarily it is pulled out because it is open, sensing that which is beyond its own sensory walls, its own limits, its own finition.⁹ Yet sensing is a complex event as it is different from being locked in the solitary shell of one's body and only receiving what is allowed through the apertures from the outside, like the food tray sliding through the access window of the cell door. That image presupposes an isolate, not a separated being. Sensing is a complex event wherein an inward receptive movement is inlaid with and through an outward responsive movement. As elucidation of a sense of the phenomena of these movements is obstinately unamenable to articulation in the prosaic language of secondary logic, let me attempt to get at them indirectly, metaphorically, referring again to the möbius loop. Let us say, then, that these movements constitute, as it were, an exposedness and movement toward outside/inside, a möbius loop of sensibility.

Here there is the rhythmic dance of an immanent and intimate tension. It begins with life itself and life is nakedness, vulnerability, an always already exposed-to-death. A sensible-

⁹ In *Totality and Infinity* Levinas limits this openness of the living from ..., its receptivity and responses to satisfied needs and the happiness of their satisfaction: "Finition without reference to the infinite, finition without limitation, is the relation with the end [fin] as a goal. The sense datum with which sensibility is nourished always comes to gratify a need, responds to a tendency" (*TI* 136).

corporeal being is vulnerability in itself, yet always already open and going beyond its self. It receives beyond its needs; it responds to what is beyond its contentment. It is exposed to the world that is other, from which it receives and to which it responds. If a need-based response is the satiating inward movement which brings in the other, removes its alterity and sames it, outward movement towards the other is an *insatiable* response to the other, a corporeal-desire for that which is beyond its own satisfaction, its own completion. In spite of its finitude, desire overflows its form and content, its substance, towards the exteriority. The tightness of skin, the smallness of voice, the insufficiency of a caress, all are tight, small and inadequate with regard to the other, for that toward which they move is always more and always beyond the scope of their reach. In this surplus, in living from elements, one is drawn as one might be drawn by fire, by the rolling river, by the night's sky, the call of the precipice, the fragility of dew, not as a gratification of any need, but as an over-flowing, free-floating corporeal desirous response to alterity, not a happiness in contentment but a *desirous joy*.

The corporeal-desirous responses are joyous beyond the living-being's contentment in its self, beyond its satisfaction with having grasped and samed that which is other and transformed it into energy and force for its being and life. If contentment is the state of ease of mind/body, happiness in needs satisfied, then it may be characterized as a passive state of satisfied interiority in-itself. Contented happiness, what Levinas calls the happiness of enjoyment, differs in this way from the joyous ecstatic happiness of corporeal Desire. Enjoyment of contentment is a fulfilled happiness; even the sense of a growing appetite for it carries a promise of fulfillment. It is a sitting back in the satisfaction of that which one has received or is receiving. It requires an openness, but one that is restricted, one that meets the need. It is the state of satisfaction of needs, yes, but of the interiority *in its finiteness*. The joyous corporeal happiness, in contrast, is an

opening of the interiority *toward* the outside; it is coming out of the shell rather than the satisfaction of sitting inside. It is a pouring out, no matter how imperfectly, or incompletely. The mixture of laughter and tears, for example, can be the height of happiness. One is bursting open: laughter accompanied with tears, urination, running nose ... the letting go of corporeal secretion, as in, to take another example, love-making.

Prior to, or better, beyond thought and language, a living being yearns for that which is not itself, an aching yearning which is the birth place of ecstatic happiness and joy. The happiness of contentment, the satisfaction of the interiority in and for its self, this need-based happiness is the happiness of 'freedom from': contentment in and for itself. However, the happiness of ecstasy is that of a rupture in the finitude, opened up moving outward in a restlessness for the exteriority as the exteriority. This is a sensuous/sensible freedom from the finite, but also a 'freedom to,' an outward movement. As love is not to be found in the possession of the object of desire, a joyous happiness is not to be found in the possession of the object of need. Joy is the sense-based expression of a corporeal desire. Just as corporeal need is that which reaches for incorporation of exteriority (to reduce it to the same), corporeal desire is that which opens up toward the exterior world for the exteriority itself, that is, for the other which remains other.

A desirous response is a paradox. Laughter is a bursting open of the finite being's shell, an interiority flowing outward. An outward force of sensibility is manifested and transfigured in laughter. A finite being, even in its laughter, is ever incapable of fully expressing the joy and rending away from inwardness. It is not seldom that tears and pain join up in this outward bursting, and a hue of sorrow runs through joy: the finite entity is bound to its body, to its corporeality. Rapturous joy becomes a memory, a trace leaving the body exhausted and uncontented in

its reach: what remains is exhaustion and a memory of the ungraspable always sliding away joy. The joy itself is transient. Such ephemeral ecstatic joy is of the order of desire, a reaching of the spirit that, however satisfied the body, cannot be once and for all grasped.

iv) Finitude and the Trauma of Separation

In living from elements “an energy that is other, recognized as other”, becomes in enjoyment a sensible-being’s own energy, own strength (*TI* 111), the finite itself. This process presupposes a sensible-corporeality to recognize, sensuously, the energy as other than itself, that recognizes itself as other than that from which it lives; it requires that it recognize itself as separate and other than that in which it is encompassed; it requires therefore, recognition of itself as limited and small, as a finite existent, separated and independent, dependent and vulnerable. Clearly, these are not at this level of analysis attributes of thinking, but of sensibility. This sensible encounter with the exteriority entails a more complex dynamism than defining, as Levinas does here, the finite as contentment and sensibility as the *mode* of enjoyment (*TI* 135).¹⁰ As the finite opens up and reaches out for that which is neither of itself nor for itself, it collides with its own finiteness, its definiteness, limitations and smallness. It experiences vulnerability. Separation is a trauma of an interiority encountering the exteriority, experiencing infinity as a finitude, a trauma prior to language, to thought. It is a primordial anarchical experience beyond the particularity of historical time and space. The trauma of separation is immanent to life as a human being. As a living being, as ‘living’ and ‘being’, this existent always receives and responds to the exteriority beyond its own preservation as a living being. The need-based

¹⁰ Though Levinas rescues sensibility from the limits of representation, he constrains it within the “*mode* of enjoyment” which itself is limited to the contentment of a corporeal need-based living from.

response, the response of a *conatus essendi*, this effort to preserve its being, once again, is but *one* response to alterity and existence.

Shocked in the face of its own finitude the living being coils back inward after reaching out, as the caressing hand is jerked back from the flame; the interiority withdraws, hides as much as possible in the familiar and secure space of the body. There is, in short, a reactive corporeal self-containment of interiority. “It is the living human corporeality, as a possibility of pain, a sensibility which of itself is the susceptibility to being hurt, a self uncovered, exposed and suffering in its skin. In its skin it is stuck in its skin, not having its skin to itself, a vulnerability” (*OB* 51). Standing at a precipice the desire to open up and jump is joined by the need for a solid foot-hold. The timeless staring into the horizon, the dancing flame or the falling water, the standing at the edge of the forest, being in the now facing the future, are examples of the ever recognized, ever written off existential stand off of the two orders: finition and infinity, determinateness and indeterminateness, need and desire: the primordial tension. Neither the outward movement, the desiring response to the alterity, nor the coiling back, the escaping from the alterity, is a final resting place. As long as there is life in the being, as long as there is sensibility, tension is the rule. The corporeal desire for exteriority is never extinguished but it may be postponed, mediated and adjusted to corporeal substantiveness: one may displace the desire to soar from a cliff by flying a kite or some such, but, however mediated or alienated, corporeal sensibility carries the trace of the order of desire.

As egoism is more than the happiness of enjoyment, happiness is more than enjoyment. Moreover, neither need based enjoyment nor desire based happiness stand alone, outside the trauma of separation. The sensuous experience of separation, the recognition of the other as other—infinite and unforeseeable, life-giving and life-menacing—the recognition of the

sensible-being as *of*, yet outside of, this infinite—finite and vulnerable, living and dependent—is the birthplace of sensibility as ambiguity, the possibility of alienation/occlusion of desire and the domination of a for-itself survival being. This is the place of corporeal need and desire, of the experience of happiness as contentment and joy, but it is also the place of the experience of fear. The menace of fear is the birth of the bad infinite.

v) The Bad Infinite and Fear

A being comes to life open, naked and exposed to the exteriority; a living being is born as an *extreme* passivity—a passive receptivity, prior to any knowledge, calculation or judgment—a passivity toward that which is absolutely other but from which it lives: the air goes in, the interior shouts out: the miracle of life is in the primordial dynamic encounter between the interiority and exteriority. The finitude reaches beyond its own being precisely because it is both a corporeality and a sensibility. In a sense, the experience of ‘birth’ is not a historical event; it happens outside of time and space.

Opened up, exposed to the exteriority, a living being is necessarily faced with its own finiteness, its vulnerability, its urgent needs and their satisfaction in order to remain a *living* being. This sense-based experience of separation, of a finitude standing *on* and being *of* the infinite existence (autochthonous) is primordial trauma, trauma that culminates in a sensuous awareness of an interiority with its desires and needs. A radical receptivity, the interiority opened to the beckoning of the unfathomable, the enigmatic existence of the exterior world, moves outward in desire toward and for that which is neither for itself, nor for its corporeality: this is the experience of free-floating happiness, joy and freedom-to. Then again, opened and exposed to existence, the interiority moves inward in need of the body and in response to a body in need,

sensing its limits, its vulnerability, closing down and escaping from: this is the experience of free-floating anxiety and fear, of freedom-from. The finite searches for protection from that which is not itself and yet it lives of it; it needs the others to maintain its own life, to survive, and it needs to secure itself from the summons of the exteriority, as well as its own desire. Finite sensibility is Odysseus in his encounter with the Sirens. Hence the postponement of desirous enjoyment, hence its alienation and occlusion. The image of the all powerful, steel-reinforced Sport Utility Vehicle in various commercials transporting its passengers to the middle of nowhere is an attempt to offer satisfaction of the need for control and security. But it is also sold as a capacity for assuaging the occluded desire for an un-alienated openness and joy, as a mediated access to “freedom to” through satisfaction of “freedom from.” Because it is finite, the mystery of existence turns into menace, the ecstasy of reaching out and being reached deep down, becomes a horrific opening out into an unforeseeable depth and the infinity of existence becomes a ‘bad infinite’¹¹ and thus contributes to the formation of fear and so the need for protective distance from the infinity of the other.

It is the need-based fear response to the exteriority that gives it the quality of ‘unforeseeable’ danger, the menacing’ and ‘threatening’ quality. It is this quality in turn which drives back and holds the existent in the here and now, the space and time to which the naked and exposed ego would confine itself. In fear lies the failure of the possibility of happiness and joy. The present becomes a burden, a prison from which to escape. This is where the I-in-tension hypostasizes itself as *conatus essendi*, an egoism of *fear* appearing as care and concern for the self. Nonetheless, this egoism is *only the corporeal, need-based response to the other, which,*

¹¹ Levinas introduces the concept of “the bad infinite or the indefinite, the *apeiron*” as distinct from “infinity” and the infinite exteriority (TI 158-59). This ‘bad infinite’ refers to “the fathomless depth of the element”; it stands at a distance from metaphysical infinity, the idea of infinity. Faced with this fathomless depth, the vulnerability of the finitude itself (i.e., absence of capacity to see what is coming at one from that infinite horizon) yields the experience of insecurity and fear. See Chapter Three below for further discussion of the bad infinite.

though dominant, is never the only response. However occluded, the desire-based response is always present.

vi) Conclusion

The space of *il y a*, existence without existents, is the black hole of existents, the condition of no separation. The space of existents is the space of separation, that is the space of an existent, a hypostasis, a sensible-corporeality, a finitude encountering the other, the exteriority, the infinite. The space of existents is already the space of a separate, spatially-temporally definite living-being, living and being in and of a spatially and temporally indefinite life. Separation is the moment of sensuous awareness. Sensing itself and that which is beyond itself, it is pulled simultaneously outward and inward. A need and desire based respons-ability, it welcomes the other, and so senses the ambivalence of its affectivity, the tensions of its joy *and* its vulnerability.

In the always already present encounter with exteriority the sensible-being is cracked, is a non-totality, never complete in itself. As already ruptured, the finite existent may, and in fact often tends to, coil back on its self, withdrawing from the indeterminateness of the space in which it is rooted. But, though it is never even potentially a pure and simple totality, there is an *élan*, as Levinas calls it, which seeks in spite of itself its own totalization, making itself one invincible, invulnerable, an eternal for-itself whole. Yet the very rupture that induces this tendency is the crack through which the light gets in, an impetus toward an opposing *élan*, a moving toward that which is neither itself nor for itself. All too frequently it is the fear reaction to vulnerability that tips the tension toward the finite subject's need-based responsivity toward not just the attempted exclusion but the annihilation of the other in the totalizing drive to same it

or destroy it utterly. Levinas's phenomenology of the care-for-the-other, the focus of the next chapter, will provide a horizon from which to consider the nearly ubiquitous hegemony of the for-itself closure of that totalizing *élan* as it affects western conceptions of resistance, which will, in turn, establish a position from which to consider the constitution of an adequate, that is, an effective resistance.

CHAPTER III

The I-in-tension: Subjectivity as Respons-ability

Introduction

In the previous two chapters, through a review of an existential-material *epoche* of an already formed subject (the discussion of isolation and sensory deprivation), I argued for separation as the first ontological experience. Separation entails not only the presence of interiority and exteriority but also their encounter and primordial relations of tension. Entailing as it does the experience of trauma, there is also reactive response: the persistent tendency not just to assume, but to create totalities, a tendency stemming from the need aspect of the finite sensible being and its fear for survival. Yet, there is also a desire-based response, a persistent tendency to break through totalities—beginning with the boundaries of the finite, the same—in desire for the other, the general exteriority. The former tendency feeds on and fuels greed and fear, as the latter thrives on and nourishes hope and love.

In the chapter at hand, I present, through Levinas, the birth of the subject—the I—and subjectivity in the encounter with the Other,¹ the personal other as an alterity. I argue that the sensible-corporeality becomes an I, can call itself an I, only through the encounter with the Other, when and because it is called on by the Other. Only in this encounter, in what shall be presented as the proximity between the two singularities—the sensible-corporeal and the

¹ In this chapter I use the term “Other” as the human other who is an alterity. Here, only because of the limits of my research, the personal other signifies only the human.

Other—, does the sensible-corporeality gain the reflexivity required to refer to itself as self. This proximity “which is [both] a relationship and a term” (*OB* 86) is the space of subjectivity. But subjectivity as receptivity and respons-ability to the Other is also always a signifier of the I's, need-based (for-it-self) and desire-based (for-the-Other) response to the Other and to others. It is in this sense that I claim that human subjectivity may be said to be a negativity.² I conclude having theorized the subject as such as an I-in-tension, the tension between the survival and the ethical as equiprimordial aspects of human subjectivity. Finally, I present this subjectivity as a complex spectrum forming and reforming in what may be diagrammed as the four corners of the life and death of the I and the Other.

i) Encountering the Other and the Birth of the Subject

“Think about yourself,” says every questioner, every torturer in every language, while stretching the prisoner’s body on a torture bed, or locking the solitary door on his face. “Do it to Julia,”³ is the type of response every questioner hopes for.

One wonders at the extent of infrastructure, force and violence required to remind oneself of the primary, solitary position of her own self! If one’s concern consisted, originally and essentially, of concern for the self alone, what is it that would require the bareness of the solitary cell, the hardness of the torture bed, or the definiteness of the bullet or rope to sluice the I? What is it that must be purged in order to confine the I’s focus to its own self through its corporeity? Why, in short, is it necessary to imprison, to isolate in order to convince one to concern herself first and foremost about herself? And how is it that across time and space it is not only those who pick up the shovel and dig the entombing grave to house those marked for death, or pull the

² That is to say again, human subjectivity is characterized by the absence of a positive hypostasis, a reified and enclosed state of being. In this sense, “negativity” is not negation nor even opposition but rather a necessary component of the spectrum of the primal closed/open ambivalence of the subject; see Chapter Two, note 1.

³ George Orwell, 1984. (London: Penguin Books, 2000), 300.

trigger or lay down a brick to build the oven, who must deny and obfuscate? How is it that the whole thrust of civilization has remained trapped in an eternal apology: fabricating, painting over and polishing a “good conscience.” After all, no matter who digs the graves or builds the ovens, or ..., those marked for death are just as dead: why does the need for such cover resonate within the heavy soul!⁴

If extreme images of prison and torture are difficult to bear, if such apologetic rationalizations are hard to identify with, we need only watch a cheese or beer commercial or the like. The message is the same: “think first and foremost about yourself.” Whether appealing directly to this motive or indirectly through one’s duty to buy healthy food, a safe car, etc., the object is always to provide an excuse for, a sense of entitlement to, a good conscience for one’s self-aggrandizement. Why does even the capitalist will recognize and require such pandering? Once such concern for oneself, one’s security, comfort and contentment, is recognized as the distilled quiddity of power, all these efforts to realign the subject within the confines of the self, to forget about or even to betray others, point—with the sharpness of a compass needle—toward a more primordial but occluded relation than to the one with one’s self, namely: the relation to the Other.

With this compass I engage Levinas’s phenomenology of subjectivity—leaning on, borrowing and departing from his phenomenology—to elucidate possibilities for conceiving subjectivity beyond the need-based for-itself conception favored and reinforced by the totalizing institutionalized power not only of capitalism but of hegemonic modern western theory, and thus the conception that remains central to received theories of resistance.

⁴ One is always already put into question; humanity itself is always already put into question. This is a question, Levinas elucidates, “where I enter strictly obliged to responsibility for the mortality of the other man and, concretely, as losing before the death of the other the innocence of my being. This is a putting in question before the death of the other which is like a remorse or, at least, like a hesitation to exist. Is not my existing, in its quietude and the good conscience of its *conatus*, equivalent to letting the other man die?” (“Notes on Meaning” in *GCM* 164).

ii) Proximity: the Space-time of a Corporeal-sensibility Encountering the Other

In what follows it is argued that it is only in "proximity" that the I comes into being. The sensible-corporeality, distinguished through separation from the exterior, content in its self, enjoying life and being, gaining energy and life-force from consuming the exteriority, bringing in and saming it and yet being teased and drawn out by the unfathomable and unforeseeable beckoning of life and existence, originates, originates of course, prior to self consciousness, lacking even the vaguest sense of I-ness. As we have seen too, without the other, the exteriority, there is no interiority, no sensibility. But it is only with the entrance of the Other that the interiority (the sensible-corporeality) with all its equivocations becomes an I, a subject. In this sense, the I at its most fundamental level is neither the I of its thinking, nor of its consciousness of something, nor only of its ethical responsibility for the Other. It is not its quality as a conscious or responsible entity, nor, for that matter, is it its power or labour⁵ alone that makes a living being a subject. Rather, it is the I of exposure, of being exposed to and beckoned by the Other; it is that which *responds to* the Other. This I is *of* its respons-ability-to-the-Other, a respons-ability which falls within the polarities of need-based *and* desire-based response. Nonetheless, it is a respons-ability which from the beginning, prior to or outside of any decision making, makes the responding sensible-corporeality, among other things, responsible for the life and death of the Other, a respons-ability, that takes place within an ethical *condition*, a space prior to and outside of the distinction between any actual good and evil.⁶

⁵ See Chapters Four and Five.

⁶ The distinction I am making here is between the ethical *condition* and the ethical *relation*. The space-time of separation-relation is the space-time of encounter with the others and the Other: it is the proximity between the interiority and the exteriority, the ethical condition, the condition of respons-ability, charged with ethical *demand*, but with the possibilities of *both* ethical and survival respons-ability. It is the *khôra* within which, regardless of its response, the I is always responsible for the life and death of the other. See below, "The Ethical Condition: Radical Receptivity-Responsivity".

In this conception "proximity" may be said to be the *khôra*⁷ of receiving and responding, a space presupposing separation and participation (*OB* 81-83), a non-totalizable space that is always already occupied by the same and the Other, absolutely separated yet related.⁸ Unlike *il y a*—the presence of an absence of separation wherein the subject and subjectivity wither to annihilation—, proximity is the *khôra* of continuous bearing and delivery of the I, the subject and subjectivity, the space of a separated being, a sensible-corporeality—in and with all its ambiguities⁹—always encountering the Other. In other words, proximity is the possibility of contact, of desirous caressing and needy fearful seizing.

iii) Proximity: The Birth of the I-in-tension

In desire the I is borne toward the other in such a way as to compromise the sovereign self-identification of the I, for which need is but nostalgia, and which the consciousness of need anticipates ("Meaning and Sense," *CPP* 94).

Responding to the question of the position of the subject in an ethical relation, Levinas emphasizes that, of course "... one must make precise just how the I is posited or affirms itself" (*IR* 117). In this response another question is embedded, a question as to what makes a living-being an I prior to its self-affirmation, what posits it as an I. Is an I affirmed simply because it is found in the world and is therefore to be "posited as standing with full rights to be where he is"; is the I simply that which "perseveres in being," a *conatus essendi* (*IR* 117)? If an I is more than and prior to self-referentiality, what is it that renders it this "more" and how is it that this sensible-corporeality is so rendered? How could one refer to oneself as an I if one had not been

⁷ On *khôra*, see "Introduction," 11n16.

⁸ "Proximity is not a state, a repose, but, a restlessness, null site, outside of the place of rest. It overwhelms the calm of the non-ubiquity of a being which becomes a rest in a site" (*OB* 82).

⁹ See Chapter Two on the ambivalences of the sensible-corporeality described through corporeal desire for the others, need, and fear for survival.

seen, addressed, and interrupted in one's standing? "It is only in approaching the Other," Levinas argues elsewhere, "that I attend to myself" (*TI* 178). But if the I is not reducible to the unfolding of a substance out of its own self, an unfolding and self-positing, for example, through practicing its power, or its life-activity, its labour, then how does this approach of the other bring about this attendance? In short, once again, how does a living-being, a sensible-corporeality, become transfigured into an I, an I that then attends to its self?

To engage these questions let us continue with the phenomenological thought project of the previous chapter, starting from the interiority as a sensible corporeality, always already a separated finite being encountering the others, exteriority itself and as such. As we have seen, only as separated can it be and remain open, receptive and responsive to that which is beyond its own body. Because it is *living*, it *lives* from, *in* and also is *of* life which is beyond itself, always simultaneously prior and posterior to, always other than itself. It lives from elements and enjoys its contentment and life in its vastness; yet it fears the indefiniteness of the elements, the insecurity hidden in its depth, its beyond-ness (*TI* 141). Yes, as a corporeal-sensibility it is open to the sunlight and the darkness of the night; it bathes and is inundated in life and existence (*TI* 159); it is teased beyond its own skin by the height and depth of the exteriority; it stretches out towards the blue of the sky, green of the leaves, caress of the air and the fragile beauty of a flower. Yet, *because it is a finitude*, the indeterminateness of the exteriority becomes menacing, it fears the infinite as it enjoys and desires it.¹⁰ None of the living experiences and sensuous-consciousness of finitude and the exteriority's infinitude presented in Chapter Two engenders an

¹⁰ Here some of the reflections of the first aeronauts' experiences are striking. Gilbert White's reflection, for example, upon seeing two hot-air balloons flying over his house: "I was wonderfully struck at first with the phenomenon; and, like Milton's "belated peasant," felt my heart rebound with fear and joy at the same time" (*The Age of Wonder*, 136). Or Dr. Alexandre Charles, who flew in 1783: "Nothing will ever quite equal that moment of total *hilarity* that filled my whole body at the moment of take-off. ... It was not mere delight. It was a sort of physical ecstasy" and at the same time he claims: "never has a man felt so solitary, so sublime, - and so utterly terrified." He never flew again (*Ibid.* 131-132).

I from a sensible-corporeality; none renders it a subject. To claim otherwise, one must start from the a priori assumption that one is always already posited as an I or, as Levinas put it above, because it just simply “perseveres in being” (*IR* 117).

In his earlier works Levinas locates the origin of subjectivity “in the independence and sovereignty of enjoyment” (*TI* 114), and places the principle of individuation within enjoyment,¹¹ as when he says, for example that the I is “posited in the independence of happiness” (*TI* 120), and it is this I, the I of “the imperialism of the same” (*TI* 39), the “solipsist disquietude of consciousness” (*CPP* 55), and the I of “egotism,” of the *conatus essendi*, that goes through an “inversion” of its “in-itself and for-itself (of “every man for himself”) into an ethical self” (*EN* 202).¹² The gaze of the Other forbids the I’s conquest and “puts a stop to the irresistible imperialism of the same and the I” (*CPP* 55).

This human inversion of the in-itself and for-itself (of “every man for himself”) into an ethical self, into a priority of the for-the-other—this replacement of the for-itself of ontological persistence by an *I* henceforth unique certainly, but unique because of its chosenness for a responsibility for the other man—inescapable and nontransferable, this radical turnabout would take place in what I call an encounter with the face of the other (*EN* 202).

However, the proposition that the I as unique, chosen for responsibility, is a “human inversion”, presupposes the in-itself and for-itself as the original state. But that is not all: at the same time Levinas calls this “being qua life ... , an “instinct of preservation,” “a self-contraction” (*EN* 201). In other instances he makes explicit this reversal of the relation, arguing that the I is first posited as an ethical I: “straightaway for-the-other, straightaway in obligation.” This is an I for which its

¹¹ Given Levinas’s conceptualization of “enjoyment” as limited to the realm of the satisfaction of needs, this phenomenology, of course, runs very parallel to Marx’s evolutionary materialist ontology of the development of ‘being’ from the process of need satisfaction.

¹² “The face I welcome makes me pass from phenomenon to being ... : in discourse I expose myself to the questioning of the Other, and this urgency of the response—acuteness of the present—engenders me for responsibility; as responsible I am brought to my final reality” (*TI* 178).

uniqueness, as elected in an ethical relation, is its very identification; as he says, such an I will “hold to this primordial election before being affirmed for-itself” (*IR* 117-118).

In either case,—whether being an already posited I, the I of enjoyment and egotism, who in the presence of the Other *inverts* to an ethical self or one who the initial epiphany of the Other’s face *posits* as the I—proximity, the space-time of separation and encounter, is rendered, for Levinas, a positive non-ambiguous ethical condition *and* relation. This is a condition and relation in which “the proximity of my fellowman is the responsibility of the *I* for another” (*EN* 186), and where “the identity of the subject comes from the impossibility of escaping responsibility, from the taking charge of the other” (*OB* 14). That is to say, whether inverted from an in-itself and for-itself or posited in the first place, it is in the radical passivity of encountering the other, that a subject is born as responsible-for-the-other; it is “an allegiance” (*OB* 49) whose subjectivity is “an exposedness always to be exposed the more, an exposure to expressing, thus to saying, thus to giving” (*OB* 50). And this amounts to a positing and a privileging of a primordial ethical singularity, a tensionless Good: In this Levinasian paradigm, that is to say, proximity as the space-time of non-indifference is a pure moment of the Good outside of presentation and representation, but also it has to be imagined outside of any trauma that would indicate tension.¹³

Need and Desire

Entering the event of the encounter from the epiphany of the face – from the *desirable* which gives rise to the desire in the desiring being – one arrives at the desire-based response, *i.e.*,

¹³ “Responsibility for the other, in its antecedence to my freedom, its antecedence to the present and to representation, is a passivity more passive than all passivity, an exposure to the other without this exposure being assumed, an exposure without holding back, exposure of exposedness, expression, saying.” And “this saying [the exposure of exposedness, the responsibility] remains, in its activity, ... a sacrifice without reserve, without holding back, and in this non-voluntary – the sacrifice of a hostage designated who has not chosen himself to be hostage, but possibly elected by the Good, in an involuntary election not assumed by the elected one” (*OB* 15).

being-for-the-other: one only arrives at a response that is responsibility “through all the modalities of *giving*, the acceptance of the ultimate gift of dying for the other” (*EN* 186). Yet, neither does the ethical response exhaust the responding being’s respons-abilities, nor does the ethical relation totalize the event of the separation and encounter between the same and the other. When viewed, however, not from the epiphany of the face but from the perspective of the responding being, one constituted through need and desire, it appears that, far from absolutely untrammelled, the call of the other in proximity is inundated with deep ambivalence. Levinas himself points here and there to ambiguities immanent to the presence of the Other. Let us return with him once again, then, to his distinction between need and Desire and their relations.

As he presents them these experiences are, as we have seen, of two absolutely separated orders of responding and relating to the Other and to exteriority as such, experiences distinguished as to origin: “...we again meet with the distinction between Desire and need: desire is an aspiration that the Desireable animates; it originates from its ‘object’; it is revelation—whereas need is a void of the Soul; it proceeds from the subject” (*TI* 62). Yet, for Levinas, these are not two isolated orders but rather stand always in relation to one another, as “[i]ndeed the time presupposed by need is provided me by Desire;” and “human need already rests on Desire” (*TI* 117). At the same time, however, he points toward a different relation when he claims that “the Desire for the other, above happiness, requires this happiness, this autonomy of the sensible in the world.” That is, it is “a desire in a being already happy” (*TI* 62). Or when he writes that “the for-another arises in the enjoyment in which the ego is affirmed, is complacent, and posits itself” (*OB* 55). Here it seems that the time of Desire is preceded by a time of need, that the possibility of Desire rests on needs satisfied, evidently an inversion of the earlier statement. Thus

there is apparently an immanent ambiguity in this proximity, as we know that the relation between need and Desire cannot be reduced to a linear, causal or dialectical relation.

Consider the following statement in this regard: “[t]he desire for the other, ... is born in a being that lacks nothing, or, more exactly, it is born over and beyond all that can be lacking or that can satisfy him” (*CPP* 94). Now this “more exactly” does not appear to be “more exact,” but rather a change in the claim; a being that lacks nothing... lacks nothing, whereas whether or not need is satisfied would seem to be irrelevant for one “born over and beyond.” This difference, this apparent discrepancy, points up something of the nature of the immanence of the ambiguity in the relation: *though desire is animated by the Other and the exteriority, it is yet born in a being which is also a sensible-corporeality, a being of need*. That is to say, the order of Desire originates from alterity, the exterior, while the order of need emanates from the subject, the interior, but *they meet and come into tension in the sensible-corporeality, permeating its response*.

Here again then, Levinas’s effort to put the two in relation while articulating their separation illuminates the sensible-corporeality, a being of need *and* desire, as a site not simply of divergently sourced orders, but of their tensional relations and the immanent ambiguity of those relations, of that tension. The impossibility of isolating Desire from need, on one hand and on the other hand, the impossibility of imagining a responding (desiring) being emptied of need, or, again, the impossibility of lining up the two orders in a cause and effect matrix, all suggest the impossibility of a proximity emptied of tension and the ambiguities necessarily immanent to such tension.¹⁴ It is, then, as responses of a respons-able being, a responding being, that need and Desire disclose their immanently ambiguous and irresolvable tensional relation.

¹⁴ For Levinas’s discussion of the corporeality’s ambiguities see the section on “Patience, Corporeality, Sensibility,” Chapter Two in *Otherwise Than Being*, 53-56, where for instance he writes: “In corporality are united the traits we

The responsibility-for-the-other, the ethical response to the Other, then, is *a* response born in Desire for the other – a response which in turn points toward the possibility of other responses. Yes, desire is “to burn with another fire than need, which saturation extinguishes” (*CPP* 97); and yes, “in desire the I is borne toward the other in such a way as to compromise the sovereign self-identification of the I” (*CPP* 94). But, in the *presence* of the Other it is not only the desire and the birth of an ethical subject that takes place; in the presence of the Other a responding being is exposed who is more and less than a desiring being, who is *also* fundamentally a needing being.

The Murderous Response: Survival Respons-ability

Levinas, having opened the door to this proximity and having thus pointed towards an ambiguous immanent tension, we can follow its traces further in his description of the “face.” The face, for its part, is inviolable; those eyes, which are absolutely without protection, the most naked part of the human body, none the less offer an absolute resistance to possession, an absolute resistance in which the temptation to murder is inscribed: the temptation of absolute negation.¹⁵ The inviolability of the face thus carries with it reference to the presence of potential violence, its resistance referring to a negating force in the responding being, even in its state of radical passivity prior to cognition, consciousness and choice. If “to see a face is already to hear ‘You shall not kill’,” the possibility of a murderous response to the Other must be presumed. That is, if there were not ‘at once’ the possibility of both a desiring *and* a murderous responsibility in ‘me’ how is it that the face of the other, the ‘You shall not kill,’ “is for me at once the temptation to kill and the call to peace” (*BPW* 167)? If ethical subjectivity, responsibility-for-the-

have enumerated: for the other, despite oneself, starting with oneself, the pain of labor in the patience of ageing, in the duty to give to the other even the bread out of one’s own mouth and the coat from one’s shoulders” (*OB* 55).

¹⁵ Levinas links the epiphany of the face to the social: “This temptation to murder and this impossibility of murder constitute the very vision of the face. To see a face is already to hear ‘You shall not kill,’ and to hear ‘You shall not kill’ is to hear ‘Social justice’” (*DF* 8).

Other is primordial subjectivity, if subjectivity is “welcoming the Other,” is “hospitality” (*TI* 27), then who is this ‘me’? What is this I who is capable of the temptation to do violence to the other and to die for the other if it is not an I-in-tension, an I born in its response to the Other, but born in-tension?

The command in the “nakedness of a face,” that which “opposes my power over it, my violence, and opposes it in an absolute way,” that which “says no to me by his very expression” (*CPP* 21), carries the trace then of that which the command would thwart. “Thou shall not kill,” once again, must presume the primordial ambivalence of the corporeal-sensibility’s responsibility, the ambivalence of the for-itself *and* the for-the-other tension. In the presence of the Other the I is born in its response to the Other, born not as unequivocal but as an *I*-in-tension, both a survival and an ethical responsibility to the other, responsible for the life and the death of the other.

iv) Proximity: the Ethical Condition

If one’s head is covered by a sack does one have a face?

The face, Levinas repeatedly reminds us, is not the nose, eyes and lips, but the straightforwardness of the Other, completely exposed through its nakedness, without protection, outside of the order of power. As he says, it “is the most destitute also: there is an essential poverty in the face, the proof of this is that one tries to mask this poverty by putting on poses, by taking on a countenance” (*EI* 86). The epiphany of the face is the expression of the Other. In pictures of the torturing of the Abu Gharib prisoners we recognize the gaze of the I of survivalist imperialism, of hunters who proudly exhibit their trapped and defenseless prey. We also look upon defaced others, exposed in their nakedness, not just in their bare skin, but stripped of

human identity, any expression at all: still-shots of naked bodies with heads covered, posed and arranged for photo ops. One sees vulnerability, poverty. They are presented as reduced not just to captured but to mastered bodies. The masters portray themselves as masters by showing off their trophies, putting the naked vulnerability of their hostages on display, as if, through the suffering of the other, they had conquered their own anxieties. They announce to the world, “See, there is nothing in the other to fear.”

Yet the faceless naked bodies must haunt their voyeurs; in the tortured exposure of their naked vulnerability, their susceptibility to pain and suffering, the pain and suffering itself, they interrupt whoever is exposed to them. Whoever gazes upon those pictures finds himself inundated by, swept into, an ethical *condition*; one finds that one has been penetrated-by-the-other and has responded-to-the-other, even if the response were only closing one’s eyes or turning off the television set. Still one has responded to that ethical event: the involution, recoiling and seeking refuge inside, backing away from the pain, are all responses to the other.

Prior to freedom and will, a human being, a corporeal-sensibility, is rooted in the ethical condition. One’s response is preceded by one’s receptivity. A sensibility is receptivity and responsivity, always already in proximity with the Other and the others. Once more a detour into the materialist bracketing of exteriority in the course of sensory deprivation studies helps to bring this primordially of human receptivity into relief.

The Ethical Condition: Radical Receptivity-Responsivity

One of the original difficulties for the scientists in constructing a sensory deprivation space was, of course, eliminating all uncontrolled and unaccounted exposure of subjects to the external world, *i.e.*, the elimination of the interiority’s receptivity. To minimize the subjects’ sensory receptivity, they were fitted with darkened goggles and laid on beds in darkened rooms.

Their arms and hands were covered with cardboard cylinders and white noise was streamed into their ears through rubber ear covers.¹⁶ Yet, short of cutting the brain stem,¹⁷ creating prolonged and complete isolation from the external world proved extremely difficult and, in fact, success by these means was ultimately limited. To remedy this problem Dr. Cameron then combined the reduced sensory condition with insulin-induced coma, kept his subjects in a state of sleep for long hours and/or administered other drugs that reduced sensory conduction within the body. Still, in his reports we read the complaints that some of his patients kept their sense of space and time by noting the composition, number and intervals of their meals (which he tried to counter by randomizing the meal routine, giving breakfast, for example, for lunch and at variable intervals). One of his patients retained a temporal image by sensing, in spite of the ear covers and white noise, the faint rumble of a passing airplane that flew overhead to New York twice a day.¹⁸ All in all, sensory receptivity is apparently not something one may simply order to shut off. One receives unless one's receptivity is severely blocked, diverted or completely over-loaded.¹⁹ Hence it is the effect and sometimes the purpose of extreme isolation in the various prison systems not just to control the interactions and communications among prisoners or between the prisoners and the outside world, but finally to destroy the human being herself. Or, conversely, the tactic of torturing a prisoner in front of another relies in part on the primordial receptivity. Exposed to the other's suffering, one receives the other's pain, and, insofar as one withdraws within one's self, the involution is a response to the anterior receptivity.

¹⁶ Cameron, "Sensory Deprivation," 231; Bexton, et al., "Effects of Decreased Variation in the Sensory Environment," 71; Hebb, D. O., "The American Revolution," 76-79.

¹⁷ Bexton et al. in "Effects of Decreased Variation in the Sensory Environment" refer to F. Bremer and C. Terzuolo's experiment on cutting the brain stem to achieve total isolation, 7.

¹⁸ Cameron, "Sensory Deprivation," 232.

¹⁹ Again, the case of the Guantanamo prisoners provides examples of attempts to disrupt the subjectivity of the prisoners through manipulation of sensory receptivity. A mixture of sensory deprivation, sleep deprivation and sensory overload—loud heavy metal rock music, etc.— was utilized to break down the psychical integrity of the prisoners; see for example "Afghanistan to Guantanamo Bay – the Story of Three British Detainees," *The Guardian*, (Aug. 4th, 2004). <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2004/aug/04/afghanistan.usa>.

In the first chapter I argued that a human before anything else is an affectivity, a sensible-corporeality. This affectivity, it was emphasized, exists in a complex relation with exteriority. It is a receptivity prior to any withdrawal; it lives from the nourishments of the elements, and stretches out towards their depths. Skin-bound, separated but dependant, it is a vulnerability fearing and avoiding the unknowable extent of the elements. In short, in living from the elements a sensible-corporeality senses the exteriority, its own affectivity, that is, its needs for its self and desire for that exteriority: but it is only in its encounter with the Other in the exposure to the Other's face that it senses itself as seen, as a visibility.

In the proximity with the human other, sensible corporeality moves beyond the position of Gyges, the all-seeing but never seen. Facing the face, it is exposed to an exposure, "the pure denuding of exposure without defense" (BPW 167). The face is an "exposure to death, to mortality itself" (BPW 167). This facing of the face in its precariousness is at once facing the exteriority qua exteriority (prior to knowledge and cognition, prior to action and reflection) and facing the exteriority as mortality, a finite living-being, a vulnerability to death, a corporeality in need. It is the defenseless, unprotected look in the Other's eyes that is transcendental, the fleeting warmth of its body, the thirst and hunger, the precarious life which transcends the Other's being. The face that looks penetrates its onlooker: the face is sensed and seen as it is fully there, prior to any protection or defenses, fully offered without a power or will to choose between offering or holding back. It is there, present and exposed, outside of or prior to the order of power. The face is precariousness, *i.e.*, it is the epiphany of life at the edge of death. *Proximity then is the ethical condition charged with the ethical appeal prior to ethical responsibility.* As one stands before the presence of the Other, one is in the ethical space-time dimension, the *khôra* of respons-

ability, the *khôra* of subjectivation and subjectivity. It is the imminence of pain, the possibility of death in the presence of a life, absolutely separated and beyond the sensible-corporeality's being that makes proximity the ethical condition. *The I is born in its response to the Other.*

v) Proximity: The Inter-human Relation

A human, a corporeality and a sensibility, is paradox par excellence: an embodied finitude but one that lives in and is of life, that exists in and of indefinite existence. It is a survival but also a desiring being. Inadequate in its reaching out, always coming short in relation to that which it senses, it desires beyond its needs, irrespective of its needs. Its corporeal-desire is for that which is outside of need satisfaction, that for which it has no reference to need. Grasping the edge of the elements, it senses exteriority's bottomless depth; sensing the vastness of the space, as it were, makes its skin tight. However, encountering the personal other, one faces precisely this Other at once as an alterity and as wholly weakness; more than alterity, it is the body, a life exposed to death in all its finitude and needs that beckons one to become the I.

For Levinas, that the Other remains always the other does not, of course, reduce the otherness to difference, does not same it under a mask of 'difference.' Being Other is not negation or exclusion. Neither is it just another example of sensible corporeality, expendable, replaceable; it is a *singularity*, prior to any representation, identification, objectification. It is other, as Other; it is not 'for' anything or anybody; it is beyond and prior to any purpose; it is as it pours out, as it gazes.

This gaze that supplicates and demands, that can supplicate only because it demands, deprived of everything because entitled to everything, and which one recognizes in giving...—this gaze is precisely the epiphany of the face as a face. The nakedness of the face is destituteness. (TI 75)

Yet the Other, naked, exposed, vulnerable and mortal, is not just another finitude, another vulnerability, entering into a symmetrical and reciprocal abstract relation of equivalency. Receptivity and respons-ability are primary relations that are already presupposed in the idea of reciprocity or contractual relationship. Equations between the Other and the sensible-corporeality (the I), based on anything from God to Reason, from Goodness to Science, are all created on the basis of the originary ethical condition, that is, the proximity, the anarchical, non-historical space-time of the encounter with the Other, of receptivity and responsivity. They all come afterward, are all post-inter-human relation. The original radical passivity—passivity prior to, not opposed to, action—, is the space of receptivity and respons-ability prior to any action, any consciousness or cognition. The seed from which we draw comparison, identification and representation is the fruit of the asymmetry in the face-to-face encounter. In this sense, inter-human relation always finds itself steeped in an ethical condition, faced with an ethical demand; the response, however, resides in the tension of the ethical and survival, as the Other can be approached from a need-based and/or desire-based *élan*.

The gaze of the Other and the Birth of the Subject as a Sociality

The Other measures me with a gaze incomparable to the gaze by which I discover him (TI 86).

With the entrance of the Other one sees that one is being seen, being sensed, is interrupted in the midst of existence, passive and exposed. “The one is exposed to the other as a skin is exposed to what wounds it” (OB 49). It sees and recognizes that it has been heard and seen by the Other. Infinitely separated, it stands at an un-traversable distance, yet is always in a frictional relation. Sensing itself now not just as a finitude in its encounter with exteriority, but as the object of the Other’s gaze, sensible-corporeality senses itself across a distance from itself. Of course being exposed to the Other’s gaze, sensing the gaze, sensing oneself from a distance, is

different from relating to the Other as a sound-board, a mirror, an object for the I's self-reflection, as happens, for example, in Plato's *Alcibiades*.²⁰ The Other's gaze comes as a revelation, not only of the Other's alterity and mortality, but also of the sensibility as a responsibility to the Other's life and death, and, through its responding, the revelation of the I-in-tension. In the presence of the Other the I gains a presence, presented as the I to the Other and so to itself; it gains language in responding to the Other, finds itself expressing. From its birth, then, the I is a *sociality*; it is through its respons-*ability* to the Other that the corporeal-sensibility stands out jolted, leaping from the space of the same to the I as a sociality.

It is, then, only in the encounter with the other, under the gaze of the other, that the I is drawn out from within the sensible-being; as it is seen and sees itself gazed upon, as it responds and senses its own response, it looks back and sees itself as a "*self*." It is in the space-time provided by absolute separation, the gap that is the possibility of relation-participation, the *khôra* of inter-human relations, in the presence of the Other, that a corporeal-sensibility reflects back on itself as that which can name itself I. In response to the Other's exposing exposure, one is manifested as an I, a subject, as one takes a step outward: "I am here," either to give or to refuse. The primordial receptivity and responsivity to the Other gives corporeal-sensibility the space-time to become the I, the I to be seen, seeing it is seen, presenting itself as a self; the Other reflects back to the I the sense of responding to that which is not itself, inspiring it to desire to

²⁰ In *Alcibiades I* the soul takes the eyes of the other as a place to contemplate itself: "SOCRATES: Did you ever observe that the face of the person looking into the eye of another is reflected as in a mirror; and in the visual organ which is over against him, and which is called the pupil, there is a sort of image of the person looking?" Referring to the same text, Foucault follows Plato's discussion arguing for "dialogue as a method of discovering truth in the soul," a method of self-contemplation and the care of the self ("Technology of the Self," *E* 235). Incidentally, we also hear from Marx that "a man first sees and recognizes himself in another man. Peter only relates to himself as a man through his relation to another man, Paul, in whom he recognizes his likeness. With this, however, Paul also becomes from head to toe, in his physical form as Paul, the form of appearance of the species man for Peter" (*Capital Volume I*, 144). Here, perhaps, Marx's Hegelianism shows in drawing an equivalency among the self, the other and the species; Foucault conflates self and other to the self, Marx to the species.

give life, to be for the other, but also, in its primordial tension, revealing that it can be for-itself, thus a murderer.

i) Proximity: Tension and the Immanence of Ambiguity

Levinas frequently directs his readers' attention to what he calls the ambiguity of the face as “wholly weakness and wholly authority” (*IR* 215). Unprotected and defenseless, the Other is destitution, is at the verge of dying: “the directness of death is the face of the Other” (*IR* 135). More than that, this exposed and disarmed face, this revelation of mortality, is also the disclosure of the possibility of murder.

What does the face say when I approach it? This face, exposed to my gaze, is disarmed. Whatever the countenance that it then takes on..., the face is the same—exposed in its nudity. From beneath the countenance it gives itself, all its weakness pierces through and at the same time is mortality, to such an extent that I may wish to liquidate it completely (*IR* 215).

Though the face is without defense, it yet discloses what Levinas refers to as “lordship,” that is, its status as “wholly authority,” its command: “Thou shalt not kill.” In its revelation, the face suspects the I, accuses and forbids it (*EN* 186). Thus, the proximity, the *khôra* of the epiphany of the face, of the event of encountering the other, is the space-time of non-indifference, the impossibility of being indifferent to the life and death of the other, an impossibility with which I could not agree more. However, Levinas equates this impossibility of indifference with the impossibility of saying “no” to the Other. In this paradigm, then, to be non-indifferent to the Other is at once to be responsible-for-the-Other “through all the modalities of giving, [including] the acceptance of the ultimate gift of dying for the Other” (*EN* 186).

Human Subjectivity: Primordial Respons-ability

Levinas thus posits subjectivity itself as signifying primordially a positive ethical responsibility for the other. He says: “[s]ubjectivity is not for itself; it is, once again, initially for another. ... [The Other] approaches me essentially insofar as I feel myself—insofar as I am—

responsible for him”(EI 96). But, one must ask: How it is that the only possible response of a non-indifferent being is responsibility; what are the necessary conditions for rendering this non-indifference a solely positive response occurring within the “proximity of the same and the other” (OB 137), within the *khôra* of the inter-human relation? How is it that the non-indifference of proximity becomes an “ethical impossibility,” an impossibility to say “no,” to refuse to give the gift of dying-for-the-other? What are the necessary conditions within which to equate respons-ability with responsibility, non-indifference with being-for-the-other and subjectivity with unequivocal positive ethical responsibility? We can find Levinas’s responses to these questions in his depiction of the proximity as the encounter between the Other –already an ambiguity— and the same –a pure entity in its state of radical passivity.

An Ambiguous Other and an Unequivocal Same

In its ambiguity “[t]he face is lordship” Levinas says, as well as “that which is without defense”; hence, in the face “there is ... the supreme authority that commands” (IR 215). This is the authority that elects and obliges subjectivity as responsibility. The face, absolute vulnerability to death, beckons and demands help, forbids murderous response; it “orders and ordains” a response to save it (EI 97). The response, on the other hand, “is put forth for the other, without any ‘taking up of attitudes’ ” (OB 143); it is from “one absolved from every relationship, every game, literally without a situation, without a dwelling place, expelled from everywhere and from itself” (146). This responsibility is paradoxical, Levinas writes, “in that I am obliged without this obligation having begun in me, as though an order slipped into my consciousness like a thief” (13). In this paradigm “the identity of the subject comes from the impossibility of escaping responsibility, from the taking charge of the other” (14). With concepts such as “choseness,” “ordered and ordained,” “elected” and “obliged” Levinas lays out the ground of the argument for the ethical impossibility of saying no to the other, for the impossibility of refusing

to give the gift of one's life for the other. This is an argument, however, that requires both a non-indifferent responding being in radical passivity and a sensibility without corporeality, without need.

Levinas writes: "The response which is responsibility, responsibility for the neighbor that is incumbent, resounds in ... [radical] passivity, this disinterestedness of subjectivity, this sensibility" (14-15). This radical passivity, uncovered and exposed in its encounter with the Other, he insists, is provoked by the Other "as irreplaceable, as devoted to the others." It cannot resign; its response of responsibility originates from the Other, through the Other's ambiguity and without the participation of the responding being: "It is as though the first movement of responsibility could not consist in awaiting nor even in welcoming the order (which would still be a quasi-activity), but consists in obeying this order before it is formulated" (13). In other words, in a primordial radical passivity, the responding being, the subjectivity in this paradigm, is a sensibility with "nothing at its disposal that would enable it to not yield to the provocation" (*OB* 105), the provocation which itself is to a responsibility that one cannot escape (*CPP* 133). Thus here, unlike the face which is in and of ambiguity, sensibility must be taken as unequivocal, as stripped of need and enjoyment, for only then is its exposure to the gaze of the other truly for-the-other, only then is it the expression of "frankness, sincerity, veracity" (*OB* 15). Imagined as void of its corporeality, a corporeal-sensibility in its original radical passivity would be an unequivocal, solely desire-based respons-ability, provoked, summoned, demanded and elected by exteriority, responding to the Other as responsible-for-the-other-unto-death. Only then can a 'here I am' be taken as a frank, sincere and tensionless absolute ethical responsibility.

The responding being then is rendered a sensibility without corporeality, without responsibility, an unequivocation for which Levinas invokes the language of substitution, expiation and the Good. Subjectivity as responsibility, he says,

remains, in its activity, a passivity, more passive than all passivity, for it is a sacrifice without reserve, without holding back, and in this non-voluntary – the sacrifice of a hostage designated who has not chosen himself to be hostage, but possibly elected by the Good, in an involuntary election not assumed by the elected one (*OB* 15).

In this paradigm then, proximity must be the space-time of encountering the other in its ambiguity while the same is held outside of its sameness, prior to corporeal and sensible ambiguities – only here is an ethical impossibility possible. Here, on an ethical plane so separated as to be imagined in isolation from the plane of being, subjectivity without tension is possible –so unchosen, so protected from the contaminating influence of the ontological realm. We can recognize this concern and this effort in Levinas’s notion of the Good. The Good, as the source of the subjectivity, is a metaphysical entity, comparable to Plato’s forms:

To reduce the good to being, to its calculations and its history, is to nullify goodness. The ever possible sliding between subjectivity and being, of which subjectivity would be but a mode, the equivalence of the two languages stops here. Goodness gives to subjectivity its irreducible signification (*OB* 18).

Yet here again, in the effort to protect the ethical, it is placed in a beyond so distant that, from the point of view of being, responsibility-for-the-other, appears as mere ethical *illumination*. In conceptualizing subjectivity as responsibility-for-the-other tout court, and responsibility as the impossibility of saying no to the other, Levinas theorizes the subjectivity first and foremost on the ethical plane, the plane of the metaphysical. However, he directs our attention to the porous separation between the being and the otherwise than being, arguing for the “*being’s other*” situated in a diachronic relation to the being in which “the beyond being does and does not revert to ontology; the statement, the beyond, the infinite, becomes and does not become a meaning of

being” (19). But, even here, in the possibility of a relating which he qualifies as an enigma, here where the ethical permeates the ontological, it, and with it subjectivity, remains external to material experience. Yet at the same time Levinas himself emphasizes that “giving has meaning only as a tearing from oneself despite oneself, and not only *without* me” (74). When, according to Levinas, proximity, the immediacy of contact, “is the immediacy of enjoyment and its frustration,” when to be for-the-other, to be despite oneself, is not “an indifferent surface” but “an attack made immediately on the plentitude of the complacency in oneself ..., on the identity in enjoyment ..., on life in which signification, the for-the-other, is swallowed up, on life living or enjoying life” (Ibid.), then *subjectivity as pure positive ethical responsibility* remains an abstraction. Proximity on the other hand, the *khôra* of the encounter of the same and the other, is the space-time of ambiguities, tension and trauma as primordial. The face is in and of ambiguity, as is the sensible-corporeality.

Ethical Responsibility an Ontological Possibility

While it is true that “a purely ‘ethical’ impossibility” is not an ontological impossibility (OB 198), that saming or murdering the other is the predominant response historically, it is also true, of course, that the survivalist response of the for-itself is not the only ontological necessity either. Ethical response, a response-for-the-other even unto-one’s-death is a human actuality: the everyday “senseless kindness” depicted in Vassily Grossman’s *Life and Fate*,²¹ the death under torture of a prisoner refusing to give away the others, the leap into the water or fire to save the

²¹ Levinas frequently references Grossman’s *Life and Fate*, citing examples elucidating the face as the epiphany of the other as a human being, the face beyond the countenance and masks. It is in this text that Grossman, depicting life and its struggles in the Soviet Union’s labour camps and the Nazis’ concentration camps, introduces the concept of *senseless kindness* as opposed to a ‘Universal Good’: “The private kindness of one individual towards another; a petty, thoughtless kindness; an unwitnessed kindness. A kindness outside any system of social or religious good.” This kindness, he elaborates, “this stupid kindness, is what is most truly human in a human being.” It is “powerful only while it is powerless”; it is “potent only while it is dumb and senseless” (*Life and Fate*, 408-409). This kindness is a manifestation of the possibility of ethical responsibility in the realm of being, but also, with Grossman and Levinas, it manifests the immanent necessity of ethical subjectivity in human struggle.

others, or the refusal to bear arms. In other words, humanity is a site of ethical exigency, not only as an actual possibility but also the site of actual being-for-the-other²² “when giving offers not the superfluxion of the superfluous, but the bread taken from one’s own mouth” (OB 77). One does respond ethically to the Other, *unto-one’s-death*, in the realm of being. But also one does respond survivalistically to the Other, *unto-the-other’s-death*. One’s subjectivity is always of responding to the other – one is always in the state of receptivity and responsivity, is non-indifferent, thus is always the keeper of the life and death of the other, responsible for the life and death of the other, albeit as savior or murderer; the answer to Cain’s query is contained in the question. In order to theorize the possibility of subjectivity with both ethical and survival aspects, not as contradictory, or mutually exclusive, or balancing unity, but as the primordial tensional condition of human subjectivity, I re-examine the traumatic event of encountering the Other with its ambiguity *as a finite yet infinite alterity*.

The Other: Finite yet Infinitely Other

Levinas’s purely ethical response to the Other, the monologically prioritized responsibility-for-the-Other, can be understood on the basis of the presupposition of an immanent positivity on the part of the sensible-corporeality. Without this pre-originary immanence—absolutely vacant of ambiguity—one may have recourse, as some have in fact interpreted Levinas to intend, to guaranteeing the pristine unassailability of the purely ethical

²² Referring to the “Gordian knot of the body,” Levinas writes: “The Gordian knot of the body, the extremities in which it begins or ends, are forever dissimulated in the knot that cannot be undone, and that commands in the ungraspable noesis its own transcendental origin. Sensible experience as an obsession by the other, or a maternity, is already the corporeality which the philosophy of consciousness wishes to constitute on the basis of it. The corporeality of one’s own body signifies, as sensibility itself, a knot or a denouement of being, but it has also to contain a passage to the physico-chemical-physiological meanings of the body. And this latter does devolve from sensibility as proximity, as signification, as one-for-the-other, which signifies in giving, when giving offers not the superfluxion of the superfluous, but the bread taken from one’s own mouth. Signification signifies, consequently, in nourishing, clothing, lodging, in maternal relations, in which matter shows itself for the first time in its materiality” (OB 77).

response through comprehending his notion of the face of the Other as the face of God.²³

Without recourse to such a faith-based interpretation the question concerning the ambiguity of the face may be addressed again, but from a different direction.

An alternative may be sought by distinguishing finitudes. That is, agreeing that the face is ambiguous, it is possible to understand that that ambiguity consists in its being finite, mortal, but not just another finitude. For this again, we can turn to Levinas himself: “to approach the face of the other is to worry directly about his death, and this means to regard him straightaway as mortal, finite” (*IR* 135). The other is finite, but it remains nonetheless, both before and after its revelation, Other. The Other is at once *finite*, a vulnerability-to-death, and an unfathomable, *infinite alterity*. In its mortality it is the site of both life and death—ungraspable and unfathomable depth—beyond and other than one’s own living and being. In this sense, then, the face, as the epiphany of the Other, is the epiphany of life and death other than, more and beyond the sensible-corporeality’s living being. It is not authority but alterity; it is a mortal being with needs, yet transcendental in its otherness and it is this infinite finitude that is the Other. The face does not forbid; it expresses life at the edge of death. It is a life in need of life; “[t]he nakedness of the face is destituteness. To recognize the Other is to recognize a hunger” (*TI* 75).²⁴ The face reveals itself to the sensible-corporeality in its utmost poverty. In its revelation is its resistance; it, this revelation itself, cannot not but be received and sensed as other; the revelation itself

²³ Levinas discusses his reference to “the word of God” in the process of introducing responsibility for the other as a rupture in being in relation to Spinoza’s for-itself conception of existence, i.e., being as an effort to be: “all of a sudden a rupture of that effort is produced in my responsibility with respect to the other, who logically is nothing, who is other, who is separated, who is stranger. I have this responsibility as soon as I approach the other man. It is in this sense that I speak of the word of God which overturns my perseverance in being into a solicitude for the other” (*IR* 59).

²⁴ This recognition “is to give” (*TI* 75). And a giving “... has meaning only as a ‘taking care of the other’s need,’ of his misfortunes and his faults”; a gift is not “of the heart, but of the bread from one’s mouth, of one’s own mouthful of bread” (*OB* 74).

cannot be undone, erased or totalized once and for all; even to be defaced it must first be received as Other. The face, then, resists its totalization:

The infinite paralyzes power by its infinite resistance to murder, which, firm and insurmountable, gleams in the face of the Other, in the total nudity of the absolute openness of the Transcendent. There is here a relation not with a very great resistance, but with something absolutely *other*: the resistance of what has no resistance—the ethical resistance (*TI* 199).

“Thou shalt not kill” at its very least has an overdetermined, non-monological meaning; it bears witness to the existence of an ambiguity prior to its having become a commandment, to the ambiguity of an antecedent, primary, response to the event of encountering the Other. It points back, in short, to the registration at the level of sensibility that it can be a savior *and* a murderer, that Cain is both the keeper and murderer of his brother, that he is responsible for both his brother’s life and death. It is a testimony, on one hand to proximity as an ethical condition with the always already presence of the ethical appeal in the encounter, and simultaneously, on the other hand, to the ambiguity of the sensible-corporeality’s respons-ability and responsibility.

vii) Sensible-corporeality: Ethical Desire and Survival Need

As Cain in the material world then, we appear as sensible-corporeality, as embodied I-in-tension, equiprimordially ethical desire and survival need. But, though separated, the sensible-corporeality is never un-related, never a non-participant in the exteriority. Separated and independent it stands on and in the exteriority, exposed, drinking it in, bathing in it, enticed by its otherness and menaced by its endlessness. Sensuously aware of its own finition and the exteriority’s infinity, as a corporeality and a sensibility it is susceptible to pain and also to joy; it is always already in tension as it is always already in the state of encountering the other. By virtue of its body, it stands separated from the exteriority, but, encumbered by its temporality, it

is in need of life beyond its own to remain alive. Yet, as a sensible body, it is an affectivity, receiving and reaching for that which is beyond its own being. Hence it is always insufficient in itself and inadequate in its participation in exteriority. The incommensurability of exteriority and interiority is the impossibility of totality. The interiority always overflows its needs, and the exteriority always surpasses its need satisfaction; as Levinas writes:

The insufficiency of interiority is not immediately convertible into needs presaging their satisfaction or suffering from their penury; the broken interiority is not mended in the horizons outlined by needs. Such an exteriority reveals an insufficiency of the separated being that is without possible satisfaction – not only unsatisfied *in fact*, but outside of every perspective of satisfaction or unsatisfaction (*TI* 179).

This insufficiency of the separated being reveals “a hunger that nourishes itself not with bread but with hunger itself” (*Ibid.*). It corresponds to the desiring aspect of the sensible-corporeality. The interiority therefore, is never a fulfilled, a totalized entity at rest in-itself, but always a “more in the less.”²⁵ The Other, then, reveals the face in its absolute destitution, a living-toward-death to the gaze of the sensible-corporeality in all its ambiguities: a receptivity and respons-ability in need of exteriority for its own being, in fear of its unforeseeable depth, and a receptivity and respons-ability in its desire for others and the Other. Proximity is always already infused with trauma as the event of face to face relation occurs across and through the constellation of ambivalences and ambiguities.

Fear of and for Death

Perhaps nothing elucidates this position of the I-in-tension, the ambiguities immanent to the proximity, more than fear of death. No matter how sensuously aware of its own vulnerability, interiority does not come face to face with its own death; death sits on a plane other than the graspable and controllable universe. It is an exteriority that remains exteriority, even in cases of

²⁵ Levinas describes a thinking-being who has the idea of infinity as “more than himself,” or that which is “the more in the less” (“Philosophy and the Idea of Infinity,” *CPP*, 54). I borrow this notion to describe a corporeal and sensuous state of being.

suicide and murder. The idea that by choosing the time of death one has taken control over one's own death (generally coming after one feels complete powerlessness, lack of control over one's life) could not be more illusory, as death is, in Levinas witty inversion of Heidegger's phrase, "the impossibility of possibility" (*TI* 234). "For a being to whom everything happens in conformity with projects, death is an absolute event, absolutely a posteriori, open to no power, not even to negation" (56). Death and thus murder is annihilation of the possibility of control and mastery over the affected living-being. However true that by murdering, and therefore surrendering control over the murdered one, the murderer may be attempting to extend her reach over the rest of humanity, and regardless of scientific discoveries extending longevity, death in-itself in general, and one's own death in particular, remains unknown, other, ungraspable and unforeseeable; it remains, in spite of all, an imminent menace. In the face of the Other, one is not only presented with life in all its fragility and nakedness, prior to any protection and defense, but is also presented with death, as "[d]eath, ... is present only in the Other" (*TI* 179).

Arriving before the presence of the Other whose face is touched by death (*IR* 135), sensibility is traumatized by its directness. Unlike facing the exteriority as an infinity with its accompanying shock at one's own finition in the sensuous recognition of the infinity of the other, here the I is shocked to consciousness through facing the personal Other, an alterity but a finite alterity, a life-towards-death. The I then is born into and through its experiences of its insufficiency, its inadequacy, receiving and sensing death coming and promising through the Other, receiving and sensing through the Other the call of life, the ethical appeal.

A Despite-Itself-Consciousness: The I as Sociality, or an Inadequate Respons-ability

Autochthonous to the ethical condition, responding to the ethical appeal, tied to its own corporeality, the I, therefore, senses its self as a 'despite-itself,' or, in other words, it senses itself as "the more in the less," a negativity. As negativity, self-consciousness, rather than the

consciousness of an in-itself that is for-itself, signifies awareness of the self as a sociality, a consciousness of the self as always already ruptured: a despite-itself. Rather than the I joining itself, rendering itself One, self-consciousness is of the I's non-coincidence, its fission of its need-based mortality and its desire-based affective living, a simultaneous facing inward and outward, like Janus (*Ianus*), the god of entrances and exits, a ground for the same and the Other. Tension, then, is the originary state of the I. Born in sociality, through the other, the I is born as singularity-in-tension. Always an I-despite-its-self, the I is never 'one at home with itself,' neither a sum of contradictions, nor their synthesis, but always "the-other-in-the-same." It is the 'One' that is secondary. Facing the Other, the I, with its survival need (driven by the greed of egoistic enjoyment and fear of death/the future/the unknown—the Other/other), and corporeal-ethical desire (driven by hope and love for the life/future/unknown—the Other/other) is both ambivalence and ambiguity. Being of tension, never at-home and self-sufficient, the totalization under the for-itself is a reaction to the agony of the primordial condition.

In welcoming the Other and the future, the I expresses itself in love and hope: through the gift of and for life²⁶ it is open to eros. Not being closed within its mere being, its body, but being a torn and despite-itself sensibility and corporeality, the I responds positively to the Other's suffering, to its life and death. In ethical-desire, a concern *for* the Other's death and life, it takes a step forward and outward, offering from the life inside itself, the bread from its mouth and the coat from its back. In responding positively to the Other the subject's "centre of gravity does not coincide with the I of need" but with "the desire that is for the Other" (*TI* 236). The ethical Desire thus is a desire for the Other as a finite being. If the Other is nakedness, vulnerability and

²⁶ To give a gift of life is different than being 'pro-life,' as life is not a merely alive. To respond positively to the ethical appeal, to the call of a life-at-the-edge-of-death, to the suffering of the other, is not automatically a prolongation of life; response to the suffering of the other does not translate into a principle that physical life must be preserved and extended no matter what the circumstances. One cannot make a prescription out of the ethic of the other.

mortality, if it is suffering, then being-for-the-other is being-for-the-other's-life; it is to give a gift of life, eros, regardless of the I's needs. Thus, being-for-the-other is a desirous response to the Other in its finitude, its mortality, without reducing it to a knowable, without drawing any equation between the I's own finitude and the Other's, without reducing and saving the Other's mortality to a totality. This presence in the presence of the other, a presence without withdrawal, without inwardness, requires risk, and what is risk here but one's exposure to one's own vulnerability in stepping forward out of oneself, despite oneself, and moving towards the other for the other. To-be-for-the-other is "in the risky uncovering of oneself, in sincerity, the breaking up of inwardness and the abandon of all shelter, exposure to traumas, vulnerability" (OB 48). Here lies the possibility of 'freedom-to.'

The *ethical response* signifies the birth of an *ethical subject and subjectivity*, a subject born in its receptivity and respons-ability through the Other, and as responsibility-for-the-other. The joy of opening up and giving the gift of life/love to an infinitely Other, for the Other, is a joy infused with pain. As a finitude, the subject always finds itself inadequate; as it loves more, it aches more; as it hopes more, it rests less: always a "more in the less." When one keeps quiet while suffering torture, pacing the solitary cell or going into the fire to save the other, one is responding to and for the other despite one's enjoyment and security, is responding despite one's vulnerability, fear and suffering; one's subjectivity, then is of desire-based respons-ability, thus of ethical responsibility. Even so, the ethical-subjectivity's response to the Other for-the-Other is always a finite's response with all the limitations that entails. The response, thus, is never a total and perfect response. Short of dying, one is always inadequate²⁷ in the gift of life; as long as there is life in the I there is a gift to give. Indeed, this persistence of the gift, incidentally, may

²⁷ This is not, of course, to say that one cannot refuse to give the gift, one can and frequently does in its need-based respons-ability, a survival response to the other but for-the-self.

shed some light on the phenomenon of “survival guilt”; for instance, the guilt of a parent outliving his or her child, or survivors of a natural disaster or human atrocity is a trace of an underlying ethical subjectivity, a desire-based response to the death-of-the-Other in which the I’s centre of gravity does not coincide with the I of needs and survival, but with the I of desire, the ethical. The subject then, finds itself in a position of constantly explaining, justifying, of issuing apology. No wonder there is such a common tendency to appeal to a higher power to salve one’s bad conscience,²⁸ to refer to the God who saved one but called another one to himself! The ethical condition as the primordial condition of inter-human relation is and remains outside the rational/irrational nexus; it is the condition to which the latter dyad is largely a reaction. Of course, no one should take this argument for the ethic of the other as advocating a cult of self-sacrificers. Such a position would end the human species being and the ethical altogether. On the contrary, the emphasis is on the impossibility of a totalized ethics-of-the-Other as well as the impossibility of a totalized enclosure in survival-of-the-self.

Respons-ability beyond the ethical includes the survival response as well. In the presence of the Other, receiving the other’s pain and suffering, its call at the edge of death, the I is pulled out in its response to the other. But responding in its fear of death and responding through its own need, the responding being recoils, folds back on itself, moves inward. A primordial receptivity and respons-ability, responding-to-the-other but from its own needs, the survival-subject is then born in its withdrawal from the Other. In its attempt to dwell in the “known” space and time of the same it engages the impossible: it tries not only to remove the Other—defacing it, saming it to annihilation—, but also to reduce itself, to same itself to its own survival needs, to its *conatus essendi*.²⁹ Through fear of death and in search of life, in search of ‘freedom-

²⁸ See footnote 4 above, and the discussion of “bad conscience” in Chapter Six.

²⁹ In this, the fearful reaction to death meets the totalizer, the torturer, at least half way, see Chapter Six.

from' suffering and vulnerability, it opens itself to thanatos. The survival response is the need-based response to that which it receives from the exteriority, that which "gives rise to fear or flight from responsibilities" (*TI* 179). It is still a response to the Other, but a response as a susceptibility, *i.e.*, a response to-the-other in reaction to its own vulnerability, to its own exposedness to death, hence a response to-the-other-for-the-self; hence the temptation to kill the Other.³⁰

The Other reaches into sensibility and pulls it out; sensibility responds to the Other regardless of its own wants or wishes—it receives the Other's need, agony and happiness. Sensible-corporeality has no choice in receiving the Other; even if, like Ulysses' shipmates the ears and eyes are blocked, an originary encountering of the Other is still presupposed. Nor can one assume a state of indifference to the face; one responds even if one ties oneself down or encloses oneself in an inward fortress. One receives and responds, one announces one's presence to the other, but this presence is not, of course, necessarily for the other. As one's self is pulled out and senses the other's agony it senses its own susceptibility, its own fragility, its own nakedness. Just as in Desire it breaths and gives life for-the-other, so in need it breaths and takes life for-itself. Pulled outward and yet sensing the other's agony, in its response the subject is born in a state of despite-itself-consciousness, becoming sensuously aware of itself as an I-in-tension.

viii) Conclusion: The Four Corners of Life and Death

Levinas's conceptualization of ethics as first philosophy opens a crack in dominant conceptions of the subject and subjectivity in western political and philosophical thought that

³⁰ On the fear of death and the anxiety about the prospect of committing murder, see Levinas's "On Peace and Proximity," in *BPW* esp. 164-6.

sees the ‘self,’ the I, as the in-itself and for-itself entity entailed in being a *conatus essendi*.

Through this crack we glimpse a human foundation for our humanity: that which always overflows the species *élan* for preserving its being, that which is “the more in the less.” At the same time this approach opens possibilities for removing the virtual monopoly of religions and their gods over the ethical relation, without losing them to Reason or other such imperial totalities. This Levinasian crack makes possible the present undertaking: the speculative essaying of the subject and subjectivity as equiprimordially imbued with the potentialities of both the I of the *conatus essendi* and the ethical I. And this configuration in turn puts us in a position to take up the thread of resistance, finally of an ethics-based effective resistance in the actual world.

Concluding then with a schematic presentation of the position essayed here in the effort to theorize the constitution of the subject as corporeal sensibility, I position myself to consider the deep permeation of the modern western tradition—more constitutive in my view than is generally acknowledged³¹—of the point of view of the for-itself subject and finally to argue the possibilities for conceiving an effective resistance this Levinas-enabled search perhaps discloses.

So far, taking the germ of Levinas’s conceptual framework this section has probed the ambiguities of sensible-corporeality, the Other, and most importantly, the ambiguities of the face to face relationship, proximity. The propositions and relations may be summed up as follows: (1) proximity, the epiphany of the Other’s face, the face to face encounter, is an ethical *condition*,³² charged with ethical demand; (2) sensible corporeality receives the presence of the Other and responds to it as a sensibility and a corporeality, in which process the I, the subject, is born; (3) response to the Other appears as a fluid interaction between *Desire-based* and *need-based* responses whether issuing as alloys or some other form, hence the possibilities of primarily

³¹ Again, see Chapters Four and Five.

³² Thus, in relation to the ethical condition, I refer in Chapter One to the space of sensory deprivation as the null or un-condition.

ethical or primarily survival subjectivities; (4) the I may therefore be recognized as responsible for the Other's life and death without presupposition of a pre-existing metaphysical form of the 'Good,' whether external or immanent; (5) therefore, too, the I may be recognized as a sensible event of non-indifference anterior to cognition and representation, lived in and revealed in proximity through and for the Other's presence, and with subjectivity as this I's respons-ability to the Other. This non-indifference, this *respons-ability*, then, in whatever relation of Desire and Need it may issue, is one for which the subject is *responsible*.³³ The subject is thus always already in the *khôra* of ethical demand³⁴ fecundated and delivered through the Other, in and as its respons-ability, the I is never in "indifference" and thus is always responsible and accountable for the Other's life and death. Cain is the keeper of his brother, precisely because he killed him. Cain held his brother's life and death in his hands. Thus, even though traumatized, corporeal-sensibility's response still falls within the tensions of inter-human subjectivity (see the diagram below).

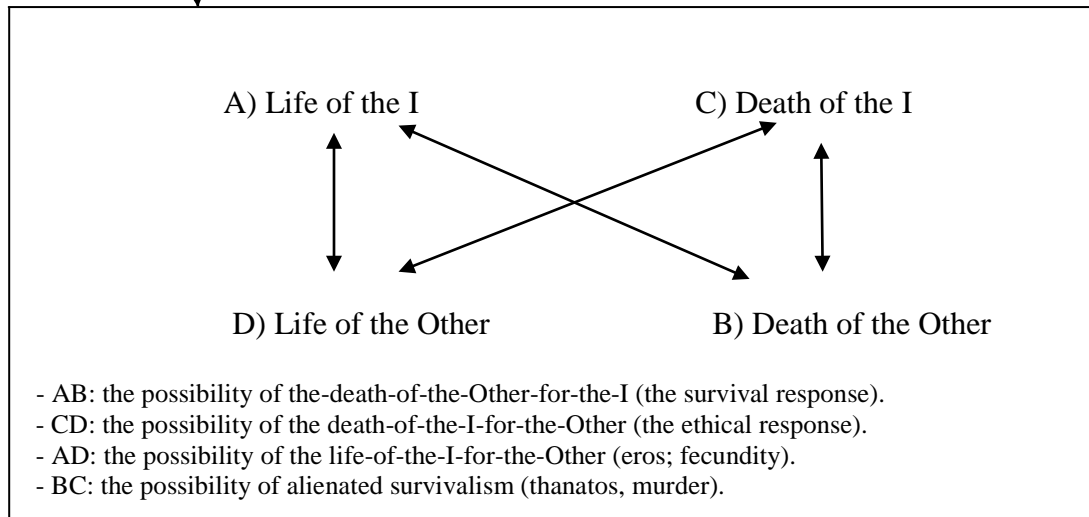
The elucidation of the human subject and subjectivity as primordially an I-in-tension potentially breaks through the paradoxical event of subjectivity without having to deny or occlude its aspects or potentialities. No matter how continuously other-alienating and alienated it is, nor how actively the I occludes and postpones its desire-for-the Other and the other, the survival-subject, the totalizing subjectivity, can never —so long as the space of separation exists—reach a state of at-homeness: it necessarily remains in the state of the accused, always in

³³ By separating respons-ability and responsibility I have, on one hand, removed responsibility from the Levinasian immediacy. On the other hand, I have opened a space through which the survival subjectivity enters into the ethical *condition* and responsibility, giving it direct participation in the inter-human relation.

³⁴ Once again, I say "ethical demand/condition" in contradistinction to "ethical command" since the latter is charged with metaphysical connotations as an order coming from somewhere beyond the Other, beyond the vulnerability to death. I take the position that inter-human space is an "*ethical condition*" as it is the space of life and death, pain and redemption, prior to, rather than beyond goodness or evil.

search of the good conscience as apology. The alternative to the I-in-tension is a closed system of totalized and samed I and Other, the annihilation of both interiority and exteriority.

Subjectivity as an Inter-human Phenomenon of Life and Death



This, then, is the subject of resistance; the subject that forms the *khôra* of the struggle for effective resistance. While it is the genius of Levinas to have cracked the totalizing for-itself auspices of the hegemonic western tradition, it has been the task of this chapter, in keeping with Levinas's admonition to "enter into where the opening should happen," to consider critically his ethical positioning from the point of view of its relation to effective resistance on the level of being, the level on which the contention between the ethic of the other and the hegemony of the *conatus essendi* actually takes place. In the upshot, this consideration has eventuated in a modified appropriation of the Levinasian situating of the ethical subject that may be further essayed in relation to examples of divergent approaches to the resistant subject in modern western thought. To this end, then, we turn now, first, to consideration of the subject in the work

of Michel Foucault and then to that of Karl Marx, representing, as they do, opposable directions of development both of which remain finally *within* the dominion of the for-itself perspective and we do so from the point of view of the possibility of conceptualizing a subject capable of ‘effective resistance’ to contemporary totalizing trends. This work, recognizing the equiprimordiality of Desire and need and thus the I as always already and continuously an I-in-tension, prepares for the conceiving of the possibility of an effective resistance founded in the ethical aspects of human subjectivity.

SECTION II

The Limits of the "For-itself": Foucault and Marx

In Section One, I argued that subjectivity is of the I's encounter with the Other, born of its response to the Other. Since the I is a separated finitude, susceptible and vulnerable, yet is *of* and lives *in* infinity, the I's response is not *a* nor *the* response but lies in a range within and inclusive of the two extremes of absolutely for-itself and absolutely for-the-Other. The I, then, is a result of a corporeal-sensibility's response to exteriority, to the call of the others and the Other, both from needs for the self, and Desire for the other, however hegemonic the former, occluded the latter.

Hence, the I is always despite-itself, always an *I-in-tension*. In this paradigm, resistance of a for-itself subjectivity against any form of totalizing-system, though it might be capable of transforming or escaping the limitations of particular forms of totalization, either as individual or mass (and human history of course testifies to such successes), such resistance inherently falls short of transcending totalizing systems as such. In fact, a for-itself resistance, insofar as it remains hegemonic, either recapitulates the previous totality or eventually creates a new one with its own dominant saming impetus. The tenets of my claim are then that: a) a for-itself subjectivity is of totality, is incapable of transcendence in that it constantly recreates the form of totalizing systems to which it capitulates anew; b) primordially the I is an *I-in-tension* with the potentiality of being-for-the-other and being-for-the-self; then c) it is through the subjectivity-for-the-other, and the ethic of the other that an *effective* resistance has a chance against totalizing systems as such.

Based on these tenets conceptualization of the subject and subjectivity within the boundaries of the for-itself (whether as self or as group) fails to extend the horizon to an adequate conception of effective resistance. On the contrary, it tends overwhelmingly to contribute to the further occlusion of the for-the-other potentiality of human subjectivity, thus,

contributing to its reification. It is in response to these concerns and with a view to illuminating the impasse of a for-itself subjectivity that I turn to Michel Foucault and Karl Marx. Here I hope through elucidating the for-itself in the notions of the subject and subjectivity, first in Foucault and then in Marx, to make the case that, without perception of and recourse to a primordially social ethical subjectivity, the horizon for conceptions of resistance and change remains within the boundaries of the saming totalizing system, of totality in general.

CHAPTER IV

Foucault: Docility, Power and the Care of the Self

Introduction

The Foucaultian notion of the aesthetic-self as the embodiment of a de-totalized self, the subject of resistance, as well as his understanding of ethics as the self's relations to itself, the locus of the practice of resistance, while illuminating in its own right, has the added advantage of bringing inherent limits to this form of resistance into relief. Though Foucault's subject is historically developed rather than given, and is thus discontinuous, it remains universal, I argue, in its reduction of all to a derivation of power. Thus, just as the docile-body represents the modern subject created by and for bio-disciplinary-power technology, the aesthetic-self is created by and for *sovereign-power*¹ in that both remain within the boundaries of for-itself subjectivity.

In the Foucaultian paradigm, to be sure, a central difference between the two subjectivities is to be found in the location of power. A bio-disciplinary regime of power is external to the individual, imposed from outside, thus the notion of the subject as docile-body. Whereas the sovereign-power regime of the aesthetic self stems from the individual subject itself. Hence, for-itselfness for a docile-body is first and foremost an external-system-identification, as the individual as a subject with its subjectivity is a fabrication of, by and for the

¹ "Sovereign-power" refers here not to the power of the king or the state, but to the power of the self over the self in the care of the self.

disciplinary power, while an aesthetic for-itselfness is a self-system-identification. This difference, however, even though redistributing strategic deployment of power as it does, serves more to confirm than to deny the argument here.

In the Foucaultian paradigm the sovereign-power, the process of self-affecting-power, signifies the individual's gaining its own will to power:² the Foucaultian subject evolves from a for-bio/disciplinary-power-self to a for-sovereign-power-self, from a docile-body to an aesthetic-self. If the docile-body is a self formed as a result of and acting as an external-system-identification, the aesthetic-self, as a result of the practices of a power distinct from and *autonomous* in relation to the dominant system of power relations, is formed and acts as a self-system-identification. In this scenario a constant task of the "de-totalized" (yet for-itself) subjectivity is to escape and survive the incorporating tentacles of the dominant totalizing power; hence, Foucault's argument for constant "transgression"³ rather than transcendence as resistance. The resistance of the aesthetic-subjectivity, then, remains within the limits of survivalist-subjectivity.

In the Foucaultian paradigm, conceptualization of the subject and subjectivity is grounded in his notions of power and the body. On one hand, the subject as interiority does not exist in its own right, but is a result of the body's subjection to power. On the other hand, power is not an attribute or possession, but exists as a field of forces encompassing all that has traditionally been conceptualized as exteriority and interiority. In spite of discontinuities among the phases of Foucault's extensive oeuvre, and in spite of the intended lack of a fully developed theory of subjectivity and power, continuities remain (earlier phases establishing elements of the horizon of the ethic of the aesthetic self), and thus a critical analysis of the limits of Foucault's

² See Foucault's 1972 conversation with Deleuze where he discusses the need "to sap power, to take power" to reclaim the subject's will-to-power (208); "Intellectuals and Power," in *LCP*, 205-17.

³ For Foucault's discussion of transgression versus transcendence, see "A Preface to Transgression," in *LCP*, 29-53.

ethical subject as the site of an effective resistance requires a brief analysis of his conception of the body, both as docile and aesthetic, and of power itself.

To this end, I have divided this chapter into a constellation of three sections essaying different threads of the argument. In the first section, “The subject as a derivative of power,” I start with a brief review of the Foucaultian notion of the modern subject as docile body, problematizing the construction of the concept as the representation of the ‘reality’ of the modern subject. Next, I analyze his method of theorizing the formation of the modern subject, and finally I draw a comparison between the Foucaultian notion of the docile body and the survival-ego arguing that the former is a reified version of the latter.

In the second section, “Power, power, everywhere,” I argue that power in the Foucaultian paradigm, power as the existential condition, content and terms of relationship, gives birth to the subject, but more importantly, fills in the proximity between the subject and others. To this end I essay a selection of relevant characteristics of Foucaultian power under the rubrics of “The Productive Hypothesis,” “Non-subjective intentionality/spontaneity” and “Power: Historical/Universal.”

Finally, in the last section, “The Aesthetic-self: totality re-dux” I rely on arguments developed in the previous sections to explicate the survivalist boundaries within which the Foucaultian new subjectivity would form and find itself. Here I investigate his ethic of the concern for the self locating it within the machinations of the technology of power, arguing that the aesthetic self is born of a survivalist response and its relations to exteriority. Hence, I conclude, it remains a totality set within the limits of a survivalist subjectivity.

i) The Subject as a Derivative of Power

Hubert Dreyfus suggests an affinity between Heidegger's history of being and Foucault's regimes of power, on one hand, and on the other hand, Heidegger's perspective on the objectification of *things* and Foucault's perspective on the subjectification of *selves*.⁴ Dreyfus notes that both are critical of the Cartesian notion of a lucid subject, a meaning-giving *cogito*, the agency of the Kantian autonomous subject for whom the world presents itself as an object and the Husserlian transcendental-ego along with its intentionality.⁵ For both, in contrast to these conceptions, the subject as self-sufficient autonomous agent is rather a product of particular practices. According to Dreyfus, however, unlike Heidegger, whose *Dasein* replaces the subject, Foucault remains happy with the subject's dispersion. With the removal of interiority, that which is known as the subject becomes a function, first of discursive practices and an effect of the "enunciative field," resting on the proposition

that this enunciative domain refers neither to an individual subject, nor to some kind of collective consciousness, nor to a transcendental subjectivity; but that it is described as an anonymous field whose configuration defines the possible position of speaking subjects.⁶

And later, the subject is transformed into an object-effect of power diagrams conjured up from a "field of forces" within which, instead of amputation and repression of the individual, "the individual is carefully fabricated [...], according to a whole technique of forces and bodies" (*DP* 217).

Erasing interiority—and thus the separation between interiority and exteriority discussed in the previous section—along with the removal of the observing subject as knower and originator, the individual becomes a *visibility* and *receptivity*, hence, as intended, stripped of

⁴ Hubert L. Dreyfus. "Being and Power: Heidegger and Foucault," http://ist-socrates.berkeley.edu/~hdreyfus/html/paper_being.html.

⁵ Hubert L. Dreyfus. "Heidegger and Foucault on the Subject, Agency and Practices," http://socrates.berkeley.edu/~hdreyfus/html/paper_heidandfoucault.html.

⁶ Michel Foucault, *The Archeology of Knowledge*, (New York: Harper Colophon Books, 1972), 122.

agency and spontaneity, but also of *respons-ability* and *responsibility*. She appears as an effect of power-subjectivity, that is, as a reified survival-ego: a receptivity without respons-ability. In the dual meanings Foucault attributes to the concept “*subject*” there is room neither for sociality, nor for respons-ability,⁷ but only for subjugation of an insular entity to a form of power. He writes:

There are two meanings of the word *subject*: subject to someone else by control and dependence, and tied to his own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge. Both meanings suggest a form of power which subjugates and makes subject to.⁸

As the bio-disciplinary power technique “applies itself to immediate everyday life[, it] ... categorizes the individual, makes him by his own individuality, attaches him to his own identity, imposes a law of truth on him which he must recognize and which others have to recognize in him” (SP 212), the subject becomes a product and object of power, an *artifact*.

The Docile-Body: an artifact

A body is docile that may be subjected, used, transformed and improved.

Discipline and Punish, 136

Foucault interprets his own work as “a reading of a certain reality,” a “deciphering” of a “layer of reality,” an interpretation which “can produce some effects of truth,” effects of truth that could be implemented “within possible struggles” (FL 261). And Foucaultians often charge his critics with reducing his writings to ‘positions’, ‘arguments’ and ‘ideas’, a “naïve” reduction of a thinker who, Bové for example reminds us, “perhaps more than Gramsci, has done much to rethink, to problematize, the role of the intellectual and the relations between power and the

⁷ Interestingly enough, though Heidegger replaced the subject with *Dasein*, he removed the possibility of respons-ability and responsibility by making it an effect of technological forces. A part of a standing-reserve, finally then saming both ‘subject’ and ‘object’ in “a system of information.” For a more detail discussion see Dreyfus’ “Being and Power: Heidegger and Foucault.”

⁸ Michel Foucault, “The Subject and Power,” in *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, by Hubert Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 212. Hereafter cited as “SP”.

practice of discourses and disciplines.”⁹ In the face of these claims, and to engage them, I turn to *Discipline and Punish* as the germinating site of the Foucaultian comprehension of the subject-as-subjugation in his notions of the docile-body and of the conceptualization of modern western subjectivity as docility. Illustrated here are the contours of the construction of an artifact which sames reality within its own form, an artifact that shapes a finally closed identity and sets the ground for the entrapment of the subject within the power mechanism.

The Docile Body as Artifact

At one level of analysis, the docile-body is an abstract notion constructed from and representing two distinct but overlapping perspectives on human beings: a) that of Enlightenment mechanical materialism, and b) that of modern power’s instrumentalism. The materialist perspective derives directly from the Enlightenment’s reductive approach which perceived the human being as essentially corporeal, an organic machine whose soul, will, courage, etc., were understood as *effects* of the body’s material constitution and its functionality. This reductionist approach can be seen, for example, in La Mettrie’s discourse on humans as machines and in Bentham’s letters on the panopticon and the principles of inspection, both of which provide Foucault with theoretical resources for conceiving humans as useful, intelligible and manipulable ‘bodies’, as well as for comprehending the use of punishment, constraint and surveillance as processes – a panoptical technology – for manufacturing ‘docility.’¹⁰

⁹ Bové, introduction to *Foucault* by Gillis. Deleuze (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), xiii.

¹⁰ Here, to provide a sense of these reductions, are relevant excerpts taken from La Mettrie’s *L’Homme-machine*: On being a body: “Man is so complicated a machine that it is impossible to get a clear idea of the machine beforehand, and hence impossible to define it. For this reason, all the investigations have been vain, which the greatest philosophers have made *à priori*, that is to say, in so far as they use, as it were, the wings of the spirit. Thus it is only *à posteriori* or by trying to disentangle the soul from the organs of the body, so to speak, that one can reach the highest probability concerning man’s own nature, even though one cannot discover with certainty what his nature is” (2). On the ethics of the body: “Beautiful the soul, and powerful the will which cannot act save by permission of the bodily conditions, and whose tastes change with age and fever! Should we, then, be astonished that philosophers have always had in mind the health of the body, to preserve the health of the soul, that Pythagoras gave rules for the diet as carefully as Plato forbade wine? The regime suited to the body is always the one with which sane physicians

In part three of *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault introduces the concept of ‘docility’ through reference to La Mettrie’s *L’Homme-machine* (*Man-a-Machine*), as presenting “both a materialist reduction of the soul and a general theory of *dressage* [training], at the centre of which reigns the notion of ‘docility’, which joins the analyzable body to the manipulable body” (*DP* 136). On the basis of this reduction, Foucault’s notion of the ‘docile-body’ then arises out of the perception of the human being as first and foremost a body, a body conceived as an object as well as a product of knowledge—a knowable and analyzable body that is tied to an identity by conscience (*SP*, 212)—and a body as an object of power—manipulable and utilizable.¹¹ That is, the human being as an individual is perceived and rendered as a ‘visibility’ and a ‘determinability’, one that “may be subjected, used, transformed and improved” (*DP* 136). It is starting from the human being as this artifact that, all discontinuities notwithstanding, precludes recognition of sources of effective resistance from the beginning all the way through the aesthetic self.

The combination of a materialist reduction of humans to bodies and the theory of training overlaps finely with the second perspective: power’s instrumentalist approach to the human

think they must begin, when it is a question of forming the mind, and of instructing it in the knowledge of truth and virtue; but these are vain words in the disorder of illness, and in the tumult of the senses. Without the precepts of hygiene, Epictetus, Socrates, Plato, and the rest preach in vain: all ethics is fruitless for one who lacks his share of temperance; it is the source of all virtues, as intemperance is the source of all vices” (17, 18). On corporeal need: “The human body is a machine which winds its own springs. It is the living image of perpetual movement. Nourishment keeps up the movement which fever excites. Without food, the soul pines away, goes mad, and dies exhausted. The soul is a taper whose light flares up the moment before it goes out. But nourish the body, pour into its veins life-giving juices and strong liquors, and then the soul grows strong like them, as if arming itself with a proud courage, and the soldier whom water would have made to flee, grows bold and runs joyously to death to the sound of drums. Thus a hot drink sets into stormy movement the blood which a cold drink would have calmed” (3-4). On imagination and dressage: “Imagination is like the bird, always carried onward by the turmoil of the blood and the animal spirits. ... On the contrary, if the imagination be trained from childhood to bridle itself and to keep from being carried away by its own impetuosity – an impetuosity which creates only brilliant enthusiasts - and to check, to restrain, its ideas, to examine them in all their aspects in order to see all sides of an object, then the imagination, ready in judgment, will comprehend the greatest possible sphere of objects, through reasoning; and its vivacity (always so good a sign in children, and only needing to be regulated by study and training) will be only a far-seeing insight without which little progress can be made in the Sciences” (10).

¹¹ It is this approach that then resonates in the later Foucault’s notion of the subject as subjectivation.

being. The docile body, in fact, captures and summarizes the ideal type human being, the sort of human being, that is, that suits the totalizing intentions of the power system: a being produced as the effect of power, one who functions as its instrument, one obligated to take responsibility for power's objectives: *an object of and for power that finds its very meaning in being power's subject*. The meticulous descriptions of the production of an 'ideal' soldier, a convict, a monk, a worker, a school-child, almost exclusively rely on the concurrent discourses of power, envisioned and articulated by the military commanders, architects, law-makers, politicians, theologians and philosophers who laid down the floor plan for a disciplinary-society. Foucault refers, for example, to Boussanelle who provides an account of the creation of the 'ideal-figure' of a soldier in his book, *Le Bon Militaire*.¹²

Place the bodies in a little world of signals to each of which is attached a single, obligatory response: it is a technique of training, of *dressage*, that 'despotically excludes in everything the least representation, and the smallest murmur'; the disciplined soldier 'begins to obey whatever he is ordered to do; his obedience is prompt and blind; an appearance of indocility, the least delay would be a crime' (DP 166).

For the eighteenth century military, the soldier is a thing made from "a formless clay, an inapt body" (DP 135), a living raw material composed of bones, joints and muscles that are to be forced into the wished form, manufactured as an optimally functional 'automatism.' The limitation of this perspective can be highlighted by comparing it with a slave-holder's comprehension of the slave. Since slaves in the western tradition have been so often theorized only as serving bodies, void of mind and conscience, entities for which corporeal punishment readily appears an efficient method of correction.¹³

¹² One may see the very opposite imagination, a very undocile body in Jaroslav Hašek's 1923 novel *The Good Soldier Švejk*, set in Austria-Hungary during the First World War.

¹³ A good example of such perspective is an account of a Scottish visitor to a West Indian plantation in 1775 cited in Margaret Hunt's *Women in 18th-Century Europe*: "When one comes to be better acquainted with the nature of the Negroes, the horror of flogging must wear off. It is the suffering of the human mind that constitutes the greatest misery of punishment but with them it is merely corporeal. As to the brutes it inflicts no wound on their mind, whose Natures seem made to bear it, and whose sufferings are not attended with shame or pain beyond the present

For these ideologues of power, a human body is a collection of aptitudes and forces to be manipulated and trained to respond to power's needs and demands: to increase power's productivity and control. The one-way perspective from power to humans as bodies has no recognition of the inherent reductionism involved in such perspectives. Perhaps inadvertently, the perspective of power takes a central position in Foucault's genealogy of modern western 'man' when he removes the distinction between *conceiving* humans as bodies and reducing them *to* bodies. On this level of analysis, then, the body is *conceived* strictly as an artifact.

On another level of analysis—beyond its *conception* as an artifact—then, the docile-body is presented as a concrete historical *reality* denoting and entailing the modern subject of western civilization up to the mid-twentieth century. Thus the modern subject comes to be defined as a body inhabited by a soul¹⁴ produced and utilized by and for the disciplinary power diagram which is “the power and knowledge relations” supported by a set of techniques “that invest human bodies and subjugate them by turning them into objects of knowledge” (DP 28).

The two levels of the analysis of the docile-body, one as an ideal-typical abstraction and the other as the historical reality, are conflated throughout Foucault's genealogical account of the modern subject. They bleed into one another. The docile-body, then, is an artifact, but in more than one way; it is the description of an *ideal* human being from the *perspective* of the disciplinary power machine, risen from and supported by enlightenment materialist theories of human nature, as well as theories of discipline, training and surveillance proceeding hand in hand with coercion and punishment (DP 29). Yet, it is also an artifact presented as a *reality*, this time

moment.” Amanda Vickery, “Don’t Marry a Christian,” *The London Review of Books*, Vol. 33 No. 17, 8 September 2011, 24-25.

¹⁴ At this stage of his work, Foucault uses the term ‘soul’ to signify a cluster of concepts such as subjectivity, consciousness, psyche, personality, etc. (DP 29-30).

through Foucault's analysis of "the modern subject" and presented as that which is *concretely* produced or created through application of techniques of power.

[The soul] exists, it has a reality, it is produced permanently around, on, within the body by the functioning of a power that is exercised on those punished – and, in a more general way, on those one supervises, trains and corrects, over madmen, children at home and at school, the colonized, over those who are stuck at a machine and supervised for the rest of their lives (*DP* 29).

Conceptualized as a docile-body, then, the modern western individual in every capacity, whether as a school-child or a factory-worker, a soldier or a prisoner, comes to be an object and instrument of and for the disciplinary power whose subjectivity is that which is produced and invested in and on the body as the effect of power: receptivity devoid of respons-ability, hence a reified survival-ego.

The subjection of an Object: the production of docility

The individual is no doubt the fictitious atom of an 'ideological' representation of society; but he is also a reality fabricated by this specific technology of power that I have called 'discipline' (*DP* 194).

Foucault quite rightly contests the naturalness and the necessity of binary categorization and representation of humanity under good and evil, normal and abnormal, sane and crazy, etc.. He recognizes humans not as "given," presenting them, like Marx, as historically produced, but, unlike Marx, they are presented as strictly the effect of different techniques of power and modes of objectification and subjectification. In his preface to Deleuze and Guittari's *Anti-Oedipus*, Foucault calls for a new way of living, a constant de-individualization as opposed to a struggle for "rights," since, he argues, "[t]he individual" and its "rights," "is the product of power."¹⁵

Recognition of the totalizing tendency of bio-disciplinary power (through processes of surveillance, punishment, constraint and 'normalization') is supported by the claim that the entire

¹⁵ Preface to *Anti-Oedipus* by G. Deleuze and F. Guittari, xiv.

history of western civilization exhibits a process of *intensification* of power and illustrated with examples from the ancient Greeks to the present time.¹⁶ In *Discipline and Punish*, he briefly outlines changes in the “technology of power,” its “function” and “objectives” from the traditional to the bio-disciplinary¹⁷ regime of power. If power has always recognized and targeted the body as its object of control, he claims, what changes is the scale and mode of control. If, traditionally, power’s control was exercised en masse over the services of its subjects, such as in slavery, in a disciplinary mode, control was extended over the functionality of the body at the level of the individual, still later expanding to the species body under bio-power technology (*DP* 135-141, *HS* 143-45). Foucault’s argument here amounts to the claim that, historically, power’s trajectory includes a constant self-intensification through expansion of its scope to increasingly broader and deeper minutia of the body’s objectification. Hence, in this paradigm, both the individual and its “rights” appear as object-effects, the successful constructions of a *totalizing* bio-disciplinary power technology.

It is on the basis of the analysis of disciplinary power in *Discipline and Punish*, then, that Foucault theorizes the modern subject in western civilizations as a subjectivized ‘body’ and as a ‘visibility’ within a Panopticon order. Referring to the history of power and its relations with the

¹⁶ For the argument that the concept of intensification is a central theme throughout Foucault’s work, see Jeffrey T. Nealon, *Foucault Beyond Foucault*.

¹⁷ In *The History of Sexuality* Foucault locates bio-politics in a two-pronged evolution of power in the western world, “one centered on the body as a machine” and the other on “the species body ... imbued with mechanics of life.” He writes, “In concrete terms, starting in the seventeenth century, this power over life evolved in two basic forms; these forms were not antithetical, however; they constituted rather two poles of development linked together by a whole intermediary cluster of relations. One of these poles—the first to be formed, it seems—centered on the body as a machine: its disciplining, the optimization of its capabilities, the extortion of its forces, the parallel increase of its usefulness and its docility, its integration into systems of efficient and economic controls, all this was ensured by the procedures of power that characterized the *disciplines*: an *anatomo-politics* of the *human body*. The second, formed somewhat later, focused on the species body, the body imbued with the mechanics of life and serving as the basis of the biological processes: propagation, births and mortality, the level of health, life expectancy and longevity, with all the conditions that can cause these to vary. Their supervision was effected through an entire series of interventions and *regulatory controls*: a *bio-politics* of the *population*. The disciplines of the body and the regulations of the population constituted the two poles around which the organization of power over life was deployed” (*HS* 139).

“body”—the history of punishment—Foucault details disciplinary power relations, under the rubric of this “Panopticism,” as an intensification of power’s control and manipulation in the transformation of the body from serving slave to utilizable body. He argues that Bentham’s architectural plan for the panopticon prison, with its optical system, rationality and functionality, is more than a “dream building”; it is in fact, an “ideal form” of the diagram of a mechanism of power (*DP* 205). This is a diagram described as applicable to any social space that contains individuals or groups of individuals. In this description one can hear the resonance of Bentham’s rationale for the application of his “inspection principle,” a principle of uninterrupted surveillance, to schools as well as ‘mad houses’ and factory floors, among other social spaces. Bentham enthuses,

What would you say, if by the gradual adoption and diversified application of this single principle, you should see a new scene of things spread itself over the face of civilized society? - morals reformed, health preserved, industry invigorated, instruction diffused, public burthens lightened, economy seated as it were upon a rock, the Gordian knot of the poor-laws not cut but untied - all by a simple idea in architecture?¹⁸

According to Foucault, the application of this very Panopticon diagram to institutions ranging from war to education, from health to correction, succeeded in producing a knowable and docile subject: the object-effect of the disciplinary power mechanism. It is, however, to prisons that he turns as the “privileged locus” of the realization of the Panopticon in its totality: a paradigmatic place that is “at once surveillance and observation, security and knowledge, individualization and totalization, isolation and transparency” (*DP* 249). For Foucault, then, prison is the site from which to observe the function of disciplinary power relations with regard both to production of knowledge and the modern subject. It is so privileged, in fact, that it is historically related to the origins of the social sciences themselves. He writes:

¹⁸ Jeremy Bentham, “Letter xxi,” from *The Panopticon Writings*. Ed. Miran Bozovic (London: Verso, 1995), 29-95.

I am not saying that the human sciences emerged from the prison. But, if they have been able to be formed and to produce so many profound changes in the episteme, it is because they have been conveyed by a specific and new modality of power: a certain policy of the body, a certain way of rendering the group of men docile and useful. This policy required the involvement of definite relations of knowledge in relations of power; it called for a *technique of overlapping subjection and objectification*; it brought with it new procedures of individualization. The carceral network constituted one of the armatures of this power-knowledge that has made the human sciences historically possible. *Knowable* man (soul, individuality, consciousness, conduct, whatever it is called) is *the object-effect of this analytical investment, of this domination-observation*" (DP 305, my emphasis).¹⁹

Foucault's intentions notwithstanding, his analysis of the dynamics of Panopticism in prison structures actually provides a privileged locus from which to explicate how the dream-image, the ideal-type of the prisoner from the perspective of power is increasingly transformed in the process of analysis into the *reality*, the actual prisoners, and, from there, the actual modern western subject. Drawing on Bentham's "inspection principle" and his structural blue-print of the Panopticon, Foucault facilitates this transformation in his description of the functional role of the total separation between the *gaze* and the *visible*. Like the gaze of the wearer of the ring of Gyges' in Plato's *Republic*, the gaze in Foucault's analysis is one-way. Similar to Gyges, that which has a gaze (here, the prison guard/power) is invisible, and therefore, the prisoner is not only rendered an object of light-being²⁰--hence a visibility--, but also an *object for* the source of the gaze. "Disciplinary power... is exercised through its invisibility; at the same time it imposes on those whom it subjects a principle of compulsory visibility. In discipline, it is the subjects who have to be seen" (DP 187). In this paradigm, then, where the human being is reduced to a body that is always already in an immediate encounter with power, to be receptive is to be

¹⁹ Note that it is not that the human sciences are facilitated by the power-knowledge network, that aspects of their 'knowledge' are founded on a nexus modeled on Weber's rationalization as a process in which more and more is rendered calculable and subjected to calculation, but the claim is much more totalized than that: "'knowable man' is *the object-effect*" of this "domination-observation."

²⁰ In his rendition of Foucault's archaeology of the gaze throughout his works, Deleuze gives a phenomenology of the two forms of the visible and the articulable as components of knowledge. He argues that "there is a 'there is' of light, a being of light or a light-being, just as there is a language-being," a being of language, and a 'there is' of language (Deleuze, *Foucault*, 58). "The light-being is a strictly indivisible condition, an *a priori* that is uniquely able to lay visibilities open to sight ..." (59).

determinable as a result of the body's *a priori* condition as a visibility, a light-being constituted through its subjection to the historical particularity of the power relations.

Being visible here entails receptivity-determinability, *i.e.*, being receptive of a power that is exercised over the visibility, a particular power exercise which in its turn is ensured by the compulsory visibility of the bodies: "Their visibility assures the hold of the power that is exercised over them. It is the fact of being constantly seen, of being able always to be seen, that maintains the disciplined individual in his subjection" (*DP* 187).

With the absence of interiority in this conception, the combination of a visible-receptivity and invisible-spontaneity creates a space wherein there is no room for respons-ability, for the participation of the prisoner in the place she lives, except as an "object of examination" (as a human being is reduced to the individual, then to a body, and finally to a visibility). Thus, instead of a *living-being*, the prisoner is an *alive-body*,²¹ a corporeality without sensibility, held "in a mechanism of objectification" (*DP* 187).

He who is subjected to a field of visibility, and who knows it, assumes responsibility for the constraints of power; he makes them play spontaneously upon himself; he inscribes in himself the power relation in which he simultaneously plays both roles; he becomes the principle of his own subjection (*DP* 202-03).

The respons-ability of the modern subject as the docile-body is but a playing out of the will of the power; interiority is but the internalized exteriority, thus the absence of separation.

With that, Foucault completes the reification of human subjectivity, having proclaimed the actual achievement of the intentions of his Enlightenment sources and all that follows from this reified notion. That is, the body placed in the field of visibility automatically functions as an extended arm of power upon its self; all human mediation has been removed. The prisoner's

²¹ For the distinction between a *living-being* and an *alive-body* see Section One, chapter one, "Sensory Deprivation: Melting into there is," page 31.

response originates from the outside; he who is an object of power receives the intentions and reacts according to the very objectives of the power exercised over the body. That which is received *constitutes* the body's interiority, as this visibility "assumes responsibility for the constraint of power": "each individual under its [the gaze's] weight will end by interiorizing to the point that he is his own overseer, each individual thus exercising this surveillance over, and *against*, himself" (PK 155, emphasis added.).

In this light we can understand the systemic value of Foucault's statement when he says the soul exists, "has a reality," is, in fact, "born ... out of methods of punishment, supervision and constraint" (DP 29). Individuality or subjectivity, then, is "the effect and instrument" of the mastery power exercises over the body (30). This is, then, precisely the effect Bentham envisioned for "the gradual adoption and diversified application"²² of his "inspection principle," for example, in its application to schools, where there would be "no other difference than what there is between *command* on one side and *subjection* on the other."²³

To bring into relief the Foucaultian conceptualization of the docile body then: Foucault depicts visibility as working like a "trap" (200): one is laid open to the gaze of "a perfect eye." The gaze is also the source of light, illuminating "everything that must be known" (DP 173). Visibility, Deleuze²⁴ extrapolates in *Foucault*, is an object of light-being. And light as a "there is" is the non-subjective absolute condition for visibilities (F 58-59). Under the light of observation the prisoner is a visibility, "an object of information" (DP 200), a knowable and analyzable body, but "never a subject of communication." Again, this is a one-way street. Having been placed in a cage-like cell, open and visible to the gaze of power, the prisoner is

²² Bentham, Letter XXI, "Schools."

²³ Ibid., Emphasis in the original.

²⁴ Given the affinity between the two thinkers, Gilles Deleuze's *Foucault* offers a reliable close and systemic presentation of Foucault's theoretical development.

transformed into a visible-being, and, as such, she functions as Deleuze puts it, as the “concrete substance of the force,” or, the formalized “matter of force.”²⁵

Thus, the observational tower signifies power as the “there is” of *light*, representing power as invisible-unverifiable spontaneity, the gaze of which acts upon the visible-receptivity. Power then, as spontaneity, affects the body, rendering it its own object of knowledge-domination. The automatic functioning of power is assured through the permanent visibility of its subjects (*DP* 201). By the sheer fact of being subjected to the field of visibility, and being conscious of being under surveillance, then, Foucault presumes, one “assume[s] responsibility” for one’s own subjection;²⁶ that is, one responds to power as one is *supposed* to according to power’s prescription: hence, the production of docility. One is docile, that is to say, because one is docile. A prisoner, for example, then functions or behaves as the ‘ideal’ soldier who emits only the “obligatory responses” which are inscribed in, on and upon his body through a system of signals and codes. The mechanism of objectification perfected with the principle of subjection comes to fruition: through a political economy of the body a “knowable man (soul, individuality, consciousness, conduct, whatever it is called)” is born who is “the object-effect of this analytic investment, of this domination-observation” (*DP* 305). Within this proximity between body and power, and through the spontaneity of this power—functioning as the “function of force”—and receptivity of the body—functioning as the “matter of force”—docility is the induced response. In distinction from the subjectivity of a survival-ego which is of an inter-human relation, born in

²⁵ Gilles Deleuze, *Foucault* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 71-72. Hereafter cited as (*F*)

²⁶ Here, Foucault’s disciplinary regime offers a palimpsest version of the Christian conscience: “If thine eye offend thee, pluck it out” (*Bible*, Mathew 18:9; see also Mathew 5:29 and Mark 9:47). The Christian must observe his/her innermost thoughts, feelings, etc. from the point of view of the (Christian) conscience and, obedient to its commands, master and eradicate those subjective thoughts, feelings, etc. deemed sinful/evil by the (panoptical) conscience; it must follow the law. The soul is made by the power of God for the Christian, by power itself for Foucault, but the major difference is that Jesus leaves acceptance or rejection of this docility up to the individual whereas Foucault does not; for him it is automatic. In fundamental ways, Foucault’s conception of power is an attempt at a phenomenology (a “how”) of a secularized, this-worldly imposition of Christian conscience, that is to say, a phenomenology of Bentham’s Panopticon.

its need-based response to the exteriority, subjectivity as docility is born out of the inter-power relations taking place within the *khôra* of the force field, the field of unformalized and unformed power, where power is both the relation and the terms of relation.

Docile-body: the survival-ego reified

While the survival-ego is the culmination of the *I-in-tension*'s alienation from and occultation of its Desire for the other and, hence, the reduction of its self to its needs for survival with its fear and insecurity, the docile-body is the survival-ego flattened to the dimensions of the disciplinary power system. Or perhaps better, it appears to arise from the system of power-relations and thus always already to be a system-identification, always already without the possibility of a Desire to alienate from or occlude. Stripped from its sensible-corporeality, its needs and desires, its respons-ability and responsibility, Foucault's modern human, is reduced to a body as a collection of forces and utilities to be enticed, directed, invested, harvested as docility.

In contrast, the survival-ego is not solid; it is not totalized. Neither is it at home or at peace. Though under the urge of its survivalism and thus of its tendency to same and totalize both the exteriority and itself as an object of and for survival, as a negativity it remains a respons-ability-in-tension. So long as it endures, there remains under its survivalist crust the insistent nagging of a self always finding itself put into question and in need of an apology.²⁷ There is a tension here that is *Janus faced*: even when the I turns inward, its turning inward is of its encounters with and responses to the exteriority.

If a survival-ego arises from a corporeal-sensibility which is always already open and receptive of the exteriority, if it is a finitude with its desire for the other occluded as it is

²⁷ That is, potentially available to it is what Levinas calls the "bad conscience," always already finding itself in need of reassurance as to its "righteousness." See Chapter Six, "The naked I and bad conscience," 241.

menaced by the unfathomable future and the alterity of the Other, and its needs and fears for its preservation are accentuated, it nevertheless relates to and actively participates as a subject in the world within which it stands, and from which it lives. Even when its responses and relating to the others and the Other are at once in reaction to its own needs and fears, these responses are always already within the space of sociality. Insofar as the survival-ego relates in this way, it relates to itself as an object of survival and relates to others as objects in relation to the survival of that object.²⁸ Even as the survival-ego constantly totalizes itself, reducing its sensible-corporeality to mere living-being in need of preservation, naming others as mere instruments of that preservation, it must at least also constantly in some fashion postpone its Desire for the others; it must occlude and alienate its non-indifference. Even when one's survivalist response to the exteriority is essentially need-based, its for-itself subjectivity is nevertheless born in and of proximity with the Other, is, once again, always already a sociality. The docile-body, on the other hand, is always merely *of* power, born of and in response to power, finally only power's own reaction to itself.

While each is a receptivity, the survival-ego lives primarily in and as respons-ability encountering the exteriority; it is always a non-indifference, and thus responsible for its subjectivity. The docile-body, in contrast, is a receptivity that lives essentially as visible to, and, determined²⁹ by the encountered power. The dual differences between a respons-able versus a determinable being, on the one hand, and an exterior-encountering versus a power-encountering being, on the other, brings into focus two crucial distinctions between the two conceptions. First,

²⁸ This orientation is, for example, the essential basis for the for-itself sociality of Thomas Hobbes's *Leviathan*.

²⁹ There is a temporal distinction here: the survival-ego, it may be said, is at most potentially "determinable," in a general state of determinability, while the docile body is already determined, that is to say, totalized, lost from its birth.

there is the distinction in what each signifies, and, second, there is the distinction as to what each entails with respect to the possibility of resistant-ethical subjectivity.

First, as for what each signifies: to say that even in its survivalist form an I is a sociality is to say that it is a corporeal-sensibility that *delivers* into, becomes, a subject in its encounter with the Other; a survivalist-I, becomes an I in *response* to the Other. Hence, as we saw in chapter three, it is a subject, as it is respons-able and responsible. A survival-ego signifies, then, a *sociality* and respons-ability/responsibility. A docile-body, on the other hand, as an effect rather than a response is a derivative object, *i.e.*, a *non-sociality*. Moreover, it is steeped *in* and is *of* power: a living-body —a corporeality rather than a sensible-corporeality—*fabricated* as a ‘subject’ by and for the impinging power;³⁰ it is invested with the function and identity wielded by the dominant power; it is individual and determinable. The docile-body signifies an *insularity* and a *determinability*.

Second, as for conceiving effective resistance, the for-itself purview of the survival-ego’s resistance, in responding to its own needs and fears, can and does fall prey to and create new totalities to replace the old. However, the survival-ego, as the dominant aspect of the I-in-tension, always retains the *potentiality* to resist its own self-reduction and to reach outward from its occluded Desire for the Other. Thus, while always dwelling in the *conatus essendi*, it nonetheless remains potentially capable of freeing its response to the exteriority from the domination of its own needs and fears. A survival-ego, then, carries the possibility of a resistance capable of transcending the in-itself and for-itself in its Desire for the Other and thus the possibility of a for-the-Other-subjectivity.

³⁰ In the language of adaptation, the direction of fit for the survival-ego has a capacity to move from itself to the exteriority, a capacity which, in its exclusive receptivity, the docile body lacks. Thus the docile body’s very resistance remains within and only contributes to the intentions of the power nexus within which it is ensnared. The survival-ego ‘delivers into’ in its response, while the docile body is merely ‘delivered into’ by power.

In contradistinction to this possibility, a docile-body's resistance (wherever that impetus may come from) to totalizing power relations remains *contained* within the boundaries of the *conatus essendi*: no matter how much it may change its systemic-power identification, it remains tied to its own singular body, it has no space for being-for-the-other.³¹ Its *ultimate* horizon remains frozen within the survivalist purview. As an I born in and of power,³² the resistance of the Foucaultian subject precludes any relations beyond power. The struggle of the Foucaultian individual in its attempt at desubjectivation and de-totalization can only re-subjectivize and re-totalize itself as another power generated totality, its resistance limited to a reallocation of the source of subjectivizing power.

All the Foucaultian subject can do is to insist on its independence as a totality in and for itself against the dominant regime of power relations; hence it always remains a reified *conatus essendi*. In the upshot, then, the Foucaultian subject, whether docile or ethical, can be nothing more than a product of inter-power relations, relations born of the body's response to the continuous impositions of power. The soul is produced, is a product tout court, through the imposition of power on the visible body, a visibility also produced by power. Apparently, there is, in the end, only power everywhere, without a drop of respons-ability, nor, therefore, of responsibility.

³¹ As a for-the-system entity that has been produced by a power regime, the docile body does not even achieve the identity of the "authoritarian personality" as described by Adorno in *The Authoritarian Personality* or the "authoritarian character" of Erich Fromm's *Escape From Freedom*, both of which posit subjective motives.

³² The docile body, it must be emphasized is born as a product of disciplinary power, while the aesthetic self, as we shall see, is a product of the power of the isolated autonomous subject. Thus both remain derivatives of power. Neither can escape the survivalist domain.

ii) Power, Power, Everywhere

What I am trying to do is to show how power relations can get through to the very depth of bodies, materially, without having been relayed by the representation of subjects. If power affects the body, it is not because it was first internalized in people's consciousness (*FL* 209).

In the Foucaultian paradigm, despite the death of the Subject, spontaneity, agency, intentionality and representationality do remain alive and well in the social-field, but only as attributes of power. In fact, it is not too much to say that, committed to breaking down the subject/object dichotomy by the removal of the subject as interiority, and to rendering it a derivative of power, the separation between exteriority and interiority, however inadvertently, comes to naught in the Foucaultian system of thinking. Power itself thus slips into the position of the *given*: not as omnipotent but omnipresent; it comes, as we shall see, from everywhere and traverses every point and knot, including all bodies and all social forms, acting as the immanent cause *and* effect of the entire social field, all relations and institutions.

No doubt Foucault's critiques of the limited notion of power predominant in established theory has been indispensable in freeing the analysis of power and power relations from the confines of the conception of power as a property or possession of an individual, a class or a state, a possession that could be done away with by removing those who *have* or *control* the power. Yet as he untangles power from its narrow traditional domains he inverts their relations. He conceives and theorizes power as a multiplicity of ubiquitous forces, existing everywhere at once and contributing from all directions. Here, human beings as well as institutions are inexorably caught up in the concatenations within this matrix of ubiquitous forces as these forces move through them as points and knots, producing, inciting, inducing, speeding up and slowing down, affecting and creating actions and producing outcomes, fabricating both imagination and

reality.³³ Thus power, he insists, does not contain or stifle some authentic or true self but rather it is productive as a matrix for which there is no ‘outside’; nothing remains that could be uncovered or rescued. In fact, he writes: “The man described for us, whom we are invited to free, is already in himself the effect of a subjection much more profound than himself” (*DP* 30). Presenting power technology and relations of power as productive, and in the absence of anything exterior to power, hence precluding distinguishing repressive and destructive aspects of power from other aspects, leads Foucault to what I call the “productive hypothesis,” a process that renders power *the* source of representation.

The Productive Hypothesis

It is in *Discipline and Punish* that he famously calls for abandoning “once and for all ... describ[ing] the effects of power in negative terms” “In fact, power produces; it produces reality; it produces its domains of objects and rituals of truth. The individual and the knowledge that may be gained from him belong to this production” (*DP* 194). Foucault identifies and defines ‘discipline’ as the particular technology of power throughout western modern societies. Panoptic discipline is introduced as a particular technology of objectification and subjectivization, the subjection of the human body, and, to a minute degree, of social space and time. It is this that I call Foucault’s *productive hypothesis*. The book offers a rich collection of recipes and guidelines from which Foucault extracts the details of how institutions of power construct the space, organize the time and codify the movements and gestures of a body in every capacity in order to maximize control over the body and its outcomes, both en masse and retail (*DP* 137). Disciplinary power, then, is about extraction of systemically useful forces from time,

³³ Though for Foucault power is non-subjective, it is not, of course, arbitrary. Power is intentional; it has aims and objectives which are decipherable. Foucault’s cursory analysis of power as it appears in western civilization points toward its totalizing/intensifying impetus as it expands its control from body to soul and to functions and desires of both individuals and the species; see *HS* 92-102.

space and bodies to a maximum efficiency and at minimum cost (*DP* 154). This extraction, however, is accomplished by filling the proximity of the body – and all it encounters – with power. Power fastens the body to its task, constituting “a body-weapon, body-tool, body-machine complex” (153). According to this reasoning, for example, the prisoner as a body-guardian is produced through the application of a surveillance that fastens the prisoner to the ‘invisible’ and ‘unverifiable’ gaze of power. In other words, the productive hypothesis rests on an already reduced notion of the human being as “natural body,” “bearer of forces” and as thus “susceptible to specified operation” (155) suited to satisfying the aims and objectives of the impetus of power, namely the expansion of its reach and the intensification of its control.³⁴

In these productive processes of ‘discovering’, devouring and digesting the human body as an object and producing the modern individual as docility (or delinquency),³⁵ the human being is always set as power’s other, an other that is already actually samed and de-faced by power. In this one-way dynamic between the disciplinary power and the human being there is, once again, no room for a sensibility, no room for an inter-human relation, for a human’s participation as a respons-ability. Fixing one’s interpretive analysis of the ‘body politics’ and genealogical investigation of the modern subject and subjectivity within power’s perspective and discourse as he does here could only be plausible if one had already committed one’s analysis to perception of

³⁴ Lest one be tempted to interpret these statements as of limited application, leaving room for other aspects of the individual to intervene, one must remember Foucault’s definition of the ‘subject’ as an entity subject to someone else by control, or tied to one’s own identity, both of which suggest subjugation to a form of power (see above page 6). This definition of the human subject conforms to his choice of ‘body’ as the definitive signifier of the modern western individual discussed in *Discipline and Punish*. Explicating modern society as a “Panoptic society” instituted on a “carceral archipelago” he writes, “the carceral network constituted one of the armatures of this power-knowledge that has made the human sciences historically possible. Knowable man (soul, individuality, consciousness, conduct, whatever it is called) is the object-effect of this analytical investment of this domination-observation” (*DP* 305). This object-effect comes as either “docility” or “delinquency,” the latter of which might seem either a failure or a form of resistance against the disciplinary society. Yet Foucault argues that delinquency was produced “by the same mechanisms” which “inculcated docility” (*DP* 300). It is not only an effect of the system but also “a part and an instrument of it” (282), one that “was invested by power” (289). For the production of delinquency not as the failure of disciplinary society but as production of a carceral continuity see *DP*, the section “Illegalities and delinquency,” 257-293, especially 272-285.

³⁵ See the preceding footnote; see also “From Torture to Cellblock” in *FL* 146-150.

the human being as a ‘body-object’ in-itself, *i.e.*, if one’s analysis had already founded itself on the enlightenment materialist analysis of humans as corporeality without sensibility. It is by the absolute removal of the interiority with his removal of “the Subject” in his refutation of both the ‘repressive hypothesis’ and the philosophy of representation that Foucault, perhaps inadvertently, eliminates sensibility, essentially reducing the human to the body. He describes his work as an attempt “to show how power relations can get through to the very depths of bodies, materially, without having been relayed by the representation of subjects,” this by “the deployment of power exercised on the body itself” affecting it and producing it, for instance, as a sexual subject (*FL* 209).³⁶ Within the paradigm of the ‘productive hypothesis’, Foucault’s analysis is not only incapable of perceiving humans as anything more than object-effects of power, but also gives representation itself to power as the analysis of the modern subject is produced through the discourse of the organizers and ideologues of institutions of power.

Punishment

Punishment, Foucault writes, is integral to the disciplinary power system: “At the heart of all disciplinary systems functions a small penal mechanism” (*DP* 177). He iterates: every person is caught “in a punishable, punishing universality,” one in which “the whole indefinite domain of non-conformity is punishable” (*DP* 178-79). The centrality of punishment begs for the simplest questions: what is it about the human being that is more than the objectified-body and subjectified-soul, the ‘reality’ produced by power? What is this *surplus* ‘reality’ of the human being that requires this constant vigilance of the power-network and the enforcement of the ‘despotic’ force in order to keep it out, to shave it off, and/or to occlude it? What is it that is punished rather than simply trained and disciplined? If our interiority and our individuality is an

³⁶ There is a great difference between power relations’ capacities to get through to the depths of bodies without being ‘relayed’ through representation or consciousness and “producing” a “sexual subject.”

effect produced as a result of the human body being an object of power and knowledge, then what is there to be punished? What does the appearance of “indocility,” “non-conformity” refer to, or signify? Is it the remainder of the effects of a different or previous technology of power that is to be punished away from one’s body and soul? And how does the universality of the punishable and the punishing, the infliction of pain and suffering, and the despotic authority over one’s life and death square with the ‘productive hypothesis’?

Foucault describes the functionality of punishment as follows:

In short, the art of punishing, in the régime of disciplinary power, is aimed neither at expiation, nor even precisely at repression. It brings five quite distinct operations into play The perpetual penalty that traverses all points and supervises every instant in the disciplinary institutions compares, differentiates, hierarchizes, homogenizes, excludes. In short, it *normalizes* (DP 182-183).

The problem with this analysis is not in the detailing of the use and benefits of punishment for disciplinary power; many references to that effect have been provided in the text. The problem resides in analyzing punishment only from the functional point of view of its administrators. From this point of view, punishment and its application to bodies resemble the application of gardening tools to trees³⁷: one prunes to achieve the desired results; punishment, in this view, has the *function* of shaping the individual in accordance to its location and maintaining it in its proper place. That which is punished away appears as an undesirable growth, not really a part of proper subjectivity at all, but an aberrant malformation to be corrected. Such images are erected on the basis of a series of reductions of the human being, moving from a corporeal-sensibility, i.e., a being with needs and desires—a susceptibility to pain and fear as well as Desire and hope— to a material body, and from the body to a light-being, a visibility receptive of and completely responsive to power.

³⁷ See the image of the gardening analogy, “Orthopedics or the art of preventing and correcting deformities of the body in children” (1749), in *DP* (Plate ten, pages 169 and 170).

Such a notion of human being, with its externalization, its diremption of all but the body, leaves no recognition of the destruction of the aspects of interiority that punishment intends, nor, therefore, of the distortion of its responses to exteriority, to others and to life that occurs to the extent punishment's intentions are achieved. *What is rendered invisible here, that is, is the constant reduction of one's being to one's survivalist closure in reaction to the pain and fear of pain inflicted by punishment.* Within the productive hypothesis, a prisoner, modern 'man', is an "object of information" and "never a subject in communication," and thus certainly not both. Laid open to the gaze of power and receptive of power's manipulation of his body, he appears as an object of knowledge, a provider of information. Under the uninterrupted gaze of power the prisoner, in this view, becomes her own guard, an element of, and responsible for, the self-maintenance of power. Such logic relies, then, on the transposition to reality of the disciplinary power's own ideal image of the Panopticon and of its prisoners.³⁸ This transposition is well reflected in Dreyfus and Rabinow's account of the disciplinary power of Panopticism:

This new power is continuous, disciplinary, and anonymous. ... The design is multipurpose. *If* the Panopticon functioned perfectly, almost all internal violence would be eliminated. For *if* the prisoner is never sure when he was being observed, he becomes his own guardian.³⁹

These big 'ifs' are tainted with built-in assumptions. The 'perfect' prisoner here is already reduced to a mere visibility, samed, defaced and prepared for the perfect Panopticon. The simple

³⁸ Bentham's Postscript to his "Letters of the Inspection Principle" provides a telling example of such ideal images of the desired prisoner and the exercise of the panopticon's power: "Here, if anywhere, is the place for the law of mutual responsibility to show itself to advantage. Confined within the boundary of each cell, it can never transgress the limits of the strictest justice. *Either inform, or suffer as an accomplice.* What artifice can elude, what conspiracy withstand, so just, yet inexorable a law? The reproach, which in every other abode of guilt attaches itself with so much virulence to the character of the *informer*, would find nothing here to fasten upon; the very mouth of complaint would be stopt by self-preservation—"I a betrayer? I unkind? Your's is the unkindness, who call upon me to smart for your offence, and suffer for your pleasure." Nowhere else could any such plea support itself—nowhere else is connivance so perfectly exposed to observation. This one stone was wanting to complete the fortress reared by the inspection principle: so many comrades, so many inspectors; the very persons to be guarded against are added to the number of the guards" (Postscript part 1, p 25).

³⁹ Hubert Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow, *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 189.

question is ‘why’? What prevents the prisoner, though he be constantly observed, though the Panopticon work ‘perfectly’, from responding to the gaze not as the power’s guardian, but as guardian of himself against the tower’s power? Even if he is complying with the regulation, he may well be *responding*, at least initially, as a survival-ego. And if one does not limit oneself, or does not remain content with his continuous existence as only a body, a mere material survivalist, one might become industrious in finding and inventing ways of resisting the watch tower and its hold on his being.⁴⁰ The non-cooperating response of the prisoner is not *just* due to the imperfection of the Panopticon (though it has yet to come to ‘perfection’ even in ‘sensory deprivation’ chambers⁴¹), but to the prisoner’s ‘imperfections’ as a visibility, namely its receptivity *and* its responsivity, its existence as a *living-being* and not just merely an *alive* body. In fact, a prisoner is a human subject that power, through personnel, institutions and technology, attempts to reduce to an object, and who can objectify itself and reduce itself to a mere need-based subject. True, a prisoner can slip down the slippery slope of a survivalist-subject: one who relates to itself as an object of its existence and responds to that which it receives only in reaction to its survival needs. Yet, the prisoner, even so, still participates in and responds to the exteriority rather than being nothing more than a body inculcated, invested and instilled with a desirable response from the outside. If not how could the scene of torture be also a “battle” with “an element of the duel”? Foucault writes:

In *the practice of torture*, pain, confrontation and truth were bound together: they worked together on the patient’s body. The search for truth through judicial torture was certainly a way of obtaining evidence, the most serious of all – the confession of the guilty person; but *it was also the battle*, and this victory of one adversary over the other, that ‘produced’ truth according to a ritual. In torture employed to extract a confession, there was an element of the investigation; there *also was an element of the duel* (DP 41, my emphasis).

⁴⁰ Such industrious invention, of course, takes place continually in prisons, whether metaphorical or actual.

⁴¹ See the discussion of sensory-deprivation and its effects in Chapter One above.

How can the torture bench become a battle-ground, a dueling field instead of a place of extraction and planting of ‘truth’? When infliction of pain is not only intended as retaliation, a marking and branding of a body, as a statement of the Sovereign’s ‘surplus power’ and illustration of the subject’s ‘lack of power’ (*DP* 29), it is a medium between two parties, the one who inflicts the pain and the one who receives it. These are the participants engaged in the duel. But what is it that happens on that bench which, accepting the analogy for the moment, determines who wins the duel? When torture is not just pure punishment but a means to extract confession, the tortured-body of the prisoner is not just the body of Kafka’s “In the Penal Colony” who receives the inscription of power. It is a duel between an institution of power and a human being who is receptivity and responsivity, otherwise torture would have been as clean and efficient as its architects dreamed. Foucault quotes Ferrière to show the equivocal nature of confession obtained through torture:

Judicial torture is a dangerous means of arriving at knowledge of the truth.... Nothing is more equivocal. There are guilty men who have enough firmness to hide a true crime ... and innocent victims who are made to confess crimes of which they were not guilty.⁴²

There were so many instances of resistance to torture and false confessions that the judicial system felt compelled to consider its effects on rendering judgment (*DP* 40-41). But who is it that, for example, resists? What is in that body in the torture chamber that is capable or incapable of resisting the pain? What are the ‘forces’ behind this capability or lack of it? The dominant power (the judicial system) has its own forces, techniques, sciences, machinery, regulations, etc.; what are the ‘forces’ on the side of the condemned body? Are they just the physical “firmness” or fragility of the body? If so, then why and for what does one resist unto-one’s-death? If resistance or capitulation is not a response, then what is it? If the individual is a subjected-body

⁴² Ferrière 612, quoted in *DP* 40.

without an interiority that is more than the one induced and inculcated by power, if it is a receptivity without respons-ability, then resistance under torture, at the moment of execution is *naught*. And that is how Foucault perceives it: “torture and execution ... preclude any resistance.”⁴³

The prisoner, however, is always *both*, a receptivity and a responsivity, “an object of information” *and* “a subject in communication.” She (like the analogous modern subject) is always in a state of receiving from and responding to the external world, participating in and responsible for that participation. Being receptive is more than being receptive of the power of the watchtower alone; it means being open and vulnerable with all of vulnerability’s promise of suffering and even death, not only of oneself but also of others as well. It verges on naiveté to hold that by being localized in a cage-like cell, in a class-room or on the factory floor, one is but a body functioning according to the architecture of its location and to the prescription of its architects, that the domination of here and now is absolute and that one does not respond or relate to others, to a past or future, that there is only a singular body within the power grid. That is to say that for power to succeed there must be a respons-able being who accepts and participates, however consciously or unconsciously, in and according to the coercions of the regime of power. The respons-able being is absent from Foucault’s system of power-knowledge-subjectivity.

In short then, reducing receptivity to visibility to power and restricting a human being to an *object* of gaze, is founded on the presumption that a human, emptied of the ‘subject’ is *essentially* a body, defaced and objectified. The problem for Foucault is that to take one as ‘subject of communication’ implies the possibility of a response that is not necessarily inscribed,

⁴³ “Space, Knowledge and Power,” *FL* 339.

induced, invested and produced by power, in and through the body, a space otherwise than power. Such a possibility creates a crack in the paradigm where the subject is always a derivative of power and interiority is the inner fold of power. Were such responsibility to be recognized, power (in any historical form or diagram) would lose its primordial ubiquitous status. It is from this starting point in *Discipline and Punish*, then, that the notion of power evolves to become the condition and the immanent cause of every other relation, filling up the space of proximity and reducing human relations to relations within power.

Non-subjective Intentionality/Spontaneity

Let us pause for a moment and consider specifically the nature of power, what it is and what it is not for Foucault. In a conversation with Deleuze in 1972, Foucault emphasizes the centrality of understanding of “the problem of power” as the key to finding “adequate forms of struggle” (*LCP* 212). But in order to tackle this “problem of power,” he argues, one must not ask what it is, but how it works. Power cannot be exposed to the question as to ‘what’ it is, and, in fact, cannot be theorized at all: “If one tries to erect a theory of power one will always be obliged to view it as emerging at a given place and time and hence to deduce it, to reconstruct its genesis” (*PK* 198-99). Instead, he suggests, one must take power for what it is ‘in reality’, namely, “an open, more-or-less coordinated ... cluster of relations” (*PK* 198,199), a ‘reality’, evidently essentially disconnected from its genesis. Moreover, power is neither “built on ‘wills’ (individual or collective)” nor driven by ‘interests’, but “power is constructed and functions out of *powers*, multitudes of questions and effects of power” (*FL* 210, my emphasis). In other words, a particular mechanism of power such as Panopticism or bio-power is a way, as he explains in

Discipline and Punish, “of making power relations function in a function, and making a function function through these power relations” (*DP* 207).⁴⁴

Here again, the complementarity of Foucault’s notion of power and his notion of the subject stands out in sharp relief. Having rejected the individual as a ‘pre-given’ entity and removed the spontaneity of the Cartesian “I think” as *acting* on receptive beings, this function of ‘acting’ is given over to power; the ‘force’ that ‘acts’ is severed from human volition and human relations; spontaneity becomes an attribute of power. As Dreyfus observes, Foucault may not replace the concept of the Subject with a concept of the modern human being or of the human in general, as does Heidegger’s *Dasein*, but it must be added that the vacuum left by his removal of the subject does not remain empty for long. Rather, having removed the universal subject and broken up the subject-object dichotomy, ‘power’ takes up residence as both the subject and the object, as, in fact, a stand-in for the universal subject. It is true, Foucault announces, in his discussion of power mechanisms and structure, that the general presupposition is “that certain persons exercise power over others. The term ‘power’ designates relationships between partners” (*SP* 217). However, power does not result “from the choice or decision of an individual subject” (*HS* 95), hence it is non-subjective; nor is it “acquired, seized, or shared” (94). If the “term ‘power’ designates relationships between partners” such designation does not make power the effect of inter-human relations. Inversely, free from the “system of Law-and-Sovereign” and rid of “the persona of the Prince” (97),⁴⁵ power in the Foucaultian paradigm must be understood as “the multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate and which

⁴⁴ Thus, omitting the question of “what” in favour of the “how,” the usual functionalist circularity is repeated here, the snake biting its own tail.

⁴⁵ “It is in this sphere of force relations that we must try to analyze the mechanisms of power. In this way we will escape from the system of Law-and-Sovereign which has captivated political thought for such a long time. And if it is true that Machiavelli was among the few ... who conceived the power of the Prince in terms of force relationships, perhaps we need to go one step further, do without the persona of the Prince, and decipher power mechanisms on the basis of a strategy that is immanent in force relationships” (*HS* 97).

constitute their own organization; as the process which ... transforms, strengthens, or reverses them; as the support which these force relations find in one another, thus forming a chain or a system ..." (HS 92). The sphere of the operation of force relations is 'everywhere,' its operation is 'action' (SP 220), and these actions are 'intentional' (HS 94). Power, then for Foucault, is intentional yet non-subjective.

This intentionality, on one hand, is in the impetus of its exercise: "The exercise of power consists in guiding the *possibility of conduct* and putting in order the *possible outcome*" (SP 221). 'Power' is to "govern" and to "lead" others, "to structure the possible field of actions of others" (SP 221). On the other hand, it can be inferred directly from what he calls the "rationality" of power as characterized by its tactics (HS 95) and strategies (92). Foucault describes power relations as "imbued, through and through, with calculations," *i.e.*, "there is no power that is exercised without series of aims and objectives" (95). *Discipline and Punish* details the aims and objectives of the power mechanism not only in a particular historical junction, but within its entire history. Referencing Ancient Greece and Antiquity, he presents a totalizing trajectory of the intention of power which, he argues, has always targeted the human body as its object and instrument of control.

In spite of the Foucaultian rejection of a theory of power, he nonetheless conceptualizes power as consisting of *forces in relations to other forces*, affecting and affected by one another, without being tied to an origin: not one omnipotent unity, but an *omnipresence* and *immanence*. In the Foucaultian paradigm *there is* power, coming from everywhere, "the over-all effect emerging from all ... mobilities," mobilities which themselves are "the moving substrata of force relations" which, by virtue of their heterogeneity, instability and "inequality, constantly engender states of power" (HS 93). *There is* power, as it is 'self-producing' (Ibid.), and other-producing. In

other words, the field of relations-of-power is the *khôra* of ‘reality’, both its mother and midwife: “it produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth”; it produces the individual, his subjectivity and the knowledge gained of him (*DP* 194). Regardless of power’s multiplicities and heterogeneities, regardless of the micro-physics of its functionality, regardless of various diagrams and their combinations conjured up into one or another regime of power relations, power *is* the relationship and constitutes the terms of every relation: among individuals, within the individual and between the individual and the world.

Power: Historical and Universal

All relations of force imply a power relation ... and each power relation can be referred to the political sphere of which it is a part, both as its effect and as its condition of possibility (*FL* 211).

Deleuze celebrates the introduction of the notion of the “diagram” in *Discipline and Punish* as the necessary medium that solves the question of a general immanent cause within the social field without necessitating an interiority, that is an immanent cause that “forms and organizes matter; or forms or finalizes functions and gives them aims” (*F* 33).

The notion “diagram” is key to grasping significances and implications of power as ‘a general immanent cause.’ According to Foucault, a mechanism of power reduced to its ideal form, “its functioning, abstracted from any obstacle, resistance or friction,” “detached from any specific use” is the diagram of a specific power technology (*DP* 205).⁴⁶ Panopticism, for instance, bracketed from the different forms of its function (such as education or punishment) and from the matter of its function (school-children or prisoners), is in itself a mechanism of

⁴⁶ In other words, a “diagram” is a ghostly version of the Weberian “ideal type”: “This conceptual pattern,” says Weber, “brings together certain relationships and events of historical life into a complex, which is conceived as an internally consistent system. Substantively, this construct in itself is like a *utopia* which has been arrived at by the analytical accentuation of certain elements of reality” Max Weber, *The Methodology of the Social Sciences*. Edward A. Shils & Henry A. Finch, Trans. & Eds. (New York: Free Press, 1949), 90. Perhaps the Foucaultian “diagram” is as good an example as any of the limits of this ‘utopian’ construct.

power relations “making a function function through these power relations” (*DP* 206). That is to say, within a disciplinary society, education and punishment are *formalized* functions of power which give them its aims of individualizing and totalizing, acting through the school and the prison as *formed* matter of power. Remembering Foucault’s argument that power is not a form but a field of forces, non-substantive evanescent and molecular, of which “the sovereignty of state, the form of the law, or the over-all unity of a domination ... are only the terminal forms power takes” (*HS* 92), further evidences the *presupposing* of ‘power’ as a field of unformed and un-formalized forces. Diagrams of power, reiterates Deleuze, are particular in the specific sense that they are maps of formed and formalized power relations that are erected out of a field of forces which itself is the space of informal and unformed points and knots of forces (*F* 36).

Diagrams refer to regimes of power, at particular historical junctions, whether traditional, disciplinary or bio-political. In the absence of the acting subject, the diagram, Deleuze infers, acts as the “immanent cause” of the concrete assemblages at any historical conjunction.

[T]he diagram acts as a non-unifying immanent cause that is coextensive with the whole social field: the abstract machine is like the cause of the concrete assemblages that execute its relations; and these relations between forces take place ‘not above’ but within the very tissue of the assemblages they produce (*F* 37).

Here Deleuze presents Foucault’s argument that relations of power are a) “not in the position of exteriority with respect to other types of relationships”; b) all other relations from economic process to sexual relations are “immanent in” the relations of power; c) these other relations are “the immediate effects of the divisions, inequalities and disequilibriums” that occur in relations of power; and finally d) relations of power are themselves “the internal conditions of these differentiations” (*HS* 94). Power then, causes the effects within which it is realized and integrated. In other words, the effect is at once the product, the realization and the integration of the cause which entails “a correlation or mutual presupposition between cause and effect” (*F* 37).

It is Foucault's presupposition of cause and effect, possible as a result of the introduction of the diagram, that according to Deleuze solves the problem of the removal of the speaking subject and links the visible and the articulable as the Panopticon diagram does with the knowable-man as the object-effect of power (*F* 38-39): hence, Deleuze reiterates, "there is no power relations without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations" (*DP* 27).⁴⁷

On another level of analysis a diagram as a map of particular historical relations of power evinces power *as a field of forces* which exceeds the particularity of diagrams. This *field*, writes Deleuze, is of "*the outside* which exists as an unformed element of forces" from whence come the forces and to which they remain attached; thus it is an 'agency',⁴⁸ of the *outside* "which stirs up their relations and draws out their diagrams" (*F* 43). The *outside* represents the background field for the regimes of power as well as the not-yet-formalized forces, a field out of which and through which a variety of regimes of power form, overlap and disintegrate. Power bracketed from all its historical diagrams forms what Deleuze refers to as a "power-Being" (*F* 112); power then becomes a *there is*.

The Foucaultian notion of power, disembodied, abstracted and omnipresent, "a floating line with no contours" – the *Outside* –, comes back to the human world as a "power-Being"⁴⁹ (*F*

⁴⁷ Another example is sexuality: "If sexuality was constituted as an area of investigation, this was only because relations of power had established it as a possible object; and conversely, if power was able to take it as a target, this was because techniques of knowledge and procedures of discourse were capable of investing it. Between techniques of knowledge and strategies of power, there is no exteriority ..." (*HS* 98).

⁴⁸ Deleuze makes a distinction between *the outside*, *the exterior*, and *the forms of exteriority* as three "correlative agencies" in Foucault: *the outside* "as an unformed element of forces," *the exterior* as the area of concrete assemblages, where relations between forces are realized. And ... *the forms of exteriority*, since the realization takes place in a split or disjunction between two different forms that are exterior to one another and yet share the same assemblages" (*F* 43). Agency in all three forms is of power.

⁴⁹ In *Foucault*, Deleuze explains the necessity of power-Being in relation to Knowledge-Being: without necessitating an interiority, power-Being is required for the possibility of the constitution of knowledge-Being, a back-ground upon which the two forms of exteriority, the visible which is of the light-being and the articulable which is of language-being would come into relation: "It is the informal forces or power-relations that set up relations 'between' the two forms of formed knowledge. The two forms of knowledge-Being are forms of

112), a *there is* which both constitutes the condition of and produces “the individual, with his identity and characteristics,” the individual who “is the product of a relation of power exercised over bodies, multiplicities, movements, desires, forces” (*PK* 74). In the end, then, having removed the ‘subject’ and with it the space of interiority, the evacuated space is occupied by power.

A salient attribute of this bracketed power diagram is its unequivocal ubiquity. Power is the force relations traversing through every point, through local oppositions which it links together, resulting in the forces being redistributed, arranged, and converged. It is a manifold network of strategies, “imbued, through and through, with calculations,” with “aims decipherable” (*HS* 95). It is a multiplicity of force relations, immanent to the whole social field, realized and integrated in the sphere they move through and constitute as their organization; resistance is interior to its relations and the existence of power relationships “depends on a multiplicity of points of resistance” (*Ibid.*). Power is then affective, productive, positive, agonistic, non-subjective and non-egalitarian; it is spontaneity and intentionality; it targets the body for purposes of control and utilizes the functions of the body to intensify and extend the reach of that control. It is the *Outside* whose inner fold constitutes the interiority. With the subject as a derivative of power, and power as the immanent cause of relations of knowledge, organized and integrated in the social field, the axiom of power-knowledge-subjectivity completes itself, as does the axiom of power-resistance-power .

In the Foucaultian paradigm, then, the possibility of a new subjectivity, a self creating itself, is not geared to the re-introduction of the project of achieving an autonomous subject as

exteriority, since statements are dispersed in the one and visibilities in the other; but power-Being introduces us into a different element, *an unformable and unformed Outside which gives rise to forces and their changing combinations*” (*F* 112-13, underline emphasis added). See “Foldings, or the Inside of Thought (Subjectivation).” *Foucault*, 94-123.

opposed to subjection to power, but to imagining the possibility of an autonomous power, forces not-yet-bound into a particular hegemonic set of power relations, as there is, Deleuze explains, “no diagram that does not *also include*, besides the points which it connects up, certain relatively *free or unbound points, points of creativity, change and resistance*” (F 44, my emphasis). Hence, the possibility of “*a relation which force has with itself, a power to affect itself, an affect of self on self*” (101). That is to say: force folds to affect itself, a ‘self-action’, “such that the outside in itself constitutes a coextensive inside” (113), “creating a Self within man” (114). Hence, bracketed from its historicity, power as outside, as a field of forces, including the not yet formed and formalized diagrams, carries the embryo of the possibility of an autonomous force folding on itself producing a new subjectivity.

In one of his later interviews Foucault brushes off the question as to *why* there is a “tendency to try to control the conduct of others,” redirecting the question to the forms and intensities that such controls take. In different societies, he says, this game takes different forms. What is constant—and unquestionable—is the game itself: “in a society like our own,” he declares, “games can be very numerous, and the desire to control the conduct of others is all the greater” (E 300). To be fair, there cannot be a response to a ‘why’ question from within a Foucaultian paradigm of thinking, as there is no place from which to respond beyond the purview of power itself. There can be no response, that is, unless, one steps out of this paradigm and sees this tendency to exert power over others as a *response*. It is only as a ‘response’, one among other possible responses, a response resulting from a finite corporeal-sensibility’s encounter with exteriority, that one may address the ‘why’ question. And it is this encounter,

impossible in the absence of a separate interiority, that is precisely excluded in the Foucaultian paradigm.

It is *a* response resulting from a finite corporeal-sensibility's encounter with exteriority in general, an encounter which would be impossible in the absence of an interiority separated from the exteriority. In the Foucaultian paradigm the encounter is between *forces* within fields of inter-force relations out of which and through which a new 'subjectivity' is born. Asking not why, then, let us ask rather how this position as it relates to resistance appears within the ethical turn of his later work.

iii) The Aesthetic-self: Totality-re-dux

Of course all moral action involves a relationship with the reality in which it is carried out, and a relationship with the self. The latter is not simply "self-awareness" but self-formation as an "ethical subject," a process in which the individual delimits that part of himself that will form the object of his moral practice, defines his position relative to the precept he will follow, and decides on a certain mode of being that will serve as his moral goal (*UP* 28).

Foucault's aesthetic-self, I claim here, provides us, at most, with ultimate contours of a for-itself and in-itself subjectivity, *i.e.*, an "ethical" for-itself subjectivity at the level of the individual who relates to and participates in the exteriority through its relationship to itself,⁵⁰ a relationship that is always already mediated by power. In other words, the Foucaultian ethical self is an "ethical" version of an I that has already responded to others from a need-based *respons-ability*,⁵¹ taken refuge in the space and time of the same—an I already folded on itself,⁵²

⁵⁰ For Deleuze's rendition of Foucault's theorization of aesthetic-subject built on the Greeks' agonism and self-mastery see *Foucault*, "Foldings, or the Inside of Thought (Subjectivation)" 95-123, especially 99-108.

⁵¹ Foucault emphasizes that cultivation of the self into an ethical subject is the result of relations of force, force against which one "must establish his domination." This relation of force is grounded in what I call a survival need-based conception of the individual where as he writes, "the accent is placed more and more readily on the weakness of the individual, on his frailty, on his need to flee, to escape, to protect and shelter himself" (*CS* 67).

⁵² Central to the Foucaultian ethical subject is "the question of truth—the truth concerning what one is, what one does and what one is capable of doing," the truth which is the result of the process of practicing *askēsis*: the same

fixed in a state of *conatus essendi* (though autonomous, as it would be self-ruled). Its enjoyment is of self-contentment, seeking the pleasure of a self-sufficiency, untroubled with the unpredictability of a desire for the exteriority and free from the suffering accompanying such desire.⁵³

For Foucault, practices of *askēsis*, the control and mastery of the self through training, meditation, examination and monitoring of one's thinking and conscience, as well as control of representations (*UP* 74), guarantees the general principle of "conversion to self," a self-directed conversion which is integral to the ethic of the self⁵⁴ (*CS* 64-68). According to the principle of "conversion to self" the main objective set by and for the self should be sought within the self "in the relation of oneself to oneself" (64-65). Referring to Seneca, Foucault explains that "escaping all the dependences and enslavements" in conversion to self, *conversion ad se*, "one ultimately rejoins oneself, like a harbor sheltered from the tempests or a citadel protected by its ramparts"⁵⁵ (64-65). In other words, it is a responsiveness to the exteriority, but one of recoiling from, sheltering into the familiar, 'knowable' and 'controllable' space and time of the interiority, an attempt to achieve a protection against the exteriority through the creation of a network of predictability; satisfied in its needs, then, it achieves the pleasure of self-contentment.

folding on itself, "testing oneself, examining oneself [and] monitoring oneself in a series of clearly defined exercises" (*CS* 68).

⁵³ This on-itself-folding ethical subject then experiences its relation to its self as one "not only of a domination but also of an enjoyment without desire and without disturbance" (*CS* 68).

⁵⁴ In her article on Foucault and the aestheticization of ethics, Jane Bennett rejects Richard Wolin's and Terry Eagleton's Habermasian critique of Foucault's aesthetics as susceptible, on one hand, to Fascism, and on the other hand, to monadism and hedonism, due to the absence of a moral code or principle. Foucault's aesthetic, she argues, is in no need of such a principle as it is a "cultivated responsiveness" based on self-disciplinary practice, i.e., *askēsis* (Jane Bennett, "How is it, Then, That We Still Remain Barbarians?": Foucault, Schiller, and the Aestheticization of Ethics, in *Critical Essays on Michel Foucault*, ed. Karlis Racelis, (New York : G.K. Hall, 1999).

⁵⁵ Seneca writes: "The soul stands on unassailable grounds, if it has abandoned external things; it is independent in its own fortress; and every weapon that is hurled falls short of the mark. Fortune has not the long reach with which we credit her; she can seize none except him that clings to her. Let us then recoil from her as far as we are able" (Seneca, *Letters to Lucilius*, 82, 5. Quoted in *CS* 65).

The aesthetic-existence as opposed to the docile-existence then happens when one takes one's life and oneself (one's body, mind and soul) as the source of one's truth and the object of one's force, hence rendering the self the effect of one's own power over the self, for the self. Thus the self cultivates itself as an ethical subject, through practices of *askēsis* "the exercises that enabled one to govern oneself and the learning of what was necessary in order to govern others" (UP 77). In this paradigm the practice of the "care of the self" is the locus for "the life of a 'free' man in the full, positive and political sense of the word" (Ibid.); it is where one is subjectivized through "forming and recognizing oneself as the subject of one's own actions," "in the sovereignty that one exercises over oneself"⁵⁶ (CS 85). The aesthetic-self then becomes the *true sovereign* with a small "s" denoting the "free man" whose freedom beyond "emancipation" and "nonenslavement" is, in its positive sense, of "a power that one [has] brought to bear on oneself in the power that one [has] exercised over others"⁵⁷ (UP 80).

This self-cultivated and self-referential subject (realized in its ethical telos [UP 27-8]) with its very 'singularity' and its mode of being as *different*, however, responds to and approaches exteriority as an I already in the order of totality; it is in and of a relation of objectification and naming, with its self as the center of its gravity.⁵⁸ Though it is of an agonistic relation, and despite its continuous self-recreation, it is an in-itself self, doubling, turning inward in search of a new *self* from and for itself. This amounts then to a movement of self-mastery that is actually intended to overcome the always present primordial tension of the I as a sociality, of

⁵⁶ The ethical subject, that is, is created, once again, through subjection to power, though this time an affecting power that is independent of the dominant power diagram.

⁵⁷ On his distinction between "practice of liberation" and "practice of freedom" see "The Ethics of the Concern of the Self as a Practice of Freedom" in E 281-303. In this interview he defines ethics as the practice of freedom (freedom as the ontological condition of ethics) and the practice of freedom as participation in power relations, the latter defined as "strategic games between liberties—in which some try to control the conduct of others, who in turn try to avoid allowing their conduct to be controlled or try to control the conduct of the other" (E 299).

⁵⁸ Self-cultivation is a form of living, Foucault explains as he turns to Alcibiades, in which "one should be, for oneself and throughout one's existence, one's own object." In short it is "a kind of turning in place," that is, to "take up residence in oneself" ("The Hermeneutic of the Subject," E 96).

the I of need and desire, of the for-itself (survival) and the for-the-other (ethical) I. In the practice of care of the self, the ethical along with the subject, becomes a derivative of power as well.

In the Foucaultian paradigm, the ethical and social space is always already a space of objectification, of saming and control. ‘Power-over’ is assumed; it is given as primordial ontological condition and inexorable content of human relations, within and without the self, a drive, as it were, to control others and their conduct; hence, as he writes, “the freer people are with respect to each other, the more they want to control each other’s conduct” (*E* 300).⁵⁹ The Foucaultian ethical dimension, then, conjoins freedom and power in the space of an in-itself and for-itself I.

The analyses of power (as productive and positive relations of forces), of the human subject (as a derivative of power through the processes of objectification and subjection of the individual) and of freedom (as a power that one brings to bear on oneself and exercises over others) come into coalescence within the notion of the aesthetic-self representing a *singularity* situated in its mode of being as *difference*.⁶⁰ An aesthetic-self is a self-created subject according to a technology of the subject within the technology of power, entering the world as a free self practicing its freedom in the form of the exertion of its power over itself and others. It is this self, a de-totalizing and de-individualizing self, that he defines as the resistant subject, the subject that stands against the totalizing technologies of bio-disciplinary power.⁶¹ And it is this self, regardless of its continuous effort in its self-creation and agonistic relation with the dominant

⁵⁹ See the immediately above note.

⁶⁰ For the notion of *difference* as being and existence, as identity, an “extreme singularity,” see Foucault’s review of Deleuze’s *Différence et répétition*, “Theatrum Philosophicum” in *LCP*, 165-199. Also, see “A preface to Transgression” in the same collection (29-53), where he develops his distinction between transgression and transcendence, the former being an event with a reciprocal dependence on “limit,” i.e., the impossibility of reaching an outside and thus the impossibility of transcendence, arguing instead for transgression as the mode of being and thus the possibility and desirability of “the existence of difference” (*LCP* 36).

⁶¹ Foucault, “Preface,” *Anti-Oedipus*, xiv.

totalizing systems, that I argue is trapped in its mode of survivalism and remains the site of self-perpetuating totality, a constant occlusion and postponement of Desire. A self-cultivated self, as a result of practices of power, remains at its perfection an in-itself and for-itself subjectivity.

The inherent limits of this Foucaultian singularity as a saming and totalizing entity appear in sharper relief when his interpretive analytic of power is applied to his ethic of the care of the self. As we shall see, this application also highlights the continuity between the docile body and the aesthetic self, the former permeating his conceptualizations of subjectivity and resistance.

The Ethic of the Self: the practice of self-sovereign power

In his introduction to *Ethics*, Paul Rabinow argues that Foucault constructs two distinct ideal-types of moral system with two corresponding ideal-types of human being, one of the docile-body and the other of the aesthetic-self based on the Greek-Roman moral system of self-mastery.⁶² He reiterates, as does Deleuze, Foucault's insistence that the goal is not to go back and emulate the Greek's or Roman's self, arguing that the aesthetic existence is a historical experience. However, just as the power diagram is the abstracted function of power (bracketed from its historical particular form), the *technique* of "cultivation of the self," and therefore of the creation of the "aesthetic-self," is extracted from the Greco-Roman moral practices, formulated under the axiom of the "concern for the self" or the ethic of the self. Thus, regardless of the specificity of the ancient experiences, Foucault's aesthetic-self and its art of aesthetic existence as the alternative to the docile-body is developed through the Greco-Roman experiences as theorized under the rubrics of the technology of the self through a rigorous regimen of training, or practice of *askēsis*. To elucidate the argument, let us lay out the parameters of the analytics of power in the practice of self-power in the Foucaultian paradigm of the concern for the self, the ethic of the self.

⁶² Paul Rabinow, "Introduction," to *Ethics*, xxvi-xxvii.

The Ethic of the Self: A Self-Panopticon

In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault lists three necessary analytics of power; 1) the object of power, 2) the scale of power, and 3) the modality of power, plus an enumeration of 4) the techniques of power such as training, examination, observation, and constraint. Application of this same analytical grid to the care of the self demonstrates the aesthetic self as an object-effect of a *sovereign*-power relation which evinces telling correspondences with disciplinary Panopticism. Remaining within the Foucaultian paradigm, as it turns out in fact, this *sovereign*-power functions as nothing short of a self-Panopticon. Of course, the telos Foucault perceives for the care of the self is toward creating oneself in its totality as a singularity, not an individualized part of a larger totality with a sense of identity, but a self who continuously discontinues its own mode of being by residing always in a mode of *being as difference*. Foucault's effort here is to distinguish this telos from that of a disciplinary society which intends to intensify the efficiency of power by creating subjects as parts and parcels of the larger totalizing system. The soul created through the practices of disciplinary technology, he argues, was the prison of the individual who is devoid of its will to power, while the soul created through sovereign-power technology is a 'free' soul due to its regained and practiced will to power. It is important, however, not to let these differences obscure the essential continuity here, the confinement within an insular totality.⁶³

1- The object of control

First things first, the practice of care of the self is an agonistic practice that presupposes two parts to the self⁶⁴ referred to, following Plato, as the "better part" and the "the worse part"

⁶³ That is, Foucault constructs what was referred to in the Introduction to the present work as a small "One" as distinguished from and over against a big "One."

⁶⁴ In "The Subject and Power," as part of his analysis of "modes by which, ..., human being are made subjects," Foucault theorizes "dividing practices" in objectivization of the subject. He says: "The subject is either divided

(UP 68). Care of the self then is of an acknowledgement of an “adversarial” part to the individual, and hence the necessity for a ruling part. The “continent” individual is one who is self-controlled, one who masters himself, whose better part “rules over pleasures and desires”; in other words, one whose better part practices power, affecting the worse part as the object of its power (65). The aesthetic-self, then, is constituted of a divided being presupposing an internal agonistic relation wrapped in *Enkrateis*, the “dynamics of a domination of oneself by oneself and ... the effort that this demands” (Ibid.). In Deleuze’s language this duality of the individual self consists of the *spontaneity* or the function of force, and the *receptivity* or the matter of force. The exercise of *Enkrateia*, in fact, entails several premises: a) the individual is composed of two parts, the better and the worse; b) the appetites are dangerous and a threat to the individual; c) the relationship between the parts is ‘agonistic’; and d) there should be a hierarchical relation between the two parts, one being “active” (spontaneity) and the other “passive” (receptivity).

Self-mastery was 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 (UP 82-83).

So as one takes oneself as the object of control “the individual has to construct a relationship with the self that is of the ‘domination-submission,’ ‘command-obedience,’ ‘mastery-docility’ type”⁶⁵ (UP 70).

inside himself or divided from others. This process objectivizes him” (SP 208). He gives the examples of mad and sane, sick and healthy, as the effect of these dividing practices in the mode of subjectivization within bio-disciplinary power mechanisms. In the sovereign-power mechanisms we see similar objectifying practices, but this time *within* the self, as inferred from the Greek’s experiences.

⁶⁵ To be sure, as Foucault explains in the same place, this mastery-docility is different from the Christian ‘elucidation-renunciation’ and ‘decipherment-purification’ as the appetite part of the self is not an object of castigation but of control. It also differs from the creation of the docile-body under disciplinary power: since the self is the ruling authority, the power is exerted by the self from within.

2- The scale of control

The disciplinary regime of power, Foucault indicates, targets the body ‘individually’, as an organic unit composed of movements, gestures which are manipulable and utilizable, gaining a hold upon it through observation, examination, coercion and training. The sovereign-power, on the other hand, targets the body’s *sensibility*, its relations to itself and to the exteriority, *i.e.*, its receptivity *and* respons-ability. Care of the self requires a set of *askēsis* practices as part of *ethical work*⁶⁶ administrated by the self over itself, *i.e.*, training, meditation, tests of thinking, examination of conscience and control of representation (UP 74). The practice of the self, *askēsis*, again presupposes the division of the self into two agonistic parts, one the judging authority (the better part) and the other (worse) part which is to be or is rendered visible to the former. As in the disciplinary-power-diagram, the practice of *askēsis* as interpreted by Foucault, is a training regimen of intensification of (one’s own) power, its efficiency and profitability⁶⁷ (for one’s own self), “an intensification of the relation to oneself by which one constituted oneself as the subject of one’s act” (CS 41). However, contrary to the disciplinary-power-diagram, where intensification of power is a process of objectification and subjectivization of the individual through a totalizing-individualizing power function, the intensification of sovereign-power is to measure and confirm “the independence one is capable of with regard to everything that is not indispensable and essential” (CS 59), and “to ensure a wise behavior” (CS 62). The “wise behavior,” however, is that which ensures the *security* and *health* of the individual in its body and soul, the survival of the self. This is evident in what Foucault elucidates as “the increased medical involvement in the cultivation of the self” (CS 56) with the premise that one

⁶⁶ One performs *ethical work* on oneself “in order to bring one’s conduct into compliance with a given rule, [and] to attempt to transform oneself into the ethical subject of one’s behavior” (UP 27).

⁶⁷ See UP 72-77 and CS 36-68.

has a predisposition to disease, affection and disorder. The scale of control in a sovereign-power diagram, then, expands to encompass the individual's body, mind, and soul.

3- The Modality of Control

Finally, the modality of the exertion of power over the self entails a “life-long activity,” a constant self-observation, self-examination and self-testing and training. It is only through uninterrupted control, a ‘ruling’ and ‘governing’ of the worse part, but not an act of suppression or arresting of desire, that a “total victory” is achievable. This logic, thus again, follows the aforementioned premises: that the individual is of two parts, that the two parts are in an agonistic relation, and that the better part, representing authority is active, acting on the worse part to produce its docility and keep it in line. Foucault refers to Plato who draws an analogy between the affairs of state and those of the individual, arguing that one must assume a constant need for a ruling authority in times of peace as in times of war: “all are enemies of all in public”; “in private each is an enemy of himself” (*UP* 69).

4- Technologies of power

Technologies of power, Foucault writes, compose “a matrix of practical reason” “which determine the conduct of individuals and submit them to certain ends or domination, an objectivizing of the subject” (*E* 225). Accordingly, considering the “dividing practices,” to be a subject is to be “subject to someone else”⁶⁸ by control and dependence, and tied to his own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge”; hence by definition Foucault suggests subjectification of individuals as a result of their subjugation by a form of power (*SP*, 212). The mode of self-cultivation or development of aesthetic subjectivity, then, is a process of self-objectivization through which one “turns him- or herself into a subject” and recognizes oneself as a subject (*SP* 208). A ‘*subject of morality*’, then is the effect of a sovereign-power technology,

⁶⁸ This subjection, as discussed above, includes the domination of one part of the self by another.

a matrix of self-Panopticon practices. The range of such practices, extending beyond rendering the subject a derivative of power, locates ethical relations as a subsidiary of relations of power within the field of forces.

Concern for the self: a Mode of Subjection

Taken together these analytics and techniques of power, when applied to Foucault's ethic of the self, elucidate the aesthetic self as the effect of a self-panopticon, amounting to the retention of the subject as totality. The techniques of the ethic of concern for the self, the 'ethical work', hardly differ from the techniques of disciplinary power. Training, surveillance, examination and constraints are the processes invoked to produce a docile-body. Within the Foucaultian system of thought, ethical work, on the other end of the spectrum, requires similar sets of techniques categorized under *askēsis*. The distinction lays in the origin of the application of these techniques, or in Foucault's terminology, the 'form of power.' In contrast to a bio-disciplinary system, where an external regime of power produces and molds individuals into the system's proper subjects, the self-disciplinary system is an internal regime of sovereign-power which constitutes oneself as a moral agent (*E* 237), an ethical subject whose practices of self-objectivization stem from the individual's free and deliberate choice.⁶⁹ Ethical work is a set of practices "that one performs on oneself, not only in order to bring one's conduct into compliance with a given rule, but to attempt to transform oneself into the ethical subject of one's behavior" (*UP* 27). This process comes under the category of the technologies of the self that

permit individuals to effect by their own means, or with the help of others, a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality⁷⁰ (*E* 225).

⁶⁹ See CS, part III, 71-95.

⁷⁰ Thus ethics is nothing but technologies of the self for the purpose of self-mastery for whatever 'end' happens to be 'chosen' by the individual self (the examples here selected from ancient Greek history). Moreover, the self being

These self-directed practices, actions and exercises, including control over body, mind and soul as they do, encompass all that emerges from the inside and all that enters from the outside.

Self-knowledge and self-examination are practiced through a set of guidelines, codified exercises, tests and trainings for the purpose of establishing a supremacy over oneself (CS 58). For instance, the care of the body requires physical exercises, health regimens, measured abstinences, privation and other forms of restricted need satisfaction for the survivalist purposes of training the body for future disasters and destitutions (59). Meditation on the mind and care of the mind is a process of self-surveillance as well: reflecting on one's reading, writing and recollections of truth and advice received and given (51).

The ideal condition for practices of self-examination is, then, virtually a self-created and self-administrated Panopticon.⁷¹ Modeling from the ancients again, Foucault notes that night time is considered the best time for self-examination, for within the space of darkness and quietness, in the space of absence of external stimuli, one is left to oneself. But to be examined requires a 'judging authority', hence the 'division' of the self into two hierarchically related parts. A judging aspect and an accused individual is indispensable, not for "self-castigation," writes Foucault, but to inspect for the purpose of assessing the degree to which the subordinated aspect of the self has conformed to the goals and means established by the masterly component's conception of wise conduct (CS 61, 62). Control over one's thought includes acting as one's own 'night watchman' examining and rendering judgment over her mental representations. For the classical Greeks, Foucault explains, taking one's thought as the object of control is "a steady screening of representations: examining them, monitoring them, sorting them out" (63). It is

the essence of ethics, others appear as merely instrumental to the self's ethical pursuits and the insular self is thus essentialized.

⁷¹ Thus, like Plato's derivation of the individual modeled on the *polis*, Foucault's derivation of the ethical being is modeled on the larger power diagram of which that being is a part.

Epictetus who likens this role to that of “a ‘night watchman’ who checks the entries at the gate of cities or houses” (Ibid.). Through these examinations one is to accept or reject a representation not in terms of its *meaning* but in terms of an assessment of “the relationship between oneself and that which is represented so as to accept in the relation to the self only that which can depend on the subject’s free and rational choice” (64). That is to say, the intention is to detect and reject those representations that are beyond the self’s understanding and control “as not being appropriate objects of ‘desire’ or ‘aversion,’ of ‘attraction’ or ‘repulsion’”⁷² (Ibid.). “This *inspection* is a *test of power and guarantee of freedom*: a way of always making sure that *one will not become attached to that which does not come under our control*” (64, my emphasis). Thus Foucault locates within the Greek experience the possibility of an autonomous power of subjection with the potentiality of producing a free individual.

The Aesthetic-Self: An Ethical Survival-subject

The first principle of ‘conversion to self’, Foucault writes, is that one seeks one’s ‘chief’ objective ‘within oneself’ and ‘in relations to oneself.’ Through the conversion to self one escapes all the dependences and enslavements stemming from the internal forces of one’s appetites and desires and from the unpredictability of future and external objects; “one ultimately rejoins oneself, like a harbor sheltered from the tempests or a citadel protected by its ramparts” (CS 65). This relation to self falls under the ethics of control—self-mastery—in a judicial sense where

one ‘belongs to himself,’ one is ‘his own master’; one is answerable only to oneself, one is *sui juris*; one exercises over oneself an authority that nothing limits or threatens; one holds the *potestas sui* [the seat of power in oneself] (CS 65).

⁷² Thus the self declares itself to have somehow come to a determination that its selection of inappropriate desires, etc. is the result not only of “free,” but also of “rational” choice.

Thus one is to become an entity ‘in-itself’, ‘through-itself’ and ‘for-itself.’ Not only is one to free oneself from the pull of the unknowns of the external world and to control the internal impulses,⁷³ but one is to become both the source and measurement of authority.⁷⁴

Beyond this political and juridical form of the self’s relation to itself, the conversion to self, is also a relation of contentedness. This self-referential relationship enables one to find enjoyment and contentment in oneself “as in a thing one both possesses and has before one’s eyes” (65).⁷⁵ In this paradigm the mastered self is a certain object of pleasure for oneself, a contentment in the belief that one is the seat of one’s decisions, a pleasure in the feeling of mastery itself. Foucault brings Seneca’s dictum that: “the individual who has finally succeeded in gaining access to himself is, for himself, an object of pleasure ... one pleases oneself” (66). In oneself and one’s lived life, one can find the certainty of the familiar, thus, experiencing the pleasure of freedom from fear as well as the unpredictable external object of pleasure:

If to convert to oneself is to turn away from the preoccupations of the external world, from the concerns of ambition, from fear of the future, then one can turn back to one’s own past, recall it to mind, have it unfold as one pleases before one’s own eyes, and have a relationship with it that nothing can disturb (65-66).

The origin of the object of pleasure denotes the certainty and uncertainty of its presence. As in the Stoics, for example, “no external event can rend” a pleasure that “*arises* out of ourselves and within ourselves,” Foucault writes. This pleasure that arises from oneself is sure, unassailable “by the fact of not being caused by anything that is independent of ourselves and therefore escapes our *control*” (CS 66, my emphasis)

⁷³ This shows, at least among other things, that the concern with the self is actually a response to the other and the other-in-the-same. This is a survivalist response, securing oneself from the unpredictability of internal and external disorder, of the future, etc.

⁷⁴ To be sure, it is “[n]ot that one must cease all other forms of occupation and devote oneself entirely and exclusively to oneself; but in the activities that one ought to engage in, one had best keep in mind that the chief objective one should set for oneself is to be sought within oneself, in the relation of oneself to oneself” (CS 64, 5). That is to say, the insular liberal conception of “autonomy” is upheld here.

⁷⁵ One cannot avoid recognizing affinities with C. B. Macpherson’s conception of “possessive individualism” here where one ‘owns’ oneself with all of its attributes, as one owns her other commodities.

The recurrent theme, then, is the self as the origin of moral conduct, pleasure and control. Self-control protects one from the precariousness of *voluptas*, desires the origin of which are believed to originate outside of the self in the external world.⁷⁶ *Voluptas* is a “conditional,” “uncertain,” and “violent” pleasure as opposed to the “access to self [which] is capable of providing a form of pleasure that comes, in serenity and without fail, of the experience of oneself” (Ibid.).

Conversion to self is intended to guarantee one’s state of ‘freedom from’, an emancipation from internal and external dependences, a state of self-sufficiency and sovereignty; however, for Foucault, it also guarantees a ‘freedom to’ as he defines freedom as practicing “power over”:

But this freedom was more than a nonenslavement, more than an emancipation that would make the individual independent of any exterior or interior constraint; in its full, positive form, it was a power that one brought to bear on oneself in the power that one exercised over others (*UP* 80).

It is in this sense that the classical Greeks understand *askēsis* as indispensable processes in one’s transformation into an ethical subject, regarded as integral to the formation of the ‘free man.’ The ethic of the care of the self, then, was “an intensification of the relation to oneself by which one constituted oneself as the subject of one’s acts” (*CS* 41), and an object of pleasure (*CS* 66). Instead of creating a system of prohibition and authoritarian rules of conduct, as in bio-disciplinary Panopticism, the task of testing, monitoring, examining and training in the care of the self is intended by and for the self, to deal with the question of truth, “the truth concerning what one is, what one does, and what one is capable of doing” (*CS* 68). The “end result of all this elaboration,” Foucault writes,

⁷⁶ Here is a good example of a deliberate attempt to occlude Desire as it was defined in Section One, a response that is aroused by the exteriority in interests of the finitude as a *conatus essendi*.

is still and always defined by the rule of the individual over himself. But this rule broadens into an experience in which the relation to self takes the form not only of a domination but also of an enjoyment without desire and without disturbance (68).

Hence, the two processes of power technology and technology of the self coincide in the ethic of the concern for the self and are realized in the transformation of individuals to “singular being[s]” who “make their life into an *oeuvre* that carries certain aesthetic values and meets certain stylistic criteria” (*UP*10-11).

The project of de-individualization and de-totalization, and the problem of power, the Gordian knot of resistance and struggle that Foucault refers to in his conversation with Deleuze in 1972,⁷⁷ comes to a resolution through a saming: the self divided into two parts of spontaneity and visibility, is at the same time, power folding on itself. That is to say, the problem of power and the resistant subject is resolved as power is returned to the individual and the self is delivered to power. Rather than the absolute separation between interiority and exteriority as recommended through Levinas here, the Foucaultian system of thought creates a self-referential system within which interiority is rendered to and as the inner fold of power. Within this system the ethical is the self’s relations to itself, and freedom is the practice of power over that self and others (*E* 284, 299). Within this enclosed system where the field of forces is the *khôra* upon which a subject is formed as a result of relations of power, the ethic is reduced to the insular space of a self in power relation to itself; resistance and freedom then become matters of participation in relations of power. It is in this sense that Foucault interprets the Socratic dictum: “take care of yourself,” to mean: “Make freedom your foundation... through the mastery of yourself” (*E* 301). One problem here: this self-referential system holds only in as much as one

⁷⁷ “Intellectuals and Power,” *LCP* 205-218.

explains the self's folding back on itself, its self objectification, as the *function* of the fold and the techniques of power/ethics. That is to say, the system holds fairly well insofar as one limits one's questions to the 'how' of self-mastery and leaves aside questions of "why," in as much, that is, as one avoids questions as to what it is to which the folding is a *response* and for what. Foucault, then, envisions the possibility of a resistant subject within the limits of the ethic of the self, resulting in the production of the aesthetic-self who takes his or her life (and death) as a work of art, creating and recreating it while escaping the tentacles of the hegemonic totalizing power. Resistance itself is thus contained within the totality, not just of a singularity, but of a self-referentiality, is a constant escape always already contained as a privatized self within the field of power relations.

iv) Conclusion: the Foucaultian Resistance

Early in his review of Deleuze's *Différence et Répétition* Foucault, with Deleuze, calls for a new imaginaire:

Let us imagine ... an ontology where being would be expressed in the same fashion for every difference, but could only express differences. Differences would revolve of their own accord, being would be expressed in the same fashion for all these differences, and being would no longer be a unity that guides and distributes them, but their repetition as difference."⁷⁸

He argues for the possibility of an "extreme singularity" and "a free rein to ill will" as he wittily contests the universality of the knowing subject and the good will.⁷⁹ But a multiplicity of difference requires a thought free from the constraints of similarities, contradictions and negations, that is, an affirmative thought of dispersed multiplicity. This would be possible through an absolute 'difference' or being as difference, free from the unity of being as well as the

⁷⁸ "Theatrum Philosophicum," in *LCP* 186-87.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 182.

contradiction of being and non-being. For Foucault, with Deleuze, a new form of thought, not a totalizing thought, but one conceived as an instrument of multiplication and self-multiplying, would raise theory from an articulation of power to a practice, an activity against power.⁸⁰

In the early 1970s, Foucault argues for localized theories as a struggle against power. He argues that when prisoners speak of prison and the penal law they do not issue a theory *about* delinquency, but possess “an individual theory” a “counter-discourse of prisoners” (*LCP* 209). In the same fashion, instead of “total identification” with a ‘historical subjectivity’, *i.e.*, the proletariat and instead of rallying all the struggles under one totalized struggle, he argues that “all those on whom power is exercised to their detriment, ..., can begin the struggle on their own terrain and on the basis of their proper activity (or passivity)” (*LCP* 216). But if in the early 1970s the revolutionary subject disperses from the proletariat as the historical subjectivity into many localized identity-based groups, by the mid-1980s it breaks down to the level of the self. What does not change however, is the conceptualization of the subject and its subjectivity as a for-itself entity and thus its resistance and struggle as an endeavor that always centers on its own interests. So in the 1970s Foucault speaks of women, prisoners, homosexuals, etc., who by “engaging in a struggle that concerns their own interests, whose objectives they clearly understand and whose method only they can determine, ... enter into a revolutionary process” (*LCP* 216), and in the 1980s it is individuals who according to Foucault, oppose “a form of power which makes individuals subject” (*SP* 212). These oppositions are “immediate struggles” of individuals against an “immediate enemy”; “they are struggles which question the status of the individual” and “assert the right to be different”; “they underline everything which makes individuals truly individual,” all of which, Foucault concludes “revolve around the question: Who are we?” (*SP* 211-12).

⁸⁰ “Intellectuals and Power,” *LCP* 207-08.

The extreme singularity with its right to difference, then, is a truly in-itself and for-itself private individual disengaged from herself (*se déprendre de soi-même*), that is, from the self historically produced by the external dominant power regime. This disengagement from the self, then is “to disassemble the self, oneself,”⁸¹ to achieve de-individualization, de-totalization through a process of self surveillance, a ‘self-Panopticon’ that culminates in a conversion to a self freed from domination. This self then forms the basis for the construction of an aesthetic-subject who take his body and his life as his own source and object of truth, pleasure and power.⁸² Resistance then is at most a reaction to the grip of a certain technique of power, as in, for example, Foucault’s conception of resistance to the subjectivization of sexuality which he describes as an effort “to counter the grips of power with the claims of bodies, pleasures, and knowledges” (*HS* 157). Or, to take another example, when power as bio-power no longer deals “simply with legal subjects” but “with living beings” (142, 3), then, life itself becomes resistance as represented in conceptions of the “‘right’ to life, to one’s body, to health, to happiness, to the satisfaction of needs, ..., [and] the ‘right’ to rediscover what one is and all that one can be” (145). In the end, as the Foucaultian conception of the human subject is stretched from the (docile) body, to the living-being and finally to the self-referential individual, the limits of its resistance remain within a for-itself struggle for its own interests. No wonder Foucault finds the historical paradigm of the possibility of a morality⁸³ befitting a “totally free” individual in the Stoics. Without calling for a re-instatement of the Greek experience, he finds guidelines in these texts for individuals “who wish to lead a life different from that of ‘the throngs’” (*CS* 40). There he finds

⁸¹ Rabinow’s “Introduction”, xxxviii.

⁸² Foucault represents, then, a privileged site from which we can trace the evolution of the conception of the human subject from a “big” One to a “small” One without ever leaving the space of the subject as One.

⁸³ See “Return to Morality” where he argues for going back to a morality, utilizing the Greek experience “as an experience ... in regard to which one can be totally free” (*FL* 470).

the insistence on the attention that should be brought to bear on oneself ... the modality, scope, constancy, and exactitude of the required vigilance ... the anxiety concerning all the disturbances of the body and the mind, which must be prevented by means of an austere regimen ... [and] the importance attributed to self-respect, not just insofar as one's status is concerned, but as concerns one's rational nature ... (CS 41).

At the heart of the care of the self lies the “problem of finitude,” the fear of death, of being hurt, of “the future and evil” (E 103), a need “for protection against all the vicissitudes of existence” (100). In short, what we have here is a body of texts in response to the need-based aspect of the human subject, hence the ethic of the self: an in-itself and for-itself subject, a subjectivity of self-referentiality.

In the Foucaultian paradigm where power is the *khôra* of the subject and resistance, where power is the relations and the term of relations, the exteriority and the interiority, then, resistance becomes “escape,” while escape remains one of the essential conditions of the power relation itself.⁸⁴ And escape becomes escape from the power of the throngs, first as a body and then as a living-being; it becomes the disengagement of one's body and life from the dominant form of power, an escape accomplished through turning that body and life into an object of one's own power: hence the need to take one's body, life and death as a work of art, to take up residence in oneself, for oneself, that is, in short, to return to the germ of totality, the survivalist-subjectivity at the level of individual.

The thrust of this ethical “art of existence” is perhaps epitomized in the various references Foucault makes to the approach it affords to one's relation to one's death. In “The Ethics of the Concern for Self,” for example, he finds in the Stoics concern with death “almost [a] desire for death” (E 289), while, in his “Ethics of Pleasure” he speculates on the possibility of a “complete total pleasure” in relation to death. But it is in “The Simplest of Pleasures” that he points out that, unlike life which “seems quite fragile ... death [is] quite certain” and argues that

⁸⁴ For a discussion of Foucaultian resistance as ‘escape’ see Jeffrey T. Nealon's *Foucault Beyond Foucault*, 75-93.

one therefore “has to prepare it bit by bit, decorate it, ... choose it, ... shave it into a work without spectators, one which exists only for oneself” (*FL* 296). Suicide then appears as that desideratum of the for-itself bearer of difference, “an extremely unique experience,” and one moreover that places one’s last act under one’s own power,⁸⁵ a condition wherein one “can make of it a fathomless pleasure” (*Ibid.*).

⁸⁵ That is to say, this escape is always already located within a network of power relations, hence, as a transgression it never leaves the space of power; it finds and creates niches within the space of power. However, these niches are eventually incorporated within the totalizing power diagram. One’s death becomes the last frontier in this power game. This analysis is in striking contrast to the one on page ninety above.

CHAPTER V

Marx: The Impasse of Self-referentiality

Introduction

In the present epoch, the domination of material relations over individuals, and the suppression of individuality by chance, has assumed its sharpest and most universal form, thereby setting existing individuals a very definite task. It has set them the task of replacing the domination of circumstances and of chance over individuals by the domination of individuals over chance and circumstances. It has not, ... put forward the demand that I 'should develop myself', which up to now every individual has done ...; *it has instead called for liberation from one quite definite mode of development.*¹

Karl Marx

Effective resistance, for Marx, is active resistance. More than a capacity to escape and evade the subject-producing power of capitalist institutions, it is that activity which culminates in the supersession of alienated labour with its relations of division of labour, exchange and private property. It culminates in a synthetic relation of individuals and the realization of the "true community of man."²

A glance at western representations of the experience of alienated social relations in contemporary popular culture, however, suggests the vast distance we remain from Marx's hopes

¹ *The German Ideology*, C. J. Arthur, (New York: International Publisher, 2001), 117; emphasis added. Hereafter cited as *GI-A*. In what follows various translations are selected according to context; Robert C. Tucker's edition, cited as *GI* is the reference unless otherwise specified.

² "Since the essence of man is the true community of man, men, by activating their own essence, produce, create this human community, this social being which is no abstract, universal power standing over against the solitary individual, but is the essence of every individual, his own activity, his own life, his own spirit, his own wealth" (EJM 265).

for such transcendent realizations. If the film *Melancholia*,³ for example, extends this experience of alienation to a cosmic scale of universally hopeless isolation, the television series, *Touch*⁴ offers its polar opposite, a metaphysic of universally effective quantum level connectivity among all seven billion humans occupying the planet.⁵ If these polar visions exemplify contemporary concerns for the state of universal social relations, Plan B's music video, *Ill Manors*, screams out the social alienation of the British under-class, *chavs*, from the society of the 'rich boy,' a situation about which the artist claims: "What it really boils down to is we are all just in the simplest form animals and ... we lash out our primal instinct, and it has nothing to do with class".⁶

This constellation, repeatable ad infinitum, expresses the contemporary experience of the excruciating absence of shared life, a longing for acknowledgment that every individual, however desperate the loneliness, is a social being, and that, regardless of any particular state of self consciousness, every individual is a socially connected universal being. Beyond these universalistic vistas of the experience of absence, there is also, however, the actual relative (and absolute) pauperization of the global working class, and a growing mass of "propertyless" under-class alienated to the point of denying any relation to class whatsoever, a claim reducing the entire species to animal survival instinct.

³ In *The Human Condition*, Hannah Arendt introduces the concepts of world alienation and earth alienation describing the modern human condition and the search for escape symbolized in the event of landing on the moon. The film *Melancholia* is a sublime depiction of the triumph of utter loneliness, absence of human connection, or a total alienation from the universe and existence itself. It is the depiction of the imperialism of the performance principle, colonizing all human spaces, senses and attributes to a level of total alienation, from the self, the other, the human species, nature, the world and the universe, so total that it is only in giving into the most extreme alienation, alienation as annihilation, that one finds solace.

⁴ Tim Kring's *Touch* revolves around a mixture of spirituality and quantum physics, familial and global struggles, constituted of and constituting the interconnectivity of seven billion people and all living things occupying the planet. It is a sublime representation of an organic connectivity among all human beings regardless their social-historical and materially based particularities.

⁵ A very similar metaphysical premise is presented in the film *Cloud Atlas*, by Tykwer, Tom, Lana Wachowski, Laurence Wachowski.

⁶ BBC Radio 1Xtra interviewed Ben Drew known as Mistajam on his music video and film both under the name *Ill Manors*, published on March 12, 2012, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t9B0y9oV7Mk>.

At once eerily reminiscent of Marx's requirements for the emergence of transcendent revolution and eerily underscoring its failure to appear, these popular expressions resonate with particular vigor in the context of virtually continuous socio-economic and political unrest around the globe. These requirements include, let us recall, not only the prevalence of alienation and the reduction of the human condition to the animal level of mere existence, but also "an all-round development of individuals" (*GI-A* 117), universal individuals recognizing themselves beyond all material determinations such as nationality, religion or class as "human." For Marx, it is these premises that not only testify to the maturity of a definite mode of life,⁷ the estranged mode, but also, once globalized, herald the arrival of the necessary conditions for successful radical transformation.

This '*estrangement*' ... can, of course, only be abolished given two *practical* premises. For it to become an 'intolerable' power, *i.e.* a power against which men make a revolution, it must necessarily have rendered the great mass of humanity 'propertyless', and produced, at the same time, the contradiction of an existing world of wealth and culture, And, on the other hand, this development of productive forces (which itself implies the actual empirical existence of men in their *world-historical*, instead of local, being) is an absolutely necessary practical premise because without it *want* is merely made general, and with *destitution* the struggle for necessities and all the old filthy business would necessarily be reproduced, ... (*GI* 161).

Perhaps what helps account for the uncanny resonance in the examples above is this insistence, as he puts it elsewhere, that, in addition to the development of social relations and productive forces to a universal level, "private property can be abolished *only on condition of an all-round development of individuals*" (*GI-A* 117: my emphasis). Apparently, as these examples from popular culture suggest, at least one essential element has failed to develop: *the appropriate subject*. There is apparently a lacuna here between the global development of productive forces,

⁷ Marx's concept, "mode of development" differs from his "mode of production" as all modes of production throughout history fall within one definite mode of development, namely that which is based on division of labour, alienated-labour and private-property. This is what Marx calls the estranged mode of development or the estranged mode of life.

increase of wealth, and development of a mass of propertyless people on one hand, and on the other, the all-round development of individuals, the existence of “world-historical” being. Or more, the all-round subject as conceived here falls short of the development required for effectively resistant, that is effectively revolutionary being.⁸

Let us briefly reiterate the well-known logic here. For Marx, of course, the capitalist creation of these beings as workers gave them common interests, which constituted the “mass” as a class against capital. And though it has not yet become a class “for itself” it will become united, constitute itself as a class for itself and defend its interests as a class (*PP* 173). Thus we have the prophetic description of the capitalist world and the announcement of the working class as its grave-diggers, reiterating his argument in *The Holy Family*, that “[t]he proletariat executes the sentence that private property pronounced on itself by begetting the proletariat” (*HF* 149). And it is assumed that it is this historically formed being itself that makes it, by necessity, the transformative agency, as “The question is not what this or that proletarian, or even the whole proletariat at the moment *considers* as its aim. The question is *what the proletariat is*, and what, consequent on that *being*, it will be compelled to do. Its aim and historical action is irrevocably and obviously demonstrated in its own life situation as well as in the whole organization of bourgeois society today” (149). The logic seems solid: the capitalist class is clearly for itself and it will bring forth its counterpart, a for-itself working class.⁹ This for-itself proletariat, a social

⁸ At least one lacuna here is the leap from “world-historical” being as an effect of the development of productive forces to the “all-round development of individuals.” While some aspects of the development of the productive forces may contribute conditions of possibility, nothing in this development actually ‘produces’ the all-round development and the solidarity of the working class on the basis of pauperization; even “relative” pauperization, does not in itself create, develop or maintain care for the other.

⁹ Unfortunately, writing in the revolutionary pregnant time and space of 1845 in Europe, Marx does not see any need to go further in his analysis of the potentiality and possibility for the transformation of the working class as the manifestation of an “abstraction of all humanity, even of the semblance of humanity” to a “full-grown proletariat” as a wholly transformative and transcending agency of its and all humanity’s material condition (*HF* 149). Marx suffices with a reference to empirical evidence: “There is no need to dwell here upon the fact that a large part of the

subject ‘fully-grown’ into a ‘world-historical being,’ is then to be the agency of a revolutionary practice which finally transcends the “estranged mode of life” and arrives at the material possibility for a “true community of man.” Yet this “full-grown” being, let alone the true community of man, has failed to appear. A suspicion dawns on us that, among the myriad determinations here there is a more fundamental source of this lacuna than that of the historical situation of the proletariat, one located in Marx’s whole approach to the conception of the human subject as such.

It is to seek a critical analysis of Marx’s logical-ontological theory of subjectivity and alienation then that I investigate his theory of subjectivity, its elucidation and limits. Generally speaking, I argue that, while Marx establishes the human being as the historically and materially conditioned, yet social-historically revolutionizing, receptive and responsive subject; while he articulates the desirability and possibility of a human community distinct from the existing dominant alienated, ‘egoistic’ and need-based one’; while his conceptions of “species-being,” “alienation,” “exploitation” and “commodity fetishism” presuppose a broader *meaning* to humans as subjects and potentialities for human relations than the one existing in his time, he is unable, in the end, to transcend limits imposed by his approach to that subject as a need-based, self-referential, for-itself being. Specifically, in spite of all efforts to conceive ‘true’ human relations, the space of sociality, the proximity between the I and the other, remains contained within the subject’s need; need remains the relation and the term of relation between the self and the other.

Marx’s theorization of a revolutionary praxis tasked with creating a true human existence, I argue, is for this reason and with all his intentions notwithstanding finally up against

English and French proletariat is already conscious of its historic task and is constantly working to develop that consciousness into complete clarity” (Ibid.).

an immanent impasse. It proves impossible to transcend the alienated-instrumentalist social relations instrumentally, impossible to create his “true community” as ethical existence from and through alienation alone, *i.e.*, solely in response to one’s own needs and for the satisfaction of one’s own needs, no matter whether the One is an individual or a class or, for that matter, some other identity grouping. Of course this claim is premised on the distinction between need and desire¹⁰ and extends Marx’s ‘positive’ conception of resistance as the transcendence of the “estranged mode of life” to include the for-the-other, an inclusion, I argue, that is necessary to effective resistance and for which, in spite of this disjunction, he seems actually to strive.

I shall claim, then, that Marx’s conceptualization of the human subject as such provides a brilliant material phenomenological analysis of the formation and transformation of the *survival aspect* of the human subject, *i.e.*, its need-based respons-ability, presenting this essential aspect, however, *pars pro toto*, as *the* human subjectivity in its totality. Having taken this aspect as the adequate representation of the historical subject and in spite of the ethical aspect implicitly inherent to the theory of alienation and its transcendence in communism, he inadvertently allows this historically dominant aspect of the human subject to invade the conception of that transcendence, perpetuating its effects. That is, more specifically, Marx’s theory of human subjectivity, by remaining within the confines of the *conatus essendi*, and as unintended side-effect of this confinement, contributes to the occlusion of the ethical *aspect* of human subjectivity, *i.e.*, its desire-based respons-ability and being-for-the-other. This perpetuation, then, reduces the adequacy of his conception of emancipation and so plays a part in the impasse of the revolutionary project of changing the existing human condition, occluding, even as he illuminates, *effective* resistance against totalizing modes of existence as such.

¹⁰ See Section I.

This chapter is then a constellation of inquiries into aspects, respectively, of the human subject as natural, as social-historical, and as species- and estranged-being, arguing that, as long as the Marxian subject remains enclosed in the for-itself, its conception of resistance necessarily comes to an insurmountable impasse. Before entering this analysis, however, let us consider the ethical aspect that he does embed in his socio-economic and philosophical thought.

i) Marx's Ethical Dimension

Since the essence of *man* is the *true community* of man, men, by activating their own essence, produce, create this human community, this social being which is no abstract, universal power standing over against the solitary individual, but is the essence of every individual, his own activity, his own life, his own spirit, his own wealth. Therefore, this *true community* does not come into being as the product of reflection but it arises out of the *need* and the *egoism* of individuals, *i.e.*, it arises directly from their own activity. ... To say therefore that *man* is estranged from himself is identical with the statement that the *society* of this estranged man is the caricature of a *true community*, of his true species-existence

(“Excerpts from James Mill” in *Early Writing*, 265)

Ethics not as teachings of an extra-human entity but as the fundamental *meaning* in human relations, ethics not as a set of principles of moral behavior but as that which is always already present in the human condition and human relations, is among other things, the implicit ground of Marx's historical materialist theory of the estranged mode of life, as well, for that matter, as for his theories of capitalism, commodity fetishism, alienation, exploitation and so forth.¹¹ Without this ground, the rest would be reducible to merely insightful sociological and/or ideological analysis.

¹¹ For a discussion of the “spiritual” aspect of Marx's thought as an essential aspect that, among other things, expresses the unity of the early and late works and recognizes the religions as alienated forms of “existential meaning and value, of wholeness and love, of creative agency, and of interconnection with other humans, nature, and reality at large” (103), see Kevin M. Brien's “Rethinking Marx and the Spiritual.” For an opposing view, see Bryan Nelson's “Politics of the senses: Karl Marx and Empirical Subjectivity.” For more truculent rejections of the

Alienation with respect to an interiority's relations to itself and the exteriority, its relations to its ability to create, to its own creation, its own self and its relations to other human beings and to nature represents a horizon of instrumentalist, "egoistic" need-based objectifying relations. Marx uses both "egoism" and "selfishness" to refer to "man's *need*," the reified survival needs of an individual as a living-being, distinguishing these from "*human need*," signifying the needing of an individual as a social-being. Thus his term "*true community*" is used to describe "the essence of *man*" as a social-being, while, similarly, "the *real objectification* of man" refers to the possibility of successful resistance against and supersession of the estranged mode of development, *e.g.*, "the *real objectification* of man ... through the destruction of the *estranged* character of the objective world, through the supersession of its estranged mode of existence" (HD 395).

The 'trueness' of the human being as "true community" is not the achievement of the 'trueness' of the "human essence" as opposed to the falseness of human "egoism and selfishness," as both are aspects of human beings. Instead, "true community" expresses an ethical dimension, a sociality beyond the functionalist-instrumentalism of estranged modes of existence and estranged human relations.¹²

To elucidate, let us consider the example of Marx's evaluation of relations between men and women as he presents them in his criticism of "crude communism":

ethical aspect of Marx's oeuvre (particularly popular in the 1960s and early 1970s), see H. B. Acton, *What Marx Really Said* (1967) and Allen W. Wood, "The Marxian Critique of Justice," *Philosophy & Public Affairs* (1972), both of which are critiqued in Allan G. Nasser's "Marx's Ethical Anthropology" (1975). For an analysis of ethics in the context of a critical appreciation and interdisciplinary defense of lasting contributions of Marx's political economy, see Robert Albritton's *Economics Transformed: Discovering the Brilliance of Marx*.

¹² In one of Levinas's rare remarks on Marx he refers to the presence of an "ethical conscience" in Marx's critique of western idealism. He says in an interview that "[i]n Marx's critique, we find an ethical conscience cutting through the ontological identification of truth with an ideal intelligibility and demanding that theory be converted into a concrete praxis of concern for the other" ("Ethics of the Infinite" in Richard Kearney's *Debates in Continental Philosophy*, [New York: Fordham University Press, 2004], 83). A statement which in turn testifies to an affinity between the ethics of the Other and praxis in Levinas's mind as well.

The immediate, natural, necessary relation of human being to human being is the *relationship* of *man* to *woman*. In this *natural* species-relationship, the relation of man to nature is immediately his relation to man, just as his relation to man is immediately his relation to nature, his own *natural* condition. Therefore, this relationship *reveals* in a *sensuous* form, reduced to an observable *fact*, the extent to which the human essence has become nature for man or nature has become the human essence for man. It is possible to judge from this relationship the entire level of development of mankind. It follows from the character of this relationship how far *man* as a *species-being*, as *man*, has become himself and grasped himself; the relation of man to woman is the most *natural* relation of human being to human being. It therefore demonstrates the extent to which man's *natural* behavior has become *human* or the extent to which his *human* essence has become a *natural* essence for him, the extent to which his *human nature* has become *nature* for him. This relationship also demonstrates the extent to which man's *needs* have become *human* needs, hence the extent to which the *other*, as a human being, has become a need for him, the extent to which in his most individual existence he is at the same time a communal being” (EPM 347).

From the point of view of the terminology adopted in the present work, it may be said that Marx conflates “need” and “desire” in this passage and, with that in mind, it may also be noted that Marx analyzes the man-woman relation first and foremost in its functional aspect, as a relation arising from the barest and most basic natural-material needs. Yet this relation remains for Marx *also* one between one human being and another, between the self and the other, which in a nutshell expresses “the entire level of development of mankind,” *i.e.*, it is the litmus test for an estranged versus a *human* mode of existence.

This torturous attempt to distinguish “nature” as “the essence of man” from the “*human* essence” as the “nature” of man, and to portray “man’s *natural* behavior,” the existing behavior of a living-natural being, as becoming human behavior when the “*human* essence has become a *natural* essence for him” and thus his natural behavior, testifies at once to the presence of an entrenched ethical standpoint in Marx’s philosophy and the absence of a language (and so a theory) fully adequate to the elucidation of that ethical dimension.

We see the same simultaneous presence of an ethical perspective and absence of a conceptual language, when “need” is the only terminology explaining the relation and the terms of relation between men and women. As “man’s *needs*” become “*human needs*,” his relationship with the woman, the other, changes from that of an object to satisfy his ‘egoistic and selfish’ needs to one in which “the *other*” herself becomes *his need*. Notwithstanding the persistence of the mediation of the self’s needs here, the already presumed ethical aspect in human relations and its desirability act as the criteria in Marx’s criticism of what he refers to as “crude communism,” arguing that, in “...the relationship with *woman*, as the *prey* and handmaid of communal lust, is expressed the infinite degradation in which man exists for himself” (EPM 347; Underline emphasis added). Far from being a mere tap on the wrist from a romantic horizon, Marx’s position here is of course a particular application of his more general theory of alienation, an alienation which, as he writes elsewhere, “partly manifests itself in the fact that the refinement of needs and of the means of fulfilling them gives rise to a bestial degeneration and a complete, crude and abstract simplicity of need ...” (EPM 359).

What begs for further clarification is then the ethical meaning, the significance and weight of the conception of “*human need*” here, of the essence of man as the “true community,” of “the real objectification of man” and of “*true species-existence*.” For illumination let us recall Marx’s most famous dictum, the ethical ideal: “From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs!” (GP 531).

In his passionate refutation of the Lassallian proposal for a struggle for a “fair distribution,” which the Lassalians conceive as the “proceeds of labour undiminished [and] with equal rights to all members of society,” Marx rejects the Gotha program’s conception of equal rights, arguing that this vision of social relations in communist society is nothing but that of

“bourgeois right,” that is, rights based on formal exchanges of equivalencies. Marx’s argument against these ‘equal’ rights is based not only on the absence of recognition of individuals as “different” and “unequal” in the definition, but also on the reduction and reification of human beings to what they do and what they own, *i.e.*, to *workers* with rights to the proceeds of their own labours. Marx notes then that the human relation in the Lassallian progressive society remains within a totality of exchange relations between formally ‘equal’ producer/owners of commodities, *i.e.*, it remains commodity mediated and defined rather than being a human-to-human relation.¹³ Against this background we recognize the counter-intuitive argument that, to achieve a just distribution, “right instead of being equal would have to be unequal” (GP 531) as directly reflecting the ever present ethical dimension of Marx’s thought. Recognizing this *inequality* among *unequal* individuals makes it possible to recognize individuals as singularities, outside of and beyond their *measurement* “only by an equal standard ... taken from one definite side only” (Ibid.). Only when the human relation is directly human-to-human, without the mediation of equivalencies, when the self relates to the other as non-equivalent, is it potentially a relationship realizing the ethical desideratum: “from each according to his ability, to each according to his needs!”¹⁴ One may identify the meaning of “the true species-existence” here in this practical-critical dictum, the crystallization of human relations as ethical.¹⁵ This said however, there is a problem in Marx’s paradigm of transformation: in his conception, the

¹³ I borrow the term “human-to-human” from Asher Horowitz’s article, “All that Is Holy Is Profaned: Levinas and Marx on the Social Relation” in *Totality and Infinity at 50*, eds. Scott Davidson and Diane Perpich, (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2012) 57-79. There Horowitz develops this concept as a facet of Marx’s concept of species-being indicative of the ethical in Marx.

¹⁴ For a discussion of the potential for a Levinasian extension of the ethical recognition of non-equivalency in Marx and the importance of bringing that recognition to a relation with the actual processes of historical change, see Asher Horowitz and Gad Horowitz. “An Ethical Orientation for Marxism: Geras and Levinas,” *Rethinking Marxism*, 15, no. 2 (April, 2003).

¹⁵ This is a human relation that presupposes a series of separations, between production and consumption, between possession and distribution, between ability and need, and most importantly between (unequal) individual and individual, a separation between the self and the other.

movement from the status quo relation to this human-to-human relation must await a post-historical era in which all material conditions have changed and the way is prepared for such an existence, and this without the participation of this other-differentiating ethic anywhere in the process. That is, this transformation is to happen through the practical activity of the for-itself subjectivity. He writes: “this *true community* ... arises out of the *need* and the *egoism* of individuals” (EJM 265). The question in this chapter is not then whether or not Marx’s paradigm is void of an ethical dimension; it is not. The question concerns how this ethical dimension is related to the actual living subjects and their practical-critical activities in the here and now.¹⁶ The response proffered here is that Marx, like Moses glimpsing the Promised Land, sees the ethical relation but is himself unable to arrive there. While always present in his socio-political and philosophical thinking, the ethical dimension acts primarily as a beacon.

Standing on the shoulders of enlightenment thinkers and grounded in western philosophy up through Hegel and the young Hegelians, he was able to conceive a human being who is historically and materially-conditioned and who actively participates in the creation of its conditions and so of itself. Yet, theorizing the resistant, transformative activity of this historical-material subjectivity, perhaps in part to avoid the taint of moralism, in part to firm up the materialist element of transformative history itself, but for whatever combination of motives, he remains within the boundaries of the individual as the in-itself and for-itself *conatus essendi*.

The remainder of this chapter consists in the exploration of this conceptualization of the human subject and of limits to conceiving the possibility of an *effective* resistance it imposes. In the process, it should be remembered that the effectively resistant subject proposed is intended to

¹⁶ For an interpretation that emphasizes Marx’s “negative ethic” as a practical ethical program in response to the injustices in the here and now and for the alleviation of the human living condition, see Robert Albritton’s *Economics Transformed: Discovering the Brilliance of Marx*, esp. Chapter Seven, “Ethics and Political Economy,” 159-182.

contribute to the conception of a subject capable of achieving an ethical life, one that the historical Marx could point toward and that was inchoate in his youthful discursus on choosing a profession where he writes that

the chief guide which must direct us in the choice of a profession is the welfare of mankind and our own perfection. It should not be thought that these two interests could be in conflict, that one would have to destroy the other; on the contrary, man's nature is so constituted that he can attain his own perfection only by working for the perfection, for the good, of his fellow men.¹⁷

ii) Marx's Subject

In the absence of any site in Marx's texts devoted to an extended treatment of human subjectivity, one must build up her conception from pieces devoted to it amongst them severally. Pieced together in this way, the human subject appears as an ensemble of natural, social-historical and 'species' being who is both created by and creates himself through labor. Not to be essentially distinguished by consciousness or religion, or anything else, 'man' is first and foremost a natural living being with fundamental needs who begins to distinguish himself, begins to make history, when he produces his subsistence to satisfy his needs. Humankind comes into being for Marx, that is to say, through self-production in the flux of the for-itself, actively and objectively creating itself for itself. Thus, as the process of self-creation through labor, the social-historical is recognized, in a leap beyond Hegel and Feuerbach, as both natural and social. But, and this is my thesis, here in his analysis of the relations between them, bound to the sole starting point in labor as it is, the full development of the subject he seeks to depict is stymied.¹⁸ In a nutshell, this apparently insuperable bind stems from the fact that the social-historical dialectic guarantees that species development remains inextricably bound to the for-itself relation

¹⁷ "Reflections of a Young Man on The Choice of a Profession," written sometime between August 10 and 16, 1835. MECW Volume 1. <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1837-pre/marx/1835-ref.htm>

¹⁸ If this human subject were to be comprehended as a "whole," this derivation would be an example of *Pars pro toto* once again.

it has with the natural stratum; that is, reduced to the dialectic of need satisfaction in this way, the human being, and so the socio-historical, is in its essence circumscribed within the for-itself. Labor, originally alienated, appears as the essential life-activity characterizing the human as species-being and remains bound to it as its essence. In short, assigning labor the role of essential power, producing the human subject as such, Marx circumscribes his theory of human subjectivity within the boundaries of the *conatus essendi*, a need-based for-itself responsibility to itself and to exteriority in general, a circumscription fatal to the conception of a transcendent subject.

Let us single out these attributes of the Marxian subject as a natural, social-historical and ‘species’ being in order to examine each more closely. This strategy will allow me to present the argument that Marx’s subject, for all his contribution to the conception of the human subject (“man”), falls short of full realization of the potentialities he aspires to, not because he provides a given spontaneous Subject as is frequently claimed, but in this respect: tied to the limitations of his starting point in the relation to material nature, perhaps in his zeal to bring Hegel down to earth, he remains within the historically dominant aspect of human subjectivity, the *survivalist aspect*, and takes it for the whole from which the species develops and is to realize its potential humanity. Thus, notwithstanding the ethical presupposition apparent in his criticism of the prevailing human relations under alienation and his vision of the possibility of the “true community” in the post “positive supersession of private property,” humanity as subject remains fundamentally and irredeemably limited within the totality of its self-referentiality.

iii) The Human Subject as a Natural-being

It is true, as many have noted, that Marx takes the human being as a “given subject” (HD 382), but what is ‘given’ is quite distinct from conceptions of the given in the prior tradition generally. His is not the unhistorical spontaneous subject of Hegel’s self-consciousness or Feuerbach’s non-social abstract and passive sensuous individual, neither Fichte’s subject because it exists nor Descartes’ because it thinks. Marx’s given subject is of “*human nature*,” “...for man is *human nature*, who becomes as such the subject” (HD 388). And it is not merely a natural spontaneity he has in mind. In fact, this is precisely the charge he lays against Feuerbach’s “speculative materialism”: “The human essence... can with him be comprehended only as ‘genus,’ as an internal, dumb generality which merely *naturally* unites the many individuals” (Theses on Feuerbach 6). In contrast to and a fecund shift beyond Feuerbach, perhaps Marx’s most brilliant contribution to the theory of subjectivity is that his “human nature” is precisely *not* an abstraction installed in every individual from the outset. Neither is it merely the result of one of its faculties, such as thinking or consciousness, but is much more primary, an active event of reception and response, a *happening* which in its own right begs for new investigations of the nature of this human nature.

In his critique of Hegel’s phenomenology Marx lays out his own “naturalist” (materialist) phenomenology of the human subject as an objective-creative being who lives from and is dependent upon an objective world. And, I shall argue, it is here in his emphasis on the primary contribution of objective nature missing in Hegel, that one can detect limits within which Marx’s concept of the subject resides. It is in arguing for the subject as an objective being that Marx establishes the subject as the “*real corporeal*” human being, while also confining it to a need-based respons-ability and thus to the limits of a development starting from the position of the

conatus essendi. Here, then, he lays an exclusive need-based foundation for his conception of the human subject. But how to approach this claim, when Marx describes ‘man’ not just as an “active natural being,” “a *corporeal*, living, real, sensuous, objective being” (HD 390) but one who “has his process of origin in *history*” (Ibid. 391), who is in reality “the ensemble of the social relations” (Thesis VI)? What makes Marx’s conceptualization of the human as a corporeal-sensibility a limited and reified version of itself, one that only enters the world and moves through it from an in-itself position, and responds to the world only from the position of a for-itself? Is the question perhaps: What is it about Marx’s subject as active, creative and objective being that contributes to its reification as a survival-ego? A potentially fruitful approach may be achieved through an analysis of his conception of the sensuous corporeal subject, distinguishing for the moment this “natural” condition as much as possible without running afoul of its social relations.

A Reified Corporeal Sensibility

According to the well-known logic of *The German Ideology*, “[t]he first premise of all human history is ... the existence of living human individuals”¹⁹ (GI 149). Emphasizing the determinative status of human corporeality, Marx immediately concludes from this premise that the “...first fact to be established is the physical organization of these individuals and their consequent relation to the rest of nature” (Ibid.). In a footnote to his also well known statement “that men must be in a position to live in order to be able to ‘make history’” (Ibid. 155-56), he states the germ of his meaning, delineating the fundamental dynamic as one among (a) natural conditions (b) “human bodies” and “need,” and (c) “labour” (GI 156f). “The writing of history,” he insists, “must always set out from these natural bases [“the actual physical nature of man” and

¹⁹ To be sure, the production of species life must not be understood abstractly, but in its concrete relations to other “first premises” (mode of life; the family, etc.).

“the natural conditions in which man finds himself” (149)] and their modification in the course of history through the action of men” (150). Thus the humans as natural beings exist in the natural world, yet, as we know, their nature does not constitute an eternal given. The subject as a natural being is rather in an immanently participatory relation with its own ontological development, conditioned by, but always surpassing the given.²⁰

To get a closer grasp of Marx’s conception of the human as a natural being one must turn to *The Paris Manuscripts* where, critiquing Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit*, he briefly articulates his own phenomenology of the subject as a natural being. There he lays down the germ of his conception of the subject as a corporeal and sensuous being. We turn to these passages to elucidate the birth of the human as the subject who actively participates in reality and who responds and relates to the non-I only from within the confinement of a need-based living being: Marx’s subject stems from itself for itself and arrives at itself.

“*Man*,” he writes, “is directly a *natural being*” (HD 389). As a living-natural being, the human is a finite-mortal-being, a “conditioned and limited being,” one susceptible to suffering “like animals and plants” (Ibid.). On the other hand, this is a being endowed with “natural,” “vital” powers. Marx describes these powers as “dispositions and capacities, as *drives*.” A living natural being “endowed with objective, *i.e.*, material essential powers,” he writes, has “*real natural objects* for the objects of its being” (388). In other words, being active, corporeal, sensuous and objective, the subject as a natural living-being is a non-self-sufficiency. Existing as a living object, the subject is in need of objects external to itself: “the *objects* of his drives exist outside, as *objects* independent of him; but these are objects of his *need*, essential objects,

²⁰ “Labour is first of all a process between man and nature, a process by which man, through his own actions, mediates, regulates and controls the metabolism between himself and nature” (*Capital*, Vol. I, 283).

indispensable to the exercise and confirmation²¹ of his essential powers” (HD 389-90). As a living-being, the human exists as autochthonous, separated but dependent on the external world.

This dependency of the autochthonous I upon the non-I signifies the susceptibility of the human as a sensuous-being. For Marx, having its vital objects external to itself means in turn that the human as a natural being is an object to another, “to be subjected to the actions of another” and so to suffer: “To be *sensuous*, *i.e.* to be real, is to be an object of sense, a *sensuous* object, and thus to have sensuous objects outside oneself, objects of one’s sense perception. To be sensuous is to *suffer* (to be subjected to the actions of another)” (390).

As a natural being then, as before anything else a physical organization that, like all life is primordially insufficient in-itself, the human subject lives in and relates to everything beyond itself as a world of objects indispensable to its own existence. Hunger, Marx explains, is “the acknowledged need of my body for an *object* which exists outside itself,” “which is indispensable to its integration and to the expression of its essential nature” (390). As an “objective sensuous being,” a finite-living-being, the I senses its needs and therefore suffers, from which circumstance Marx infers that the subject “is a *passionate* being.” And “passion,” he continues, is nothing but “man’s essential power vigorously striving to attain its object” (390). Not just primordially, then, but in the absence of any other relations outside of those based on need, relations between the living being and its natural conditions, Marx conceives the human subject in its corporeality as an exclusively need-based being. The autochthonous I, as sensuous insufficiency, looks to the other from the point of view of its own suffering and its efforts to overcome it. A non-self-sufficiency, but passionate to satisfy its needs, the subject acts as an objective being on the objective world. Situated first in relation to its living necessities, the

²¹ On the concept of confirmation, see sub-section below “The Object-Object Relation”.

subject as a natural being *arises* from itself in response to its own needs. First and always the task every day is to actively produce and confirm its being, and as it does so, the subject is reified within its self-referentiality. Let us consider then how this self-referential object-of-need relates to itself and its external environment as an object among objects.

The Object-Object Relation

In conjunction with the refutation of Hegel's Subject as a non-being which at most can only establish "thingness" (HD 391) instead of a real objective world, Marx argues that a being that has no objective existence and has no objects outside of itself "exists in the condition of solitude" (390). As it is the *only* being, it is a "non-being," an abstraction capable only of abstraction. In contrast, to have an objective world, to create an objective world, means to be an objective being: to exist as an object among other objects. If "a non-objective being is a *non-being*" (390), then, to be a being is, by its mere existence, already to be an *object*. But what is entailed in being an object as such, and one who has objectives even prior to cognition? Then again what is entailed in being a corporeal-sensibility, a "physical organization" as an object? And how does emerging as this object among other objects effect Marx's conceptualization of human subjectivity?²²

For Marx, the point is that the object-object relation is one in which physical entities are reciprocally affective, but, of course, his conceptualization does more than that. At one level of analysis, Marx's abstraction, constructing the subject as an object in relation to other objects, establishes a state of equivalency. That which exists is observed from the point of view of

²² The analysis will suggest that there is in Marx's narration a fateful over-emphasis, a one-sidedness to his materialist correction of Hegel's account of existence, something quite other than the *aufhebung* of the idealist/materialist polarity Marx intends. From the perspective essayed here, I argue, what we have is the theorization of the subject in its capacity as a survival-ego, and one, moreover, conceived as *the* essential aspect in the development/creation of the human subject as such. Whatever comes into being beyond that survival-ego must not only come out of and through it but must also always remain grounded in it as its primary source.

objectness; every object exists in self-mediated relation to other objects, ‘recognizing’ those other objects only through its own existence. “As soon as I have an object, this object has me for its *object*” (HD 390, emphasis added). That is to say, abstracted as a relation in which every object is equally the other’s object and every object relates to the other as its own object, existence has already been²³ reduced to an object-object relation. The real corporeal human “...creates and establishes only objects because it is established by objects, because it is fundamentally *nature*” (389).

At another level, the abstraction to the object-object relation already assumes a for-itself relation: “For as soon as there are objects outside me, as soon as I am not *alone*, I am *another*, a reality *other* than the object outside me. For this third object I am ... *its object*” (390). The object-object relation paradigm presupposes a utilitarian relating and a for-itself-ness. If one were to argue that the equivalency posited here does not, strictly speaking, entail a utilitarian moment, Marx’s analogy of the sun and plant relation provides an illustration of just what sort of equivalency this is: “The sun is an *object* for the plant, an indispensable object which confirms its life, just as the plant is an object for the sun, an *expression* of its life-awakening power and its *objective* essential power” (390). Here, the sun’s effect on the plant ‘confirms’ the plant’s life, that is, it does more than ‘express’ the fact that the plant is an entity in effective relation to the exteriority;²⁴ it discloses that the sun perceived from the plant’s vantage point which is that of a finite (mortal) living-being, is a necessary object to the plant’s *objects*, *i.e.*, its life processes. The

²³ Further, Marx writes that a “being which is not itself an object for a third being has no being for its *object*, *i.e.*, it has no objective relationship and its existence is not objective” (HD 390). And, as Marx says, if one is non-objective, one does not exist (390).

²⁴ It might appear as though I am making a semantic distinction by referring to the plant as an entity and to the non-I as exteriority instead of naming both of them objects. However, I do so in order to later bring into the relief the hindrances immanent to the order of the subject/object which cannot but categorize both existence and existents as objects, hence erasing the absolute separation between the interiority and exteriority. My intention is to explicate the limits of such thinking in that it removes the capacity to conceive a human subjectivity capable of resisting and transcending the hegemony of totalizing systems.

sun is the plant's object for its objects (its survival and its development as a plant). From this perspective, the plant is also a utility for the sun in that it is through the plant that the sun's essential power of life-awakening is objectified, expressed. Thus the relation is an equivalent one in the sense of their mutual utility. However (*pace* Aristotle), conceiving the life-awakening potentiality of the sun as the expression of its objective *essential* power is only possible from the perspective of physical life. In other words, Marx's pre-cognitive object-object relation carries in itself the cognized perspective of a survivalist subjectivity. The sun, then, is 'confirmed' (for us only in our capacity as finite living beings with survival needs) as an object in effective relation to other objects. The direction of this relation, however, is observed from a point of view in which object-object relations are recognized in their utility for life. The life perspective has samed both the plant and the Sun to itself, implicating them in this recognition of their utility as necessary for life. The object-object relation here is, in short, instrumentally directed toward that which is needed to sustain the life process. This Aristotelian depiction of reciprocal self-objectification is telling of the saming totality.

If we remember that, for Marx, "passion," originally 'man's' response to suffering from his need of external objects, is nothing but man's "essential power vigorously striving to attain its object" (HD 390), we see that, far beyond merely recognizing our physical existence in a physical universe, the relations here are seen from the perspective of effective for-itself object-object relations. Yes, "As soon as I have an object, this object has me for its object" (390), but this I observes from the instrumental point of view of striving for life, for its own development, for the confirmation and expression of its essential powers. Metaphorically, then, the subject is always already situated *first and foremost* within the horizon of a set of object-object relations in which need is the perspective, the motive, and in which an instrumental relation to need-

satisfaction is not only immanent to and preeminent within these object-object relations. Need and instrumentality (the immanent impetus towards life) are *the* integral elements in the object-object relation as such.

To be a sensuous, corporeal living-being as an object among other objects for its own *objects*, human sensibility is then as limited and totalized as the object-object relation itself, for it receives and responds to the non-I exclusively as essential object to its being and for its own confirmation. The proximity of the I and the non-I is always already filled in with an in-itself, for-itself self-referential relation. In the absence of space for any other relations outside of need and self-realization, the possibility of a 'Desirous' relation is sealed off. In Marx, then, an immanent, need-based 'instrumental' impetus is *the* object-object relation at the level of the human subject as a corporeal-sensible being. Object-object relations are from the beginning enclosed in the for-itself, saming all objective reality to the perspective from this impetus. A human being is essentially a physical organization which is primordially insufficient in-itself. Hence, reified within its self-referentiality, it lives exclusively in and relates to everything beyond itself as an object in an objective world that is either useful or not for itself.

In Labour the Subject is Born

"Man," however, in Marx's paradigm, beyond being an objective being, is also "an *active* natural being" (HD 389). As corporeal-sensuous beings, humans are not just passive recipients of external forces like the plant, but, famously, they actively create their own life and ontological development. They confirm themselves through their practical, critical activity (Thesis I, "Theses on Feuerbach").

According to Marx, then, that which distinguishes the human subject as a natural being from other living-beings is the nature of its "life-activity, its productive life," *i.e.*, its labour

(EPM 328). Animals and plants, he argues, are immediately one with their life activity. They *are* “that activity,” whereas humans as natural beings take their life-activity as an object of their being, a means to satisfy their need “to preserve physical existence” (328). Human life-activity, their labour, Marx argues, appears not only as the means to immediate satisfaction of needs but also as the means of self-creation.

Following Hegel, he writes that labour *is* this “act of self-creation” (HD 395); labour is “the self-confirming essence” of the real, corporeal, sensuous, objective human being, as he is “the result of his *own labour*” (386). In this paradigm, labour is the mediatory category between the human as a for-itself corporeal-sensuous being (an object) and the material conditions (other objects, including other humans). That is to say, the object-object relation mediated through labour begets the human being as a subject. It is human labour, life activity, that renders the objective being a subject, one whose subjectivity is “the establishment of a *real*, objective world, but as something *external* to it” (389). That is, subjectivity is the product of the human act of self-creation through its own objectification and externalization, while being at the same time the objectification of the external world. In labour the subject is born.

Beyond the activity of self-creation and externalization, labour, however, is inextricable from need, *i.e.*, from human non-self-sufficiency. Labour is the response of an autochthonous being, a mortal living-being, risen from its own necessities facing the non-I, the exteriority. It is the act of an object-of-need establishing “its physical existence.” Now, labour is of course necessary to the survival of the life process, but what is important here is that it signifies a *definite* response and relation to exteriority, a definite way of participating in existence: “Labour is first of all a process between man and nature, a process by which man, through his own

actions, mediates, regulates and controls the metabolism between himself and nature.”²⁵ It is an act of interjection, an interloping self-referential grasping, removing, changing and objectifying the exteriority in accordance with the needs of the interloper. Labour is of the order of taking, annexing to, bringing in and absorbing within the self, an appropriation that simultaneously extends itself as mastery over the non-I. What it is not, what it excludes is any relation to alterity, any relation to the order of giving and caring for the non-I as the other in-itself.

It is this exclusive derivation that renders Marx’s subject one-sided. A deep-seated effect of the theorization of human corporeality and sensibility within the confines of a need-based participation in life as object to object is, then, the occlusion of a desire-based relation.²⁶ Marx’s subject, that is to say, comes into being already reduced to a survival-ego. The human subject, in this paradigm, is an active respons-ability, but solely with an in-itself origin and a for-itself horizon. Originating from the totalized position of *object* in relation to other objects, labour becomes the exclusive response of the I to the non-I; hence, it is the birth of a self-referential, instrumental, survivalist subjectivity. This subjectivity is the objective act of the objective being, a “being for himself” who confirms and realizes “himself both in his being and in his knowing” (HD 391). In the absence of an absolute separation between the human as a corporeal-sensuous being and the exteriority, and in the light of a for-itself object-object relation, Marx’s conceptualization of the subject as a natural living-being begins and remains within the boundaries of the totality of a survival-ego, a for-itself need-based respon-ability to the Other and the others.²⁷

²⁵ *Capital*, Vol. I, 283.

²⁶ As we shall see, that relation of the other for the other would be the response of the caress. But the caress signifies a Desire-based relation to the other, for the other, as the other, which in Marx’s conception of the human subject as a natural being, remains occluded under the hegemony of need and labour.

²⁷ Once again, the importance of what Marx advances here can hardly be overstated: he brings forth the material aspect of the human being that is shared with all life, the aspect of the for-itself (what the biologists call “closure”)

iv) The Human Subject as a Social-Historical Being

In this section I investigate Marx's conceptualization of the human subject as a social-historical-being, arguing that he in fact theorizes the historical process of the formation and development of the for-itself aspect of the human subject leaving the being-for-the-other occluded on this level of theorization as well. Under the 'natural' aspect of the human subject, I argued in the previous section that in Marx's derivation, the subject is born out of the object-labour-object relation that occurs as we satisfy our subsistence needs. This, "the production of material life itself," is "the first historical act"²⁸ of self-creation. Through labour humanity creates itself as a subject, not as fixed once and for all, but as a constant self/world-transformation. Thus, the natural human being creates itself as a historical being, a process in which

... the *whole of what is called world history* is nothing more than the creation of man through human labor, and the development of nature for man, he therefore has palpable and incontrovertible proof of his self-mediated *birth*, of his *process of emergence* (EPM 357).

Labour, the life-producing activity, again, is the subject-producing factor mediating between the need-based individual and objective nature: "man reproduces himself in the act of begetting"²⁹ and thus always remains the subject" (357). Labour as the subject-creating factor enables Marx to conceptualize humans as both receptive corporeality and active responding sensibility (but of course delimited by the need relation). As labour begets one as a subject, the event always happens in direct or indirect "association with other men" which renders one a social-being. The material of one's activity is a social product, Marx argues, and therefore the "expression" and

the for-itselfness itself following Hegel. On this biological component of life as such see "First Nature and Second Nature in Hegel and Psychoanalysis," (Joel Whitebook, *Constellations*, 15, No. 3, Sept. 2008): 382-390.

²⁸ For Marx, of course, the "first" historical act" consists of several simultaneous "moments" or "circumstances." It is *this* act of the production of material life "in order to sustain human life" that he understands as the "fundamental condition of all history" (*GI* 156).

²⁹ Marx uses the term 'begetting' in this context to include the whole process of the self-creation of 'man' (EPM 357).

“confirmation” of one’s life is “conceived in association with other men” which makes it therefore “an expression and confirmation of *social life*” (EPM 350). Thus, rather than transcend the for-itself, this derivation moves the being-for-itself to the social plane, rendering the latter the very sociality of the subject, an essentially for-itself relation.

Due to their life activity, with labour as the mediation between themselves and their circumstances, humans are living beings who always create themselves as subjects in relation to what they are at any particular historical juncture, but also always as beings capable of moving beyond. That the life-activity signified as labour is a response aroused from a relating born out of need is thus indeed a fateful choice: originating, as we have seen, in an in-itself location from which it acts on the exteriority as its objects with a for-itself impetus, Marx’s subject as a social-historical being remains contained within the survival-subject, with its instrumental approach to existence.³⁰ How does Marx develop this remarkable—however one-sided—account?

He begins by critical development of Feuerbach’s critique of Hegel. If Feuerbach returned sensuousness to the subject, Marx argues, he failed to recognize its active existence. Without the productive activity, sensuousness is limited to passive existence, hence the human subject is reified within its immediate empirical existence (*GI* 168). In contrast to this reification, Marx, conceiving really existing humans and their material conditions as social-historical products of their own action, theorizes human subjects as revolutionizing active participants in their objective and subjective existence. Labour, as life-activity, is thus the sensuous activity which makes it possible to remove the notion of the human subject from this reified material passivity: Marx conceives “the sensuous world,” then, “as the total living sensuous *activity* of the

³⁰ Though not, of course, alone in this, one may wonder if distorted versions of this choice might be among the things at the bottom of the frequent historical tendency of scientistic Marxists in particular to grant themselves the right to absolute deception against all who are ‘external’ to their particular cadre’s ‘truth’, privileging themselves in that, survival of that truth being at stake, the end really does justify the means. To what degree is this self-service a prevalent logic of American and other survivalist cultures and subcultures as well?

individuals composing it” (*GI* 171). “Sensuousness as practical, human-sensuous activity” (Thesis V), or labour as “life-activity, productive life” (EPM 328), becomes thus that through which the human reproduces herself not only “intellectually” but “actively and actually” (329). By introducing labour in this way, then, Marx not only frees subjectivity from abstract idealism and the inert Feuerbachian substantialism, but also sets up the actual living humans as active participants in the creation of an objective-subjective world which includes themselves:

When real, corporeal *man*, ... establishes his real, objective *essential powers* as alien objects by externalization [*Entäusserung*] ... ; [it] is the subjectivity of *objective essential powers* whose action must therefore be an *objective* one (HD 389).

After Marx, then, humans as objective-subjects and subjective-objects, appear as both responsible to, and responsible for the whole of human existence and all its history. Which is to say that, because we are capable of relating to our existence such that we participate in its creative transformation, because our being and becoming do not follow natural, historical or divine *laws*—these heteronomies being self-inflicted—, but instead we participate both ontogenetically and phylogenetically in making our own being, we are thus responsible for the state of that being.³¹

However, though this recognition and elucidation of the social-historical nature of human ontological creation represents a profound de-reification of our being and its responsibility, I argue that drawing out the formative process solely through the labour mediation, broadly conceived as it is, carries with it significant reification of its own. Specifically, it reduces the starting point of relations between the I and the non-I to, at best, the act of reciprocal objectification. Moreover, limiting this relation to its need-based component establishes a closure within a for-itself development that limits the relations of interiority and exteriority throughout the rest of the theoretical development. To support this reading and to flesh out its significance

³¹ This theme is reiterated throughout the “Theses on Feuerbach.” Within this context, Thesis XI, for example, cannot be understood as a merely voluntaristic command or a call into action, without its objective-subjective contextualization.

for effective resistance against totalizing systems—from “the estranged mode of existence” through capitalism and beyond— let us consider Marx’s often visited premises of the first historical act of self-creation.

The First Historical act

[Men] ... begin to distinguish themselves from animals as soon as they begin to *produce* their means of subsistence, a step which is conditioned by their physical organisation. The way in which men produce their means of subsistence depends first of all on the nature of the actual means of subsistence they find in existence and have to reproduce (*GI* 150, emphasis added).

The first thing to note is that the three premises, the “real individuals, their activity and the material conditions” (*GI* 149) are articulated from the horizon of individuals as physical entities designated as always already in relation to their survival needs who actively respond to these needs from within the given material conditions. Human history is driven by need and actualized through labour. Thus the first historical act is the production of the means to satisfy the subsistence survival needs, as “life involves before everything else eating and drinking, a habitation, clothing and many other things” (156), *i.e.*, “the production of material life itself” (*Ibid.*). This first historical act is not to be taken as a mere chronological fact. It is existential, for, of course, this production of material life is itself an always recurring, continuous life-need, “a fundamental condition of all history, which today, as thousands of years ago, must daily and hourly be fulfilled merely in order to sustain human life” (*Ibid.*).

This “reproduction of the physical existence of the individuals” (150) is then, for Marx, the site from which natural man comes into being as a subject.³² It is of course true as he emphasizes that the motor of this process is not an abstraction; as humans satisfy their needs, they relate to themselves individually, to others socially and to the world through this life-activity in a *definite* way, “a definite form of activity of these individuals, a definite form of

³² Compare HD 391 where this point is foreshadowed.

expressing their life, a definite *mode of life*.” What Marx so ingeniously describes here is the hegemonic need-based survivalist mode of life in its nascent stage and its existential reoccurrence throughout human history. The problem here is not with what he describes but what he leaves out of this site from which subjectivity arises. In Marx’s dynamism between the corporeal-sensuous human being and exteriority, for-itselfness is not just the hegemonic aspect of the human subject (as a natural and a historical being) but its totality. Thus when he follows this immediately with perhaps one of the most significant principles regarding the subject that he ever articulated: “As individuals express their life, so they are” (150), subjectivity is simultaneously stamped as *conatus essendi*. Within this paradigm, the determining factors in the historical nature of the human subject came to be “*what they produce*” and “*how they produce*” (Ibid.), the dynamic from which the history of human ontological self-development arises.

As is well known, the satisfaction of the first need, including as it does both the action and the instrument of satisfaction which has been acquired, generates this dynamic of human history itself, *i.e.*, the production of new needs (for instruments of production, higher standards of expectation, etc.; see *GI* 156). *What they produce*, then, is material life in the form of the proliferation of needs and population, “the production of life both of one’s own in labour and of fresh life in procreation.” As for *how they produce*, Marx once again lays out the basic premises of his conception of humans as both natural and social beings: the production of life “now appears as a double relationship: on the one hand as a natural, and on the other as a social relationship” (*GI* 157). That is, the survival needs themselves are socio-historically defined and produced. It is on this need aspect of the natural basis alone then that the rest of the premises of human history, up through all their social relations, follow from the production of their material life.

Functionalist Sociality

Theorizing the subject as a social-being from within a restricted need-based paradigm means that the reciprocity of producing and being produced is recognized only from a functionalist perspective; it means a horizon of a for-itself-and-with-the-other.³³ When Marx explains the satisfaction of survival needs as both natural and social, he immediately qualifies the latter: “By social we understand the co-operation of several individuals, no matter under what conditions, in what manner and to what end” (*GI* 157). The emphasis here is on the centrality of the co-operating, working in relation to other individuals working, regardless of the condition, the method or the objects of the production. Sociality is, then, of co-operation of individuals *with* individuals for the purpose of production of life, whether within a family, slavery, capitalist or communist arrangement. Sociality then is defined as a “materialistic connection of men *with* one another which is *determined by their needs and their mode of production*, and which is as old as men themselves” (157, my emphasis). In other words, Marx rightfully recognizes the importance and significance of “a materialistic connection of men with one another” and the role of needs; he recognizes not only the necessity, but the hegemonic position of the survivalist element, but by taking it as total, he defers the potentiality of ever-present human-to-human social relations to a post-natural history, a period after the supersession of alienation and private property.³⁴

Marx elucidates the social aspect of the human act of self-creation, then, but, as it is a derivative of a self-referential subject’s action on the world, his notion of sociality is riven with functionalism. Later on in *The German Ideology* we read: “Human beings, by no means wanting to form a society, have nevertheless, only achieved the development of society, because they

³³ More than this: If sociality is reduced to cooperation, the existence of the human subject appears prior to sociality.

³⁴ As I shall argue in the discussion of species being below, even then he can only approach the human-to-human relation through the for-itself *conatus essendi*; the possibility of a sociality prior to and unmediated by the self remains inaccessible to Marx.

have always wanted to develop only as isolated individuals and therefore achieved their own development only in and through society” (GI-P 231). This view is consonant with the claim in *The Communist Manifesto* that “the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all.”³⁵ It is true that the former is an empirical claim, what the state of affairs has been, not what it might be. Moreover, it is a claim against the idealism of the young Hegelians, making a case for a material basis for human beings’ sociality. Nonetheless, it ties human sociality to a functionality which again presupposes the adequacy of the in-itself perspective of the need-based subject. Taking “only” in the above quotation seriously the survival-ego proceeds strictly in its own terms. Thus our very ontology, whatever else might be included, actually works itself out *only* through labor, and thus, as we shall see, species being can only work itself out as a community of self-referential individual beings. It is in this sense that Marx’s concept of social-being, though recognizing an ethics of reciprocity, is incapable of accommodating an ethical sense of a desire-based respons-ability to and for-the-other. This absence of any sensible-corporeal basis for the possibility of an ethical relation within the notion of sociality becomes clearer when he attributes the possibility of any non-egoistic, non-survival-need related act to moralism, and rejects it as a nonsensical idea:

[T]he communists do not oppose egoism to selflessness or selflessness to egoism, nor do they express this contradiction theoretically either in its sentimental or in its highflown ideological form; they rather demonstrate its material source, with which it disappears of itself. The communists do not preach *morality* at all ... (GI-P 264).

Instead of conceiving being for-itself and for-the other as aspects of human subjectivity, he once again anchors that subjectivity within the for-itself, which, depending on “definite circumstances” can assert itself as egoism or selflessness (Ibid.). Human subjectivity, then, remains once again within the space of need and for-itselfness, “no one can do anything without

³⁵ *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed., Robert C. Tucker (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1978), p. 491.

at the same time doing it for the sake of one or other of his needs ...” (GI-P 272). In fact, according to Marx, “*need and egoism*,” or need and *survivalist-subjectivity* are the basis from which alienation is to be superseded and the “*true community*” is to arise, as the true community “does not come into being as the product of reflection but ... out of the *need* and the *egoism* of individuals, *i.e.* it arises directly from their own activity” (EJM 265). Functionalized totally under its need aspect, the human subject, both as a natural and social-historical being, has its centre in its non-self-sufficiency.

Sociality and Non-self-sufficiency

Centered here in itself, the individual’s sociality originates in its non-self-sufficiency. Just as need based individuals are separated yet dependent on nature, so they are separated yet dependent on one another as social beings. With the social defined as co-operation among individuals, individuals who are connected with one another in response to their need for self-preservation and development, an equivalency is established in an object-object relation mediated by labor.³⁶ Interpreting human sociality within a materialist connection among humans as ‘real,’ ‘corporeal-sensuous,’ ‘objective’ and ‘active’ in-itself and for-itself, Marx simultaneously breaks the subject free from the idealism of the ‘pure ego’ yet delimits it within a survivalist horizon:

Individuals have always and in all circumstances “proceeded *from themselves*,” but since they were not *unique* in the sense of not needing any connections with one another and since their *needs*, consequently their nature, and the method of satisfying their needs, connected them with one another (relations between the sexes, exchange, division of labour), they *had to* enter into relations with one another (GI-P 463).

³⁶ The central point Marx is making here, that the empirical individual is not a pure non-socially mediated ego, is, of course, a crucial one: “Far from it being true that ‘out of nothing’ I make myself, for example, a ‘[public] speaker’, the nothing which forms the basis here is a very manifold something, the real individual, his speech organs, a definite stage of physical development, an existing language and dialects, ears capable of hearing and a human environment from which it is possible to hear something, etc., therefore, in the development of a property something is created by something out of something, and by no means comes, as in Hegel’s *Logik*, from nothing, through nothing to nothing” (GI 162).

What we see here is the primacy of “need,” “equivalency” and “individuals,” in short, a saming perspective; the subject is essentially a product.³⁷ Based on these suppositions, the cell form of sociality resides in the utilitarian relation of an individual cooperating with another individual, as to be for-the-other is not cooperation but it is a ‘response’ to the other, outside of reciprocity; it is a receptivity and giving without *quid pro quo*, with no equivalency, no utility and no “had to.” A sociality which includes being for-the-other cannot arise from a need relation as being-for-the-other is not a response in reaction to the lacks and necessities of the self; it is otherwise than the subject’s sufficiency or insufficiency.

The persistence of the notion of the subject limited to a need-based individual, a non-self-sufficient self-referentiality, slips into Marx’s grasp of the true individual and the true community. In this paradigm the existence of true individuals and true community, *i.e.*, the possibility of the existence of the ethical individual and community, is dependent on freedom from “physical need” since humans, Marx says, “truly produce only in freedom from such need” (EPM 329). Thus, as care-for-the-other remains occluded, sociality remains within the boundaries of functionalist association with others.

In this paradigm the subject as a historical-being is primordially a being receiving and responding to the exteriority in *reaction* to its own needs of survival and development. As the subject is born out of the self-creating activity – labour –, sociality too, is a derivative of the process of self-creating activity. The human subject is a social being because of its co-operation with other individuals for the purpose of producing the means of subsistence. In fact from the beginning the relation between the self and the other is mediated by a third term: sociality as co-operation is a proximity already pre-occupied with need and labour. Even though individuals are

³⁷ We can locate Foucault’s subject in the same philosophical tradition. The difference here is that Foucault’s subject is the product of power relations while Marx’s subject is the product of need satisfaction –which is as dynamic as the power relations.

socially produced and are the crystallization of “the ensemble of social relations” (Thesis VI), sociality is nonetheless a relation of co-operation with other individuals with the object of satisfying one’s survival and developmental needs, rather than one of *responding to and for the Other*.

Assuming, with Marx, that in a true community every other power relation and every version of contradictory interests would be eliminated along with the elimination of “forced division of labour,” sociality, however un-coerced, would nonetheless remain at bottom instrumental. Free from the domination of necessity and free from the forced division of labour, the need for the alienation of life activity would be eradicated as one’s need satisfaction surpassed self-preservation. In post-history as in natural-history the need relation remains constant while the “nature” of the need changes. Having achieved a state of material satisfaction of the survival necessities – a state that guarantees the *esse* of the *conatus* –, the other itself, nature itself, becomes the I’s need, a necessity for the I’s self-development, its confirmation in its being and its knowledge. In Marx’s *true* community, then, the individual’s “existence for others and their existence for him,” would become “the vital element of human reality” and society would be “the perfected unity in essence of man with nature” (EPM 349). This would, however, be a state of total equivalency within the order of subject and object; the I’s self-objectifying act slips into the social where “in my labour I had gratified a *human* need, *i.e.* ... I had objectified *human nature* and hence had procured an object corresponding to the needs of another *human* being”³⁸ (EJM 277). Thus, through the others, the I’s self-objectification would be doubly confirmed. Sociality would remain subsumed within the subjectivity of a self-referential non-self-sufficiency: “I would be acknowledged by you as the complement of your own being, as an

³⁸ Here Marx brilliantly elucidates the sociality of the survival *aspect* of human relations, taking a giant stride beyond the idealism, materialism and positivism of his predecessors.

essential part of yourself. I would thus know myself to be confirmed both in your thoughts and your love”³⁹ (277).

Whether alienated or emancipated, Marx’s ‘social’ thus remains in and of the for-itself. He conceptualizes the notion of social being based on his notion of the human subject. Instead of being in proximity with the other, receiving and responding to the other, Marx’s human is in proximity with a world of objects, receiving and responding to its own needs. The human subject as such is born out of the individual’s self-action. That is, the subject has always begun and developed on the basis of and through response to its own needs, relating and acting upon others as objects of its own being and knowing. Sociality then *essentially* takes the shape of co-operation, no matter whether voluntarily or forced. In this paradigm, social relations *are* exchange relations and it is for *this* reason that “the ‘history of humanity’ must always be studied and treated in relation to the history of industry and exchange”⁴⁰ (GI 157). That is to say, “[t]he process of exchange both of human activities in the course of production and of human products is equal to the species-activity” (EJM 265). For Marx, the course of humanity is geared here exclusively to “what they produce and how they produce”: they create themselves through working together, exchanging their life-activities, their labour, and the product of their activities. They create themselves, that is, in and through a division of labour.

³⁹ Of course it should be remembered that such a state of freedom from self-preservation and freedom to self-development relies on a historical and material condition where the necessity for the reoccurring first historical act has been dominated. Of course, too, such a condition entails the possibility of its inversion in the face of catastrophe, for it remains, willy-nilly, *conatus essendi*.

⁴⁰ Once again –and aside from the determinism that is itself related to the exclusively for-itself perspective—this is not to deny the revelatory value of the essential insight here. As even Max Weber says: “Liberated as we are from the antiquated notion that all cultural phenomena can be *deduced* as a product or function of the constellation of ‘material’ interests, we believe nevertheless that the *analysis of social and cultural phenomena* with special reference to their *economic* conditioning and ramifications was a scientific principle of creative fruitfulness, and with careful application and freedom from dogmatic restrictions, will remain such for a very long time to come (Max Weber, *The Methodology of the Social Sciences*, 166).

Division of Labour

Marx proceeds to the division of labour as the next moment of the first historical act of human subjects who create themselves through producing their material life socially. Since, for Marx as we have seen, to act socially is to engage in mutual interdependence, as they produce their lives they create the space of exchange relations and the division of labour. Under the domination of the material conditions and the necessities of the first historical act, division of labour is a “forced,” not “a voluntary,” organization of human life-activity.⁴¹

Marx argues that the “natural” or “forced” division of labour originates “with the division of labour in the sexual act” followed by divisions developed around natural characteristics such as physical dispositions and strength, needs, accidents, etc., and from there it culminates in the division between mental and physical activity (*GI* 159). Under the capitalist mode of production, relations of production and other social relations the division of labour has, of course, expanded and continues to expand, practically, intellectually and spiritually, from the most minute through the most global aspects of human activity.⁴² Yet, regardless of its continuous evolution and development what remains consistent, he reiterates, is that

the *division of labour* implies ... the fact that intellectual and material activity—enjoyment and labour, production and consumption—devolve on different individuals, and that the only possibility of their not coming into contradiction lies in the negation in its turn of the division of labour” (*GI* 159).

As humans come together in response to their needs, they enter into an exchange relation, exchanging their life-activity and its product, surrendering, giving away, and alienating one

⁴¹ See Marx’s argument with Feuerbach on the difference between the existence and the essence of the workers (*GI* 167ff).

⁴² In “Society and Economy in History” where Marx develops his materialist conception of history, he refutes Proudhon’s simplistic understanding of the division of labour, asking: “[W]as not the caste regime also a particular division of labour? Was not the regime of the corporations another division of labour? And is not the division of labour under the system of manufacture ... ? ... And that is not all. Is the whole inner organization of nations, are all their international relations anything else than the expression of a particular division of labour? And must not these change when the division of labour changes?” (*The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Tucker, 138-39).

individual's productive-life-activity in order to obtain that of another. That is, when the sustenance of life as such is the *end* and one's "life activity" is a *means*, the social space is that of a "forced" division of labour within a survivalist horizon. This *is* alienation as it appears within the subject. The subject relates to its own life-activity as means to satisfy its own survival within the order of *conatus essendi*. Thus the human subjects relate to one another as, are constituted as, social beings through *the act of alienation*. That is, a mutually alienated relation arises in which each subject takes the other as a means to its own ends. As each relates to the other as an object of its needs, the historical subject remains within the object-object relation, but at the level of the social. The social relation, then, originates from a state which Marx defines as "mutual alienation" (EJM 267). This mutual alienation is, by definition, a relation between owners of private property (GI 160).

Division of labour is then the distribution of productive activity among individuals within which "each man has a particular, exclusive sphere of activity, which is forced upon him and from which he cannot escape" (GI 160). According to Marx, "division of labour and private property are, ..., identical expressions" since, "in the one the same thing is affirmed with reference to activity as is affirmed in the other with reference to the product of activity" (GI 160). This means that, as one 'naturally' enters into exchange relations, one enters as a particular individual with a particular life-activity and its particular product. The exchange relation within the existing human anthropology, then, is the space of mutual affirmation of the division of human activity as well as private ownership of the product of such activity.

On the one hand, since the division of life-producing activity is determined by the individuals' needs and their material circumstances: "man's own deed becomes an alien power opposed to him, which enslaves him instead of being controlled by him" (Ibid.). Of course, the

whole presumption here is that the essence of the ‘true’ individual is her free relationship with her own activity, that is, free from the domination of necessity and free to develop and express herself. Since life-activity is the essence of being human, its development free from determining necessities indicates that it is ‘truly’ human.⁴³ Hence, it is the realization of human activity as an activity that is always already alienated and remains so until the realization of communism. Human self-objectification emerges as the realization of alienation.

On the other hand, within the social space created by necessities and organized around the division of labour, individuals relate to one another as producers and owners of the objects which are needed by other individuals. That is, *the space of co-operation* is at bottom one of “*mutual alienation*,” the social nexus or social relationship “between the two owners” (EJM 267).⁴⁴ Within the same logic, private property is originally a “consequence” of “*alienated-labour (alienated-life)*” regardless of the appearance of an inverse relationship between the two. It is only later however, Marx insists, that “this relationship becomes reciprocal” (EPM 332). That is, the first historical act is the act of self-objectification but as alienation of life activity, alienation which engenders private property.

It is worth emphasizing that Marx neither limits labour to the act of manufacturing a commodity, nor the experience of alienation to capitalism. Rather labour for him is the essential life activity as such, the species-character, and alienation is the utilization of the very life-activity as a *means* of life. In this paradigm, the relations of alienation, private property and exchange, along with contradictions between the interests of separate individuals and contradictions

⁴³ Nonetheless, the notion of a humanity true to its essence is itself based on the undesirability of the prevailing existence of the human condition and human life, the condition of alienation. Alienation then indicates the “*presence of an absence*,” the recognition of something essentially human through its absence. See “The Estranged Subject” below.

⁴⁴ Marx designates exchange relations or barter as “the social species-activity, the community, social commerce and integration of man within *private* property, and for that reason it is the external, *alienated* species-activity.” That is why the exchange relation appears as *barter* (EJM 267).

between particular and social interests are all inherent within the division of labour. It is within such objective-subjective conditions that humans have historically created themselves as estranged subjects and created their mode of life as an “estranged mode of existence” (HD 395, *GI* 161, 165). For as long as one is “a hunter, a fisherman, a herdsman, or a critical critic, and must remain so if he does not want to lose his means of livelihood” (*GI* 160), one “activates his life to acquire the means of *life*” (EJM 269). For Marx the division of labour, private property and alienation are not the products of capitalism nor for that matter even of civilization:

Just as the reciprocal exchange of the produce of *human activity* appears as *barter, horse-trading*, so the reciprocal complementing and exchange of human activity itself appears in the form of: the *division of labour*. This makes man, as far as is possible, an abstract being, a lathe, etc., and transforms him into a spiritual and physical abortion.

.... With civilization the *division of labour* is intensified (EJM 269).

Civilization is their intensified form, capitalism being, of course, the most intensified form of civilization.

The human subject as a historical-social-being, then, creates itself through a process of social activity, but one that begins from the mode of alienation, as one works “*in order to live*, in order to procure for... [one]self the *means* of life” (EJM 278). In fact, Marx regards this entire mode of life as having been indispensable to human development, as he says:

This fixation of social activity [as the activation of one’s life for survival], this consolidation of what we ourselves produce into an objective power above us, growing out of our control, thwarting our expectations, bringing to naught our calculations, is one of the chief factors in historical development up till now (*GI* 160).

And it is that definite social existence itself that must be resisted, revolutionized and transcended.

What is required, Marx insists, is to “overthrow the basis of the entire existing system,” a “complete revolution” which in turn requires “on the one hand [sufficient development of] the existing productive forces, [and,] on the other the formation of a revolutionary mass, which

revolts not only against separate conditions of society up till then, but against the very ‘production of life’ till then, the ‘total activity’ on which it was based” (165).

Through an existential phenomenology of the human subject as a natural-living, social-historical being Marx ascribes the birth and emergence of the subject exclusively to its need-based relation to itself, to other humans and the rest of the natural world as means and objects of survival and self-creation. This commitment, as I have emphasized, yields the theorization of the human being who relates to and participates in existence exclusively as an in-itself and for itself subject. This being for-itself, however, is also for Marx that which signifies the *human* as a *species-being*. As he says, “Man is not only a natural being; he is a *human* natural being; *i.e.*, he is a being for himself and hence a *species-being*” (HD 391). It is here that Marx sets himself the task of conceiving the emergence and development of the “species being” of ‘man’ from the in-itself and for-itself being, the *conatus essendi*.

v) The Human Subject as a Species-Being

For Marx, as we have seen, labour is the unique essential power through which real, corporeal and sensuous individuals produce not only their material-objective life but also their world and themselves in their capacities as both natural and historical subjects. Ontologically, however, due to its utilization in the first historical act, labour has always been manifested in an alienated form: “For in the first place labor, *life activity, productive life* itself, appears to man only as a *means* for the satisfaction of a need, the need to preserve physical existence” (EPM 328). Nonetheless, labour in itself, alienated or not, “constitutes the species-character of man”

(Ibid.), since the character of any species⁴⁵ “resides in the nature of its life activity” (Ibid.). But unlike other animal species which are “immediately one with [their] activity,” *i.e.*, they are merged with it as a “determination,” ‘man’ “makes his life activity itself an object of his will and consciousness” (Ibid.). The particularity of the human’s species character thus entails separation from the self, wherein and whereby the self stands at a distance not only from nature and others but also from itself and its life-activity.

The Object-object Relation and Species-Being

Separation, unlike isolation, is a relation. An immanent critical analysis of the intricacies of the separation-relation dynamism within which Marx conceives the human subject allows the elucidation of his notion of species-being as a site that, among everything else, provides a phenomenological map of the historically hegemonic aspect of human subjectivity, namely the survival-subjectivity. The claim here is that, for Marx, de-alienation of life activity is the emancipation of the human as a species in the sense that under the estranged-mode of existence the subject utilizes its life-activity to preserve itself while in emancipated-life it lives to develop its life-activity; we move from self-preservation to self-development. However, though the direction of the relation between the self and its life-activity is transformed, as is the nature of the need, the monopoly of the need-based responsiveness of a self-referential subjectivity remains constant. To make this argument, let us initially abstract the accompanying qualifier, “alienation,” from the notion of alienated species-being and only after an analysis of the latter re-merge these terms.

In his argument for the subject as a real, corporeal and sensuous living-being, Marx presents the humans as objective beings acting objectively, within and upon an objective world.

⁴⁵ The concept “species being” is not reserved exclusively for human beings. Marx makes a distinction between human’s species-being and other animals’ species-beings on the basis of differences in what he defines as the nature of their life activity. This is discussed below; also see Marx’s “Estranged Labour” in EPM 327-29.

To be an objective being, is to have objects outside itself and to be an object for a third being; the subject, as an objective being to this third, becomes thereby an object to itself; all that is not that subject becomes an external object to that subject (HD 390).⁴⁶ The I separated from the non-I is, then, in an object-object relation; each entity, the I and the non-I relates to the other as “*its* object.” For, Marx reasons, “as soon as I have an object, this object has me for its object” (Ibid.). To stand, perceive and act in such an *object-object* relation presupposes a vantage point centered within a self standing at a distance from itself. With its center of gravity thus located, the world and everything in it including oneself, one’s activity and all other human beings’ become one’s object.

To perceive, identify and present the non-I as object in this way presupposes a position of an in-itself and for-itself being. In this order of relation, separation is not absolute. The space of separation is always already occupied by a self-referential relation of an object with another object: every separated object is an object *for* the other’s *objects*. The distance of separation-relation is already filled with need and instrumentality; it is the space of for-itself-ness; it is already purposive. Moving from the self’s needs and relating to the non-self as objects for its own *objects*, the subject in this object-object relation is in a reverse-identification, defining all externality in relation to its purposes rather than identifying itself in relation to that externality.

Unlike other living species which are merged with their existence, the human as a species-being capable of standing outside of itself, surpassing its immediate existence, is a being for himself who, among everything else, “makes his life activity itself an object of his will and consciousness” (EPM 328). Rooted in nature as corporeal and sensuous living-beings, yet distanced, mediated, humans are conscious of their corporeality, of their being sensuous,

⁴⁶ Marx is, of course, engaged here in a debate with Hegel who designates the subject as a non-real, non-objective being, an abstract entity but one capable of acting objectively and creating the objective world. It is in response to this abstraction that Marx develops his phenomenology of the objective subject.

subjected to the reality outside of themselves and thus of their suffering. It is clear from Marx's account of the human as a suffering being that the human as a subject in its separation-relation to itself as an object of life, relates to itself as a susceptibility, finally, a being of finitude. In this paradigm, one gains distance from oneself through suffering, as she experiences her own objective-subjective being (HD 390). In the absence of any desire-based relation to exteriority, this self-referential discovery of the separation-relation of the self's insufficiency situates the human at a distance from itself, from its action and from nature as a need-based living-being susceptible to the question of survival. Thus the relation of the human as a species being to itself and others is imagined solely within the limitations of a corporeal-sensibility's need-based aspect. Separated but related to itself as sensing its own suffering but also its own objectivity and creativity, the human as a *species-being* is solely a being for himself, "as which he must confirm and realize himself both in his being and in his knowing" (HD 391).

Species-Being As Universal Free Being

To realize and confirm oneself in one's 'being' and one's 'knowing' is but to be for oneself, which is a state of being that defines each and everything that the human subject relates and responds to as objects to its will and its consciousness, making the species, as Marx says, "practically and theoretically ... [one's] object." From this privileged position the human subject in its capacity as a species-being is a for-itself being, who, through that for-itselfness, "looks upon himself as a *universal* and therefore free being" (EPM 327). *Separation* in and of itself does not render a species-being universal. But if a species-being *looks* upon itself as a universal, its being universal is a quality of its *relation* to existence. Standing separated and making the universe along with itself, its existence and its life activity, his object, the human as a species being must already be standing in the position of the representation of everything as *its* object.

Separated but resting in the unique relation to the exteriority objectively, that is, as objects for its own objectives – for its self confirmation and realization – a human then is represented in the objective world as the objective world is *his* representation, constructed for himself. The human is therefore a universal being in the sense that nothing is off limits to either its perspective or to the satisfaction of its act of self-creation. And because of that it is in that sense a ‘free’ being.

The self-referential separation-relation within the capacity of a need-based corporeal-sensibility rivets the human subject to the state of *conatus essendi* with a saming-totalizing subjectivity. Marx’s description of the human’s universality is itself an articulation of this objectification as a saming-totalizing process:

The universality of man manifests itself in practice in that universality which makes the whole of nature his *inorganic* body, (1) as a direct means of life and (2) as the matter, the object, and the tool of his life activity. Nature is man's *inorganic body*, that is to say, nature insofar as it is not the human body. Man *lives* from nature, *i.e.*, nature is his *body*, and he must maintain a continuing dialogue with it if he is not to die (EPM 328).⁴⁷

Starting from the perspective of a self-referentiality, the human as a species-being is imbued with an instrumental relation with “the whole of nature his *inorganic* body”, both as direct means of his survival and tools of his life-activity. Nature, which for Marx represents everything including other humans, is the human body, is each individual’s life by extension through which one repeatedly creates and realizes oneself anew. In other words, the I sames the whole world to its for-itselfness. The universality of the human, then, rather than resulting from its identification as a particular member of a species,⁴⁸ results from how it relates to the whole of existence, *i.e.*, defining existence solely in relation to itself. “Man *lives* from nature” in the sense of both self-

⁴⁷ Compare: “Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you. And as I gave you the green plants, I give you everything” (Genesis 9:3, *The Holy Bible, English Standard Version* (Crossway Bibles, 2001).

⁴⁸ For another perspective on the universality of species-being (as representation) see Asher Horowitz, “All that Is Holy Is Profane,” 64-66.

preservation and development, lives from the exteriority and relates to it as indispensable to its existence.

No one doubts, of course, that the human being as a finite, corporeal and sensible being, is not self sufficient, but is susceptible to the external and internal material conditions. Yes, humans depend on nature, as living beings we are *of* life, but the reverse does not hold: nature is not reducible to “man’s inorganic body.” To so reduce it, is to reduce the entirety of externality to the for-itself, is to express the hubris of the *conatus essendi*. Marx expands human universality to an absolute totality. Like the snake that bites its own tail, his universality departs from and arrives at itself in a closed circle, and, insofar as there is a “dialogue” with nature in this universality, it is so only in response to the survival aspect of the ontogenetic and phylogenetic subject. That is to say that having reduced all externality to the subject, the dialogue is, in fact, a monologue.

Labour, Life Activity, Productive Life

For Marx, “[t]he whole character of a species, its species-character, resides in the nature of its life activity” (EPM 328), and human life activity, labour, is a “free conscious activity”; that is, unlike an animal’s instinctually determined activity, labour itself is an object of human “will and consciousness.” At the same time, labour is an essential power of the human as a natural-being; “it is life-producing life” (Ibid.). As a human takes its life activity as the object of its life, though at first as “a *means* for the satisfaction of a need, the need to preserve physical existence” (EPM 328), it creates itself consciously and creates itself as a free being:

Conscious life activity directly distinguishes man from animal life activity. Only because of that is he a species-being. Or, rather, he is a conscious being, *i.e.*, his own life is an object for him, only because he is a species-being. Only because of that is his activity free activity (EPM 328).

The real, objective human, then, Marx infers, is “the result of his *own labour*” (HD 386). And, because “man is *human nature*, who becomes as such the subject” (HD 388), the subject is a natural, historical and social being produced by its species life activity. Thus labour is not only the act of producing things or the simple act of ‘reproduction’ of material life, but is, again Marx agrees with Hegel, “the self-confirming essence, of man”; “[l]abour is man’s coming to be for himself” (HD 386). To be for himself “he must” through his productive activity, actually and intellectually, “confirm and realize himself both in his being and in his knowing” (HD 391). His productive activity is “the practical creation of an *objective world*, the *fashioning* of inorganic nature,” an activity which in itself “is proof that man is a conscious species-being” (EPM 328-329). The productive life, the life activity, labour, is then, perceived as the free conscious activity of a for-itself species-being, through which it creates an objective world. As a result of human productive activity,

nature appears as *his* work and his reality. The object of labor is, therefore, the *objectification of the species-life of man*: for man produces himself not only intellectually, in his consciousness, but actively and actually, and he can therefore contemplate himself in a world he himself has created (EPM 329).

Following Hegel, but with his feet in the material world, Marx conceives the human subject as a self-creating being who as a result of labour actualizes and confirms himself through self-objectification (HD 395). In Marx’s paradigm, labour is, then, the subject-producing third-term. Labour is a definite form of responsivity; it is the act of grasping and appropriating the non-I purposively, for-itself in its being and its knowing. Labour is a need-based response to the non-I as the object of survival for the human as a living-being, and as the object of representation for the human as a conscious being. In a fully realized species-life this naming process is completed as “all *objects* become for him the *objectification of himself*, objects that confirm and realize his individuality, *his* objects, *i.e. he himself* becomes the object.” By this Marx means to say that the

human being in his totality –not just in his physical existence—becomes the goal of his objectification (EPM 353). In this sense, on the one hand, subjectivity is the act of objectification, rendering nature –including once again, the subject’s self, all others and labour—the object, the matter, the tool of the subject, both as object of its consciousness and as object to its being. On the other hand, human subjectivity is itself the externalization of human objectivity through labour: As subject,

[a]n objective being acts objectively, and it would not act objectively if objectivity were not an inherent part of its essential nature. It creates and establishes only objects because it is established by objects, because it is fundamentally *nature*. ... [I]ts *objective* product simply confirms its *objective* activity, its activity as the activity of an objective, natural being” (HD 389).

Thus again, labour, functioning as the mediation between the human and the exteriority, confines the human subject to its need-based corporeal-sensuous being, *i.e.*, to the status of an object, and renders an active, objective in-itself and for-itself being as the subject.

In all three aspects of Marx’s human subject, natural, historical and species-being, the subject connects and interacts with existence in its totality from the position of a self-referentiality and non-self-sufficiency. It is active and objective; its action is “revolutionary, of practical, critical activity” (Thesis I); it responds and relates to everything, but only “1) as a direct means of life and 2) as the matter, the object, and tool of his life activity” (EPM 328); its life-activity, labour, is a conscious and free activity as it is an object to its consciousness and will and through this life activity, it is a subject as such. Hence, the human subject is and acts for herself, ontogenetically and phylogenetically, realizing and confirming herself actually and intellectually, both in practice and consciousness (in praxis). Marx’s subject is, then, always located in the midst of its interaction with the non-self. It receives and responds to the exteriority

as always already objectified as the rest of nature, beyond its own body but as its own body, thus, it begins and remains within the totality of a non-self-sufficient self-referentiality, *i.e.*, a need-based respons-ability to the exteriority. The *quality* of need of course changes but the fact that the subject is a relation *of* an individual to itself, a self interdependently related to others and the rest of existence *from* the perspective of the self's needs and *for* the purpose of satisfying those needs, that fact remains constant. Respons-ability as the possibility of care and being-for-the-other has no place, is in this sense non-existent in Marx's conceptualization of human subjectivity as such. Need, then, is the relation and the term of relation between the I and others, while labour, the act of self-objectification, and other-objectivization is *the* response. Instrumentality reigns here in a philosophy of for-itself-ness.

However, even though humans, functioning within their capacity as universal and free species-beings, have naturally and socio-historically lived and created themselves and their mode of existence, they have objectified themselves not as *true* human beings, but as alienated. Ontologically his labour first appears to the human being "only as a *means* for satisfaction of a need, the need to preserve physical existence" (EPM 328). Therefore, as a conscious being the human subject "makes his life activity, his *being* [*Wesen*] a mere means for his *existence*" (Ibid.). In other words, the real objective human individuals set out from their first historical act in the state of estrangement and retain it *throughout* their natural history. With the inverted relation between life and life-activity, labour, though it is still a free conscious activity, has always already manifested as alienated labour.

In this paradigm if a human were to confirm and realize herself for *her* self, if she were one with her essence, then existing as a species-being and living a species-life would expand from an existence and a life of contradiction "between man and nature, and between man and

man,” to one characterized by harmony, a “true resolution of the conflict between existence and being, between objectification and self-confirmation, between freedom and necessity, between individual and species” (EPM 348). Such would be the state of humans in the “true community” made possible in a post-private-property, post-alienated state of being. For the time being, however, estranged labor means estranged-subject as it “turns *man’s species-being* – both nature and his intellectual species-powers – into a being *alien* to him and a *means of his individual existence*” (EPM 329). The estranged subject, then, is the historical manifestation of the human subject as *conatus essendi*.

vi) The Estranged-Subject

No doubt Marx’s conceptualization of the human subject as a natural, historical-social and species being restores subjectivity to humans themselves. Under Marx’s concept of the subject, humans themselves as corporeal-sensuous beings appropriate the status of active-objective agents of change and participants in the creation of themselves, their world and their mode of existence. That is, according to Marx, “[m]en, not as abstractions, but as real, living, particular individuals *are* this community. *As they are, so it is too*” (EJM 265). Both the human subject as well as the world become historical products of a dialectical dynamism between humans as objective-subjective beings, as living-beings in need of producing their lives ever anew, and the natural-material conditions, as the continuously configured objective condition. Marx depicts both human materiality and their material circumstances as the conditions from which they live, to which they are subjected and upon which they act, hence recognizing their participation in a revolutionizing dynamism of self and world.

In opposition to the early economists and the materialists, Marx refuses to accept that which *is* –the ontological state – as the final word, the given, as the totality to which humanity must adapt, arguing that all is a historical product “the result of a whole succession of generations, each standing on the shoulders of the preceding one, developing its industry and its intercourse, modifying its social system according to the *changed* needs” (*GI* 170, my emphasis). Through Marx, the subject becomes comprehended as the natural, social-historical human being, and the human becomes the active, responsible and objective subject. Thus it is that Marx contributes to the de-reification of human nature and de-mystification of the subject and its agency.

The subject is conceived as the acting agent of its own existence and its transformation, with its self as the *object* of its labour. As we have also seen, this life-activity is the subject-producing character of the human as species-being. Hence, the current mode of existence, that which *is*, is only that which is at the moment; it can be otherwise: existence is not essence, but rather the social-historical production of ourselves. Now, the condition from which we begin this production, the first historical act which must continue everyday throughout the whole history of humanity, is the necessity of satisfying our changing survival needs. Yet under the domination of necessity not only is labour, “my activity[,]. . . *other* than itself” but “all things are other than themselves” (EPM 366); they are but means in response to necessity. Thus, labour, “the self-confirming essence, of man,” “is *man’s coming to be for himself* within *alienation* or as an *alienated man*”⁴⁹ (HD 386). Further, since “as individuals express their life, so they are” (*GI*

⁴⁹ Approving of the dialectic of negativity, Marx writes that “Hegel conceives the self-creation of man as a process, objectification as loss of object . . . , as alienation and as supersession of this alienation; that he therefore grasps the nature of *labour* and conceives objective man—true, because real man—as the result of his *own labour*. The *real, active* relation of man to himself as a species-being or the realization of himself as a real species-being, i.e. as a human being, is only possible if he really employs all of his *species-powers* –which again is only possible through the cooperation of mankind and as a result of history—and treats them as objects, which is at first only possible in the form of estrangement” (HD 386).

150), and this includes their community,⁵⁰ the situation is one in which we must move from a position of estranged for-itself being through estranged for-itself being to become true individuals (real species beings) in true community.

However, by categorizing human existence as the alienation of essence and at the same time designating the realization of that essence as the result of the self-objectification of the estranged subject,⁵¹ Marx both re-reifies and re-mystifies human nature and its subjectivity. This whole history is the history of human subjectivity conceived as limited to a need-based responsibility and therefore, when human existence and essence are brought “into harmony” (*GI* 168), it is still in response to their need, as the “*true community* ... arises out of the *need* and the *egoism* of individuals, *i.e.* it arises directly from their own activity” (*EJM* 265), the activity of for-itself beings.

This re-reification and re-mystification stems from situating the event of the subject within the I and its relation to its own self via the objectified exteriority, a relationship which is already confined to need regardless of its proliferation and increased complexity. Reified to its need-based responsibility to the self and the others, Marx’s human subjectivity begins at and, however limited or expanded it may be, retreats to the self. The definitions and dimensions of the self change from an egoistic “human commodity” (*EPM* 336) to an “individual communal being,” a “total man” (351), from an egoistic for-itself being to a for-itself *human-being*. In whatever configuration, estranged or emancipated, the subject remains a for-itself entity acting only in response to its own interests.

⁵⁰ Since “its *subject*, man, is a being estranged from himself” (*EJM* 265) and since “as long as man does not recognize himself as man and hence give the world a human organization, this *community* appears in the guise of estrangement” (*Ibid.*).

⁵¹ “The whole of history [of estranged existence] is a preparation, a development, for ‘*man*’ to become the object of *sensuous* consciousness and for the needs of ‘man as man’ to become [sensuous] needs” (*EPM* 355). Given a willing mind, it is easy to see an inherent intelligent design in history and turn Marx’s notion of historical materialism into an *objective* faith, as many dialectical-materialists and other scientific Marxists have done.

The self-referential respons-ability, then, is the moving axle which runs through the notion of the human subject at all levels of being and in all modes of existence from the first historical act and its realization as alienation through the communist synthesis. That is, the essential difference between the starting point and the resolution is the nature of the self's relation to its life-activity, labour.

Whereas the *alienated* subject is the result of the objectification of its life-activity as *means for* life, the *essential* subject takes its life-activity as the *object of* its life. Thus it is that, for Marx, the life activity of the existing subject is inverted; what ought to be the means is the goal and vice versa. Thus it is that, though the subject realizes and confirms itself in its being and knowing, it does so not as “a real species-being, a human being” but as alienated. And so it follows that to create oneself as a free subject, a ‘total-man,’ life-activity must be freed from its position as utility and rendered an end-in-itself.⁵² In this scenario the *conatus essendi* is divided into two stages, self-preservation and self-development, and it is only after the abolition of the forced division of labour that the subject acts truly *for* himself. After this abolition, that is to say, self-confirmation is no longer an act of the satisfaction of “crude need,” but rather of “human need”: “[n]eed or enjoyment have therefore lost their *egoistic* nature, and nature has lost its mere *utility* in the sense that its use has become *human* use” (EPM 352). The true community has been advanced significantly beyond the level of crude need, yet it is still ethically limited, remaining as it does within the circularity of the subject-object relation, the circular logic of the *conatus essendi*: considering that the human other and nature would no longer be mere crude instruments for the satisfaction of self-preservation, the I would nonetheless relate to them as necessities for

⁵² “The realm of freedom actually begins only where labour which is determined by necessity and mundane considerations ceases; thus in the very nature of things it lies beyond the sphere of actual material production” (*Capital III* 823).

the satisfaction of its self-development as a *human*. The crucial point here is that the horizon of the self-referentiality of the subject persists.

The effect of this limiting horizon comes into relief when Marx describes the emancipated condition as one in which humans “relate to the *thing* for its own sake,” which happens when the thing itself has been transformed into “an *objective human* relation to itself and to man, and vice-versa.” He expands on this “objective human relation” in a footnote emphasizing that, “in practice I can only relate myself to a thing in a human way if the thing is related in a human way to man”⁵³ (EPM 352). What we have here is the total incorporation, the appropriation of the external world by and for the subject: “all *objects* become for him the *objectification of himself*, objects that confirm and realize his individuality, *his* objects, *i.e.*, *he himself* becomes the object” (Ibid. 352-53). Marx expands the horizon of the actual human subject from a self-preserving egoistic one until, having become all-encompassing, the very horizon collapses in on itself as it reaches the outer limit of the for-itself.

Having theorized the subject completely from within the sphere of need, then, Marx can extricate humanity from its alienated being and conceive the achievement of essential being only as a transformation *within* that totality: the synthetic resolution he seeks then can only be a self-referentiality that is one with that totality, a totality that is one with that self-reference. And, as self-referentiality is integral to the event of *need*, as need is the representation of a lack in search of fulfillment,⁵⁴ that lack must be fulfilled within the given subject-object order. Thus the subject, whether individual or collective, can only exist in a self-enclosure where it can only

⁵³ He continues: “Similarly, the senses and enjoyment of other men have become my *own* appropriation. Apart from these direct organs, *social* organs are therefore created in the *form* of society; for example, activity in direct association with others, etc. has become an organ of my *life expression* and a mode of appropriation of *human life*” (EPM 352). Here again we see the conflict between Marx’s underlying Desire and the limits of possibility for his for-itself approach.

⁵⁴ Neither the need nor the lack is limited to the basic necessities of the corporeal living-being, but are as expansive as human existence itself, including all social-historically produced practical, intellectual and spiritual needs.

relate to externality as objects of its being and its knowing, its will and consciousness. In this order, then, there is no room for the human Other, the other is never truly Other but only my object, my extension, as I am its. In the end, there is never any actual exteriority to anyone, but, however developed, only an objectified same ready at hand to be used.⁵⁵

However, since Marx identifies the historically prevailing subject-object order as a process of self-creation through objectification as estrangement within which “the human essence *objectifies* itself in an *inhuman* way, in opposition to itself” (HD 384) the only way forward is through the development of the *conatus essendi* within the subject-object order.⁵⁶ Thus he attempts to extricate the alienated subject through the conception of two distinct modes of affirmation one as the “anthropological” and the other as the “truly *ontological*” (EPM 375). Within this paradigm the overarching problem, then, is that of the specific mode of self-affirmation and not the exclusivity of the totalizing-saming subject-object order. That which distinguishes between the estranged subject’s mode of existence and the human one then becomes “the different modes of affirmation [that] constitute the particular character of their existence, of their life. The mode in which the object exists for them is the characteristic mode of their *gratification*” (EPM 375).

As in the analogy of the sun and the plant where each is affirmed as the object for the self-affirmation of the other (recalling that the plant realizes its life by consuming the life-awakening energy of the sun and the sun’s life-awakening essence is ‘affirmed’ in the plant), in a subject-object order, the subject’s affirmation is the “annulment” of its object which is also the

⁵⁵ As in the sun/plant analogy, the sun being confirmed and expressed in satisfying the plant’s needs, you are confirmed in satisfying my needs. If my needs are for crude self-preservation you are confirmed as an object of my mere life, then professors, for example, represent to me “those who control entrance into the market,” they are confirmed as crude means. But if my needs are for intellectual-development, the professors are confirmed as professors. In either case, however, the confirmation is strictly in terms of my use; the Other is always defined and objectified by the I’s needs.

⁵⁶ “Development through” should be distinguished from “development from,” the latter being a component of the necessary, the former being impossible.

affirmation of the object: “Where the sensuous affirmation is a direct annulment [*Aufheben*] of the object in its independent form (eating, drinking, fashioning of objects, etc.), this is the affirmation of the object” (EPM 375). Further, in the state of post-private property, where human “*feelings, passions, etc. ... are truly ontological affirmation of his essence....: [t]he meaning of private property, freed from its estrangement, is the existence of essential objects for man, both as objects of enjoyment and of activity*” (Ibid.). In a state of emancipation from alienation, the subject-object relation is transformed from possession to appropriation, from saming as subjugating to saming as incorporating, yet both happen in a for-itself ontology without leaving any space for the *others* or, therefore, for a relation of being-for-the-other:

Man appropriates his integral essence in an integral way, as a total man. All his *human* relations to the world – seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, feeling, thinking, contemplating, sensing, wanting, acting, loving – in short, all the organs of his individuality, like the organs which are directly communal in form, are in their *objective* approach or in their *approach to the object* the appropriation of that object. This appropriation of *human* reality, their approach to the object, is the *confirmation of human reality* (EPM 351).

In other words, in the state of harmony between existence and essence “all *objects* become for him the objectification of himself, objects that confirm and realize his individuality, *his* objects, *i.e., he himself* becomes the object” (Ibid. 352-53).

Being mutually exclusive but of the same order, one mode of affirmation acts as the necessary condition for the other. Humans as living-beings whose existence begins and depends on a pre-existing material condition, find themselves “in possession of the productive forces acquired by the previous generation, which serve ... as the raw material for new production.”⁵⁷ Their material life, social relations and ideas then, “are historical and transitory products.”⁵⁸ But working within the subject-object order and in response to the self’s need, the more significant

⁵⁷ Marx, “Society and Economy in History,” 137.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 140.

feature of human practical activity for emancipation is that it requires the contribution of alienation itself, the alienated affirmation being necessary to the appearance of the free ontological affirmation:

Only through developed industry, *i.e.* through the *mediation* of private property, does the ontological essence of human passion come into being, both in its totality and in its humanity; ... (EPM 375, my emphasis).

That is, the real ontological essence of the human being is actually brought forth only through its alienated form.⁵⁹

This logic provides context to Marx's later statement in *The German Ideology* that, "in general, people cannot be liberated as long as they are unable to obtain food and drink, housing and clothing in adequate quality and quantity" (GI 169). Here we have a sentiment which might sound like a simple matter of fact but it is one that points towards the impasse from which Marx's historical materialist theory suffers, an impasse that becomes clear when observed from the horizon limited to the for-itself within which it in fact takes place: a horizon wherein practical activity arises from the individual's interests and egoism alone, where within the alienated mode of development one submits to the domination of material relations "from egoistic need, from necessity", where "the needs of society mean only the satisfaction of ... [one's] personal wants while for society he is only the slave that satisfies its needs" (EJM 269). The human subject, lacking any aspect beyond its need-based subjectivity, is trapped within the circle of survivalism. Let us recall that, as Marx argues, need is historical and material, socially produced and materially experienced.⁶⁰ When one relates to society through her necessities and

⁵⁹ It is within this theoretical purview, and, of course, his historical context, that Marx finally theorizes an in-itself and for-itself proletariat as the historical revolutionary subjectivity tasked with revolting "not only against separate conditions of society up till then, but against the very "production of life" till then, the "total activity" on which it was based" (GI 165).

⁶⁰ We are living in the space occupied with many venues for private individuals to become public figures through exposure of their private existences. Social media as well as the entertainment industry are venues for the expression of and satisfaction of the new needs, to which, of course, they themselves contribute. One commentator describes

egoism, the society is experienced and treated as a means for satisfying her own survival needs; meanwhile, to satisfy these survival needs working through egoistic ‘necessities,’ she submits to the domination of the material relation, thus further alienating herself, her labour and so on. Marx himself points to this impasse in *The German Ideology* where among the reasons for the necessity of a transcending revolution he recognizes the *necessity* of “the production on a mass scale of ... communist consciousness,” of “the alteration of men on a mass scale” (GI 193). It is here that, referring to the procession of failed communist revolutions, he warns that the development of productive forces which implies the existence of “world-historical” individuals is an “absolutely practical necessary premise because without it *want* is merely made general, and with *destitution* the struggle for necessities and all the old filthy business would necessarily be reproduced” (GI 161). Nonetheless, without a theory of human subjectivity beyond the for-itself *conatus essendi*, that is, without one which is also for-the-other – even presupposing the presence and development of world-historical, all-rounded individuals and communist consciousness – human relations and human resistance remain within the circularity of for-itself interests. Lacking the desire-based aspect to human subjectivity, the active presence of being-for-the-other in its critical-practical activity, the subjects’ revolutionizing movement rising from necessity and egoism is stymied. Marx, recognizing the impasse, is left with the hope that it can be overcome in the process of revolution itself: “[T]his revolution is necessary... not only because the ruling class cannot be overthrown in any other way, but also because the class overthrowing it can only in a revolution succeed in ridding itself of all the muck of ages and become fitted to found society anew” (GI 193). Here, perhaps Marx senses the indispensability,

the extent of the need for fame experienced by current youths: “If you aren't important you aren't alive. Everyone trades giving others attention to get some in return. It's a big circle of trade to not sink into obscurity”; “Teenage quest for fame results in pornography, criminal charges.” <http://times-news.com/community-news-network/x1633473402/Teenage-quest-for-fame-results-in-pornography-criminal-charges>.

for an effective resistance, of a human subject distinct from what he takes to be its egoistic need-based origins. Yet, unable to conceive a subjectivity from his for-itself horizon that can rid itself of “the muck of history,” one that eschews repetition of that muck in a new totality, the possibility of conceiving the actualization of *effective resistance* is itself stymied.

vii) Conclusion

Marx offers a phenomenological and ontological analysis of the *survival aspect* of the human subject organized in two contradictory but inter-dependent categories: alienated and essential. However, in the absence of an overt conception of being for-the-other, a responsibility to the Other and the others, one that includes a theorized desire-based aspect to human subjectivity, Marx’s concept of human subjectivity is re-reified within the reductive totalizing trajectory of its survivalist aspect. At the same time, by explaining the event of the subject through the dialectic of negativity, and therefore through a closed circular logic, theorizing the existing social-historical subject as the manifestation of an abstraction of that which is not yet, Marx inadvertently re-mystifies the human subject. This re-mystification takes place in the process of Marx’s construction of the closed circular relation between alienation and essence.

This self-explanatory circular logic contains all the elements and stages of a self-referential non-self-sufficient need-based subjectivity: its alienation from its subjectivizing activity, labour, exactly because of its very act of self-objectification, the act by which the subject will be restored to its essence. Yet again when the time comes that the satisfaction of subsistence needs gains priority (at the behest of possible degradation of material condition and prioritization of self-preservation) the subject and its mode of existence can be reduced to its

abstraction and so on and on. In its totality, this logic contributes to the occlusion of the desire-based aspect of human subjectivity.

It is then the limitations imposed by conceptualizing the subject only through its need-based for-itself respons-ability that entails the occlusion of the care-for-the-other. Without the for-the-other aspect to human subjectivity, the space of the other, not as *another* like the I, nor as an object of possession or appropriation is precluded. In short, *survivalism*, in both of its presentations as self-preservation and self-development, *is itself a state of human alienation, the alienation of the for-the-other aspect of human subjectivity*. Thus, whatever the ambiguities in his presentation and beyond the illuminating development of the possibilities of the social for-itself, Marx is to be credited here with elucidating the yet totalizing limits of such a development, limits imposed by the absence of the for-the-other aspect of the human subject.

SECTION III

Effective Resistance and Ethical Subjectivity

CHAPTER VI

Prison and the Subject of Resistance: A Levinasian Inquiry

Introduction

Death and imprisonment, physical and psychological torture, are of course among the responses of state power to its others. These others are categorized and identified according to the self-definition of the state, but also in relation to what they represent or signify. Regardless of the state and the nature of its prisoners, as Foucault shows in his *Discipline and Punish*, prisons not only exact retribution but also act as subjugating institutions with the intention of reconstructing subjects. In this sense, prisons function as totalizing systems. Important variants notwithstanding, these prisons (like their states), turn out to have much in common. For what they share, what makes them ‘totalizing,’ is their continuously renewed effort with the intention to engineer not just the complete eradication of all opposition, but the complete elimination of all distinction between human subjects and imposing systems, replacing all that is not themselves with themselves.¹ Of course, both this intention and its implementation indicate the primordially of human resistance. Within this context, prisons, and more pronouncedly prisons that are

¹ See Introduction, “Totalizing Systems,” p 4. One of the virtually universal signs of this intention, usually taken as limited confirmation of success, is the assimilation of the prisoner as a positive functionary of the prison system, an indication of which is of course the act of informing. In the extreme solitary confinement of Pelican Prison (California), for example, the termination of this form of torture is geared to the transformation of the prisoners into informers. See “Ashker v. Brown,” <http://ccrjustice.org/pelican-bay>.

directly politically motivated, become concentrated sites of the struggle between resistance and capitulation.

To emphasize the psychologically sophisticated and systematically complete nature of the totalizing procedures of this intention, I call them *the paideia of totalizing systems*. It is a “*paideia*” in the sense that, through the application of an ensemble of strategic manipulations of the subject’s sense of being, it intends an ontological transformation, reducing the subject as such to a “for-the-system” being. Contrary to the common sense dictum that everyone breaks down under pain and fear of death, the persistence and intensity of totalizing practices, within prison systems for instance, are evidence of the possibility and actuality of resistance.² Yet, to investigate the human potentiality for resistance one should begin with the basic questions. Why, under the *paideia* of the totalizing system, do we so often come to lose our ethical bearings, our social identities, such that we capitulate to this *paideia*? Yet again, why is it that we also so often resist when resistance seems so impossible, and how is it that we are also capable of effective resistance?

Building on previous chapters in what follows I shall argue that to conceive effective opposition to this *paideia*, we must look to the fundamental *meaning* of resistance itself, specifically, its *ethical* meaning. This meaning may tend, generally, in one of two directions: 1) withdrawal exclusively into the state I have called the “survival-ego,” a condition in which one’s life is ‘rationalized’ through the subordination, finally, of everything to concern for survival, a reduction to the slippery slope to complicit capitulation, or 2) expansion toward solidarity with other beings, and, ultimately, I shall argue, beyond being itself—to what Emmanuel Levinas refers

² No doubt resistance to totalizing agendas is not a homogenous totality itself as, often enough, it exhibits a tendency to lose its bearings, its human purposes, frequently its humanity, in and through the very processes of resisting its enforcers. Often enough too, we become, insofar as we were ever otherwise, ethically indistinguishable from them.

to as the “otherwise-than-being”³ where a responsibility more ancient than the formation of being itself may be interrogated, and from whence I extrapolate the germ of a resistance beyond the resistance of being itself, or what I referred to in the Introduction as *effective* resistance.⁴

However, while the interrogation of the ethical meaning of resistance may be informed by any number of theoretical approaches, the meaning itself is, of course, lived. And while the sites of resistance are no doubt ubiquitous, they are to be found in exaggerated and so especially clarifying form in the suffering of people confronted and invaded in the context of overtly coercive manipulation by institutions and their personnel that have been developed with the intention of forcing transformations of fundamental being into system-functional identities. The treatment of politically imprisoned men and women and their responses thus offers a privileged site for examining the systematic instrumentalities of this intention.⁵

i) Political Prison and the Survival-Ego

To state the bare bones in advance: the objective of prison systems for political prisoners is precisely the production of the survival-ego by applying such techniques as physical torture, environmental manipulation and indoctrination—central components of the *paideia*⁶ of totalizing systems—with, at its most insidious, the systematically related goals of getting the prisoner to reduce herself to an object of survival and, on that foundation, breaking her down until she

³ To remind ourselves again, the responsibility of the “otherwise-than-being” referred to here, far from indicating any mystical source, is sought in what Levinas takes to be an imminent, phenomenologically accessible, experience prior to the formation of ‘being.’

⁴ See page 4.

⁵ This is not of course to deny the political aspects of the incarceration of ‘criminal’ prisoners, nor, for that matter to suggest that the supposedly more benign forms of coercion are necessarily different in intention or effect, but only to select political imprisonment as most suited to bringing into relief the present emphases. On these other forms, see for example the classic film, “The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner”, directed by Tony Richardson, (1962).

⁶ While this *paideia* has been the experience of prisoners under such states as Nazis Germany, China, the Soviet Union and the Islamic Republic of Iran, the American C.I.A. project MKUltra, with its interrogation manual (known as “Kubark”) makes as good a representative example as any.

identifies with and participates in the system's meanings and intentions. This is a process of attempting to isolate her from others, physically, ethically and, ultimately, existentially, *i.e.*, to reduce her to self-referentiality, removing whatever autonomous social existence she may have brought with her. The final phase consists of testing the efficacy of the process and solidifying the results through engaging the agency of her newly internalized identity on behalf of the system itself, not only against her own former ego, but finally including her family, her fellow prisoners and her culture generally.

The process of attempting to install this regression generally begins with the application of physical torture, an approach to be sure with many functions beyond the goals of finding out what of immediate use the prisoner knows. These functions include creating a willingness to be used for propaganda purposes: producing an example, furthering political control through public confessions and other such exercises in humiliation designed for public consumption. Though this process, euphemistically called "conversion" and/or "rehabilitation," can be divided analytically into reciprocally reinforcing aspects of the *paideia*, they form a constellation under the rubric of *varieties of torture* which may be treated together and which, for reasons of focus, will be the approach here.

The fundamental intention of the initial phases of this *paideia* is not limited to the experience of pain and suffering as such, nor even solely the fear they engender. Fear of pain and suffering, yes, but whatever else these may be, they are essentially means to achieving the great anxiety of constant insecurity and the longing for comfort that this fear brings with it. Regardless of ideological venue, it aims at, and often succeeds in, breaking the will. A Chinese prisoner recalls:

I was really accepting things in order to make myself more comfortable—because I was in great fear.... In this situation your will power completely disappears.... You accept

because there is a compulsion all the time—that if you don’t go on their road, there is no escape.... [Y]ou become passive....⁷

An Iranian writes of her experience of being blind-folded as the moment she lost her humanness: “I became a donkey. They covered my eyes and I became a donkey, an ass.” She continues later: “with my eyes blindfolded the whole world went dark. Fear and anxiety about future torture and death became dominant.”⁸ The basic achievement, reduction to the survival-ego, is accomplished if and when the prisoner identifies himself exclusively as a survivor at all costs. And this torture-induced focus is the slippery slope at the end of which is the totalizing systems’ desired total capitulation, because, reduced to the survival-ego, the prisoner’s agency is virtually theirs. Nothing of the prisoner remains inaccessible; reality itself is the system’s reality.

By means of *isolation*, *surveillance* and the concomitant *unpredictability* and *insecurity* that together they provoke, this *reality* is then used to support and extend the torture-induced anxiety and render it constant.⁹ It is crucial here to induce the sense of incessant imminent threat, the insecurity of the unpredictable, as illustrated, for example, in many prison memoirs of political prisoners under the Islamic Republic of Iran.¹⁰ The experience just after the pain of the cord hitting the bottom of the feet is one of expectation: when is the next one coming? Torturers,

⁷ Jay R. Lifton, *Thought Reform and the Psychology of Totalism* (New York: Norton & Company, 1961), 36.

⁸ Ziba Nawak. *Siba-Zinab* (Germany: Nima Verlag, 2007), 7. My translation from the original Farsi.

⁹ These techniques have a long heritage: the eighteenth and nineteenth-century’s Jeremy Bentham’s prison design, the “panopticon,” took the form of a pentagon so constructed that prisoners could never see the guards but could always be seen by them. The blindfold, so effective in the example of Siba-Zainab’s statement above, the goggles on the Afghani prisoners in the U.S. ‘war on terror,’ further isolate, removing the visual support of other prisoners, intensifying the sense of being seen without being able to see. By thus accustoming the psyche to a sense of one-way observation, this technique is intended to form a horizon of psychic heteronomy. Such techniques, and others such as solitary confinement and the like, are intended to reduce and *isolate* the person in her survival-ego by removing contact as much as feasible through maximally restricting external stimuli, including all forms of sociality, thus maximizing the sense that the authority’s power is absolute and that one is alone under its gaze.

¹⁰ See, for example: Agah, A. *et al.*, *We Lived to Tell: Political Prison Memoirs of Iranian Women*. Toronto: McGilligan Books, 2007. Talebi, Shahla, *Ghosts of Revolution*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2011. Darvish, H. *Hanooz gheshe bar yad ast*. Berkeley, USA: Noghte Books, 1997 (Farsi). Parsippur, S. *Khaterat-e Zendan*. Stockholm: Baran Press, 1996 (Farsi). Also see <http://www.bidaran.net/> (Farsi) and <http://www.iranhrdc.org/english/>.

of course, develop a sense of timing that emphasizes unpredictability and thus maximizes the anticipatory fear and anxiety in the intervals. The benefits of such intervals are highlighted in the CIA's interrogation manual:

There is an interval—which may be extremely brief—of suspended animation, a kind of psychological shock or paralysis. It is caused by a traumatic or sub-traumatic experience which explodes, as it were, the world that is familiar to the subject as well as his image of himself within that world.¹¹

One *lives* in this anticipatory interval. Here, the tendency all too frequently is to turn the fear against oneself, to fear oneself, if not for the aggression one may feel against the domination of the all too powerful system, then for the eruption of one's old personality (and, under the conditions of the constantly observed survival-ego, it is experienced as a previous and very dangerous personality). Thus is solidified the survival-ego, a state of constant anxiety that an imminent annihilation will surprise the next second. Insofar as the system has been successful, a state is achieved in which a little hope can often complete the conversion. Thus, according to Kubark, when the prisoner experiences the “loss of autonomy,”¹² it is time to institute and administer the paternal relation:

Now the interrogator becomes fatherly. Whether the excuse is that others have already confessed (“all the other boys are doing it”), that the interrogatee had a chance to redeem himself (“you’re really a good boy at heart”), or that he can’t help himself (“they made you do it”), the effective rationalization, the one the source will jump at, is likely to be elementary. It is an adult’s version of the excuses of childhood.¹³

Whether the totalizing system be Iranian, Chinese, American, or otherwise, the process of regression and identification with the interrogator as father figure¹⁴ initiates variations on the

¹¹ CIA, *Kubark Counterintelligence Interrogation*, July 1963, 66.

<http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB122/index.htm#kubark>.

¹² *Ibid.*, 41.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 78.

¹⁴ See Guantanamo inmate Padilla's case (“Investigators broke Padilla with intense isolation,” Warren Richey: *The Christian Science Monitor*, 08, 14, 2007) who sees his captors as his protectors and his own lawyers as part of a continuing interrogation program. Or the following from Mohammad Hashemi's confession: “I would like to plead

same form: restriction of access to any but the given ideology, intense and repetitive indoctrination, forced self-negation through 'frank' public disclosure, 'authentic' repentance of one's 'crimes,' and then, as a reward, social 'recognition' as a successful convert or reformed being. Thus a process of reduction-reification of the *I-in-tension*, goaded towards its need-based self-referential aspect is accomplished, the identification with the new ontology of the survival-ego.

The integration of the 'true convert' into the totalizing system is, of course, insidious. For example, in 'revolutionary' Iran, as in China, the prisoner began in unofficial settings to 'help' other prisoners 'confess.' The process moved on, flowing organically from the informing-and-denouncing 'education,' to informing on the slightest appearance of 'incorrect' behaviour or attitude on the part of other prisoners, other 'true converts,' even guards, and, of course, on themselves in the form of increasingly subtle 'confessions.' Then, one could become, to use one of Lifton's phrases for the Chinese convert, a "prisoner-official,"¹⁵ a convert so advanced along the road of 'reform' as to act as an interrogator, *i.e.*, a *samed*¹⁶ subject, an object of the system and her own survival, a for-the-system subjectivity. Eventually the "prisoner-official" finds herself torturing confessions from newcomers, going out as a guide and informer with the guards on search-and-arrest missions against members of her former political group and other political groups, against the most distant members of her extended family, and against husband, wife,

with my former colleagues and friends who shared my deviant ideas to return to the correct path, relinquish their false notions, reform themselves, unite against imperialism and overcome the carnal instincts that can lead them towards having relations with Satan and his representatives" (Quoted in Abrahamian, *Tortured Confessions*, 165).

¹⁵ See J. R. Lifton's excellent *Thought Reform and the Psychology of Totalism*, p 48.

¹⁶ That is to say, the former subject has been absorbed by, become a component of the system, see above, Introduction, "Totalizing Systems" 4-6.

mother, father, children. From witnessing executions she may move on to participating in them.¹⁷

What, then, in the face of such systematic *paideia*, could constitute an “effective resistance”? Both experience and analysis suggest that the attempt to use the modern techniques (merely glimpsed here¹⁸) to replace the content of the resistant identity with that of a totalizing system, be it Nazi, Stalinist, Islamic, Maoist or modern Western, has met and continues to meet with mixed success and more than occasional failure. However, experience and the analyses of the previous chapters also point in a direction beyond such totalizing intentions altogether, towards sources of *meaning* both beyond and within the self, sources capable of continuously resisting reduction of one’s self to the survival-ego, to subjectivity-onto-the-system, sources in short, of effective resistance.

Remembering, referring to my prison notes and discussing with other former Iranian political prisoners, I find that many of us had an intuitive sense of something of the sort. Caring for humanity and life itself as such, and sensing, hoping, believing that such caring would remain outside the power game, fortified the resolve not to participate in the slippery slope of the rational strategic action of survivalism: one must *begin* with the knowledge that, in playing the game that ends in betrayal of that *meaning*, in becoming a convert, the instrument of surrendering oneself and others to the system, one is already dead.

¹⁷ See the testimony of the former Iranian political prisoner at the recent “International People’s Tribunal” at the Hague who, sliding to the bottom of the slippery slope, found himself “pressured into collaborating with prison authorities by shooting other prisoners as a member of a firing squad”. “He described this pressure as “psychological rape” adding “I was not myself, I was a puppet ... It was not me who did this.” *International People’s Tribunal: Judgment*, Feb. 2013, p.24: <http://www.irantribunal.com/Eng/EnHome.html>. Of course this is not a new phenomenon; the Nazis concentration camps could not have sustained themselves if it were not for the work of the “*Kapos*,” nor, for that matter, could the Stalinist work camps have done without the services rendered by criminal prisoners.

¹⁸ See also the discussion of the intention and effects of solitary confinement and sensory deprivation in Chapter Two above, which, of course, could itself be greatly extended.

Here the question of survival itself becomes a question of survival of *what* and *for* what. This is not a question born of having overcome ‘necessity,’¹⁹ in the space of its absence: it derives rather from and for the ever present presence of the other. In *Survival in Auschwitz* Primo Levi speaks of his relationship with a civilian, Lorenzo, who for six months passed a piece of bread to him every day through the electric fence, who gave Primo his own vest, who “neither asked nor accepted any reward, because he was good and simple and did not think that one did good for a reward.”²⁰ A relationship to which Levi attributes, in part, his survival:

... not so much for his material aid, as for his having constantly reminded me by his presence, by his natural and plain manner of being good, that there still existed a just world outside our own, something and someone still pure and whole, not corrupt, not savage, extraneous to hatred and terror; something difficult to define, a remote possibility of good, but for which it was worth surviving.²¹

ii) Interrogating the Meaning of Resistance

If the totalizing system attempts to supplant the “otherness” of the prisoner with the identity it prescribes, and if it has access to our being and its solidarities, if it succeeds in goading us to alienate our ethical aspect, it is finally our otherness that must be preserved. But the slippery slope is indeed slippery. All too often, attempts to theorize resistance, in their well-intended efforts to explain it, finally become complicit in the reduction of the other to the same. If, somehow, in the process of actual resistance, people find, in so many instances, sources within themselves that access a responsibility to and care for humanity, a space of encountered otherness, it may be this very otherness itself that lies behind the often-recognized sense that humanity itself is the ultimate resistance to totalizing systems.

¹⁹ See the discussion in Chapter Five of the limits to the need-based foundation for a transcending resistance.

²⁰ Primo Levi, *Survival in Auschwitz*. (New York: Touchstone, 1996), 119.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 121.

It is to give what Max Horkheimer called this ‘banal’²² sense of humanity an articulated meaning that, after our critique of the hegemony of the *conatus essendi*, the *élan* of the survival-ego, and after elaborating on the limits of resistance theorized and practiced within a for-itself paradigm in general, we return here to Levinas. But, in so doing, it is crucial to avoid reducing Levinas’s interrogation of ethical alterity to a generalized statement on the praxis of resistance, to preaching a new strategy, rather than interrogating a meaning of resistance that may lie in the depths behind various of its guises. Such strategies, falling into ends/means rationality or dialectical transformation with the totalizing system as its other, are merely defensive. And, while defenses are a necessary part of the process, they are (when abstracted from care-for-the-other) ultimately susceptible to reduction to the being of the person who is imprisoned within the ‘reality’ of the system, and thus to the slippery slope. So the last thing we need is another model of resistance, another method of suffering by which, through its employment, one could learn to suffer successfully without capitulation and become a ‘hero’ of resistance somehow more morally attuned than the survival-ego.²³ A fundamental and disqualifying limitation of the heroic identity is that it is, as ego-identity, an extension rather than a transcendence of the self-enclosure

²² Max Horkheimer, *Dawn and Decline*. (New York: Seabury Press, 1978), 152.

²³ In his attempt to bring a Levinasian ethical commitment to political resistance, Simon Critchley concerns himself with the psychological condition of the resister suffering not from the consequences of resistance but from the pressure of the ethical commitment itself. Taking from Levinas the idea of “the unfulfillability of the ethical demand” (*Infinitely Demanding*, 10) he comprehends Levinas’s ethical subject as necessarily “split” because “constituted through an act of approval to a demand to which it is fundamentally *inadequate*” (57). Drawing on Freud and Lacan, then, Critchley understands the experience of Levinas’s ethical demand as “traumatic” and defines Levinas’s ethical subject as a “traumatic neurotic” (61). Asking if Levinas’s ethical theory does not “condemn us to a lifetime of trauma and lacerating guilt that cannot – and moreover, should not – be worked through” (67), he claims that, because it is void of sublimation, this ethic does indeed risk “being disastrously self-destructive to the subject” (68). The antidote to the “self-laceration of depression” he proffers is “humour”. In humour, he argues, “[t]he subject looks at itself like an object object and instead of weeping bitter tears, it laughs at itself and finds consolation therein” (81). While the care evinced here is well-intentioned, however, one may wonder if the therapy creates more problems than it solves. One may wonder, for example, if such an ethical subject, reduced to an *abject object* through ethical failure as it is, may not require the further consolation chided in aphorism seventy-five of Nietzsche’s *Beyond Good and Evil*: “Whoever despises himself still respects himself as one who despises” (trans. W. Kaufmann. New York: Vintage, 1989.). The procedure appears all the more suspect when the unexplored issues here are reduced to the positive claim against what Levinas calls the “bad conscience” that “I can bear the radicality of the ethical demand because I can laugh at myself” (85, 6). For the discussion on the “bad conscience” see below 249.

of the survival-ego. Constrained within its self-referentiality, it tries with all its might to cleave to its determination against the will of the torturer, like trying to hold one's breathe until it is over. It is still quite vulnerable to the paideia of the totalizing system that remains its 'other.' Moreover, it is doubly susceptible in its tendency to stand (until it falls) in some morally superior relation to the 'lesser' political prisoners who fail in their efforts to resist, explaining that failure as due to an absence of adequate quantities of will, faith, loyalty,²⁴ and so on. To pretend to explain or even understand –let alone to assume a competence to judge– the intricate complexities of the soul of an individual prisoner is to remain trapped in the enclosure of one's being. It is not only to fail to respect the otherness of the other but also to participate in the very hubris of the totalizing system. It is, in short, completely to miss the point.

It is, then, to locate a site of potentially *effective* resistance to, among other things, such strategies of being that we have returned to Levinas. What we intend to encounter, in short, is another 'reality,' another level of *meaning* unencumbered by strategies of being of whatever ilk. This reality, while occluded within the hegemonic survivalist 'realism,' has nonetheless broken with some frequency through that occlusion, has in fact been accessed by many in the darkness of their suffering as political prisoners and other such denizens of totalizing systems.

Drawing further on Levinas here, we shall see that he strips away the deep occlusions of this experience, disclosing its sources at a level of humanity phenomenologically more ancient than culture, consciousness, or even the formation of the "I" as a subject. Here, he interrogates an inherent responsibility to and care for the other that relates in fraternity all who have ever lived, live now or will ever live, relates them in a common humanity-of-the-being-for-the-other that is

²⁴ All of these characteristics, when functioning as a yardstick, objectify the subject and reify the event of resistance.

immanent to everyone.²⁵ One indication that this relation is not an illusion of slave morality, the ultimate defense of the soul's "retreat to the inner citadel,"²⁶ is to consider what a potent obstacle the resistance of humanity must be, if totalizing systems go to such lengths in their attempts to overcome it... and so often fail.²⁷

It is, then, with recognition of the mystery of alterity as the ultimate horizon, an otherness that resists both explanation and coercion, that a human meaning of resistance may be approached; this potentially effective resistance, I argue further, is ultimately the resistance of otherness itself, a praxis of resistance beyond resistance, humanity itself as resistance. With this approach, then, the following interrogation adumbrates a phenomenology of resistance, beginning with a brief interrogation of the limits to approaches to resistance based on the power of the individual will.

The will of the 'pure I'; the passivity of the 'naked I'

When, in *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas presents the will as combining a contradiction, he puts his finger on limits to the power of individual will that turn out to be pertinent to elucidating the limits of resistance at the level of being. On the one hand, the will claims sovereignty against all external attacks, having a power beyond any possible quantifiable adversary: "Not for eternity will I waver" (*TI* 237). On the other hand, there is contained here an insurmountable proneness to error, an untrustworthiness, an unreliability, "to the point that voluntary being lends itself to techniques of seduction, propaganda, and torture" (*Ibid.*). As he says, the will can make it seem as though the difference between cowardice and courage consisted in nothing more than the

²⁵ Being-for-the-other, it is perhaps worth re-emphasizing, is not a drive but a Desire, not an altruistic self-sacrificing biological extension of the for-itself to the level of social survival. It is to be sure a responsibility of the corporeal-sensibility, yet its source, unlike the drive of the for-itself, is external to and separate from interiority.

²⁶ See Isaiah Berlin's liberal critique of Epictetus and St. Augustine in *Four Essays on Liberty*, Oxford University Press, 1969, 135ff.

²⁷ See Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, 109 for a similar logic. Another indication, of course, is how often totalitarian regimes resort to mass murder; in Iran, for example, tens of thousands of political prisoners are known to have been executed during the 1980s; in the Indonesia of 1965-6, it was millions.

mechanical differences between quantities of energy put into resistance and quantities put into overcoming it (which, were it true, would mean that individual resistance in the context of the committed totalizing system might indeed be futile). He continues:

When the will triumphs over its passions, it manifests itself not only as the strongest passion, but as above all passion, determining itself by itself, inviolable. But when it has succumbed, it reveals itself to be exposed to influences, to be a force of nature, absolutely tractable, resolving itself purely and simply into its components. In its self-consciousness it is violated. Its "freedom of thought" is extinguished; the pressure of forces initially adverse ends up appearing as a penchant. In a sort of inversion it loses even the consciousness of the bent of its penchants. The will remains on this moving limit between inviolability and degeneration (*TI* 237).

This 'I' of the will is an 'I' folded in on itself, a folding that puts the subject in the grip of being and the violence that this folding does to me. This 'folding in' to self-referentiality, placing the 'I' in solitude, is its degeneration, its reification as an object.²⁸ The 'I' folding in on itself, the on-itself-folding-I of the in-itself will, is the reduction of the *tension* of the *I-in-tension*, in a search for freedom from suffering and the happiness of quietude. But, fortunately, no matter how much history of being and how much hypostasizing theory, the I never wholly resides in itself.²⁹

Suffering and patience

In the isolation and other tortures of the totalizing system, one is thrown back, inevitably, upon her will and its defenses, where, sooner or later, she may reach the limits of heroism. Recuperating and marshaling all forces of her will to block the invasion, the attempt to conquer her inner life, she closes her eyes, turns inward, away from the exteriority, and, with that, from the face of the other. She tries to fold in on herself, building a fortress of solitude; she tries to

²⁸See, for example, Levinas, *Time and the Other*, 52-55 and *Totality and Infinity*, 238, 9.

²⁹ Primo Levi gives a palpable account of this recession into this quietude when he recounts standing with other prisoners witnessing the hanging of a prisoner who had taken part in the revolt at the Birkenau gas chamber: "I wish I could say that from the midst of us, an abject flock, a voice rose, a murmur, a sign of assent. But nothing happened. We remained standing, bent and grey, our heads dropped, Here we are, docile under your [German officers'] gaze; from our side you have nothing more to fear; no acts of violence, no words of defiance, not even a look of judgment". Yet it is here, where one is witness to one's own reduction, "broken and conquered," as he says, that one is still capable of being "oppressed by shame" (*Survival in Auschwitz*, 150, 151). The tension remains.

become an impermeable thing,³⁰ resisting all incursions. Against the violation which the system imposes upon both her psychological and physical being in order to reach and eliminate the otherness ‘inside’ and the others through her, she closes her eyes behind the blindfold, turns inward to her familiar world and musters everything available to deny its breaching. In this dynamic of invasion and denial, courage itself thus becomes a tool of the system, finally isolating a pure-I, that is, one restricted within the meagerness of its own ego. This isolated ego *is* the entrance to the slippery slope to becoming the inverted will, the *samed*, the system’s reified thing.

This inverted will, an “inversion” in which “‘freedom of thought’ is extinguished” and “the pressure of forces initially adverse ends up appearing as a penchant” in the case of the convert—the *samed* prisoner—is not, however, inevitable. For, while the inversion threatens the will “in its dignity as *origin* and identity,” “it *only* threatens, is indefinitely postponed, is consciousness” (*TI* 237). Here in consciousness, as Levinas interrogates it, our relation to time, the non-identity of the “instant,”³¹ is the site of resistance at the limits of the will:

Consciousness is resistance to violence, because it leaves the time necessary to forestall it. Human freedom resides in the future, always still minimally the future, of its non-freedom, in consciousness—the prevision of the violence imminent in the time that still remains (237).

Thus:

To be conscious is to have time—not to overflow the present by anticipating and hastening the future, but to have a distance with regard to the present; to relate oneself to

³⁰ The ethical limits of this strategy are uncannily highlighted in the mirror image of this ‘heroism’ presented in Sartre’s depiction of the anti-Semite, who out of fear “wishes to be pitiless stone, a furious torrent, a devastating thunderbolt—anything except a man” (*Anti-Semite and Jew*, 53, 4).

³¹ The “instant,” where Heidegger seeks a heroic purity, the “instant,” the ‘cell-form’ of Levinas’s theory of time, is where, in contrast to Heidegger, he finds the other. For Levinas, we are potentially free –and we are free insofar as we realize this potentiality—in every instant (see Levinas’s *Time and the Other*, 56, 7). From this point of view, the totalizing system may be recognized as having the goal of reducing one’s “instants” to immediacy, to living in the absolute presence of the totalizing system; thus, one loses or maintains one’s resistance in an “instant,” in each and every instant.

being as to a being to come, to maintain a distance with regard to being even while already coming under its grip. To be free is to have time to forestall one's own abdication under the threat of violence (Ibid.).

With this relation to time, the self-identical³² self—the self defining itself in its *conatus*—still retains a distance from itself. It is by virtue of this minimal distance that it becomes possible for the natural being to “...take up a position with regard to its nature; it disposes of a background and, in this sense, is not completely born, remains anterior to its definition or its nature” (TI 238).³³ There is a crack in the space-time of the formation of self-identical consciousness wherein resides the naked-I, anterior to the self's identification.

It is, of course, the freedom of the prisoner, the distance from her being, the moment of distance from her presence that the system seeks to replace with immediacy.³⁴ This is the principle function of physical torture. For, as Levinas says, “[t]he privileged situation where the ever future evil becomes present—at the limit of consciousness—is reached in the suffering called physical” (238). Because of this proximity of the present then, suffering is a principle site of the slippery slope. It is the principle bearer of the system's intentions:

The whole acuity of suffering lies in the impossibility of fleeing it, of being protected in oneself from oneself [from one's will and the reversal of “penchant” that it is susceptible to].... And it is the impossibility [*sic.*] of retreat (238).

³² The defined being is “self-identical” “...by reason of its place within the whole, the natural being (for birth describes precisely the entry into the whole that preexists and outlives),” yet, as Levinas goes on, it is one that “has not yet reached its term, remains at a distance from itself, is still preparatory, in the vestibule of being, ...” (TI 237).

³³ Here, too, in the freedom of the instant, where “...the present splits up into an inexhaustible [*sic.*] multiplicity of possibles that suspend the instant” (TI 238) is where Levinas finds the possibility of initiative, of creativity, and of consolation (“...for how could one sole tear, though it be effaced, be forgotten, how could reparation have the least value, if it did not correct the instant itself, if it did not let it escape in its being, if the pain that glints in the tear did not exist ‘pending,’ if it did not exist with a still provisional being, if the present were consummated?”). This, incidentally, is perhaps an extremely fecund thought for the guilt-‘redemption’ of the *tavab*, the convert, the *kapo*, the cooperator, as well as for the ‘guilt’ of the near-*tavab*, or for those who are ‘guilty’ of having survived the prison system (an issue to which we return below).

³⁴ Perhaps it is a function of ‘beer and hockey’ culture, of mindless television, of consumerism as a whole—not to mention the entrepreneurial identity—in the more ‘benign’ systems of western ‘democratic’ capitalism to attempt to fill this distance in the being who would exist as ‘immediate,’ as self-identical in the present instant.

Here in suffering, “reality acts on the in itself of the will,” suspended in an indefinite menace, the will sickens with fear. In the “dead-end” of the suffering, death comes as a release.³⁵ This is of the insidiousness of torture and suffering. In contrast to death, which always, even as the trigger is pulled and the hammer comes down, is yet in the future, at a distance, “...suffering realizes in the will the extreme proximity of the being menacing the will” (*TI* 238). But if the in-itself will is menaced and defeated by fear of suffering, the self itself remains, in its distance from itself, far from unequivocal.

Suffering thus remains ambiguous. As in “the pain acting on the for itself of the will,” and in the consciousness of the pain to come, the I is turned into a thing, a body, an object of suffering, but simultaneously there remains a distance from the reification, “an abdication minimally distant from abdication” (*TI* 238). This is because one retains consciousness, even if it is only consciousness of oneself as an object of torture. And, of course, the torturer cannot do without this consciousness, for awareness of the suffering is the fundamental requirement of the exercise: the I must witness its suffering. This minimal distance that consciousness provides is the locus of the potentiality of what Levinas calls “patience”:

This situation where the consciousness deprived of all freedom of movement maintains a minimal distance from the present, this ultimate passivity which nonetheless desperately turns into action and into hope, is *patience*—the passivity of undergoing, and yet mastery itself (*Ibid*).

Levinas is distinguishing “patience” here, from the mere passivity of submission and capitulation. In patience the subject is neither relegated to a quietistic contemplation floating above and beyond history nor to becoming nothing more than the product of objective forces, a

³⁵ Such dynamics not only speak to the normality of false confessions and self-incriminations obtained under torture, but also of suicides under the conditions of imprisonment and torture (as well as, sometimes, of speeding up one’s own execution).

reified nexus of objectivity. Here, the violence done to me “continues to threaten from the future, is not yet upon me, is only conscious.” Here, in this consciousness, says Levinas, the will achieves a “mastery” in a new sense, not a willful mastery over, but one beyond the reach of the fear of death: “[t]he egoism of the will stands on the verge of an existence that no longer accents itself” (TI 239).

It is in this existence that no longer accents itself that the opening for resistance beyond the enclosure of being and its will is to be found. In patience, “the violence the will endures comes from the other as a tyranny”(Ibid.). Violence can only come about in “...a world where I can die *as a result of someone and for someone*” (Ibid.). Thus suffering in patience changes the *meaning of death*, distancing it from the isolation of my will and my enclosure within the poignancy, the desolation, of its being *my* death. “In other words,” writes Levinas, “in patience the will breaks through the crust of its egoism and as it were displaces its center of gravity outside of itself, to will as Desire and Goodness limited by nothing” (Ibid.).

What is potentially accessed in the dark night of the soul of the prisoner of the totalizing system, both inside and outside of prison, is a suffering beyond the suffering of the individual being, a suffering in and for the other. With the approach the foregoing suggests then, the following begins with an adumbrated phenomenology of the torture chamber, elucidated through engaging Levinas’s phenomenology of “Eros” and the “caress.”

iii) Eros, Thanatos and Totalizing Systems: The “Caress” and Torture

Eros, in its relationship to the other, opens up the meanings and intentions of both the resister and the totalizing system in ways that can be approached through a comparison of the

“caress,” as Levinas presents it, and torture. Eros appears in this comparison as both a source and an ineradicable resource of resistance.

The suffering and death of the tortured prisoner is, of course, a personal experience, but, as resistance, this experience is also, insofar as it is suffered in eros, a relationship to the other, to alterity as such, against domination; for, as such a relationship, it is, as Levinas says, a relation with the mystery of an unspecifiable future that precludes power.

It is only by showing in what way eros differs from possession and power that I can acknowledge a communication in eros. It is neither a struggle, nor a fusion, nor a knowledge. One must recognize its exceptional place among relationships. It is a relationship with alterity, with mystery—that is to say, *with the future*, with what (in a world where there is everything) is never there, with what cannot be there when everything is there—not with a being that is not there, but with the very dimension of alterity (*TO* 88, emphasis added).

Beyond or within the poor defense represented by the consciousness that must be present during torture, this relationship is precisely the experience potentially encountered in the work camps, on the torture table, in the solitary cells, in the ‘coffins,’³⁶ waiting for the death squad. When all else is gone, when they have an almost total control of your body and, through it directly or indirectly, access to all your being, your senses, your biological necessities, your psyche and spirit, with eros, you are still a subject:

There where all possibles are impossible, where one can no longer be able, the subject is still a subject through eros. Love is not a possibility, is not due to our initiative, is without reason; it invades and wounds us, and nevertheless the I survives it (*TO* 88, 89).

The ‘I’ becomes a subject, is a subject as it relates to, is in relation with the alterity, a dimension that can be occluded but not removed.

³⁶ The ‘Coffins’ was the prisoners’ term for the sensory deprivation boxes to which Iranian political prisoners were subjected in 1983-84. They were called “the factory” (for making *Tavabs*, converts) or the “graves” (from which “you will never emerge”) by the warden.

Reviewing the death-row wills, the letters smuggled to families, and so on, one encounters the virtually ever-present sense of this eros-centered relationship to a future (ungraspable and other) beyond the death that is frequently welcomed as saving the prisoners relationship with that future, their responsibility to and love of the other:

I loved life very much, yet now to stay alive is too expensive. I am not capable of accepting their conditions. I lived a life of integrity and suffering..., and I always wanted to live with humanity and decency.³⁷

“Dear father and mother, I’ve wanted to have an honourable life and I loved life for all of its beauties. Life is truly beautiful and it is for life’s beauties that I accept death.” From Enayat Soltan-zadeh’s will, written just before his execution.³⁸

This suffering and death-onto-the-future is not a theodicy in the sense of offering a *quid pro quo* for sacrifice. It is an acceptance of the mystery of the future—without knowing how or to what, one lets go of one’s being without expecting a reward; one lets go in death, when it comes, without asking “one more breath Mr. Hangman” (*TI* 149), or screaming with Orwell’s Winston, “Do it to Julia! Do it to Julia! Not me! Julia! I don’t care what you do to her. Tear her face off, strip her to the bones. Not me! Julia! Not me” (*1984*, 300)!

It is the unreachability of this eros, of eros itself that sustains this resistance. It is the reaching without the capacity to grasp, the very failure to introject and incorporate the ‘object’ that puts the eros of the resister beyond the power of the totalizing system:

Can this relationship with the other through Eros be characterized as a failure? Once again, the answer is yes, if one adopts the terminology of current descriptions, if one wants to characterize the erotic by “grasping,” “possessing,” or “knowing.” But there is nothing of all this, or the failure of all this, in eros. If one could possess, grasp, and know the other, it would not be other. Possessing, knowing, and grasping are synonyms of power (*TO* 90).

³⁷ Part of G. J. Kohneh-shahry’s will, *The Book of Prison II*, 272; my translation.

³⁸ *The Book of Prison II*, 267; my translation.

Where the relationship with the other is a relationship with the absence of the other, where “...absence is a horizon of the future, an absence that is time” (*TO* 90), coercion of the body, control of the time of death, cannot grasp. The time of life as eros, is not in a presence available to the torturer: “This is a horizon where a personal life can be constituted in the heart of the transcendent event, what I [call]... the ‘victory over death’ ” (90).

That torture cannot grasp eros, does not mean that it cannot reach for it; it can and does, and it is that impossible reaching that animates much of the experience of the torture chamber. This animation can be glimpsed in a comparison of torture with the caress. According to Levinas,

The caress is a mode of the subject’s being, where the subject who is in contact with another goes beyond this contact. Contact as sensation is part of the world of light. But what is caressed is not touched, properly speaking. It is not the softness or warmth of the hand given in contact that the caress seeks. The seeking of the caress constitutes its essence by the fact that the caress does not know what it seeks. This “not knowing,” this fundamental disorder, is the essential (*TO* 89).

The torturer, too, in contact with the body of the subject of torture, goes beyond this contact. In the contact of the caress, there is awareness of the warmth and the pleasure that is aroused by it, but this is not the end of the caress, however much it may be mistaken for the end where intimacy is reduced to stimulation; if this arousal is the end, it is not a “caress.” Similarly, in the cable contacting the vulnerable body during torture there is awareness of the pain and suffering it arouses in the subject, and perhaps the pleasure and confidence this arouses in the torturer,³⁹ but this is not the end intention of the torturer insofar as the torture is in the service of

³⁹ This ‘arousal’ may but perhaps need not be that of psycho-sexual pathology. See Jean Amery’s *At the Mind’s Limits* where, with reference to Bataille, he proffers a form of sadism sourced in “...existential psychology... in which it appears as a radical negation of the other, as the denial of the social principle as well as the reality principle.... The sadist wants to realize his own total sovereignty” (134).

saming of and for the totalizing system. Like the caress, torture seeks something else, something always slipping away, ungraspable.

The caress

...is like a game with something slipping away, a game absolutely without project or plan, not with what can become ours or us, but something other, always other, always inaccessible, and always still to come. The caress is the anticipation of this future..., without content. It is made up of this increase of hunger, of ever richer promises, opening new perspectives onto the ungraspable. It feeds on countless hungers (*TO* 89).

Though not without project, the torturer, too, finds what he or she seeks slipping away and inaccessible; torture is made up of the increase of hunger; it too feeds on countless hungers. When, for example, is the broken prisoner to be fully accepted as a convert, as a true re-born child of any totalizing system? Never. When the guards humiliate and beat a prisoner for having succumbed to their torture and betrayed his friend,⁴⁰ they seek to further break him down out of the sense they have that they have only reached him superficially, on the level of his will, that the full conversion is still to come; it is *always* still to come, no matter the evidence:

In October 1985 we heard that Vahid had been hung in the prison yard.... All of the *tavabs* (converts) were shocked by the news. For the last three years, Vahid had co-operated non-stop with the prison system. He had just begun to computerize the prison's intelligence gathering. He was in charge of gathering and collecting information and intelligence.⁴¹

The subject of a totalizing system, the human subject, though reducible to its survival existence, to an I in-itself and for-itself still remains a respons-ability, a corporeal-sensibility in relation to the exteriority: every instant remains an opening to responsibility; every instant is the space-time

⁴⁰ Here, in *Look Closely; Its Real*, Parvaneh Ali-zade reports on a prisoner tortured into setting up an appointment with his friend so that he can be captured and is later tortured further for having betrayed his friend (26). A stark sense of the pressures involved here may be glimpsed in the reference the book title is making: it is an official referring to the hanging body of a tortured boy the prisoners were brought en masse to see (20).

⁴¹ The case of Vahid Sarie-al-Ghalam, *Memories of Prison*, F. Azad, 140; my translation.

of the *survival* and the *ethical*. Hence, the obsessive renewal of domination and the incessantly required expression of submission and loyalty on the part of the convert, the informer, unremitting until annihilation itself. Torture then, like the caress, can never be satisfied:

The caress consists in seizing upon nothing, in soliciting what ceaselessly escapes its form toward a future never future enough, in soliciting what slips away as though it *were not yet*. It *searches*, it forages. It is not an intentionality of disclosure but of search: a movement unto the invisible. In a certain sense it *expresses* love, but suffers from an inability to tell it. It is hungry for this very expression, in an unremitting increase of hunger. It thus goes further than to its term, it aims beyond an existent however future, which, precisely as an *existent*, knocks already at the gates of being (*TI* 257, 8).

The situation is precisely the same with torture, except for the intention; for the latter, the object, while equally unattainable, is complete disclosure (and frequently when it fails, complete annihilation). And this means, of course, that it expresses not eros, but thanatos: what it would ultimately eradicate is the eros-unto-alterity itself; it would ‘same’ the other as ‘eros’-unto-system. It is not enough to obey “Big Brother”; one must love him. Even this is not enough unless one understands that there is to be, finally, no one there to do the loving. It is impossible to grasp the otherness of the other as such, to ‘same’ it, with the reach of torture, as with the caress, for the simple reason that, however occluded, that otherness is not available to anyone involved in the process. Hence, the cycle of increased violence, of ever greater inhumanity on the part of the totalizing system, hence the fantasies of the omnipotent power of torture’s caress:

[The torturers] see a metaphysical power in the cable, a supra-human power. For them the cable does miracles. The entire body of the prisoner must be touched by the cable for the miracle to occur: that is the person is changed from being a filthy, illegitimate creature that would be burned in the fires of hell into a clean, pure and legitimate creature that will go to heaven. The prisoner’s resistance under the cable is, to the warden, like an infant refusing to leave the womb.⁴²

⁴² A *tavab* in “Maraee Kaffar Ast,” N. Khaksar, 117-18; my translation.

The caress of torture, as the kiss of thanatos, like the caress of intimacy, as the kiss of eros, cannot capture the alterity of the other. The intention of total ‘saming,’ whether that of the system or of the lover,⁴³ can never achieve total satisfaction. Though the manifestations on the level of being, the behavior of the subject of torture, may exhibit no sign of otherness, though it may be entirely occluded from consciousness, even from the being of the subject, grasping, possessing, that otherness cannot be accomplished. Eros says, “no.” And, thus, eros is, under the worst of circumstances, in the dark night of the soul, a potentiality, a possibly accessible resistance, beyond the resistance of the will, to whatever strategy of power is applied.

The passivity of the naked I as resistance

The freedom of the subject of torture exists by virtue of the necessary distance between the subject-as-object and the consciousness of what is being done to that object—putting the subject minimally distant from the present and thus the immediacy of the pain and suffering. This freedom may render resistance on the level of being possible, but even when successful, this possibility says nothing about the fundamental question: “Why resist?.” And without an unshakable response to that question, the minimal distance provided by consciousness, though sometimes enough to prevail, is finally a poor defense indeed. In the long run, the retention of the subject against the tyranny of the totalizing prison system cannot adequately rely on defenses of any kind, but rather depends upon the meaning of resistance itself.⁴⁴

⁴³ The vicissitudes of the alloy of thanatos and eros in the erotic encounters of sexual relationships, perhaps even in cases of mutual love, devolve into a cycle of grief over the failure to comprehend this facet of eros: seeking and expecting to find the other, to remove one’s solitude through erotic fusion with, absorption and possession of, the other—mistaking the element of thanatos for the element of eros—yields more thanatos, more aggressive seeking, more insistence; finally the attempt to *take* the love of the other, to storm the citadel or to take it by cunning, is a formula for the erosion of eros. Perhaps failure to recognize and appreciate the searching, the increasing hunger, of the caress as an expression of the eros-unto-alterity, the love of the otherness of the other, that which brings forth the silly primacy of ‘performance’ or manipulation, is largely responsible for the attempts to ‘break through’ (or the expectation of being broken through) that culminate in the identification of intimacies of sexuality and torture.

⁴⁴ Those who would reduce all meaning to the status of a ‘defense’ are, of course, already defeated.

To be sure, every ideology provides its own meaning, but these, mixed as they are with the history of being and its occlusions, with its various ‘alloys’ of eros and thanatos, are mutually contradictory and subject to the slippery slope of saming. In the dark night of the soul, retention of one’s subjectivity against a system that would remove it, the refusal to become an object, is confronted with the problem of being as such. The very act of consciousness constitutes the pre-reflexive I as an object. Here, says Levinas, much is obscured in the transition to consciousness. The calculations, the conscious decision making, the compromises are products of the subjection of all prior responsibility to the concepts of the historical order of being. Subjection to the concept is the occlusion of the naked I; we lose our fraternity, our prior and primary community. Thus, as we attempt to articulate our sociality, linguistically, in conceptual categories, we thereby create a thicker occultation, separating ourselves from our fraternity and limiting it within our individual being.⁴⁵ Abstracted to the concept, human beings appear as abstract equals, equated as particularities among other (‘samed’) particulars under the conceptual category. It is as thus equated that we are reduced to ‘pure’ individuals, our nakedness is occluded and we lose our fraternity; our ego is “...the equal, but it is no longer the brother of all the others.”⁴⁶ Subjected to the concept, our egos become mere members of a genus “in perfect symmetry and reciprocity with the other egos”⁴⁷ where we no longer have access to our deepest meaning, our meaning as ethical beings.

They called me to participate in a public religious ceremony. I had never participated in these programs before, but, at this moment, I was in a state of indifference. I felt the heaviness of this indifference on my being; this scared me. I feared for my future. What would they want from me? How far could I retreat; where could I stop and tighten my belt again? In those days, I was thinking that I could hold out, was holding out,

⁴⁵ Here perhaps lie possibilities for the development of a content for Marx's general concept of "species being".

⁴⁶ “Notes on Meaning, ” in *GCM* 169.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

preserving my strength for bigger battles. Was this only a justification for my growing indifference, for allowing myself to be led?⁴⁸

In our ‘pure’ individuality, responsible finally to itself alone, the ego turns inward, seeking an escape route, seeking strength,⁴⁹ looking for the meaning of its suffering, and for how far and in what form to capitulate.

The “naked I,” an anteriority prior to this transition, is historically occluded in the constitution of being itself and it is behind this occlusion that Levinas finds the original ‘fraternity’ of humanity that constitutes his ethic. Thus, to retain the being of resistance, apparently paradoxically and against all the instincts of resistance on the level of being, one must let it go.

iv) The Naked I and Bad Conscience

Drawing on Saint Augustine’s distinction between “the truth that shines” and “the truth that accuses” or “puts into question,” Levinas regards the truth that puts into question as an expression for the truth as awakening to the spirit or to the human psyche; the truth of the naked I *is* the putting into question of its right to be.⁵⁰ The naked I, the I-in-question, is always already suffering the question of the right to be. The sociality, the proximity of the other, is thus always already electing me, elevating me to the unto-other, to non-indifference to the other’s mortality; thus I suffer *in* my humanity. The attempt to eradicate suffering from the experience of life, as, for example, Freud’s ‘empirical’ observations evidence we often do in the quest for

⁴⁸ M. Raha, *Simple Truths III*, 22; my translation from Farsi.

⁴⁹ This, as we say in Iran, is the strength of the deers’ antlers locked together, ensuring through their antagonism their mutual annihilation.

⁵⁰ As will become clear below, this is not a questioning of the I’s right to be as opposed to having no right to be. Rather, it is the I’s right to be as always questioned in its relating and responding to others as opposed to the right of the *conatus essendi* of the in-itself and for-itself subject.

‘happiness,’⁵¹ removes us from the very source of our humanity, our fraternity, and places us as ‘pure’ individuals among ‘samed’ equals.⁵² This repressive approach to life is, for Levinas, an occultation of the naked-I by being. Here, the “good conscience,” having taken the pre-reflective I as an object of reflection and become self-conscious, appears as a manifest phenomenon proceeding from a prior, latent, position in which the I has been “awakened in responsibility” (GCM 169). The “good conscience,” that is, proceeds from a prior “bad conscience,” the conscience of the I-in-question, and thus appears as an ‘integration,’ a ‘saming,’ a return to “health” (169). This ‘health,’ however, is acquired through an occultation of the ethos of sociality, a sociality concomitant with the ‘malady’ of bad conscience which has been ‘healed over.’

This ‘malady’ must not be ‘samed,’ must not be returned to the ‘health’ of the good conscience by any means, including all of our attempts to express it. The question of my right to be is not a question about *my* being—well-being, unique-being, changing-being, enduring-being, my being versus my not-being—, in my finite materiality. It is a question of “the justice of being,” of the meaning of being, “not the ontological meaning of the comprehension of this extraordinary verb, but the ethical meaning of the justice of being” (171). “[H]ave I the right to be?” asks for me, against nature, awakens me to its identity of the indiscernible, the untransferable responsibility for-the-other, “wherein life awakens to humanity.” This question, then, a “question that is repressed most of the time” (171), is not to be redeemed as a good conscience that justifies itself, even as an unto-the-other conscience. The redemption of ‘peace’ through responsibility, love, anamnestic solidarity and so on is (as redemption, as peace), just

⁵¹ Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, 23.

⁵² See “Interiority and Economy,” *TI* 109-147.

another, perhaps more subtle, version of the step onto the slippery slope and the fall.⁵³

But what is the site of meaning here if it is not this consciousness of one's pain, of one's self-knowledge, or knowledge of one's precarious life? Levinas responds: "[I]t is a 'consciousness' that, rather than signifying a self-knowledge, is effacement or discretion of presence."⁵⁴ It is a "bad conscience" in which one has to "respond for one's right to be, ... in the fear for another" (*GCM* 175). This putting into question is

...the inversion of the *conatus*, of the persistence and the problem-free perseverance of the being in being. This is a shaking and an inversion by which, as *myself*, I pierce beneath the identity of the being and may henceforth speak of *my* shaking, of *my* conatus, of *my* persistence in being, of *my* being put in question, just as I speak of my being put into the world; an entry into the concern-for-the-death-of-the-other-man—an awakening of a "first person" within the being. This is problematicity at its origin in the guise of my awaking to responsibility for the other, in the guise of a sobering up from my own existing (*Ibid.*).

The I's right to be comes into question as its being is threatened. Blindfolded, in a solitary cell, on the torture bed, in the interrogation room, one is always already in the presence of the other. Prison, with all its techniques and procedures, provides one with ample motives for assuaging one's self with the "good conscience" of holding on to one's being. But "is not my existing, in its quietude and the good conscience of its *conatus*, equivalent to letting the other man die?" (*Ibid.*). In the dark night of the soul, retention of one's subjectivity against a system that would reduce it, the refusal to become an object for the self and the system, points toward the very meaning of one's subjectivity and hence its resistance.⁵⁵

It is in the bad conscience of the for-the-other in its 'passivity,' that one may locate an

⁵³ This is not, of course, an argument against responsibility, love, anamnestic solidarity, and so on, but rather an argument against their reduction to utility in the name of peace and redemption. On "anamnestic solidarity", see Christian Lenhardt's "Anamnestic Solidarity: The Proletariat and its *Manes*", *Telos*, No. 25, Fall 1975, 133-154.

⁵⁴ "The Bad Conscience and the Inexorable," in *GCM* 174.

⁵⁵ Sitting in the "coffins," I used to fantasize that Iraqi missiles hit the prison, to wish they would; but the fantasy wasn't satisfying. It would start with imagining that I survived and could escape. But I would always find myself picking my way through the injured and dying people who had not been so lucky. I would wind up having to stop to help and getting caught. Eventually, I saw that I was looking for a release that could only come as a result of the death of others and that such a fantasy was unworthy of existence.

immanent ‘resistance beyond resistance,’ a naked resistance of the for-the-other itself. Here, I find a sense of the resistance potentially experienced in the dark night of the soul of the prisoner, a resistance that remains beyond the reach of the totalizing system with its access to being. With the interrogation of this passivity, in its distinction from passivity on the level of being, one may locate an ethical ‘self’ in contradistinction to the self as it appears on the level of being. Jacob Timerman, in his account of his confinement in a solitary cell in a clandestine army prison in Argentina describes the pressure of such conflicting responsibilities and the effort of the prison officials to push him into such conflicts: “More than once I was brusquely awakened by someone shouting: “Think. Don’t sleep, think.” But I refused to think. ... To think meant becoming conscious of what was happening to me, imagining what might be happening to my wife and children; to think meant trying to work out how to relive this situation, how to wedge an opening in my relationship with the jailers.⁵⁶

This passivity *must* remain beyond the world of action, beyond even the material being that is the site of action:

The prereflective I in the passivity of the *self*: it is only by the self, or by the I-in-question, that this passivity is conceived. This is the passivity more passive than any passivity, more passive than that which, in the world, remains the counterpart of an action of some sort and which, even as materiality, already offers a resistance: the famous passive resistance. (*GCM* 170)

Levinas means to distinguish the sense of passivity, chosen or imposed, within the order of being from that of the naked I as a “passivity more passive than any passivity.” The passivity of the order of being is already no longer the naked passivity of the pre-reflective I, the ‘I’ of the bad-conscience; it is already resistance of the ego-being of the pure I, the I confined to its will, already defensive and/or aggressive, calculating and negotiating, already a strategy of being—and

⁵⁶ Jacob Timerman, *Prisoner Without a Name, Cell Without a Number*. (New York: Vantage Books, 1981. 35). Timerman’s quandary is echoed in other prison memoirs; “If you don’t think about yourself, don’t you think about your family?” is a familiar question to political prisoners of totalizing systems in general.

thus as indifference on the level of being already complicit in the order of being of the totalizing system; these strategies of being are precisely what the totalizing system would induce, would goad, and precisely what is to be resisted in the dark night of the soul:

We have been captured at a bad time. They cannot tolerate even the slightest sign of strength; they cannot stand the least trace of not being indifferent. As long as the time has not come when we completely break down and give in, they will not let us go. Today our release comes at the price of our complete breakdown.⁵⁷

I would argue, however, that the passivity of the naked-I is always already a resistance, resistance more passive than passive resistance on the level of being, a resistance beyond resistance that may perhaps even be recognized as the ultimate source of all ethical resistances. In its very being-for-the-other it is always already a resistance to the saming intentions of the totalizing system. Here, then, beyond the “disengagement within engagement” of the “patience” available to consciousness on the level of being, is—to reverse Levinas’s emphasis—a potential *engagement within disengagement*, the engagement of the fraternal humanity immanent to the naked I, and thus, however occluded, to the I of being. This resistance is the resistance of the being-for-the-other which, in the disengaged passivity itself, stands beyond the machinations of the totalizing system. It is ethical praxis⁵⁸ as a fundamental engagement.

iii) Conclusion

Thus the praxis of engagement within disengagement is to be distinguished both from any consciously empowered resistance on the level of being and from the withdrawal of the psyche from pain and suffering under the stress, fear and anxiety of torture. One’s passivity here

⁵⁷ Letter I smuggled to my family during a prison visit, unpublished “Prison Notebook,” 74; my translation.

⁵⁸ This conception of “praxis” is not a prescription for how to resist (though we need that too). This is not another version of a categorical imperative for successful resistance. Rather it points toward where resistance as humanity or humanity as resistance springs up. This ethical praxis is the khōra of the ontological praxis.

is not a withdrawal from one's being as may happen, for example, in traumatic experiences such as rape or other torture of one's being. The engagement in disengagement is not a withdrawal into the no-place of traumatic shock, not simply the flooding of the ego by anxiety, but rather is as precisely opposed to this withdrawal as it is opposed to submission in the service of happiness or the contradictory responsibilities of the order of being. Here, in engaged disengagement, the meaning of life itself is transformed. From avoidance of suffering, it becomes acceptance of suffering as intrinsic to life and it becomes *responsibility-in-suffering*. Here, then, both happiness and suffering are aspects of being, but one is not reduced as the survival-ego is reduced to the seeking of happiness as the avoidance of pain and suffering. Withdrawal into traumatic shock, into the nowhere of an ego-less being, draws one, when the ego returns, toward the survival-ego: traumatic shock is... traumatic; one tends to fear the experience, tends to compulsive avoidance of its repetition. In short, one is impelled toward the capitulation and compromise of the survival-ego. The engagement of disengagement is one's connection with others rather than a disconnection from everything—a solidarity, rather than a retreat into solitude: the openness to which, by its very existence within the context of the totalizing system, *is* engagement. Here, then, is the subject as an *I-in-tension*, a finite being but in and of the infinite, born in the *khôra* of proximity, always separated but in relation with the other, one with need for-itself and Desire-for-the-other, thus always already a survival and an ethical being.

What can be said, then, about commitment to resistance confronted with the contradictory responsibilities on the level of being? What is the appropriate response to those who, from love and responsibility, council capitulation (feigned or real): that sometimes one is faced with a choice between contradictory responsibilities and should choose the greater, the responsibility to

the ‘God,’ the ‘nation,’ ‘the people,’ ‘humanity’? No!⁵⁹ What the totalizing system wants is beyond my being, is my sociality, ultimately my naked I, my being for-the-other self itself; it wants to convert it to a survival-ego, and from there to a for-the-system self. It is the meaning in the passivity of resistance beyond resistance in its absoluteness that remains external to, other than, such systems’ instrumental strategies of causality. If I, accepting my solitude, my identity as a pure-I, an in-itself and for-itself, oppose my responsibilities on the level of being to the system—Levinas is quite right here—I contaminate my resistance as a naked I with the motivations and counter-motivations of the conflicting responsibilities we necessarily encounter in the world of being. Again, no. This ethical responsibility is not a choice to be weighed in a cost-benefit analysis of consequences of whatever stamp. It is rather an acceptance of an opening unto responsibility for the other immanent from the beginning—that is why it cannot be reduced to just another option of ‘conversion’ produced in the dark night of the soul; it is not a conversion, but an opening. Thus, in full recognition of the horrible consequences of continuing resistance, one *must*, beyond all excuses and explanations, in the defenseless passive patience of the denuded self, open oneself to this original naked responsibility. My apology for this resistance must be without apology, without the reification of any ‘said’ that I, or Levinas, or anyone else can say.

⁵⁹ However much this engagement within disengagement, this resistance beyond resistance, may necessarily seem an unseemly heroism passing itself off as humility, this obstinacy and stubbornness of the for-the-other is more opposed to such heroism than its usual antonym, cowardice; both heroism and cowardice are artifacts of the will, subject to the mechanics of relative quantities available there. The passivity of the pre-reflective I, in its responsibility, “...does not conserve its assurance in the heroism of the being-for-death in which consciousness asserts itself as lucidity and thought thinking *to the very end*” (“Notes on Meaning,” *GCM* 170); nor is it the fortifying of a courage in the face of the abyss of existentialist facing of nothingness. While such motivations clearly exist, to reduce resistance to them is to miss the point.

CONCLUSION

Humanity as Resistance

Coming to the end of this essaying, I want merely to explore, tentatively, a small part of its possible implications as an ethic in relation to the praxis of resistance. Here, within the limits of the few indicated notions in Levinas' work, I find not only a potential for reconsideration of our contemporary human situation in general, but, within that potentiality, new appreciations of the meaning of resistance that, beyond the machinations of totalizing systems, suggest a position less vulnerable to their coercions than their contemporary power with all its momentum might lead one to believe.

The shift from purposes on the level of being to meanings of the otherwise-than-being allows us to clarify the core intention of the totalizing system; it ultimately seeks to coerce and manipulate the finally insular being – in Levinas's terms, the *interiority* itself – in order to remove its otherness, its for-the-otherness, and transform it into a for-the-system. In the face of these systems, whether those promoting non-Western or Western heteronomies, is disclosed the primacy of the impulse to *efface the face that calls us to responsibility*. Against this impulse, Levinasian interrogation, clarifying the meaning of resistance, finding the for-the-other *pre-ontologically immanent*, suggests a source of resistance (beyond resistance) that is potentially more formidable than any totalizing system: humanity as resistance, but also resistance as humanity.

This *meaning* is not just another moralizing cultural ethic from which to stand in judgment in the apparently vain hope of achieving a psychic economy in which guilt appears in sufficient quantities to coerce enough of us into a united humanity, a humanity with a sufficiently similar mastery of aggression to allow, if not an amorphous and all-inclusive ‘love,’ at least a capacity to ‘just’ get along. It is not that at all. Such moralizing, in its attempt to dominate the individual will through the application of group aggression, parallels the *paideia* of the totalizing systems—prison institutions, camps and societies at large—preparing the human subject for the cycles of domination and capitulation, and domination again. The intention of totalizing systems, in their frustrated narcissism, to apply aggression in order to “same” everything that is not otherwise annihilated, is precisely opposed to fraternity, the proximity without synthesis immanent to individuals in their relationship of responsibility to, and concern and care and love for, the other person.

The interrogation here has suggested that humanity as resistance must begin at the beginning—the first step away from a pre-reflective, raw responsibility is the step onto the slippery slope; it must begin, prior to any reason, in the relation to the face of the other. Thus, the de-ontological approach, the removal of the subject as such, represents precisely the wrong direction; *humanity must refuse to absent itself from its social and political forms.*

Reflecting, then, on Levinas’ ethic of absolute responsibility suggests, not without risks, a reconsideration of ethics and their relation to praxis. Of first importance here, it seems to me at the moment, is the fact that Levinas’ absolute is an absolute on the level of meaning. Prior to and absolutely separated from all action (let alone praxis) is the *meaning* of responsibility. This absolute separation not only preserves the meaning of humanity from contamination with the ethics of consequences, the cause and effect relations, the dialectics of the practice of being

human in social and political contexts (the only place they are to be found). It also preserves this ethic from contaminating the field of action as just another ideology in the name of which the ends can be said to justify the means. The absolute is absolutely separate from the strategies of being, yet without being absent from the praxis of resistance.

The ethic of absolute responsibility for-the-other, by remaining on the level of meaning, thus remains a potential opening up of being to the immanent otherwise-than-being which, potentially available to everyone, may disclose humanity as resistance and, in its resistance beyond resistance, stubbornly refuse to give up its spirit to the totalizing system: in itself, it preserves human meaning. As such preservation, however, it *speaks* to being, perhaps reminding being of its absence, the absence of the for-the-other, occluded under the shroud of solitude. Solitude, that Archimedean point of totalizing systems—whether the political prison or the prison of the isolated, privatized liberal ‘I’ and its system—is precisely what responsibility and responsibility denies. One is always already in relation to others, even in the solitary cell. The solitary cell, in fact, presupposes the primordial sociality of the prisoner, targets one’s being-in-relation-to-the-other, but more than that, one’s being-for-the-other. It is perhaps this solitude, crowding out social meaning as it globalizes under capitalism, that is the principal source of regression to totalizing religious and other metaphysical/transcendental samings so popular in recent decades—evidently on the ground that, in the fantasies of the private world or in the communities increasingly dominated by capitalist invasion, and in the absence of any public meaning to speak of, any meaning is better than no meaning at all. As the political prison experience underscores, submission is not just an abandonment to an isolated ‘nowhere’ (as it appears in some versions of anxiety, fear and death), not just a retreat into isolation. Rather, it is an opening up of access to one’s for-the-otherness, an opening of a passage through which

violence and death reaches the other; as an Iranian prisoner says explaining his submission in a clandestine letter from a secret prison in Tehran: “They made me lie, saying that I was a spy, that my journal was financially supported by foreign countries, name other writers, journalists and thinkers as spies, perverts....”¹ This submission is incorporation as a functional and functioning part, an integer of the totalizing system.

If I sign a document falsely claiming I have become a Muslim in order to get out of prison or to save my life, this is not a private act of my self in its solitude; I enter the service of the totalizing system, becoming useful to it in myriad ways. On the other hand, if I, taking an absolute stand on principle, never lie, there will be occasions when my refusal to say anything will contribute to the suffering and sometimes death of others, if only by the ‘sin’ of omission. Here there is no choice; I must make judgments according to my grasp of consequences knowing both that my grasp is inadequate and that such considerations leave me with at least one foot on the slippery slope. To be sure, an ethic of resistance is not the same thing as a politics of resistance, but it is also true that they are inextricably related. Ethics of resistance is politics of resistance too; decision in the dark night of the soul is a very political moment. Politics of resistance always occur against the background of ethics of resistance; the smallest political act is a very ethical moment. Both are always already separated and related. Thus we find ourselves in a situation where, while both ethics and politics are always possible and always necessary, a comfortable unity within, between or among them is not available. There is then no human situation void of tension, no subject but an I-in-tension, no place for that garrison of the survival-ego, the good conscience, in ethics or politics, let alone both.

What Levinas can perhaps help provide here is not another model or formula of resistance or of praxis, but a human meaning, an accessing of a passivity beyond passivity prior

¹ Faraj Sarkoohi, “A Letter from Prison,” *Payvand*, February 1, 1997. My translation from the original in Farsi.

to and in the process of forming political judgments and decisions. This would be a space where, as most important instances exemplify, it is impossible (and, in any case, unadvisable) to select a principle and apply it to whatever given case comes to hand. In the context of totalizing systems, in the context of the globalizing capitalistic-survivalist *paideia*, as well as proliferating power relations in a continuously fragmenting world, the I-in-tension must, then, inform being, which is, after all, where resistance must succeed or surrender. It is in this context that the I-in-tension, resisting the lure of the happiness of quietness, accepting the suffering that is inevitably concomitant with life, must stubbornly resist the saming-intentions of totalizing systems in the recognition, again, that it is the totalizing system that must “same,” effective resistance, resistance as humanity, that must not.

In any event, to give up on humanity, to dream the dream of a planet cleansed of ourselves, is to capitulate, to succumb every bit as much as to dream the dream of a planet samed in our particular image, to make idols of the versions of ourselves that demand the death of the other, of alterity itself. In the end, these are the same thing. Thus, from the beginning one must take a stand against both. As long as there are still human beings in the world, it will be meaningful, regardless of success or failure, to offer our absolute resistance to totalizing systems everywhere, and, when it becomes necessary, to say, with Ezat Tabatabaieian on the occasion of her execution:

Life is beautiful and lovely. Like everybody else I, too, loved life; but there comes a time when one must say farewell to it. Such a moment has come for me and I welcome it. I have no particular will to make; I would just like to say that the beauties of life are unforgettable. Those who are alive, try to make the best of your life.... Hello to all I have loved, I love and will love.²

² Nasser Mohajer. Edit. *The Book of Prison* V. II, (Berkeley: Noghteh Books, 1998), 271. My translation from the Farsi original.

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Abbreviations

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Emmanuel Levinas

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Michel Foucault

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