Rethinking Foucault's Care of the Self: Critique and (Political) Subjectivity in the Digital

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Abstract

This thesis aims to rework Foucault's care of the self so that it can be understood as a political activity that opens the possibility for a new type of subjectivity. I develop and exemplify this claim through an analysis of the digital. Firstly, I focus on Foucault's ethical work, which I articulate and defend by reading the care of the self through the notions of body, critique and limits, thus envisioning a political activity from which a new subjectivity can emerge. Ultimately, I understand the care of the self to be an embodied critical practice that aims at transgressing the limits of imposed truths and forms of life. The exercise of the care of the self, thus, permits for a conversion of power, which signifies the passing from a moment of subjection to one of subjectivation. Secondly, I employ such arguments in a more practical manner and analyse the digital and the subjection process it enacts. I argue that the digital, which I take as the exacerbated use of the internet through gadgets, is a complex tool-like space characterized by quantification, seclusion and symbiosis, and that such notions arise as a result of the mechanisms that uphold the digital: discipline, mediation of discourse and biopower. However, my interest here is not in these characteristics and mechanisms per se but about the subject they create. I claim that the digital serves to exemplify the making of the useful and docile bodies of the twenty-first century: depoliticized in their utility and docility insofar as they are made to take for granted the imposition of a contingent truth. Thirdly, I then explore how my political reading of the care of the self serves to 'fight' the depoliticized digital subject, where I claim that our attention should be directed towards the mundane, the everyday, and the regaining of it through thought exercises, which allow for the subject to rethink that which was once taken for granted and regarded as incontestable. In doing so, I argue for the value of the uncertain and the political possibility that rests within.

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Introduction

"My point is not that everything is bad, but that everything is dangerous, which is not exactly the same as bad. If everything is dangerous, then we always have something to do."

(Foucault, 1997b)

The interest in political theory follows, I think, primordially from a desire for an understanding that may lead to change. Those of us who call ourselves theorists in one way or another want to offer some sort of comprehension that leads to the opening of possibilities. And, for most of us, this yearning to do so will have come from the heavy influence of another theorist who came before us, and whose work we most likely stumbled upon and hooked us. Who we crossed paths with will, undoubtedly, have important consequences in the shaping of our research. A French author once wrote that names carry weight, expectations and assumptions. He posed that names of authors become key words in a way; we hear them and immediately pose ourselves in a certain world, a particular understanding. Authors are names loaded with meaning. In my case, coincidently, the theorist that gripped me happens to be the same as whose ideas I just expressed: Michel Foucault.

To mention the name Foucault is to call upon notions such as: power, discipline, madness, subject, knowledge, truth, biopower, governmentality, and ethics. And, it also means to invite a certain degree of frustration. Foucault is not the name usually turned to when wanting to find possibility and change. Rather, such a name is read to call upon an all-encompassing notion of power that (supposedly) leaves no room for resistance. This thesis, through an analysis of his ethical work, will work against such pessimism. I take Foucault's invitation to understand his work as a toolbox, from which I will make use of certain notions

that I will contend offer possibility through the understanding of what we are and, in doing so, permit the grappling of the unoccupied space of what we could be. I will argue that Foucault's ethical study of the subject through Greek and Roman ancient thought poses important implications for political possibility through the coming about of new subjectivities.

I will further develop and flesh out such claims by offering an analysis of the digital, a tool-like space from which a particular subject emerges. My bringing of the digital into the conversation intends to offer a more practical and tangible reading of my theoretical reworking of Foucault's care of the self. Moreover, I take and defend the digital to serve as an exemplary case of the subject today, one that results from the emphasizing of particular characteristics and the Foucauldian power mechanisms at play in this tool-like space. In doing so, I also aim to show the productive conversation that arises from bringing together the strands of Foucault studies and digital media literature.

Scope of the Thesis

Allow me to set the stage for the thesis to follow. I aim here at offering a succinct description of the work so as to better ground and underscore my contributions. Within Foucault's ethical work, I am particularly interested in the idea of the care of the self, offered in the third volume of *The History of Sexuality: The Care of the Self.* In this text we find a historical tracing of such a notion, from Antiquity until early Christianity, arguing that this was an activity to be understood as a technique by which the subject could fashion itself. Contrary to critics that read it mainly as an individualistic account of the subject, I take the Foucauldian care of the self as inherently political. I contend that the turn to the subject of ancient thought is the result of his genealogical take on power, not as a renunciation, but rather, as the theorization of resistance. I read in the care of the self the way in which to begin

understanding how to 'fight' against power by posing the idea of the subject at the centre, one which has the capacity to self-transform and bring about a new type of subjectivity.

I offer such reworking of the care of the self by bringing to the fore the concepts of body, critique and limits. Ultimately, I argue that the care of the self can be read as the bodily critique of limits, a critical embodied exercise which aims at transgressing the limits of an imposed truth. The 'practicality' of such activity will be evidenced by a discussion of thought exercises which allow for the possibility of thinking, as rethinkable, what was previously understood as incontestable, thus, permitting the self's own truth over an imposed one. This statement, begs the question: which is the imposed truth am I trying to contest? And so, I take a step back from Foucault's care of the self and into his genealogical analysis of power, which I showcase through the notion of the digital. In doing so I offer a reading of the digital that underscores its complexities, contending that from them a particular type of subject emerges, a depoliticized one.

When attempting to bring together both my interests—a political reading of the care of the self, and making a case for the depoliticized digital subject— I require making use of notions and theorization outside of Foucault, such as micropolitics, politics of becoming and thought exercises. I do not shy away from the limitations of Foucault's thought, but rather rework them through the summation of voices which complement the objective being sought. Ultimately, this dissertation aims to offer a reworking of Foucault's thought into instances of possibility. I will argue that rethinking Foucault's ideas on the care of the self offers a possibility for a new subjectivity, exemplified through an analysis of the digital.

Current debates and Contribution

Foucault's thought, as mentioned, is not one to be thought as pertinent in seeking change. Rather, his ideas on power are deemed as totalizing, making any hope for resistance or

change fruitless. This reading is particularly heightened when discussing his ideas on the self: the Foucauldian subject is taken to hold no space from the power mechanisms that made it, making it futile in any attempt of contestation or transformation (Nealon, 2008; Castro, 2012; Allen, 2013; Castro-Gomez, 2015). Even more drastic of a reading, are those that take it that not only the self in Foucault cannot contest that which made it, it is not even able to actualize such interest (Žižek, 2002; Myers, 2013). This body of work will be addressed and discussed in depth in Chapter Two as one that wrongly takes Foucault's notion of power to be lacking in freedom, and thus, in the possibility to resist. Due to this, they contend that a subject constructed in such a scenario would be one with no capacity to differentiate itself from the power mechanisms that made it. This is not my reading of Foucault.

My reading of Foucault finds resonance with those that, without negating the problematics and limitations in his thought, do read in his work the possibility of finding freedom, resistance and change. Particularly, I find my thesis to be engaging with those that take Foucault's work on Greek and Roman ancient thought of vital importance to emphasise possibility within his theorization or power (Lloyd, 1997a; Butler, 2001; Luxon, 2008; Kelly, 2013b; Laidlaw, 2014; Sauquillo, 2017; Lemke, 2019). My thesis is housed within a reading of Foucauldian thought that underscores the valuable role that ethics, embedded in both power and freedom, had in the delineation of the subject. This is an understanding that sees Foucault's work on ethics as the pertinent response towards his notion of power: from an idea of power that reaches even life itself, where else could resistance be understood if not from that same life? Moreover, I take that this body of work is one that, like me, first and foremost takes Foucault's invitation to not take any truth for granted, to always question those aspects which seem the most objective: madness, the prison, sexuality. It is here where I find my thesis to contribute in a threefold way. Firstly, contributing into furthering a positive reading of Foucault, I offer a novel argument into reworking the care of the self. My first contribution

is, then, not only defending that the subject in Foucault holds a potential for possibility, but that such a defence is constructed by the notions of body, critique and limits. I set apart my reading of the care of the self as I argue that, in order to understand it as an inherently political activity, we must read it as an embodied critical exercise of the transgressing of limits.

My second contribution stems from my discussion of the digital and the subjection process it signifies. The digital I define through the exacerbated use of the internet and gadgets. I characterize it as a tool-like space, referencing everyday examples like sleeping with our phones next to us, the restless need of having the newest model of smartwatch, the normalized use of apps to track our steps, the blurred line between home and workspace as we carry with us our work commitments everywhere we go. What interests me in this part of my argument is offering a reading of the digital that underscores its complexities and ambivalences, and the theoretical possibilities that emerge as a result (Bucher, 2019). Such complexity is one that I emphasise through the voices of the pioneering analysis of the digital (Turkle, 1984; Poster, 1990); through the relation between the digital and democracy (Dahlgren, 2007; Hands, 2007; Dahlberg, 2011; Tufekci, 2014b); and through the more radical and sceptical views with regards to the possibilities that may come from the digital (Gane and Beer, 2008; Harcourt, 2015; Moore and Robinson, 2016; Han, 2017; Dean, 2019). Each and every one of these readings of the digital offer important and valuable arguments of what the digital is and what it has to offer: quantification, symbiosis, seclusion, and empowerment. My interest, however, is not so much these characterisations per se, but rather what allows them to come about in the first place and what they mean for the subjection process.

And so, I make use of Foucault's genealogical thought to flesh out three key mechanisms of the digital. Firstly, I underscore the role of discipline and normalization

through the digital, evidenced by the constant surveillance that the virtual world signifies. Secondly, I argue for the mediation of discourse, not simply as censorship but as in the making and regulating of meaning. Consequently, and lastly, I take the digital as mimicking biopower, through the minute control of populations. Succinctly put, I argue that from the digital, the useful and docile bodies of the twenty-first century come about. And such utility and docility is characterised by its depoliticized being. The digital works to bring about a particular type of subject, one that sees the digital's imposed truth as normal, objective, incontestable. Such is my second contribution: in the complex and ambivalent tool-like space that is the digital, a particular type of subject emerges, a depoliticized digital subject.

As I bring together the two previous arguments—my reworking of the care of the self as the bodily critique of limits and the depoliticized digital subject—my third contribution comes to the fore. To bridge both arguments, I recognize a limitation in Foucault's work when it comes to offering a practical take on the care of the self and, thus, I turn to the work of Merleau-Ponty, read through Marina Garces, and William Connolly. By such additions I am able to then offer a more tangible comprehension of the bodily critique of limits, actualized through thought exercises that centre the body in the practice of critiquing limits. I work from the idea of 'the politics of becoming' in underscoring the value of thought exercises (Connolly, 1999) that allow for the questioning and contestation of what was previously taken for granted. This idea, while fleshed out through the authors I introduce to 'solve' Foucault's limitations, is one which still finds resonance and place in Foucauldian ethics. The care of the self is an activity that theoretically culminated through the idea of *askēsis,* an activity framed by the exercises of meditation and training, aspects which allowed for the subject to come into its own truth or, in other words, to contest the imposed truth. In this way, my third contribution becomes a furthering of Foucault's work on ethics through

the fleshing out of the possibility that thought exercises allow in the contesting of imposed truths and the bringing about of new subjectivities.

From the contributions just outlined, I would like to further offer an important implication. From my political reading of the care of the self, understood through the bodily critique of limits, the idea of conversion of power will emerge. I will contend that, given the great importance that critique plays in a political care of the self, such an activity, much like critique, signifies a conversion of power. Critique in Foucault is an exercise of questioning that which governs us and such questioning carries within it a refusal. Critique is not only an enquiry into that which made us but, rather, the phrasing of the intrigue is already stating a dismissal: "how *not* to be governed like that?" (Foucault, 2007b); in other words, "how not to be subjected like that?, how not to be made like?, how not to be limited like that?". So, as I defend the care of the self to be inherently political, I propose the idea of conversion of power insofar as it poses a question which, in its very phrasing, refuses subjection. Conversion of power exemplified from the passing of the subject that was made to one that made itself; the passing from a subjection to a subjectivation process. However, the conclusion that can stem from such conversion, and the one I offer, I will state since now, is not one of certainty in answers. The struggle to pass from subjection to subjectivation is not one to be clear and delineated, but it is one that rather explores how, through the underscoring of critique, we can advance possibility and new subjectivities.

I take my work to be speaking, ultimately, to post-structuralist theory in conjunction with Foucault studies literature and digital media literature. Post-structuralism, broadly understood, continues to grow and further enhance its theoretical possibilities, and within it the work of Foucault persists to be current and important. My thesis helps further this conversation as I offer a reworking of one of his vital ideas, the care of the self, and defend it to signify the possibility of a new subjectivity. Also, my thesis helps to emphasize and grow

digital media literature in the awareness that such is an aspect of our lives that has changed forever, and I make a case for better understanding it through an analysis of the subjection process it entails, and in this way offering a way to reimagine the subject from within.

Constructing the Object of Study

I would like to use the remainder of this introduction to address the way that this dissertation came about through the approaches that informed it. The reader might have already noticed that the project to be advanced in the following chapters are aspects to be constructed; none of the notions that I have presented up until now have been traced as already existing 'out there'. And, indeed, the following chapters will take time to offer accounts of problematizations, instances of constructing the object of research, of bringing to the fore the possibility of offering *being to be necessarily thought* – what does this mean?

Foucault would shy away from any sort of categorization or label. He refused to answer if he considered himself a philosopher, a theorist, a historian, or something else. And he would also show hesitation in classifying his thought within a particular school of thought. Foucault's thought was always oriented towards one main objective: understanding the present, being able to offer an ontology of that which we are today (Foucault, 2007b). The way in which this objective is sought will change throughout his work[1] but ultimately it is always there.

Often deemed as a structuralist, given his emphasis on discourse, his work is actually more fitting in the post-structuralist school; he was not so much interested in the existence of the structure but how such a structure was made. As Paul Rabinow explains, while Foucault indeed was "caught up in some of the structuralist vocabulary of the moment, he never intended to isolate discourse from the social practices that surrounded it" (Rabinow, 1984, p.

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[1] A comprehensive review of Foucault's thought will be offered in the beginning of the first chapter.

10). Rather his enquiry was always focussed on a core question: *how does discourse function? -* and in the posing of this question he intended to isolate techniques of power in the places where such analysis is rarely done (Rabinow, 1984, p. 10). When, however, we try to offer a definition of what Foucault meant by discourse we run into a problem, for such a notion is left frustratingly unclear by Foucault, mutating in between his stages of thought (Howarth, 2000, p. 48). It is in his last stage of thought, the one that occupies the interest of this thesis, where, while he maintains a "commitment to a non-reductionist conception of discourse, he links it to non-discursive practices and political strategies surrounding sexuality" (Howarth, 2000, p. 78). In the introductory volume to *The History of Sexuality*, he says:

> Indeed, it is in discourse that power and knowledge are joined together. […]. We must make allowance for the complex and unstable process whereby discourse can be both an instrument and an effect of power, but also a hindrance, a stumbling block, a point of resistance, and a starting point for an opposing strategy. Discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it. (Foucault, 1978, pp. 100–101)

Indeed, this is not a precise definition, but is one that serves the purpose of this dissertation. What I want to underscore here is how this definition of discourse is one that brings to the fore power and knowledge and how these concepts result in the coming about of regimes of truth and the position that the subject will have within this matrix (Howarth, 2000, p. 79). Not only that, but it also helps to bring into conversation the drive that Foucault had in his research and work as one which does not accept any external position of certainty; there are no universals in Foucault's work, there is historicity and there is context. To put it in other terms, our world, Foucault would agree, is contingent; there is no possibility of full fixation, even of the subject. One of Foucault's infamous phrases "the death of man" (Foucault, 1989) speaks to this. Not wanting to argue that man itself had ceased to exist, he rather argued that a

particular type of subject had died, made by the particular context and historicity of its time, which in themselves worked through contingent power mechanisms.

What does it mean for the doing of research to have such a world view? Foucault went through different approaches and methodologies (which I will present in the next chapter), but it is by his later work that he was able to pose and verbalize more clearly his guiding principle in doing research. Not that it should be seen as a correction from the previous nor as an improvement, but as often happens when doing research, it becomes easier to bring something to the fore after many attempts. Ultimately, Foucault reaches a point where it is not only the world that he understands as not having certainty, but also the object of research itself. In other words, to theorize and speak of a world with no universal grounds upon which to stand, this has to mean that the object of study is, also, uncertain, contextual, constructed.

The way, or name, by which Foucault will refer to this aspect of his research is *problematization*, where the researcher finds themself constructing the object of study. The object of study in this view is not pre-existent, but as Glynos and Howarth explain, it is being constituted through the unearthing of the discursive and non-discursive practices that bring the former into play as a problem. It "is the constitution of a problem (explanandum) which invariably results in the transformations of perceptions and understandings" (Glynos and Howarth, 2007, p. 34).

It is in his penultimate piece of work where he officially introduces such an idea. Foucault explains his 'new' approach to research, as one that aims to fulfil the objective of offering a contextualized history of experiences (here, particularly, of sexuality), and so he must first offer an account of who is living such experiences. In other words, he must construct an account of man at that moment. He posits:

It was a matter of analysing, not behaviours or ideas, nor societies and their "ideologies", but the problematizations through which being offers itself to be, necessarily, thought—and the practices on the basis of which these problematizations are formed. (Foucault, 1985, pp. 11–12)

Here, we must be cautious and not understand problematizations to simply "represent concrete (political, economic, etc.) problems; [rather] they refer to creative work defining the conditions under which certain possible answers may be ´constructed´ or ´created´'" (Lemke, 2019, p. 358). It is in this manner that the project for the remaining chapters of *History of Sexuality* becomes the problematization of the desiring man, or, how different moments in time have constructed and understood various ways to approach a subject that experiences sexuality (also contextual and historical).

In the last interview before his death, Foucault talked about his research approach, not as one that claimed to be methodical with the purpose of rejecting all but one answer, but rather, more of an approach of, precisely, *problematization* or "the development of a domain of acts, practices, and thoughts that seem to me to pose problems for politics" (Foucault, 1997c, p. 114). Throughout his work this is palpable; he analysed madness, delinquency, sexuality, all examples of problems for politics, all of them dependent on understanding political structures in certain ways, but at the same time, it cannot be assumed that politics will solve them. Foucault goes on to say:

In madness, delinquency, and sexuality, I emphasized a particular aspect each time: the establishment of a certain objectivity, the development of a politics and a government of the self, and the elaboration of an ethics and a practice in regard to oneself. (Foucault, 1997c, pp. 116–117)

The establishment of a certain objectivity, or *being offers itself to be, necessarily, thought*, are I think the key aspects in understanding the use, or role, of problematization in Foucault. The possibility of being the actual 'being' establishing itself as a supposed objectivity where

contingency becomes secluded and hidden, being then presenting itself as natural, given, taken for granted. For this seclusion, or depoliticization, to happen three aspects intertwine: games of truth, relations of power, and forms of relation to oneself and to others (Foucault, 1997c, p. 117), three aspects which, as we will see as this thesis advances, are precisely the pillars of Foucault's work.

Moreover, and what is vitally important in Foucault's thought, is that if problematization allows for the underscoring of how a possibility became thought as a given, it must also then offer the conditions for different responses to be offered. In other words, if by problematizing we underscore and aim to show that a given is not so, by doing so and drawing out the mechanisms, circumstances and contexts which led to the establishment of a certain objectivity, we are also then implying the possibility to be thought differently:

> [Problematization] develops the conditions in which possible responses can be given; it defines the elements that will constitute what the different solutions attempt to respond to. This development of a given into a question, this transformation of a group of obstacles and difficulties into problems to which the diverse solutions will attempt to produce a response, this is what constitutes the point of problematization and the specific work of thought. (Foucault, 1997c, p. 118)

A given into a question. In other words, transforming the given of seeing supposed objective fields of knowledge, like madness, delinquency, sexuality into questions of how each of these fields of experience shape the subject. The world, as the object of research, is not "out there" ready to be seized. Rather, for Foucault and Foucauldians alike, it is to be constructed. Understanding the world and research in such a way, opened Foucault to many criticisms. Maybe the most common in this regard was the supposed relativism upon which his work supposedly falls, relativism in the understanding and relativism in the steps to follow. As we will see in the coming chapters, this alleged relativism meets another popular critique which Foucault faces, namely, the supposed totalizing effect of his analysis of power. A supposed

conclusion that, power being everywhere, leaves no room for resistance, theorized upon a relativistic ground. What can come from such a scenario his critics ask? My aim in this dissertation is to show that, not without its problematic aspects, the ground of the uncertain is an extremely productive site for the envisaging of theoretical research and resistance.

So, this thesis offers a problem driven approach, in which I will construct the object of study, not claiming to have found it "out there", but bringing it into being through the uncertain and contingent. I place myself upon this understanding of doing research for it is here that I find where possibility can arise. By problematizing the subject, the care of the self and the digital in such a way, I signal to the always open space that calls us to always have something to do. Foucault said, following the epigraph that opens this Introduction, that his supposed pessimism is not to conclude that nothing can be done, but rather, on the contrary, as knowing that there is always something to be done, inviting us to seize that space.

<u>Structure of the Thesis</u>

This dissertation aims at just that through three main contributions. First, it provides a political reading of the care of the self through the *bodily critique of limits* which makes way for a new type of subjectivity. Then, a critique of the current subject will follow, by arguing for an analysis of the digital as a toollike space that serves a particular subjection process in upholding the hegemonic discourse. Lastly, I will bring the previous two contributions into a third argument of how to imagine the new subjectivity in more practical and tangible terms through the digital, by bringing to the fore a defence for thought exercises. The thesis develops as follows.

Chapter One starts by offering an overview of Foucault's thought in order to position the reader in relation to the texts, and to offer the appropriate context. After doing so, I concentrate on giving a full rounded account of the care of the self. I do so, firstly, by

presenting and fleshing out in a chronological manner the ideas that would construct this part of Foucault's work. I offer a comprehensive account of the project titled *The History of Sexuality*. What we take from this first chapter is that Foucault read the care of the self through three distinct historical periods, one of which, referred to as the golden age, would be the one where Foucault would concentrate on building his understanding of the care of the self.

Chapter Two begins by offering a defence of Foucault's work on the subject and Greek and Roman Ancient thought. I open the chapter by discussing the main critiques that have been made towards the care of the self, which I will spend the totality of that chapter arguing against. I then move onto a discussion of the political in Foucault, given that if I am to offer a political reading as part of his work, I must situate what is meant by 'political' and how this fits into my aim for the chapter. The rest of the chapter argues for the underscoring of three main aspects: the body, critique, and limits, as the concepts that when brought to the fore allow for the care of the self to be understood politically, thus opening up the possibility of a new subjectivity. The chapter concludes by accepting that this part of Foucault's thought is not finished, and that a clear and practical understanding of the care of the self is still to be fleshed out, but there is a particular concept (*askēsis*) to which I will return to salvage my argument from the limitations faced here.

Chapter Three aims at fleshing out the exemplary case that I will make use of to characterize our subjection process today. And so, the chapter dives into constructing an understanding of the digital as a tool-like space, which serves as a paradigmatic case of the discourse which today governs us. I make use of current digital media literature to underscore the various concerning aspects that the digital holds and, to add to such existing literature, I emphasize that the worrying aspects of the digital arise primarily because they signify a particular type of *subject*, a depoliticized one.

Chapter Four builds on the previous chapter to draw out the mechanisms which enable and make the depoliticized subject. While chapter three offers an argument for understanding the digital in its complexity and ambivalence, the fourth brings to the fore the particular mechanisms found at play in the subjection process. Here, as I delineated before, I make use of Foucauldian ideas, which will further strengthen the argument for the need of care of the self. Firstly, I draw out the aspect of panoptic discipline, the constant surveillance we know we face within the digital. I follow this by contending that the digital holds a mediation of discourse, understood as in a mediation of meaning: the digital regulates meaning, ours included. Lastly, and as a consequence of the previous two points, I argue for the aspect of biopower, as the digital comes to control entire populations through the creation of useful and docile bodies.

Chapter Five brings together both sides of the argument, as once again I foreground the pillars that allowed me to make the political reading of the care of the self – the body, critique and limits – signalling how these concepts should be understood in a more practical manner. I argue for the body to be seen as the site of resistance, where critique is understood as the exercise of resistance, while the limits (or transgressing of them) constitute the objective of resistance. Here, I emphasize that Foucault's thought shows limitations, and so from his reading of *askēsis* - that which lives in between the poles of meditation and training - I invite the reader to imagine the productive possibility of mundane thought exercises, and the way we can regain the everyday through them. I signal to the potential that rests upon making questionable that which is thought as certain or, in other words, to bring about a new subjectivity through the living of our own truth instead of the imposed one.

I.   Chapter One: Foucault's Care of the Self

To hear the name Michel Foucault will immediately ignite certain ideas: "the death of man", "power is everywhere", "where there is power, there is resistance", and adjectives like relativism, totalizing, and despair are probable to also be triggered by said French name. These ideas and adjectives, while representing wrong understandings of his work, do in fact signal to the pillars in Foucault's texts: the subject, power-resistance and how to better understand the relation between them. Even if he is thought primarily as a theorist of power, the reality is that his work was always focused on the subject and its interplay with power (Foucault, 1982); whether it is through an analysis of scientific knowledge, or through disciplinary power mechanisms, or through the subject itself and its possibility to self-transform.

Like any thinker, Foucault's thought is not without limitations and criticisms, however as I will argue in the next chapter, I take most of these criticisms as not grounded upon a fair or right reading of that which they intend to critique. For example, there is a common line of critique[2] which argues for a supposed lack of continuity in Foucault's work when, rather, the objective was to simply offer different angles and new perspectives. Those that critique Foucault, never offering actual solutions, seem to ignore the fact that he himself never intended to offer solutions. He was vocal about this point, never aiming to offer steps or recipe like solutions to his theorizations, he never wanted to conclude a "this is what we now do" thread in his analysis. Rather, Foucault himself classified his work always as a "toolbox" (Foucault cited in O'Farrell, 2005, p. 50) for those interested to grab as they need in the moment they need it. Foucault envisioned for his analyses, his problematizations, his genealogies, his thought, to ignite thought, raise critique, and formulate questions oriented

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[2] A reading and discussion of Foucault's critics will be fleshed out in the following chapter.

towards the underscoring of contingency understood as the impossibility of full fixation. Plainly put, if anything, I take Foucault as wanting to ignite the simple but powerful realization that the mechanisms that make us into subjects are never objective, never given or "natural", but rather they are always contextual, they could have always been different and, thus, the possibility to resist and reimagine them is always present.

At the core of this dissertation is a rethinking of Foucault's care of the self into a political reading that ignites a new type of subjectivity. I will offer what critiques this part of his work faced, and argue against them. However, before being able to achieve both of those objectives, which will be the subject of Chapter Two, I must first offer the necessary contextual information and background into Foucault's last stage of thought, which is precisely what this chapter will do. Firstly, I will present a brief overview of the entirety of Foucault's thought so as to better situate my particular interest. Secondly, I will go into depth in Foucault's interest in ethics, offering an account of the core texts of this moment, and how he moved from a focus of understanding sexuality as a contextualized lived experience to an interest in antiquity's activity for self-transformation.

Foucault's Thought, An Overview

Foucault's thought can be divided into three stages: archaeology, genealogy and governmentality or ethics. This is not a demarcation that he himself made, but in retrospect is how most people read Foucault. His archaeological work was one in which his main concern was the analysis of subjection through the so-called objective sciences or, in other words, the relation between subject and knowledge. The way in which this part of his thought has been understood, and hence it being named as archaeology, is through the signalling of historical breaks in the ways in which subject and knowledge are related. At this point he did not care to give reasons as to why such breaks and shifts happened, that would come in the next stage.

His second stage, genealogy, perhaps the most famous, is where we find his focus and the analysis of the relation between subject and power. It is through his genealogical analysis of power that he goes deeper into the previously superficially signalled breaks, and this interest goes beyond merely signalling such breaks but, rather, seeks to explain them. Lastly, he turns to ethics, also known as his governmentality stage, where he situates the subject and the relation to itself as the centre of study. I read this last part of Foucault's work as that where he wanted to understand how the subject can enact the possibility of self-transformation as resistance.

Archaeology

The first stage of thought in Foucault's work was the most 'superficial' in the sense that what he had as an objective was to 'simply' point towards historical breaks or shifts. To point towards historical breaks in archaeology meant to study the *underneath* of knowledge, or, in other words, "the conditions upon which different discursive formations arise" (Sauquillo, 2001, p. 21). Simply put, there was a desire to understand the underneath of knowledge as a means to signal the ways in which different historical times drew the dividing lines between truth and falsehood. It is in this way that Foucault sets out to be a non-transcendental thinker; there will be for him no one discourse, no one truth, no one rationality. For Foucault, each historical time will have its own regime of truth and in this initial stage of his thought, he traces three particular ones. By the name of epistemes he will be referring to "the condition of possibility of knowledge from a certain époque" (Sauquillo, 2001).

Episteme is that which sets about the possibility of discursive formation: that which demarcates what can—and cannot—be thought. By setting about these possibilities, epistemes ultimately dictate the relation between man and knowledge. The three analysed by Foucault are: Renaissance (XVI century), Classic (XVII century) and Modern (XVIII century) (Sauquillo, 2001, pp. 72–73). During the Renaissance, the construction of

knowledge is understood through an order of likeness, where the world is comprehended through symbols and signs, including man himself. The Classic episteme replaces the simple likeness with representation: signs are now seen as deceiving, and we cannot ever truly know the world but rather only its representation. Lastly, in modernity, if all is a representation, there must be someone in charge of such representations, and so man takes the role of the representing subject.

The tracing of these three epistemes underscore how the role that knowledge has is to not only make us understand reality in different ways, but actually constructs reality in different ways. In other words, it is an analysis of the role played by what we know as scientific knowledge in the subjection process. It is not so much about who the renaissance, classical or modern man is but what made the renaissance, classical and modern man possible in the first place. And so, this is precisely to what Foucault was referring when he uttered the phrase "man is dead", not a negation of the subject, but rather, the underscoring of the idea that contingency and historicity construct not only what surrounds man, but also man himself. There is, for Foucault, no essentiality in the subject. Rather, subjects are always a contingent social and historical construction. This is better exemplified in his idea of subject positions within a discourse, meaning the "places of enunciation that subjects can occupy in speaking, acting and thinking" (Howarth, 2018, p. 384). Having brought to the fore the falsehood of thinking of truth and rationality as one cohesive block, it remained to study and analyse the how and why of such contingency. This is not to mean that by analysing the how and why would then allow for the control and manoeuvring of contingency, but for the understanding and underpinning of the mechanisms which allow it. Enter Foucault's genealogical stage.

Genealogy

During his second stage of thought, Foucault would offer what remains to this day one of the most intriguing and controversial analyses of power. Having set out the breaks in between discursive formations, it remained to offer the mechanisms of such breaks, genealogy would have to go deeper than archaeology. It is no longer about only signalling to different regimes of truth, but more so towards what explains the changes between them through an analysis of the relation between praxis and knowledge, and power in between:

> Genealogy means to develop an analysis that focuses on and distinguishes power and different territories in which specific knowledges and powers that make up capitalist societies arise. A genealogy of power, then, looks into the history of the conditions that allowed the formation and development of both knowledge and power mechanisms; it is a discrete look towards the truth that permitted the establishment of the complex relations between the social world and its representations. (Varela and Alvarez Uria, 1999, p. 360, my translation)

> Genealogy, then, can be said to be the method of analysis that first and foremost, teaches to not take anything for granted. Genealogy is that which invites us to question why our society is set up in a certain manner, which is never accidental. Genealogy highlights that it is precisely one of power's most powerful mechanisms to make us believe in the supposed accidental or natural character of each society's regime of truth and the practices that stem from there. The key piece of work that Foucault produces in this period was his analysis of the penitentiary system in *Discipline and Punish* (Foucault, 1995). In this text Foucault offers a genealogical account of the passing from a sovereign type of power to a disciplinary one, an explanation that stems from the posing of the question: prisons, why do we take them to be the natural and only form of punishment (Foucault, 1995)? And so, in a meticulous manner, it is shown how the prison responded to particular needs, to the specific needs of a political economy in a given context. It is not that the prison is a given that has always been. It is in

this manner that Foucault culminates his ideas on power, as one that goes beyond any juridical or State conceptualization, beyond the idea of commodity and one that negates power as solely repressive.

This stage of thought began with his inaugural lecture at the Collège de France, later published under the title *The Discourse on Language* (Foucault, 1971c)*,* where he traced the production and coercion of discourse and truth in our society. As he analyses the coercion of discourse, we can begin to see the first hints towards an idea of power that is not found in the State or juridical figures, as it was typically thought. In this speech which marked the start of his genealogical stage, he would also offer a glimpse into an understanding of power that ultimately negated a uniquely repressive facet. So, from discourse as the starting point, through the prison, there is in this moment three takeaways from Foucault's notion on power. Firstly, he will take the notion of power from the almost exclusive juridical and state conceptualization in which it had been placed. Power is more than the State. Secondly, power is not a commodity; it is not something that can be passed in between individuals in a zero-sum game. And last, but certainly not least, power is not only repressive, as typically thought. If power were only repressive, Foucault posed, who would obey it? Power has a productive quality; power creates, makes and allows (Brown, 2008).

Ultimately what emerges from this genealogical stage is the triad: knowledge-power-truth, three terms so closely tied together in Foucault's thought that one must be cautious of not confusing them for synonyms. Power as a strategic relation of forces, as that which can embrace everything. Truth as product of discursive formations that possess their own political economy (Sauquillo, 2017, p. 153), which means it cannot be verified, demonstrated or recuperated (Chignola, 2018, p. 21); truth is never without nor outside power. And knowledge as that which stems from the interplays of power and truth. The conclusion of Foucault's genealogical stage is the creation of useful and docile bodies through the power-

truth-knowledge triad. And so, from the conclusion of a subjected body stems the interest of how that body could also be possibility. The matter of how subjects are governed and govern themselves through the production of truth becomes vital (Chignola, 2018, p. 21). And thus, enter Foucault's governmentality stage.

Ethics

This last stage is one that receives the most criticism in Foucault's work. Not even the name of the stage has a consensus: governmentality, ethical stage, biopower, biopolitics. This last stage is read as being disconnected from the previous ones, given the 'abrupt' turn to Greek thought and the heavy focus on ethics, a notion which Foucault took to understand as the ability that the self had to fashion itself. As we will see shortly, readings of Antiquity, from the Greek through the Hellenistic-Stoic period to Christianity, will be core components of his thought at this time. Through the juxtaposition of such historical stages, he will offer the idea of an ethical subject not as one that is free of restraints to do as it may in its constitution, but as one which depends deeply on the ideas of *epimeleia heautou* (care of the self) and *gnōthi seauton* (to know oneself), ideas which will be developed in the remainder of the chapter.

In my reading of Foucault, the exploration of an ethical subject in his last stage of thought is one that is done so not in negation of his previous stages but, rather, to accentuate them. In a way we can see in Foucault's work on *The History of Sexuality* (Foucault, 1978, 1985, 1986) the synthetization of archaeology and genealogy into problematization. We have seen from the introduction that Foucault's research was problem driven, where the object of study was not seen as already existing, but rather as one to be constructed. This becomes extremely clear in this last stage of work, and such clarity is not through a dismissal of previous stages but, rather by the bringing of them together and closer. In reading the volumes of *The History of Sexuality* (Foucault, 1978, 1985, 1986) one can see the

archaeological signalling to the breaks in our understanding of sexuality, a genealogical account of the power mechanisms that upheld the breaks and, finally, the making of these instances into a problematization of the contextualization of subjection through sexual experience.

The emphasis in this chapter—and in this dissertation—given to Foucault's ethics, should not be understood as a negation of his previous work. On the contrary, the emphasis on the ethical subject is done so precisely because of the ideas and analyses that preceded it. One cannot understand *The History of Sexuality* without signalling to the breaks in the sex narrative—archaeological work—nor without trying to understand those breaks through the underscoring of the micro workings of power in such narrative—genealogical analysis. Foucault's governmentality is thus deeply dependent on its previous stages.[3]

This has been an admittedly brief introduction to Foucault's thought, but I trust it has been enough to situate the reader for the analysis that will now follow. Thus, it is important for the reader to know that Foucault's thought has three stages which build up on one another, and that more than power what was truly the interest of these stages was subjection; how the subject was created and made into a certain way by different mechanisms. It is in the last stage where it seems as if the subject carries more of an importance because, this time, the analysis is not so much on how it is subjected but, rather, on subjectivation: on how the subject can create and transform itself. Let us now fully flesh this out.

Sexuality as Experience, and the Self that Experiences It

It is said that Foucault began to write the introductory volume to *The History of Sexuality* on the same day that he finished writing *Discipline and Punish*. This volume, titled *The Will to*

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[3] A more in-depth account of both the criticisms and defence that Foucault's governmentality stage receive will be outlined in the 98next chapter.

Knowledge and published in 1976, is seen to mark the move from genealogy to his study of governmentality. The premise of the book is simple: we have come to believe a false premise, we have mistakenly come to understand sexuality as something which is repressed in modern society but, signals Foucault, the reality is that we are constantly talking about sex, even to the extent that we are actually being forced to confess our sexuality without realizing it. This constant talk of our sexual lives is not to conclude that we are living our sexuality freely and openly but, rather, that sexual discourse is constructed in a way which allows for the thorough control and monitoring of one of the fundamental human activities. It is in this text, then, where Foucault can clearly formulate what he has been concerned with all along: the relation between regimes of truth and the subject, a relation analysed through power.

As he brings to the fore how an uncontested notion of a repressed sexuality is actually actively working to make a certain type of subject, Foucault here is then bringing to the fore precisely how the role of truth is not innocent, but very much a mechanism of subjection. The idea of sexuality here serves a purpose and it is not to be understood that the idea of sexuality in itself interests Foucault. The idea of sexuality here is to be seen as a *dispositif* serving two aspects, says Miguel Morey:

> […] one has to do with the relationship between subject and truth; the other concerns the nexus that is established between sex and knowledge—and, behind them both, we find, a same figure in exercise: power. (Morey, 2014, p. 391)

Foucault himself states that the objective of the project, at this point at least,[4] was to analyse a "certain form of knowledge regarding sex, not in terms of repression or law, but in terms of power" (Foucault, 1978, p. 92). And it is in this way, that we find the culmination of

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[4] The objective of the project changes drastically in between the first and second volume of HS and I will outline this shortly.

Foucault's work on power, for it is through the *dispositif* of sexuality that an idea of power as omnipresent and productive strategic forces is taken a step further, into biopower.

Foucault offers a schematization of power as follows: one, it is not something to be acquired; two, it is exercised from innumerable points; three, the relations that power creates are immanent and have a directly productive role; four, power comes from below; five, power relations are both intentional and non-subjective—this does not mean that it results from the choice or decision of an individual subject; and, lastly, where there is power, there is resistance (Foucault, 1978, pp. 94–95). Ultimately these characteristics will nourish an idea of power that is everywhere, which is "not to mean that it comes from everywhere, but that it embraces everything" (Foucault, 1978, p. 93). This conceptualization of power, as one that can embrace everything, that starts to signal it as the infinite control of populations, shows us that the project at hand is not so much about sexuality and its legal regulations and its repression, but more so we are facing a story about the *hows* and *whys* regarding our discourse on sexuality and underscoring the fact that we have taken them for granted.

This analysis of power through sexuality is one that mimics in many ways the analysis offered in *Discipline and Punish*. In the key text of his genealogical stage, Foucault offers an analysis of different models of power exemplified by illustrations of how cities would act towards cases of different diseases, whether it be leprosy or pests (Foucault, 1995, pp. 195–228). In this way Foucault starts to build a notion of power which goes beyond the juridical structure and brings together corporal control through inclusion and exclusion mechanisms. In *The Will to Knowledge*, sexuality will take this analysis even further, insofar that in this scenario we are presented with a power that works in the minute management of populations, even through our biological needs and composition. This is the key aspect that Foucault wished to make: it is not that sexuality is repressed, but that this discourse of repression serves as a cover for how deeply controlled this aspect of our lives actually is.

As we move into the nineteenth century the 'new' forms of sexuality that arise further prove this control. Homosexuality, the child's sexuality and non-monogamous relations, mimic again the argument made of how different penal economies would disguise themselves as more humane, but, in reality, the analysis offered by Foucault is to not think of these new frontiers of sexuality as to signify a better sense of freedom because they simply are further forms of control by bringing about the discourse of perversion (Foucault, 1978, pp. 36–49). This analysis corresponds to that found in Discipline and Punish, where we see the sovereign power mutate from corporal to disciplinary punishment, a move that should not be taken to signify a humanization from power precisely because the change in punishment responds to the 'need' for effectiveness from the penal economy of the time. The parallels to the analysis of sexuality are then in understanding that the coming about of different terrains of sexuality, far from signifying the exercise of choice and freedom, are constructed in a way which serves the ultimate control of the population through sexuality. And so, the objective of this introductory volume comes to life. The objective of analysing regimes of truth and the subject through the underscoring of power, by the use of sexuality as a *dispostif,* comes to show that sexuality far from being repressed is more thoroughly controlled, meaning that the subject is then made and adjusted in its specificity. The consequences and implications of this argument, however, are not discussed in this introductory volume. And then an eight-year silence followed.

It wouldn't be until 1984 when the continuation to the introductory volume to *The History of Sexuality* would be published and, in fact, this year saw the publication of not only volume two but also volume three: *The Use of Pleasure* (Foucault, 1985) and *The Care of the Self* (Foucault, 1986)*,* respectively. However, these publications would cause quite a bit of confusion, which Foucault anticipated and addressed. The objective of the project set out in the first volume seems to have changed in the second and a gap is found between them. And

so, Foucault offers a clarification in order to introduce the second volume. The idea for the project, we are told, was for it to be a questioning of sexuality understood as an ahistorical constant (Foucault, 1985, p. 4), which meant to offer "a history of the experience of sexuality, where experience is understood as the correlation between fields of knowledge, types of normativity and forms of subjectivity in a particular culture" (Foucault, 1985, p. 4). However, after the ending of the introduction he deems that there is a key aspect missing from any theorization that would allow him to construct such a history, the form of subjectivity, what Foucault would reference as a theorization of the desiring man, a theorization of man as an object of itself. And so, the perceived change in between volumes happens due to the need for a re-focusing of attention and to:

> […] analyse the practices by which individuals were led to focus their attention on themselves, to decipher, recognize, and acknowledge themselves as a subjects of desire, bringing into play between themselves and themselves a certain relationship that allows them to discover, in desire, the truth of their being, be it natural or fallen. In short, with this genealogy the idea was to investigate how individuals were led to practice, on themselves and on others, a hermeneutics of desire, a hermeneutics of which their sexual behaviour was doubtless the occasion, but certainly not the exclusive domain. (Foucault, 1985, p. 5)

In other words, there is a realization that if a history of the experience of sexuality is to be accounted for this can only be achieved by also offering an account of the subject that lives such experience, and that not only lives it but is made through it. In order to do so, Foucault will go back in between the fifth and third century and analyse the experience of sexuality and the desiring man through four axes: "the relation to one's body, the relation to one's wife, the relation to boys, and the relation to truth" (Foucault, 1985, p. 32). The analysis of these four instances will be done by bringing to the fore the interplay of *aphrodisia* and *chrēsis:* pleasure and use. The experience of the aphrodisiac comes about by the linking of acts, pleasures and desires in a dynamic relationship (Foucault, 1985, p. 43),

and when understood alongside the aspect of use, we reach *chrēsis aphrodisiōn* which has a threefold strategy: need, time and status. (Foucault, 1985, p. 54). This analysis serves the ultimate purpose of underscoring a concept that will become of the utmost importance for Foucault: the techniques of the self, one which we will be returning to throughout the fleshing out of the thesis.

Ultimately, what underlies the analysis of this second volume of *The History of Sexuality* is an understanding of how the techniques by which man focuses attention on itself—dietetics, economics, and erotics—are intertwined with the role of truth. What is brought to the fore is how the conjunction of these techniques posed a regime of truth in the making of a subject, one which will underscore the role of austerity[5] in and through the sexual act. Dietetics signals to the technique of the right time, where the body become the concern of austerity. Economics understands austerity through the moderation of the privilege that man has over his wife. And, lastly, austerity in relation to erotics meant the renunciation of all physical relation with boys (Foucault, 1985, pp. 251–252). In other words, these three techniques demarcate the three axes previously stated: the relation to one's body, to one's wife and towards boys; three axes tied by a fourth, their relation to the axis of truth. The role of truth is that which allows for the idea of mastery, or self-mastery, to come about: dietetics as the mastery of oneself; economics as mastery of the idea of authority in relation to the conjugal relation, and mastery towards the more carnal desires towards boys (Foucault, 1985, p. 212).[6]

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[5] An aspect which will be of great importance in the care of the self.
[6] This last aspect is interesting, as it is the technique which allows for the idea of mastery to be not just important to the desiring subject, but also in the boy's point of view. The idea of austerity was also to be performed by the boy in not yielding to others and achieving self-mastery (Foucault 1985, 212).

It is in such a way that Foucault concluded that the analysis of sexual behaviour in Greek thought throughout the 5ᵗʰ and 3ʳᵈ centuries BC is one that first and foremost underscored the idea of self-mastery:

> We have seen how sexual behaviour was constituted, in Greek thought, as a domain of ethical practice in the form of *aphrodisia,* of pleasurable acts situated in an agonistic field of forces difficult to control. In order to take the form of a conduct that was rationally and morally admissible, these acts required a strategy of moderation and timing, of quantity and opportunity; and this strategy aimed at an exact self-mastery— as its culmination and consummation—whereby the subject would be "stronger than himself" even in the power that exercised over others. (Foucault, 1985, p. 250)

What is of particular interest for Foucault here is how the aspect of desire is theorized, understood and enacted in this historical period. The conflict that desire produces is not to be shied away from; rather it is placed at the centre of the subject's lifeworld so as to produce a truth-power juxtaposition that would inform the subject's path to self-mastery. How this self-mastery actually came about, or how the subject enacted a relation to itself that allowed for this possible austerity, becomes the next theoretical undertaking.

The Hermeneutics of the Subject, or How the Subject Makes Itself

Having rerouted the project of *The History of Sexuality* into a problematization of the desiring subject juxtaposed to truth, the task then becomes the understanding of how the self came about. Foucault's work and research interest in a particular moment were always made evident by his seminars at the Collège de France, and his interest in the care of the self is no exception. It is in the seminar *The Hermeneutics of the Subject* where one can read and appreciate all the research, reading and thinking that went into the third volume of *The History of Sexuality, The Care of Self.*

Foucault will frame his analysis of the self to self-relation through two concepts: *epimeleia heautou* and *gnōthi seauton*, Greek terms that translate respectively into *care of the*

self, and *know yourself.* The research of bringing to the fore how the desiring subject could

create itself will be characterized by the role played between care and knowledge. In fact,

Foucault claims to undertake such objective means to try to uncover the idea of *epimeleia*

heautou from *gnōthi seauton*. Foucault argues that Western thought managed to seclude the

care of the self by rather emphasizing the role of knowing oneself and, while he does not

want to deny the importance of knowledge in the self to self-relation, he wants to uncover the

reasons and mechanisms which allowed for Western thought to dismiss the idea of care.

      The researching of the care of the self, and the attempt to uncover it from the need to

know oneself, will ultimately be signalling to the relation between truth and subject, or,

between the juxtaposition between philosophy and spirituality; notions which Foucault takes

to mean the already demarcated limits to access truth and the self-transformation needed to

undergo access to truth, respectively. Ultimately, then, the Foucauldian journey into the

analysis of the care of the self is one of tracing subjectivities being made through regimes of

truth. The care of the self will look different depending on the historical moment, Foucault

will underscore three times: Socratic-Platonic, Hellenistic-Roman and Christianity. Through

each of these stages Foucault will try to underscore the relation between care and knowledge,

and how such a relation uncovers a particular process of subjection or subjectivation through

regimes of truth. In the different historical moments, *epimeleia heautou* will mutate and

change. It will be seen as an attitude towards the self, others and the world; as attention and

looking; and as actions exercised on the self by the self (Foucault, 2005, pp. 10–11). Even

within these mutations, however, Foucault finds that there is a constant at the core of the idea

to care for oneself, and that is, from Socrates to Stoicism and even into Christianity, it was

understood as a principle of moral rationality (Foucault, 2005, p. 9), which for Foucault begs

the question: how, then, did such a pivotal notion in the history of thought come to be

neglected by Western thought and philosophy, and absorbed by the idea of knowing oneself (Foucault, 2005, pp. 12–13)? Enter the Cartesian moment.

The Cartesian moment is the moment in which to know oneself was centred over the idea of care; it is the moment in which we find a "philosophically requalified *gnōthi seauton* and a discredited *epimeleia heautou*" (Foucault, 2005, p. 14). Ultimately, this was a moment in which the understanding of the access to truth drastically changed. Prior to the Cartesian moment, when care of the self was the priority, the practicing of such activity is that which allowed the access to truth; such activity enabled the subject to practice the self to self-relation in order to access truth. But, as the Cartesian moment happens, the self to self-relation ceases to matter and thus the access to truth becomes dependent on the accesses already demarcated; there is no need for care or transformation. In other words, the Cartesian moment is that moment in which the possibility of truth is explained and allowed by the mere existence of the subjection process (Foucault, 2005, p. 15).

The displaced importance in the need of self care for accessing truth signifies that there was a shift in the relation between spirituality and philosophy. Philosophy, let us remember, as that which "determines that there is and can be truth and falsehood, and whether or not we can separate the true and the false" (Foucault, 2005, p. 15), and spirituality as the "search, practice and experience through which the subject carries out the necessary transformations on himself in order to access the truth" (Foucault, 2005, p. 15). In this notion of spirituality, naturally there can be no truth, nor access to it, without the transformation of the subject (Foucault, 2005, p. 15). This is why the Cartesian moment is so concerning for Foucault, for it was the moment when Western thought secluded the self to self-relation, and came to understand the mere existence of knowledge as an access to truth, disregarding the tradition of a history of thought that understood the transformation of the subject, i.e., the practice of spirituality, as vital for the access to truth. Spirituality becomes relegated behind

philosophy, and so *gnōthi seauton* is brought to the fore over *epimeleia heautou*. It is the aim of Foucault to analyse this covering and undo it, and highlight the possibility that rests within the practice of the care of the self. Ultimately, he will reach a moment of argument where he will signal to a particular historical moment, the second stage, referenced as the "golden age*"* of the care of the self as the preferred moment for his analytical purposes. This will be justified through an argument of it being a moment of the care of the self where the activity was better framed within the possibility of allowing the coming about of new subjectivities.

The first stage of the care of the self is introduced through the reading of key ideas from Socrates' *Apology*, in this way, offering a first glimpse of such a first stage and its relation to *gnōthi seauton*. The reading of the *Apology* shows that, at this moment, to know oneself was a consequence of caring for oneself (Foucault, 2005, p. 5). In other words, it was *epimeleia heautou* that which gave reason to *gnōthi seauton*. This "prioritization" of care is exemplified by how Socrates encouraged others to take care of themselves, an aspect which has four important implications according to Foucault: (1) to encourage others to take care of themselves is something which is entrusted to him by the gods, (2) in this encouragement Socrates has neglected himself, he has not cared for himself, (3) Socrates sees his role as the one to awaken the citizens, and (4) to care for oneself is a principle of restlessness and movement (Foucault, 2005, pp. 7–8). By signalling to these four aspects, Foucault is underscoring the starting point of encountering the care of the self as an activity that is encouraged by a figure that has not himself cared for himself and, furthermore, is actually just a messenger of such encouragement, and it has the very specific objective of awaking citizens.[7] Simply put, Foucault is encountering a first moment of the care of the self as an activity that is subjected to divinity's encouragement and to fulfil a specific role for a specific

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[7] The wording *citizens* here matters and is not arbitrary insofar as in this first historical stage to be studied, it will become clear that to care for oneself was reserved for a very limited part of the population, that of rulers to be.

number of people, and in which it was to care for oneself that justified knowing oneself. Notice the importance of care over knowledge—the latter being justified by the former.

The call from divinity into the practicing of the care of the self brings to the fore the soul as the objective of the care (Foucault, 2005, p. 53), such that was what spirituality intended to look out for. Here Foucault finds that the idea of *khrēsthai* is particularly necessary to understand the role of the soul, as a verb which translates to "I use, I utilize" (Foucault, 2005, p. 56) but it is not any type of use, rather it is a use that happens through the subject itself and in such a manner that the meaning of being a subject becomes: "the subject of instrumental action, the relationships with other people, of behaviours and attitudes in general, and the subject also of relationships to oneself" (Foucault, 2005, p. 57). In other words, the soul being linked to the activity of caring for oneself through this particular envisioning of *use* is highlighting the not yet secluded role of spirituality.

Ultimately, Foucault will argue that at this historical moment, the care of the self, understood as the caring of the soul, has four important characteristics: firstly, it is linked to the exercise of power, which signals the emergence of a care that is between privilege and political action (Foucault, 2005, p. 36); secondly, there is a pedagogical lack, argues Foucault, in Athenian education which then makes the care of the self follow a pedagogical model which will mould the idea of care in a particular way (Foucault, 2005, p. 37); thirdly, this idea of care was exclusively for young people within their relationship to a master, or a lover (Foucault, 2005, p. 37); and, lastly this is a care with no urgency, in Foucault's reading of Alcibiades, the care is only brought to the fore in the realization of being ill-prepared to tackle an objective (Foucault, 2016, p. 38). Ultimately, what we learn through these four characteristics is that at this moment, the care of the self is saved for a particular age group in order to alleviate a lack in education. Also, there is no rush in this care; rather it is only until the lack is exemplified when the year to care for the soul begins. To care for the soul, then

meant a particular purpose, a particular objective, and that was the becoming of a better ruler, the better knowing of the city-state (Foucault, 2005, p. 38).

Within the specificity of this understanding of the care of the self, Foucault ultimately takes his reading of *Alcibiades* to signal that to care for oneself consists, precisely, in knowing oneself (Foucault, 2005, p. 67), as was advanced by Socrates insofar as to care was exposed as that which gives reason to knowledge. Contrary to what would later characterize Western thought, in *Alcibiades* we find a relation between care and knowledge in which it is knowledge which is at the service, so to speak, of the self; knowledge finds its place through the subject that cares for itself, not before. This allows us to make better sense of the introduction of the idea of *khrēsthai*, as we find the subject itself to use and utilize itself by being subject to action and to others. It is in this manner that the exercise of knowing oneself, in the Socratic-Platonic stage, must be understood, for in order to know oneself there must be a withdrawal into the self (Foucault, 2005, p. 68); the self becomes the subject of itself in order to know. This does not happen in isolation but, rather, the role of the master will be particularly important, and a figure that will constantly appear in the care of the self, but whose particular actions will mutate. For this particular stage of *epimeleia heautou*, the master-disciple relation is understood as the one who cares about the subject's care of itself and loves the disciple - it is very much a guiding figure (Foucault, 2005).

Three changing aspects start to open the transition towards the Hellenistic-Roman stage. Firstly, the idea of care begins to be a more generalized activity (Foucault, 2005, pp. 74–75)[8] and not exclusively for rulers to be. Secondly, we have seen that the care responded to a lack in Athenian education, but with the passing of time and the generalization just

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[8] We must be cautious of the idea of generalization, Foucault is careful to point out. There are two crucial constraints to this generalization: (1) to take care of oneself is an activity that requires time, and thus is only available for those with the capability of free time, i.e., the elite; (2) those who are capable to care for themselves will become separate from the rest.

signalled to, the care began to be seen as indispensable in all life stages, particularly so during old age, and not just serving to rectify a pedagogical gap (Foucault, 2005, pp. 75–76). And, lastly, the erotic of boys, this link to the erotic, present in Plato, starts to disappear and move to the background—a change that will specifically be evidenced in the master-disciple relation (Foucault, 2005, p. 76). So, here we are seeing changes in the relation that the care of the self holds with politics, pedagogy and the erotic (Foucault, 2005, p. 76).

We move now to the 1st and 2nd Centuries AD, also known as the prime of Roman Stoicism, from Musonius Rufus until Marcus Aurelius, which Foucault calls the renaissance of the classical culture of Hellenism (Foucault, 2005, p. 82). The changes towards politics, pedagogy and the erotic, will be the three aspects used in Foucault's analysis to demarcate the reading of the care during the Hellenistic-Roman moment. The transforming and changing of said aspects during this second historical moment will bring to the fore the comprehending of the care of the self through the ideas of notion, practice and institutions (Foucault, 2005, p. 82): a notion that has become generalized as a principle which sees oneself as the end instead of the city-state institution, and is practiced through an aspect of self-finalization and not solely through the aspect of self-knowledge.

The spreading of this activity through more life epochs than just young age and life activities does not happen seamlessly, a tension is brought to the fore, as this activity is opened to any facet of one's life, then a question is raised regarding how this activity could be coextensive with individual life and, more importantly, must it be so? (Foucault, 2005, p. 86). I take this question to mean the interrogation of what was an activity that seemed only to matter for politics, as it now finds itself crossing into other spheres. The generalization across all of a lifetime is explained by Epictetus (Foucault, 2005, p. 90) and his defence of the care of the self as to be purposeful for life moments, which is not to mean that to care for oneself will be the same in all stages of life. So, ultimately, what we are seeing here is a decentring

and re-centring of the care, insofar as it is decentred from the exclusivity of young age and political training, and recentred in all stages of life and as a more critical activity towards oneself. Foucault will understand and further flesh out this decentring and recentring through three interrelated aspects: (1) a critical activity with regard to oneself, (2) self and medicine, and (3) old age (Foucault, 2005, pp. 94–100, 107–108). We thus, start to see the care of the self in the 1st and 2nd Centuries as an activity that more and more intertwines itself with life in general, with the art of living, and does so, not as pedagogical training as it was previously understood, but more so as a critical activity, involving more of a sense of correcting than that of teaching (Foucault, 2005, p. 125).

How does this new understanding, which aims to correct rather than teach, affect the role of the master, one which we have seen in the Socratic-Platonic age functioned on the basis of the ignorance of the disciple and underscored the role of the erotic (Foucault, 2005, p. 128) in order to better the political telos of the time? As we move to the next stage of the care, we find, with Seneca, that the role of the master remains, but its importance is not due to ignorance, which is not to say that ignorance is not there, but the master's role is more about correcting the subject in order to find its status as a subject: "[…] the subject should not strive for knowledge to replace his ignorance. The individual should strive for a status as subject that he has never known at any moment of his life" (Foucault, 2005, p. 129). It is not that the master teaches the disciple for a specific activity, like rulers-to-be, but rather it is a matter of correcting past teachings so as to become a subject in itself. The master here, then, is the mediator in the individual's relationship to his constitution as subject, the master is effective agency (Foucault, 2005, pp. 129–130).

Such constitution as a subject will happen through three main domains: dietetics, economy and erotics, or: the body; the family circle and the household; and love (Foucault, 2005, p. 161) which, we have seen already, are the guiding pillars in the understanding of

pleasure in the second volume of *The History of Sexuality*. These three domains characterizing care in this stage show that the role of others has a different purpose than in the previous stage. For *Alcibiades* the others referred to those that were to be governed, one had to be better for them, but they had no active role in such a process. In this Hellenistic-Roman stage, the displacement of ruler training, does not displace the need for others in the care, but gives them another meaning. It is through the relation with the other that the care of the self acquires meaning in this second stage. The aspect of *salvation* is particularly important to better understand this.

The idea of salvation in Stoicism is not one seen as being saved from (a negative understanding) but being saved by (a positive reading). For example, says Foucault, let us think of how a city is saved by its building defences, signalling then a positive reading of salvation (Foucault, 2005, p. 183). But what does this positive salvation signify for the care of the self in this particular moment?

> The person saved is the person in a state of alert, in a state of resistance and of mastery and sovereignty over the self, enabling him to repel every attack and assault. Similarly "saving yourself" means escaping domination or enslavement; escaping a constraint that threatens you and being restored to your rights, finding freedom and independence again. (Foucault, 2005, p. 184)

The subject is then saved by and not from, saved by the caring for itself in its relations to others, and in doing so the role of master and disciple blurs, the self becomes its own master, the self becomes the agent of salvation. This begins to push us towards the idea of resistance in stoic salvation, to be understood as that in which the self becomes its master, it escapes domination. Ultimately, what we are seeing here is a care of the self in which the self turns more towards itself, an idea which opens way for a discussion on *conversion* (Foucault, 2005,

p. 207), a paramount concept in Foucault's notion of *critique*.[9] This notion of conversion is not exclusive to the golden age of the care of the self, but, needless to say, that during this period it has a significance which Foucault deems worthy of highlighting and contrasting against the other understandings of this notion.

For the Socratic-Platonic moment, conversion meant the turning away from appearances, acknowledging one's own ignorance and a reversion to the self (Foucault, 2005, p. 209). In Christianity conversion is taken to be a sudden change, a transition from one type of being to another, a renunciation of the self (Foucault, 2005, p. 211). And in between, during the Hellenistic-Roman period, the idea of conversion signifies a reversion in the immanence of the world, liberation from what we cannot control, in the adequacy of the self to self and where, as we have seen before, knowledge is not so important (Foucault, 2005, p. 213). This idea of conversion signifies a turning of the gaze from others onto the self, a "movement" which is closely related to truth. Signalling to this reminds us that it is precisely the relation between subject and truth that sets about the framing of the interest in the care of the self. So, where does this fit into this analysis of conversion and turning of the gaze?

Conversion in Hellenistic-Roman time signified a shift—a movement of the subject with regards to himself, the subject must advance towards something that is himself, it *returns* to itself (Foucault, 2005, p. 248). Foucault contends that this movement has been interpreted by Western thought as the negation of possibility for an ethics of the self (Foucault, 2005, p. 252) when, rather, it should be understood and worked as the possibility for a creation of an ethos. Stoic morality helps to illustrate this as it discloses that you can only arrive at yourself after having passed the great cycle of the world, that there is no negation of the world or an enclosed individualism as Western thought would like to argue.

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[9] The concept of critique will be explored in the next chapter and will represent one of the pillars for making my argument for a political reading of the care of the self.

The turning of the gaze is only achievable through the relations to others as much as the relation to the self, something that a deeper look into Seneca's spiritualization of knowledge makes clearer (Foucault, 2005, p. 289).

Seneca's spiritualization of knowledge makes clear the idea of the turning of the gaze by bringing to the fore the following characteristics: (1) the subject changes its position, (2) the change allows for the grasping of reality and value of things, (3) the subject sees himself and grasps himself and, (4) in this, the subject finds freedom and a mode of being in its freedom. All these four aspects compose the idea of spiritual knowledge for Seneca (Foucault, 2005, p. 308). This theorization of the spiritualization of knowledge to explain the turning of the gaze, does not answer the question of how is it that the subject changes its position. How does the subject enact the first "step" of the spiritualization? The answer to this question is *askēsis*, a concept which in Greek Hellenistic-Roman signifies the practice of the self by the self, but rather it is a way of binding the subject to truth, it is the practice of truth (Foucault, 2005, p. 317). We have returned, once again, to the posing of the relation between subject and truth: "the 'spirituality of knowledge (*savoir*)', and there was 'practice and exercise of the truth'. This is how, I think, the question of *askēsis* should be approached […]" (Foucault, 2005, p. 319).

Within the Christian world the aspect of *askēsis* transforms greatly, signifying the progressive renunciation that leads to the ultimate renunciation of the self (Foucault, 2005, p. 319). For Antiquity it was rather more about the constitution of the self to ultimately arrive towards a self-sufficient relationship with oneself (Foucault, 2005, p. 320) which happened and was dependant on *paraskeuē*, an "open and oriented preparation for the individual for the events of life" (Foucault, 2005, p. 320). For Greeks and Romans, the function of *askēsis* had, then, as a final objective the constitution of a full and independent relationship of the self to itself through *paraskeuē,* i.e., the passing from the logos to the ethos. It is *askēsis* that enables

truth telling to be constituted as the subject's way of being (Foucault, 2005, p. 327). So, *askēsis* in the Hellenistic Roman understanding, succinctly put, is that which enables the acquisition of true discourses and the possibility of becoming a subject of these discourses; in other words, making truth your own (Foucault, 2005, pp. 332–3). Opposed to this, is the overall idea of Christian *askēsis*, which ultimately is built on the aspect of self-renunciation reached by the role of confession, which is when the subject objectifies himself in a discourse of truth (Foucault, 2005, p. 333).

How is this binding of truth practically achieved? Foucault points towards listening, reading and writing, and speech, activities which find themselves tied through the idea of *parrhēsia*, which roughly translates to the idea of frank speech, and activity which brings again to the fore the role of the master, for it is a speech in a dialogue. The idea behind the purpose of the master's speech[10] is for it to allow the disciple to:

> Form an autonomous, independent, full and satisfying relationship to himself […]. The objective of *parrhēsia* is to act so that at any given moment the person to whom one is speaking finds himself in a situation in which he no longer needs the other's discourse. (Foucault, 2005, p. 379)

In other words, *parrhēsia* has the objective of achieving this self sufficiency which the seminar has been hinting at. Up until now, Foucault says, we have encountered the first stage of *askēsis*, the listening and reception of a true discourse, but there is another stage, that of the exercise of putting these discourses to work in the subject's activity. In other words, it is the phase how to truly become the active subject of a true discourse, how to transform truth into ethos. Enter the role of exercises, through the understanding of ascetics:

> Ascetics, that is to say the more or less coordinated set of exercises that are available, recommended, and even obligatory, and anyway utilizable by individuals in a moral,

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[10] Here, the discourse of the master has two adversaries, a moral one—flattery—and a technical one—rhetoric.

philosophical, and religious system in order to achieve a definite spiritual objective. (Foucault, 2005, pp. 416–417)

The system of askesis-exercises which Foucault identifies from ancient thought, are ones which very much mimic the idea of technique, or specifically the idea of techniques of the self which are paramount for the possibility of the self creating itself: abstinence, meditation on death, meditation on future evils and the examination of conscience (Foucault, 2005, p. 417), activities which ultimately will be encompassed in two pillars: meditation and training, which open up possibilities for a transformation of the subject into one of action and true-knowledge (Foucault, 2005, p. 417). In other words, meditation and training encompass the activities which allow for the self to make itself as the object of *tekhnē*. Within the two pillars there are some further key ideas. Training is one, which is lived by the idea of abstinence and tests, and meditation is understood as an exercise of thought on thought itself. Abstinence, we have seen since the beginning, feeds into the idea of self-mastery, while the aspect of tests calls, precisely, to see life itself as a constant test. With regards to meditation, what interests Foucault is how it allows for care and knowledge to meet and the testing of the truth of representations, and to see if we will be able to act according to them. These pillars call for the self to answer, through frank speech, the question: am I really the ethical subject of the truth I know (Foucault, 2005, p. 463)?

What comes out of this lecture is a tracing of the care of the self that is unfinished, understandably so given that this was a first approach to this matter through a seminar format. However, I think that what does remain clear is that the analysis of the care of the self offered is one done first and foremost through the interplay and relation between the aspect of spirituality and philosophy, or between the idea of truth itself and the access to truth. In this manner Foucault tries to convey, I think, that indeed his interest has been permanently not only the relation between subject and regimes of truth, but how the access to truth, or the

possibility to do so, may signify either subjection or a subjectivation process. And this, Foucault tries to frame by underscoring other elements of his historical reading of Antiquity: the analysis of the passing from *epimeleia heautou* as a secluded activity to a more generalized practice, the role of the master and salvation, the idea of conversion, spiritualization of knowledge, *askēsis*, and *tekhnē*.

The Foucauldian Care of the Self

How then do we read Foucault's care of the self? The bulk of this chapter until now has been about how he read Greek and Roman ancient thought to inform himself. Now we turn to understand how he made such readings his own and offered his own comprehension of said concept, which he tackles in the third and last volume[11] of *The History of Sexuality: The Care of the Self* (Foucault, 1986). This volume follows the second volume in the sense that it offers and analysis through the use of the same three pillars of thought: the body, the wife and boys. Now, here I think it is important to underline, and it will become even clearer in the next chapter, that it is not so much about the pillars per se, but what they meant in the constructing the idea of the care of the self. In other words, it is not so much about fidelity in a marriage, but about what that aspect of sexuality meant in the coming about of a certain subjectivity.

In this text we are presented with an idea of e*pimeleia heautou* understood as an activity that signifies the cultivation of the self (Foucault, 1986, p. 43). This, of course, follows from the ideas discussed in the seminar where, even through its mutations, the care of the self was presented to us within an ethical framework, one to be read as a framework in

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[11] It was not intended to be the last, but as already mentioned *The History of Sexuality* was unfinished given Foucault's death. 2018 saw the publication of a fourth volume, *Confessions of the Flesh*, a work that gathers the research, notes and writings that Foucault was compiling for this text at the time of his death. The publication of this text was controversial given that Foucault was very clear in neither wanting nor giving permission for any publications after his death.

which the self relates to itself and in doing so fashions itself. The care of the self is concluded to be an attitude, a mode of behaviour which ultimately:

> […] came to constitute a social practice, giving rise to relationships between individuals, to exchanges and communications, and at times even to institutions. And it gave rise, finally, to a certain mode of knowledge and to the elaboration of a science. (Foucault, 1986, p. 45)

Again, here in this definition, all the analysis and reading of the care of the self through Antiquity is evident. By posing this as his ultimate definition, Foucault is encapsulating an activity he read through history as that activity that passed from a narrowed down part of the population towards a more generalized practice, which ultimately we understood as allowing for a knowledge of the self through the guidance of a master, one that had the purpose of leading the path from a self being a non-subject to becoming a subject, the stoic turning of the gaze. Foucault is also emphatic and clear when offering his "finalized" understanding of the care of the self not as an individual activity but as a social practice (Foucault, 1986, p. 51). And how could it not be, if the pillars that brought it into being, were all of them speaking to social relations? Here Foucault will also stress the aspect of labour, to take care of oneself implies labour, it implies taking time from one's day in order to pursue such practice (Foucault, 1986, p. 50). What is the characterization of this labour? It is a labour of thought, a task that goes beyond tests of measures or assessment of fault, and rather serves the screening of representations as a constant attitude (Foucault, 1986, p. 63). This is a point which will become particularly important in the following chapter. Enough to note for now how such a characterization is one which draws on an understanding of the care as an activity to be carried throughout life, not instilled in the specificity of becoming a ruler to be or in the guilt of Christianity.

Ultimately, what we find here is Foucault paying further attention to the aspects of the Hellenistic-Roman care of the self that he read as alluring during his seminar. The golden age

for Foucault meant the turning of the gaze, a turning of the self onto itself. This turn, or the recentring of the self, was to be seen as a notion of conversion, as that which implies a shift in one's attention and allows one to ultimately re-join oneself, an aspect which Foucault will equate with an idea of the ethics of control (Foucault, 1986, p. 65), or as he later also expressed it as a sovereignty over oneself (Foucault, 1986, p. 85). Ethics of control and sovereignty over oneself have at the core, as the terms evidently imply, the aspect of austerity, which was something Foucault underscored through his reading of Stoicism. He poses that austerity is to be met or achieved through the *askēsis*, an activity which achieves meaning through the ideas of meditation and training (aspects which will be furthered developed in the chapters to come).

The concluding thoughts offered by Foucault on the care of the self are around the strengthening of austerity themes, where physicians would worry about the effects of the sexual practice. Any sexual practice outside the bond of marriage was condemned and the love for boys was disqualified (Foucault, 1986, p. 235). What I find useful here, is not so much how austerity was evidenced in these three pillars but how those pillars allowed for the coming about of a subject. I do want to underscore the pillar of the body. The body, we have seen, becomes all the more significant when we see the passing from a pedagogical to a medical model of the care as we move from the Socratic-Platonic to the Hellenistic-Roman period. Here, in the third volume, we come to see the body clearly as the vessel to be cared for, which he took to be a warning in Antiquity from the dangers of illness deriving from sexual practices (Foucault, 1986, p. 238). Again, here I am not so much interested in the role played by the risk of illness per se and how that set about the bodily lived experienced through the body. Rather, what I find is the continuity that the underscoring of the body in *The History of Sexuality* signifies with the work in *Discipline and Punish*.

As said in the brief overview opening this chapter, the genealogy of the passing from a sovereign to a disciplinary form of power is one that concludes in an analysis of the control and manufacturing of the subject through power mechanisms. Now, in the care of the self we find Foucault informing his thought through a reading of the body in Greek and Roman Ancient thought which required for the self to create itself through bodily austerity, ideas which I will fully develop in the next chapter.

Historical Moments of the Care of the Self

The tracing of the care of the self shows that Foucault's turn to antiquity follows a concern with better understanding the subject and its relation to ethics or, in other words, an interest in better theorizing how it is that subjects are able to fashion themselves. This curiosity unravels juxtaposed to the analysis that wants to better understand a concept of the care of the self which is not secluded by the idea of knowing oneself; and so the account develops in wanting to understand how, in Antiquity, the care of the self became an event in thought (Foucault, 2005, p. 9). There was particular attention paid towards the interplay of the idea of philosophy and spirituality. In other words, *epimeleia heatou* is found in between that which determines that there is and can be truth and falsehood—philosophy—(Foucault, 2005, p. 15) and the search and practice through which the subject transforms itself in order to have access to truth—spirituality—(Foucault, 2005, p. 15). The need for transformation that spirituality highlights to access truth, will have particular importance for Foucault:

> It [spirituality] postulates that for the subject to have right of access to the truth he must be changed, transformed, shifted, and become, to some extent and up to a certain point, other than himself. […] It follows that from this point of view there can be no truth without a conversion or a transformation of the subject. (Foucault, 2005, p. 15)

Both in Greek and Roman thought spirituality was found to hold an important role; the subject needs to undergo a self-transformation to be able to relate to truth. This changed in Christianity where the relation between subject and truth becomes permeated by the Cartesian

moment: the period after which, in the modern age, what gave access to truth was knowledge (*connaissance*) in itself, with no need for the subject to have transformed. In other words, the modern age sets up a form of subjectivity without spirituality (Sauquillo, 2017, p. 418), which comes to mean an idea of subjectivity that comes about through subjection and not subjectivation. It is a subject that is constructed and not one that has constructed itself.

There are three stages: the Socratic-Platonic, followed by the Hellenistic and Roman period—known as the *golden age*—and, lastly, the Christian asceticism stage. During that of the Socratic-Platonic moment we can see a care of the self that is linked to knowledge insofar it serves the governing of others, thus, it was an activity with pedagogical ends and exclusively for a certain part of society. During the golden age, the care of the self became more of a cultural aspect, leaving behind its exclusive pedagogical ends for future rulers to be. Finally, during Christianity, the relation of truth and the self was majorly transformed by the role of confession.

Socratic-Platonic Stage
The first stage of the care of the self is very much characterized by its pedagogical purposes, as well as the importance of the master-student relation, aspects exemplified by the four main characteristics which Foucault draws out: it's link to the exercise of power, pedagogical lack, the centricity of young people (and their relationship with their master), and its lack of urgency (Foucault, 2005, p. 36). The care of the self had a very specific target in mind at this moment: those who would become rulers so as to assure they would become better at their future responsibility. The care of the self, thus, allowed for the rising of a proper political subject, which was needed insofar that such subjects had to govern others (Raffnsøe, Sørensen Thaning and Gudmand-Høyer, 2016, p. 382). There was an important pedagogical aspect that the care of the self needed to fulfil in this moment, not only in the 'becoming better' of rulers but also that, argued Foucault, in comparison to Spartan and oriental wisdom,

Athenian education was found lacking in academic and amorous purposes (Foucault, 2005, p. 44) which made all the more important the matter of taking care of oneself.

This pedagogical lack signifies for the care of the self in this historical moment to be understood as not only having a purpose in the need to govern others but also in the manner of being governed, says Foucault: "taking care of oneself in order to be able to govern, and taking care of oneself inasmuch one has not been governed sufficiently and properly" (Foucault, 2005, p. 45). There was then a sense of utility in this moment of the care of the self, which is why the verb *khrēsthai* was introduced, understood as a use that happens through the subject, pertinent to the understanding that it was the soul that needed to be cared for. As the care of the self here serves to better prepare rulers to govern others and themselves, to care for the self represents at this moment an instrumental action in the connecting of others and with oneself through the link of the soul (Foucault, 2005, p. 57).

Foucault's reading of this first stage of the care of the self, leaves us with an activity that had evident links to the practice of politics. The care of the self served, first and foremost, to the better governing of the city. While indeed a pedagogical lack also signalled that the activity was to serve the subject itself, ultimately, the goal was the city state. The care of the self, as an activity for the subject, was merged with the care of the self as an activity for the ruler to be. Foucault becomes critical of this, as he finds that such an emphasis on the pedagogical model denies the care of the self of a sense of autonomy. The self cares for itself to comply with an objective outside of it.

The Golden Age
It will be in the middle stage of the care of the self where Foucault will draw out the most for the purposes of an analysis of subjectivation. From Hellenistic-Roman thought, heavily drawing from Stoicism, Foucault will try to separate this stage from both the Platonic-Socratic and the Christian moments (Foucault, 2005, p. 254). There are similarities between

the first and second stage insofar as they both share a pedagogical aspect. But, contrary to the first stage, for the golden age the pedagogical purpose takes the form of a "general and unconditional principle" rather than it being about "corrections" (Foucault, 2005, p. 247), which means that it is no longer bound exclusively to a certain status in society, i.e. becoming a ruler (Foucault, 2005, p. 247). To care for oneself becomes a part of life, independently of the profession practiced. This generalized care is a much more critically loaded activity, for though the aspect of knowledge and training is still present, we have seen that this time it is much more about the critical conversion of unlearning and questioning previous education.

From Seneca we will learn to speak of the care of the self as the idea of bettering oneself, in the sense that the self must achieve an authority over himself that nothing limits or threatens in order to achieve the ultimate purpose of control accompanied by an enjoyment that has escaped desire (Raffnsøe, Sørensen Thaning and Gudmand-Høyer, 2016, p. 391). This is the idea of sovereignty and mastery over the self through austerity. What we see in Foucault's interpretation of Seneca is, thus, that the care of the self has a purpose residing in the self itself. The care of the self was no longer exclusively for bettering future politicians; it became something for 'everyone', in which the ultimate goal resided in the self itself. The purpose of the care of the self, thus, becomes the bettering of the self for the self itself, not for its subordinates. This intensification of the self-self relation follows an understanding of the care of the self as a relation where the subject is first and foremost a field of possibility. What I take makes the golden age 'golden' for Foucault is, precisely, that Hellenistic-Roman thought viewed the subject, through the care of the self, as capable of conversion, critique and possibility. This entails that the subject was viewed as an object of knowledge and field of action (Raffnsøe, Sørensen Thaning and Gudmand-Høyer, 2016, p. 392). Such a possible object of knowledge and field of action opens the way for the political stemming out of the

self itself, and such a relation is formed by what becomes the key part of this new era of the care of the self, that of questioning what has been previously learned.

Christianity

The third, and last, moment of the care of the self that Foucault analyses is that of Christianity where the idea of confession gains particular importance. For Foucault the golden age of the care of the self is obscured by the stages that precede and follow it, for both of these moments practice the care of the self with a lack of autonomy. As was mentioned, in the Platonic-Socratic stage, the purpose of the care of the self did not fall on the self itself. In Christianity, we once again face a lack of autonomy insofar as the main aspect of the care of the self becomes the renunciation of the self. For Foucault the Christian interpretation of the care of the self carried within it not the richness of the golden age, but the problematic aspects of the Socratic-Platonic moment, hence why he concentrated so much in uncovering the mid historic moment (Foucault, 2005, p. 254).

During this Christian interpretation Foucault finds circularity between self-knowledge, knowledge of the truth and care of the self (Foucault, 2005, p. 255). To be saved, you must accept the truth of the revelation, but this is only attainable if you have purified yourself through knowledge through the care of the self, but this purification is only possible if you have previously accepted the truth (Foucault, 2005, p. 255). In other words, what Foucault is seeing here is the Cartesian moment where the subject's attainment of truth does not require a transformation of the subject, but that each subject is enabled for knowledge in itself, the role of spirituality is displaced (Sauquillo, 2017, p. 419). What this ultimately means for Foucault is that the Christian care of the self is characterized by the renunciation of the self (Foucault, 2005, p. 256).

Moreover, this displacement of spirituality becomes all the more worrying as it is done at the same time that the aspect of confession comes into play as a particularly

important role, an action that would open the way for the matter of humiliation (Sauquillo, 2017, p. 416). This importance of truth telling and purification through confession comes about from the influence of the idea of *askēsis*, present in Socratic philosophy and Stoicism, but radically reinterpreted in Christianity to signify the renunciation of the world and the self, and, thus, leaving the self bound to the search for truth and submission to God (Raffnsøe, Sørensen Thaning and Gudmand-Høyer, 2016, p. 413); a truth that was not found through the transformation of the self, but through the exercise of confession fed by humiliation and guilt. The search for truth and submission to God only demerits what was supposed to be an activity of the self for the self (Foucault, 2005, p. 256); furthermore, a renunciation that only highlighted an idea of subjectivity that only understood itself in the service of those that governed, a confessor that renders its body as a confessor and will only seek truth insofar it is demanded of him by another (Raffnsøe, Sørensen Thaning and Gudmand-Høyer, 2016, p. 419).

The Care of the Self, a Conclusion

A first moment in which the role of education foregrounded through pedagogical lack plays the centre role. A final moment in which the role of truth is used to subjugate the mind and body through confession. And, in between, a moment which is characterized by the art of knowing oneself, through both learning and unlearning. Foucault set out to study these three different stages with the purpose of analysing the relation between truth and subject, for he would try to separate the golden age from the rest.

What is it, then, that Foucault takes from his analysis? Given the three stages, the critiques and worries found in each, Foucault comes to understand the care of the self as a "cultivation of the self" (Foucault, 1986, p. 43) both "personal and social, where self-knowledge occupies a considerable place" (Foucault, 1986, p. 45). As personal as it was, Foucault was insistent in signalling the activity's social aspect which would give rise to

relationships between individuals, even institutions, and ultimately, a mode of knowledge (Foucault, 1986, p. 45). So, even as the influence of the golden age, particular that of Seneca, is patent in Foucault's care of the self seen as converting the self to the self (Foucault, 1986, p. 65), this underscoring of the self is not one enclosed in itself, but rather, it is the starting point to an interest in the political and its conditions of possibility:

> It [the care of the self] is much more concerned to define the principle of relation to self that will make it possible to set the forms and conditions in which political action, participation in the offices of power, the exercise of a function, will be possible or not possible, acceptable or necessary. (Foucault, 1986, p. 86)

The role of the self-self relation signals to the way in which Foucault understood the relation between the self and the political, or, even more so, as the way he wanted to construct such relation. It is not about the prioritization of the ethical sphere over the political, but about the importance of the self in both. In the activity of the self cultivating itself, fashioning itself, the political tension is a productive one, and the way to understand the political in this reading is then the politicization of perpetual tension and conflict. The care of the self leads to the type of subjectivity that has that tension within.

Let us remember the importance of spirituality and philosophy drawn out by Foucault, as he placed the care of the self to be in between that which determines the limits of truth—philosophy—and that which allows the subject to transform in order to have access to truth—spirituality (Foucault, 2005, p. 15). This tension in between truth and the subjects' access to it, calls upon the crisis of subjectivation of the golden age, in which the self found itself trying to navigate the critical exercise of unlearning the political while still inhabiting it: the transformation to access truth while facing truth's limits. Foucault said that what he tried to offer through the analysis of the care of the self was a story of the relation between subjects and regimes of truth and underlying such a query is, thus, a story of the relation between ethics and the political. Let us now turn to this more directly in the next chapter, where I will

underscore the idea of the body, critique and limits, as notions which help to read the care of the self as a deeply political activity that allows for the possibility of a new type of subjectivity.

II.   Chapter Two: The Bodily Critique of Limits

"Greek ethics is centred in a problem of personal choice, of the aesthetics of existence"

(Foucault, 1997b, p. 260)

The previous chapter offered the reader a familiarization with Foucault's work by manner of a brief overview, and a greater concentration on the last part of his thought, that of the care of the self. This part of his work, we have seen, is what has become known as his ethical stage, characterized by an analysis on ethics and governmentality. The 'last' Foucault, we have also seen, is one that cannot be understood separated from the previous one, for in the concern for ethics we find both the archaeological and genealogical Foucault. In a way, one could say that the final Foucault is the climax and summation of that which preceded it. We find in Foucault's ethical stage the archaeological work through the uncovering of the changes in the discourse on sexuality, and we find a genealogy that underscores how the shifts in the way in which talk about sexuality is far from random, but rather follows a careful tracing of population control. These carefully manufactured discourses on sexuality find reason in an understanding of a rationality that works to make us into subjects.

Just as much as Foucault's last work cannot be understood without the previous stages, his last stage cannot be separated into two different accounts, as one of governmentality and one of ethics. Rather, they work, and must be understood, in unison. The work on governmentality is the climax of the analysis on power that Foucault offered in his genealogical stage. Parallel to this climaxing of power through a rationality that can embrace anything, even life itself, we find his analysis of resistance, as the antidote, in his work on ethics. Foucault's last work then is both the analysis of the way things are and the resistance

we can pose. To a form of governmental power, it is only through ethics that we can find a resistance towards it. Ultimately, what we find in Foucault's last decade of work is the climax point of a perpetual problematization of the idea of the subject. He himself said that it was the subject, and not power, that had been his interest all along. In an interview at the beginning of 1984 when asked about his current work, Foucault replies by saying that his work remains with the constant concern of "trying to find out how the human subject fits into certain truth games whether they be scientific model, institutions or practices of control" and the difference is that in his last decade he sees "the games of truth not as coercive but as practice of formation of the subject, as an ascetic practice" (Foucault, 1997f, pp. 281–282). The subject has been there all along, whether in the analysis of subjection through the science/knowledge discourse, through power mechanisms, or through the possibility of self-formation.

Nonetheless, reading Foucault's work as perpetually prioritizing the theorization of the subject is not easily accepted, as I have hinted at since the introduction. Rather, his ethical work is typically read as if he had renounced his previous analysis and was developing something 'new'. This understanding follows a pessimistic reading of the Foucauldian notion of power. Given that, as we saw briefly in the previous chapter, the conclusion of his genealogic work is that of an omnipresent productive power, critics deemed that this left little—if not no—space for the theorization of resistance and freedom in such a framework. And so, these critiques have also claimed that Foucault himself realized this and, thus, renounced this framework and turned to ethics. Reading his turn to ethics in such a way, leads also to the perception that the interest of the subject is a purely ethical one, as if he realizes that indeed nothing politically productive can stem from his ideas on power, and thus we should solely concentrate on the ethical realm. I will offer a different reading of Foucault's ethics, but I must first offer a more comprehensive account of said critiques.

Defending Foucault's Subject

Foucault is a controversial thinker whose work invites criticism and debate. Particularly, his work on the care of the self is one of the most criticized and contested. Let us remember that Foucault's work is usually read through three stages, not set out by himself but rather by scholars and readers, and it has resulted in a double edge sword. On the one hand it serves as an initial pedagogical guidance, but it is also at fault for the most common misunderstandings which lead to incorrect analyses of Foucault. The analysis by stages allows conclusions of disconnection and incoherency. Moreover, this assumed disconnection is taken to mean that by jumping from one stage to the next Foucault 'gives up' on each stage and starts a clean slate every time; this is a particularly common comment regarding the end of his genealogical stage. By setting a notion of power through an analysis that commenced by looking into speech and "its order", culminating in the deep gaze into the whys and hows of the penitentiary system, Foucault is able to construct an idea of power that does not come from everywhere but can embrace everything—an idea which is wrongly simplified into thinking that what Foucault was arguing for was power being everywhere in a totalizing manner.

This very simplistic phrasing of Foucault's genealogy of power is one that seems to leave no room for change or transformation: if power can embrace everything then where can resistance stem from? Critics of this idea of power take that even Foucault realized how problematic this notion was and, thus, renounced it and turned to ethics (Castro, 2012; Allen, 2013; Myers, 2013; Castro-Gomez, 2015; Lemke, 2019). And, I must admit, in a way these critiques are right. Foucault is not one to give clear answers into what to do, or even if there is anything to do. There is no recipe book when it comes to Foucault's theory; there is no clear path of what to do once we understand power as a strategic relation of forces that can embrace everything. And, surely, this lack of instruction makes many that read Foucault dubious of how useful his ideas actually are.

However, I will argue that this scepticism about Foucault's utility feeds on the misunderstanding of coherence throughout the stages of his thought. In other words, critics deemed that Foucault himself realized the frustration that his analysis on power produced and, thus, started anew by studying the subject and antiquity once he realized how unproductive his ideas of power were. Thus, this change of focus has been understood to be inspired not only as wanting to have a clean slate from the analysis on power, but, from the topic of the political in general, given that Foucault's development of an account of subjectivity is read to be purely ethical. Having realized that his genealogical work offered no possibility of transformation, he himself—supposedly—abandons the project on power—and political possibility—to turn solely to an ethical venture through an analysis of the subject. The turn to the subject is then seen as a result of Foucault's anesthetizing effect of his thought (Castro-Gomez, 2015, p. 18), and thus he renounces his previous work (Lemke, 2019) given that the idea of anaesthetic is not understood here as the alleviation of the pain, but as the impossibility of movement and reaction. And so, the last part of his thought, deemed as purely ethical, where the subjectivity envisioned is one which is closed off to the political reigned by a power that offers no grounds for change. In other words, Foucault's interest in the subject is seen as following an aspect of privatism, abandoning the political, and is about the subject in its seclusion to itself (Lemke, 2019, pp. 239, 308).

So, as gripping and inciting as Foucault's revolutionary analysis on power was, when paired with subjectivity and resistance, it seemed, for certain critics at least, to offer no political possibility. If we have a power that is omnipresent, where do we find the space of resistance? Moreover, how can it be convincingly argued that the subject that comes from such power mechanisms will be capable to critique, fight and resist the very mechanisms that make it? In other words, if power can embrace everything, what differentiates it from domination, and how then can we envision a subject that is not dominated? These are the

critical questions that Foucault's work on power pose and which divide scholars into either answering them in a positive or a negative way. From this idea of power, that supposedly holds no difference with domination, any idea of subjectivity seems fruitless for political transformation—the negative reading. From an idea of power that cannot be understood without the role of freedom, the idea of subjectivity is the vital component for political transformation—the positive reading.

To further develop the negative reading, we must flesh out another component of Foucault's notion of power which has up until now only been hinted at: its productive quality. Foucault's genealogical stage stems from the dismantling of traditional models of power which understood it solely to inhabit the state apparatus as a repressive commodity (Brown, 2008). To view power as solely tied to the state is a too reductive quality which leaves unattended all the other ways in which power affect us which are not juridical or state figures; *"we must cut off the head of the king in political theory"* (Foucault, 2001, p. 122) Foucault famously said. Cutting of the head of the king means to also let go of seeing power as a commodity: power is not something that can be transferred between individuals, as the passing of the crown amongst Kings makes us falsely believe. And, of course, power is not only repression, if it were only so, who would obey it? Power is enticing, seductive. By tackling these three models of power (juridical, commodity and repressive), Foucault sets the grounds for the way that he will invite us to think about power as it passes through the subject by tying itself closely to knowledge and truth—this is how power can embrace everything. Both knowledge and the subject are vital conducting *vessels* of power. As we understand power to be something that extends far beyond the state, we start to see it as a force which passes through the subject and in doing so constitutes it. Power, then, produces discourse as much as it controls it. Power creates.

However, power's productive quality only seems to add more complications into the matter. If it is power that enacts a subjugation process from which a particular type of subjectivity emerges, then how can we consider such subjectivity to have any sort of possibility to 'break free'? Any subjectivity constructed within this framework is one created by that same power it is trying to fight, so even if such a subject is able to articulate the desire to embark on such a fight, it cannot. There is no authenticity in a supposed fight against the mechanisms that subjugated it insofar such as the subject is always-already interpellated in the social norms it wishes to attack (Nealon, 2008, p. 102). If we take it that, indeed, power mechanisms are those that create subjects, resistance to those mechanisms is nonsensical. This is the underlying argument that feeds the negative reading of Foucault's *History of Sexuality*, where his analysis of antiquity does not offer a convincing possibility for the subject to rearticulate itself given the power mechanisms in which it is found (Žižek, 2002). Žižek argues that Foucault's very idea of biopower, presented precisely in the first volume of *History of Sexuality*, captures the idea of how power constitutes individuals directly, so how then can we expect for the subject to all of a sudden fight that which makes it? (Žižek, 2002, p. 253). In other words, the subject that resists is actually playing under the same rules it is trying to fight; it is a product of the disciplinary norms and biopolitical technologies that nest capitalism (Vighi and Heiko, 2007; Castro-Gomez, 2015). It seems illogical, then, to expect a subject to put up a fight since that which made it would not equip it with the necessary antagonism to do so (Castro-Gomez, 2015). This critique can even be taken a step further.

A subject which is always already interpellated in the forces which make it, poses a problem in terms of being able to fight such forces, but even more so begs the question if such a subject would even care about fighting them in the first place. It is not only that the Foucauldian subject could not fight off that which made it, but that it is not deemed to have the concern to try to fight in the first place. Why would we expect a subject built by totalizing

forces to have the ability to want to critique? Such a subject, rather, is one that, in its construction, is one which by its very defining qualities closed off to the world (Myers, 2013). We have discussed the problematic that the conceptual framework between power and domination present, and it is in this critique in which it becomes all the more amplified: if we cannot differentiate between power and domination, then the subject made from power is a dominated one, why then would it even care to fight such domination? (Myers, 2013, pp. 36–37).

To take that power and domination are synonyms in Foucault's work is an implication resulting from reading a supposed lack of theorization of freedom in his work. Even if we were to try and look into his analysis of the 'politics of ourselves' as a moment in which he seems to offer us political possibility, the lack of the role of freedom makes this analysis unconvincing. In such a discussion, Foucault first suggests that the self is not a given entity which rests between political struggle of forces of domination and, second, he acknowledges the possibility of self-transformation through the techniques of the self (Allen, 2013, pp. 1–2). So, we have, on the one hand, a self that conceives itself within the workings of power and, on the other, one that conceives itself within the possibility of transformation (Allen, 2013, p. 2). By posing the subject in between these two pillars, Foucault would seem to propose that individuals are both able to take up a critical perspective on technologies of domination and on them being able to transform such technologies (Allen, 2013, p. 46). Allen, for example, reads these two accounts as the two sides of Foucault's autonomy, but as a whole still finds such a notion embedded and rooted in power, which leads to the question of how this account of autonomy is truly enacted in subjects (Allen, 2013). So, while bringing to the fore the idea of freedom and how it plays in the politics of ourselves does seem to hint at being able to envision a subject that would be ignited by critical thought, we still find ourselves where we started: being bound by a power that seems to offer no room for change.

Even if we want to be charitable, say his critics, and assume that there are hints to a transformation, Foucault still "leaves unanswered the question of what it is that enables us to take up relations of subjection in a transformative way" (Allen, 2013, p. 68).

The negative way to read Foucault, then, we can conclude to be that of not finding reason to believe that subjectivity represents any political transformation in his thought given that subjectivity is made up by the power to be fought. The subject in Foucault is so embedded in power that there seems to be no way in which it could (or even want to) resist. Being from the beginning fully defined by the power mechanisms which inhabit it, the best-case scenario would be for this subject to express some desire for transformation (without knowing how to go about it), or it would not even reach that point since it would have no capacity to even care for a transformation in the first place. In this reading there is no space to be found between the subject and the mechanisms that make it, no space to allow for freedom. In other words, the subject is 'controlled' by that which has made it and runs through it, hence, it will never be able to break free from it. The anaesthetic effect of Foucault, can also be read as a totalizing one (Castro, 2012): in the face of a power that leaves no room for resistance, what can a subject formulated from this notion offer regarding critique and political transformation?

The positive way to read Foucault will be the topic of this chapter in its entirety, but I will start now to point towards some important aspects which will help serve the argument. First of all, and I by no means think this is a sufficient defence, but it seems that the negative reading of Foucault overlooks the fact that his work was left unfinished due to his death. There are in Foucault, albeit underdeveloped, instances that call for the construction of a type of subjectivity that rejects an imposed individuality (Chignola, 2018, p. 102). These hints are precisely found in the attention placed in the reading of antiquity, and through it, the study of the subjection process through juridical and disciplinary modernity of the state, but also

through an autonomous constitution of Greek and Roman ancient thought, where there is a creative work by the subject on the subject (Chignola, 2018, p. 123). Bringing these aspects to the fore, means to highlight the role of critique and its aesthetic components in Foucault's thought, which the negative reading seems to overlook and, hence, miss the possible reading of the Foucauldian subject as one that can be read to have a desire and a capacity for self-transformation (Butler, 2001). This is something, for example, which feminist theory, taking from Butler's reading of Foucault, has advanced (Lloyd, 1997a). If we are to find—which I will argue we will—the possibility for resistance through the subject it is to be found in his reading of antiquity, for it is there that the technologies of the self, and how their role then allows us to see the subject as constituted by methods of work by the subject itself, come to the fore (Sauquillo, 2017, p. 416).

However, in order to be able to reach the political potential that the reading of antiquity has, it must be done by underscoring the role of freedom and truth in Foucault's thought. Power and freedom are two concepts that cannot be separated in Foucault's work, something to which James Laidlaw attests to in his reading of freedom as being indispensable in the understanding of how subjects come about (Laidlaw, 2014). Having power and freedom so closely interconnected is not something to shy away from but rather, something to bring to the fore and utilise in the monitoring of power mechanisms, always framed by a discussion of what we are and what we might become (Magill in Lloyd and Thacker, 1997, p. 7). The way in which Foucault studies subjectivity is always with regards to the role of truth. This is important to take into account as we read into Foucault's work on antiquity, in which he would insist on how the role of truth in Greek thought claimed the invigoration of the subject, contrary to Christianity where truth would play a condemning role (Sauquillo, 2017, p. 431). Understanding the role of truth is vital in order to differentiate in Foucault subjection from subjectivation or, in other words, the role of truth as key in the making of a radical

subject that is not merely imitating the norm. By taking into account the role of truth, and its coming to being through freedom, we can escape the negative reading that deems the Foucauldian subject as one that has no space between that which made it and that which it can resist. And this, I read to be precisely his last stage of thought.

Another way in which we can appreciate Foucault's attentiveness to truth in antiquity is by the role of *parrhēsia*, frank speech, which when practiced by the subject results in a subject able to "undertake the hard work of judgement aided by guides not yet supplanted by rules" (Luxon, 2008, p. 388). In this way we can begin to appreciate that the role of truth will be key in uncovering the space that at first sight might seem non-existent, but by bringing the idea of frankness to the front we can then begin to appreciate that the subject can differentiate itself from the rules imposed and can exercise judgement. In this way we can begin to see that there might be in Foucault the possibility of a subject that is self-creating, though not without constraints (Kelly, 2013a, p. 517).

One last aspect to remark on before diving into a fully fleshed out defence of Foucault's subject is the matter of supposed incoherency. Foucault regarded his work as a 'toolbox', he was explicit about never having the intention of offering a cohesive theory, and I think that those that engage with his thought must at least acknowledge this characterization. He never intended for his work on power to produce a recipe-like solution (Lemke, 2019, p. 382). Foucault was clear and vocal about this:

> At this point I think we need to bring into the discussion the problem of the function of the intellectual. It is absolutely true that when I write a book I refuse to take a prophetic stance, that is, the one of saying to people: here is what you must do— and also: this is good and this is not. I say to them: roughly speaking, it seems to me that things have gone this way; but I describe those things in such a way that the possible paths of attack are delineated. Yet even with this approach I do not force or compel anyone to attack. (Foucault, 1996, p. 262)

Not only then does he state that he has no 'recipe', but even given the toolbox of his collected thoughts, Foucault never envisioned the possibility of "eliminating" power (Foucault, 1982, p. 793). This speaks, though partially, to the critique towards Foucault's notion of power. It is not only mistaken to conclude that there is no room for resistance in Foucault's genealogy, but it is also that arriving at such a conclusion stems from an already mistaken starting point which assumes resistance in Foucault would be a notion free from power. Critiques that claim that Foucault's genealogy of power, one that can embrace everything and which leaves no room for political possibility, seem to think that political transformation must be one that gets rid of power, as if only there would we find resistance. But there could be no such thing as a society without power, something which Foucault was emphatic about. And, adding to this the importance of freedom, we can start to see that power differs from domination insofar that it depends on the exercise of freedom to be. And thus, where there is power there is resistance.

On the one hand then, there are critiques that deem this work as incapable of offering a possibility for political resistance through the idea of subjectivity because such an idea is seen as one that cannot be separated from the power mechanisms which made it. On the other hand, there is the reading of ethics as one that shows an interest in political possibility. However, even in this positive reading, it remains true that Foucault did not explicitly state how to go about it. The remainder of this chapter will attempt to offer an argument of Foucault's ethics by signalling to its political potential in the coming about of a new subjectivity. I will try to show the political potential of his ethical work through the delineation of key aspects that we must look towards for the envisioning of new type of subjectivity. I do not intend to negate the problematics of power, resistance, truth and subjectivity, rather I understand the interplay of these terms to offer a new horizon of political praxis found within a form of subjectivity that primarily constructs itself.

I will attempt to show that it is not a renunciation of his previous work, nor is it an abandonment of the political. Rather, much like he himself said, I read Foucault´s concern on the subject to be deeply connected with his previous stages, as I understand it to be profoundly political as well. I do not see a rejection of his earlier thought, but rather in Foucault's unfinished work I will argue we can read an effort toward a new type of subjectivity. The question, then, becomes: What does this horizon of political praxis that stems out of the Foucauldian subject look like? This is the question that I will try to answer through the fleshing out of the political instances of Foucault's work on the care of the self, after which I will delineate a new subjectivity through three main ideas: critique, body and limits. The rest of this chapter will aim at theorizing each of these terms into the wider scheme of the delineation of a subject.

The Political in Foucault

Offering a political reading of the care of the self necessarily calls for a discussion of what, within Foucauldian thought, is the political. Such a term does not have a precise definition in Foucault's work, so I will argue for its meaning by the bringing together of different strands of his work. I would like to start from an interview by the title *The Ethics of* the *Concern of the Self as a Practice of Freedom* where Foucault by, precisely, talking about the care of the self, comes to speak also about where his analysis of power finds place in his reading of ethics in Antiquity. He highlights the matter of freedom in Greek thought by underscoring that only he/she who is not a slave, not even to oneself, is free and thus, inhabits a political model: freedom is inherently political (Foucault, 1997f, p. 286). While this is by no means a definition of the political, I make reference to this discussion on freedom because it signals to the starting point of what the political might be for Foucault: something which is inherently related to freedom, and thus also holds a relation to power, since in Foucault's thought, as we have seen by now, these two terms do not exist without the other.

To envision an idea of the political dependent on the role of power and freedom leads us, as does Foucault's thought in general, to a post-foundational theoretical framework, or post-structuralism in other words. This particular theoretical framework understands the world through an analysis not only of structures, but of what makes the structure. While structuralism focused on analyses of the structures themselves, post-structuralism places an emphasis on what makes the structure. The concern about what makes the structure is constant, and in the analysis to achieve an understanding of what makes it there is an underlying conception of the world which is inherently contextual. From an analysis of the subjection process that the so-called scientific discourse entails, to the effects of the power mechanisms and to the way in which the subject itself mandates its creation as a subject, Foucault's view of the world is one where nothing should be taken as a given, as natural nor objective. Now, this is not to mean that this way of conceptualizing the world leads us to an eternal relativism where anything could be, but rather it is about underscoring the impossibility of full fixation.

An impossibility of full fixation points towards an idea of the political thought through power, antagonism, freedom, contingency (see Mouffe, 2005, p. 9; Marchart, 2007, p. 154), different from the term *politics* which is taken to be the "set of practices and institutions through which an order is created, organizing human coexistence in the context of conflictuality provided by the political" (Mouffe, 2005, p. 9). In this way we see that politics talks more to the particular societal arrangement that can arise given the understanding of the political. An understanding of the political which is informed by notions that would seem to indicate its impossibility—antagonism, contingency, power—but, rather, this does not mean for the "the impossibility of *any* ground, but the impossibility of *final* ground" (Marchart, 2007, p. 155). This is to say that nothing is ever fully cemented, fully closed, fully defined in post-foundational thought.

The impossibility of fixation is a never-ending concern in Foucault's work which, I think, precisely points towards his ideas of the political. There is a constant signalling to breaks, to shifts in meaning, whether in how we understand madness, the penitentiary system, or sexuality, to name a few. These examples in Foucauldian thought are ones that exemplify antagonism, power, freedom and contingency, which allows us to start to envision the political in Foucault as the pointing towards that impossibility. The political is that moment where antagonism, power, contingency and freedom meet to set about a discourse, showing that nothing is ever fully closed, fully defined, fully finished. The political is the beginning and the opportunity of a break since it shows that discourse, meaning, could have been different.

Let us take as an example the introductory volume of *History of Sexuality* where Foucault points towards how we have taken to understand our sexuality through a discourse on repression, but if one takes a closer look one would, first, see that it is not about repression and, second, it has not always been envisioned in this way. The idea of repressed sexuality comes about as a means of controlling a population in a particular way through the Victorian Age. Another example is the analysis he offers in *Discipline and Punish,* where he exemplifies how the passing from a sovereign to a disciplinary form of power has been wrongly understood as state power becoming more humane, and this transition implying the *supposed* disappearance of corporal punishment. The reality of such transition was not about being more humane, but about being more efficient: the penal economy came to realize the efficiency of patrolling the population over that of corporal punishment. The analysis of the establishment of these different discourses, that of a repressed sexuality, that of a more humane penitentiary system, allows us to see that such discourses are not given, not natural, but are built through antagonistic and contingent power relations, and show the role of freedom insofar that some other discourse could have been.

This is the political, the opening up of contestation towards the taken for granted, the signalling of what is as that which could have not been; it is sedimentation as much as it is contestation; it is rupture in its contingency, in the unoccupied moment where the possibility of a break lingers. I have tried to show that through Foucault's work there is a constant attempt at underscoring these moments of sedimentation and breakage which, I take it, makes his work inherently political. The moment in which we highlight that the way we understand the world has been configured by contingency, antagonism, power and freedom, is a political moment. When we come to understand that our current penitentiary system is one that was built to serve higher efficiency, efficiency which in itself is antagonistic, embedded in power mechanism and contingent, such is a political moment.

The importance of freedom in Foucault's work, as I said at the beginning of this section, also points towards the political. Freedom is permanent in Foucault's work insofar as he would insist that one cannot talk about power without talking about freedom. Where there is power, there is resistance, and thus freedom. Where a certain discourse and meaning has been sedimented, there is still freedom for such sedimentation, we have now seen, is never permanent, one can always transgress the limits. Now, this must not then be understood as if contingency and the political are synonyms. It is not that the political must equal the impossible fixation, but the political is the contestation done to signal that impossibility. There is no political without contingency, but contingency is not enough to mark something as political. It is a contingent moment which by the workings of power, antagonism and freedom, allow for the political moment to arise, displayed not as the crisis or dislocation in itself, but what that crisis or dislocation means for the contestation of the hegemonic discourse. The political, then is the critiquing of the limits that may set about a new discourse.

I have tried to argue up until now how one could read the idea of *the political* in Foucault. I have contended that this idea is to be understood through a post foundationalist lens, where (1) it is differentiated from *politics* and (2) it is an idea drenched in power, antagonism, contingency and freedom. This results in viewing the political as that moment which is both sedimentation and rupture of a discourse. Simply, as Thiele argues, what Foucault politicizes is the will to struggle (Thiele, 1990, p. 923). I have shown how this is something which we can trace continuously in Foucault's work, and his thoughts regarding the *care of the self* are no exception. Let us remember, as was delineated in the previous chapter, that the care of the self is framed by the aspects of philosophy and spirituality. The care of the self is then outlined by the relation between that which determines truth (philosophy) and that which allows the subject's transformation in order to access truth (spirituality) (Foucault, 2005, p. 15). I think that this framing could also be reworked as understanding the care of the self through the relation between the ethical and the political. Ethics for Foucault is *the ways in which the self fashions itself* or, in other words, the self to *self-transformation* needed to access truth. And, the political, as I have just argued, is that sedimentation and rupture of a discourse, or, the setting or breaking of the limits which enable access to truth. The relation that these two terms will have, as they frame the care of the self, is not static.

We have seen in the previous chapter how the care of the self started as an activity exclusive for the young rulers-to-be to better prepare them for their profession. This was followed by an epoch in which the care of the self was not bound by a specific age or profession and, rather, the activity is seen as cultivation of a new free self. Lastly, we see the care of the self to be one that serves to further subjugate the self through confession instead of freeing it. And so, we see that each historical moment has different framings as to the need or not of *self-transformation* for accessing truth, or, in other words, we see during the

different moments how ethics and the political produce different outcomes in their tension. In the analysis of these tensions, Foucault pays particular attention to the second historical period, the golden age, and heavily draws on it to formulate his own understanding of the care of the self.

Foucault ultimately refers to the care of the self as an activity of the "cultivation of the self" (Foucault, 1986, p. 43), both "personal and social, where self-knowledge occupies a considerable place" (Foucault, 1986, p. 45). This characteristic of it being personal should not mean to deny it from its social aspect which would give rise to relationships between individuals, even institutions and, ultimately, a mode of knowledge (Foucault, 1986, p. 45). The underscoring of the personal, of the self, is not one that forgets the other, but rather, it is the starting point to a concern on the political and its conditions of possibility:

> It [the care of the self] is much more concerned to define the principle of relation to self that will make it possible to set the forms and conditions in which political action, participation in the offices of power, the exercise of a function, will be possible or not possible, acceptable or necessary. (Foucault, 1986, p. 86)

The transformation of the self by the self that such cultivation allows is one that will allow for the delineation of the possibility of resistance given a notion on power that, at first sight would seem to leave no room for change or transformation. This is why, as I have stated at the beginning of this chapter, Foucault's work on ethics is developed in parallel with that of governmentality. The care of the self, thus, ultimately highlights the transformation needed to access truth while facing truth's limits. So, as Foucault said, what he tried to offer through the analysis of the care of the self is a story of the relation between subjects and truth regimes, but what rests underneath is also a story of the relation between ethics and the political. This transformation of the self, however, must be achieved through particular instances, which as I will claim and defend are: critique, body and limits.

It is not that Foucault ever addressed the care of the self through these three ideas, nor does he ever explicitly mention them as the key to achieving a new type of subjectivity. However, through the remainder of this chapter, I will try to show how his analysis of the care of the self is actually entrenched in these three aspects and how, by highlighting each of them, we can read a political take on the care of the self.

Critique

Critique is a constant notion in Foucault's work. There are two key texts in which he addresses what he takes critique to be: "What is Enlightenment?", and "What is critique?". Simply put, critique for Foucault is the questioning of authority, where the word "authority" references that which governs us. Authority, thus, is not just the king, the state or the patriarchal figure within a family, but the discourse that has made each of those figures into authority bearing characters. This way to understand critique is one that stems from Foucault's reading of the Enlightenment as a historical moment which invites a critical ontology of ourselves; he finds in this epoch the ever active critical attitude with and towards ourselves, through the finding of limits of our time and their possible liberation (Sauquillo, 2017, p. 72).

To find the limits of our time and its liberation can only be achieved through the questioning of authority, of that which makes us and sets the limits of what we are. In other words, a critical ontology of ourselves through the signalling of limits can only be done through the questioning of the subjection process which makes us. This questioning takes the form of asking:

> How not to be governed? How not to be governed like that, by that in the name of those principles, with such and such an objective in mind and by means of such procedures, not like that, not for that, not by them. (Foucault, 2007a, p. 44)

Not to be governed like that or, in other words in my reading, *how not to be subjected like that*. How not to be made into a subject by those terms, by those characteristics. As we call upon not being *that* subject, we undertake the critical exercise of responding to the subjection process which rules us. This exercise is something that Foucault traces as historically anchored and has a voluntary dimension to it, as we cannot be forced to be critical, we cannot be coerced into questioning authority, rather, to critique must be seen as "voluntary insubordination" (Foucault, 2007a, p. 47) against the bundle of power and knowledge which enact the process of subjection.

The question then becomes, why critique? What does this questioning exercise offer us? Such exercise of critique, as it questions authority via a voluntary insubordination, points towards a conversion of power (Foucault, 1997f, p. 288) as we question that which makes us, as we signal to those limits. This conversion of power comes insofar as it is not that to critique is simply to negate that which governs us, but rather it is the *questioning* of that governing, into what it makes us and into why we have come to accept it and, thus, the opening for the opportunity to go onto new possibilities (Foucault, 2007b, p. 115); in sum, it is the conversion, not elimination of power. Let us remember that in the tracing of the role of salvation within the Hellenistic-Roman period of the care of the self, Foucault underscores the idea of conversion, as that which came to signify a shift within the subject, a movement of the subject with regards to himself, the subject must advance towards something that is himself, it returns to itself (Foucault, 2005, p. 248). The idea of conversion arising from the exercise of critique mirrors this well. A voluntary insubordination that questions authority, that poses the question of how not be governed like that, subjected like that, signifies a shift within the subject, a return to himself as he steps away from that which has been imposed.

This conversion, this shift, it is important to underscore, does not mean an elimination of power. It is important to point towards this because it gives reason to reading Foucault's

work as continuous. Precisely because he has concluded a notion of power as omnipresent, as one that can embrace anything, Foucault's work on a new subjectivity could not be one of erasing power. There could be no society without power hence why any type of idea of resistance in Foucauldian terms must be one that still accepts, and even embraces, power. Conversion of power then must mean that the shift within the subject, the refusing to be subjected in a particular way, must mean that power here mutates, insofar that, from an imposed truth, we move to the self's own truth.

Let us remember that Foucault, when addressing the break between the first and second volumes of *The History of Sexuality,* gives reason to this by saying that if he were truly to account for a history of the experience of sexuality, he had to offer a theorization of the desiring man, something which he realized was missing in the introduction of the project. And so, as he turns in the second volume to analyse the desiring man, he does so through the limits that desire demarcates, and how the subject is made within those limits. What is this desire if not the authority figure that plays into the subjection process? The analysis of the care of the self that follows in the third volume of *The History of Sexuality* questions these limits and this process of being made into a desiring subject. Ultimately Foucault's take on the care of the self is one that calls for an understanding of desire, of questioning, and of re-appropriation of the self through self-mastery; what is this if not a conversion of power through critique? The calling into question of desire and the limits it sets is a mirroring of the exercise of critique previously described.

As the care of the self ceased to be for a specific function and age group, it became understood more to hold an important "critical function […] To "unlearn" (de-discere) is one of the important tasks of the culture of the self" (Foucault, 2005, p. 495). The care of the self sets about the possibility of questioning, of unlearning the previous teachings through the

cultivation of the self-self relation. Or, in other words, setting about the voluntary insubordination towards authority as this unlearning also has a sense of struggle:

> The practice of the self is conceived as an ongoing battle. It is not just a matter of training a man of courage for the future. The individual must be given the weapons and the courage that will enable him to fight all his life. (Foucault, 2005, p. 495)

The care of the self, thus, much like the exercise of critique is one that cannot be forced, but that has to find the courage to embark on the practice that will question that which has made it until then. As Foucault comes to understand the care of the self primarily through the Hellenistic-Roman lens, as that of a cultivation, he takes this exercise to be not one that could or should be forced, but one that, if desired to do, would take courage to perform.

This is also an aspect which relates to the care of the self ceasing to be an activity for a specific part of the population and becoming part of the everyday life in the sense that the idea of such activity was not then to create a pattern of behaviour, but more so to underscore that it was a matter of personal choice (Lloyd, 1997b, p. 79). One could not be forced to care for oneself, it was a matter of choice in the knowing that the embarking on such praxis would require courage and, as we said in the previous chapter, labour to perform. To embark on the task of unlearning what has been taught is a task of labour. And doing such labour will lead to learning anew, taking in that which can re-make us.

As the care of the self calls for an unlearning of the previous, it calls for a questioning of authority, of that which has made the self. This questioning, that can be referenced as an unlearning, opens the possibility for a new take on truth. "[T]he object, rather, is to arm the subject with a truth it did not know, one that did not reside in it" (Foucault, 2005, p. 501) or, in other words, it allows for the showing of the spiritual dimension of the care of the self to come through: the transformation needed for the self to access its truth, not the truth previously imposed through subjection but its own truth, by the setting and questioning of

limits. The question then becomes what meaning this mirroring between critique and the care of the self takes up politically in order to offer a political reading of the care of the self. This mirroring between activities shows that the care of the self is, in fact, an example of Foucauldian critique and by being so, its practice can be seen as a conversion of power.

As the care of the self enables a critiquing exercise that seeks to unlearn the politics of truth that previously ruled us, what it ultimately achieves is a conversion of power, a limiting or controlling of power (Foucault, 1997f, p. 288). This, of course, poses the question as to what is meant by this "conversion of power". I take this conversion of power to signify the starting point of a subjectivation process, of the moment in which the self by questioning the imposed limits from authority, questions, transgresses them and thus gains its own truth. What is the idea of de-subjugation by a self-transformation if not the conversion of power? The care of the self is, thus, a conversion of power.

If we pay particular attention to Foucault's reading of Seneca, we can see that there is room for this reading of the care of the self. Seneca said that the care of the self ultimately allowed: "[…] to replace the non-subject with the status of subject defined by the fullness of the self's relationship to the self. He has to constitute himself as subject, and this is where the other comes in" (Foucault, 2005, p. 129). There are two vital parts to this quote: the status of the subject and the place of the other. Seneca tells us that the activity of the care offers the replacement of the non-subject with the status of the subject or, in my reading, this is where the conversion of power occurs. The non-subject I take to be the subjected self, the one with imposed limits and politics of truth that match it. The status of the subject is, precisely, the self that results from the self-transformation through the subject's own truth. The conversion of power is precisely that replacing of the non-subject with the status of the subject, the replacement of the subjected subject by the subjectivated one, that is, the replacing of the subject that had been made by the subject that makes itself. The self, in this sense, practices a

conversion of power as it critiques the authority of previous knowledge in order to unlearn it, and becomes a subject.

The second vital aspect of Seneca's thought is the underscoring of the other as the self constitutes itself as a subject. This shows us that the care of the self was not intended as an activity to enclose the self, it is an activity that while it happens in and through the self, is not independent of the other: "It was a generally accepted principle that one could not attend to oneself without the help of another" (Foucault, 2005, p. 495). This other could be understood as the role of the "master" which was an important figure in the care of the self, throughout all of its historic mutations, the role of the master is a constant. What varies is how the master and student form their relationship. If we remember, during the Socratic-Platonic stage, the master was meant to help overcome the problem of ignorance. For the stoics, however, the role of the master was meant to ensure that the self achieved its status as a subject and, thus, was viewed more as effective agency (Foucault, 2005, pp. 129–130). And so, it is not only about the master teaching the unlearning, but about what that unlearning does to the others. Ultimately this care of the self, read as an ethos was "a way of being and of behaviour. It was a mode of being for the subject, along with a certain way of acting, a way made visible to others" (Foucault, 1997f, p. 286).

Limits

In his reading of the Enlightenment Foucault found an ethos which called into question the limits of our time. As we read the care of the self as an exercise of critique calls for the questioning of authority or, in other words, of imposed limits. This questioning is one that sets about a conversion of power through the transgression of limits. As we critique that which subjects us, we are questioning the limits of that which makes us. And, as we convert power by such questioning, we are then transgressing such limits. The *how not to be*

governed like that, could also be read as *how not to be limited like that.* As the practice of the care of the self calls for the unlearning of that previously taught, it also speaks for the transgressing of the previously imposed limits.

As the stoic understanding of the care of the self works towards finding the status as a subject, through the learning and unlearning, we can say that this can be read as the process of transgressing the limits which demarcated the non-subject and delineating the limits of a new subjectivity. Again, this is not something which Foucault directly spells out but his thoughts on limits allow me to make such an argument. In a text in which he analyses the idea of limits, he very much insists that such a notion is one that can only be developed and understood parallel to transgression, because what are limits if not, precisely, the representation of possible transgression:

> The limit and transgression depend on each other for whatever density of being they possess: a limit could not exist if it were absolutely uncrossable and, reciprocally, transgression would be pointless if it merely crossed a limit composed of illusions and shadows. (Foucault, 1997a, p. 34)

If a limit could not be transgressed, endangered, it would cease to be a limit. The limit exists insofar as the possibility of its negation is present. This understanding of limits is something which finds great resonance in Foucault's work on power, specifically the thought that where there is power there is resistance. If there was no possibility for resistance, then power would cease to exist. The limits demarcated by power must be able to be transgressed in order to "prove" their existence. So, as we understand the care of the self as critique, we come to see that such practice calls for and allows for the transgression of limits set about by authority/power through the conversion of power.

The idea of transgression is one that goes hand in hand with the idea of limits in Foucault's work. In fact, the notion of transgression is one which underlies Foucault's work

on ethics. Taking the idea of the care of the self as both the possibility for critique and the coming about of the self, as I am trying to argue, is something which signals to the idea of transgression, "transgression of the boundaries of discursive constitution, (self)understanding, and disciplinary or governmental practices" (Lloyd, 1997a, p. 289). Here, as Lloyd reads Foucault, we are invited to see the aspect of transgression as that which, as we push the boundaries of the imposed, also makes way for the reinvention of the self. Ultimately, to underscore the role of transgression of limits is to bring to the fore the subjects binding to an imposed truth, one that permits for the "simultaneous individualisations and totalisation of modern power structures" (Lloyd, 1997a, p. 289).

The concern of the self being bound to an imposed truth was an aspect already in the conversation through spirituality and philosophy. We have seen by now that these are the two pillars which demarcate the care of the self. Philosophy here is understood as the possibility of the subject having access to truth, determining the conditions and limits of said possibility (Foucault, 2005, p. 15). Spirituality, on the other hand, refers to the transformation that subjects must undergo to meet the possibility of truth. In other words, the care of the self is a practice which ultimately poses the relation between subject and truth, or ethics and politics as I am trying to argue. By bringing these pillars into the discussion, we can better see the role of limits since both philosophy and spirituality are understood by limits; the former being that which sets the limits of truth and its accessibility and the latter being that which sets about the transformation to access truth. Spirituality and philosophy, thus, play into the limits of subjection and subjectivation processes, of a subject upon an imposed politic of truth and a subject demarcated by its own truth.

If a reading of the care of the self through critique takes us to understanding the practice as that which questions the authority—or, the limits—in order to convert power and find a status as subject which makes itself instead of the one that the is being made, and

moreover, this move is analysed in between the role of philosophy and spirituality—or, in between the subject and truth—then what the care of the self signifies is a transgression of the limits of truth. To find, then, a status as subject is to demarcate oneself by the limits of one's own truth, that which is achieved through spirituality, that which was lost in the Cartesian moment.

As we read the practice of the care of the self through spirituality and philosophy there is a particular importance placed on the role of limits. We come to see that the care of the self as an exercise of critique is one that seeks to transgress limits. To highlight this transgression matters because it is what further exemplifies the political potential of the care of the self. To move, to transgress, to critique the limits of a truth subjected onto the self and achieving a transformation into a subjectivated truth, a truth of one's own, is a political act. This, however, should not be taken to mean that the transgression, the breaking of limits, would mean a disappearance of limits, or erasing of power. The care of the self can be understood as a conversion of power, which is not to imply an elimination of power. I cannot emphasize enough that this was something which Foucault was clear on. There is no society without power relations, it is nonsensical to think of such possibility, power creates social actors as much as it binds us. So, indeed as we understand that through the exercise of critique we are able to transgress the limits of an imposed truth opening up the possibility of a truth of our own, this is not to say that such truth is limitless, it could not be truth if it were so.

The inability to erase limits is one that can be read through Foucault's differentiation between liberation and freedom. When asked if we could conceive the care of the self as a practice of liberation, he was cautious of this characterization insofar that it could be read to imply that the care of the self then discloses a certain human nature that seems to have been concealed by repression and, thus, all that is needed is to break such repressive chains and

man will be reunited with himself, the one that is its true self (Foucault, 1997f, p. 282). He goes on to say that moments of such understanding of liberation are non-existent and can be exemplified by the liberation of colonized people, but this moment still needs to be accompanied by practices of freedom in order to, once liberated, define the admissible and acceptable forms of existence or political society. Practices of freedom, thus, are those that set about the political.

The delineation of the political through limits is something that speaks also in the stoics reading of the care of the self. Let us remember that an important component of the care of the self in such times was the reliance on rigor, control and austerity (Sauquillo, 2017, p. 426). For the Hellenistic-Roman the care of the self was a practice that ultimately called for the *self-transformation* of the subject as it lived its own truth to establish its own limits. The care of the self understood as an exercise of practice, then, calls for an understanding of limits carried out by the subject itself.

Body

I have argued up to this point that the care of the self is a practice that can be read as an exercise of a critique on limits by setting about new ones. I have also defended that to flesh this out from the care of the self allows for a political reading of such concept. Just as critique poses a conversion of power, so does the care of the self, which signifies that both these activities were deeply intertwined in Foucault's thought. And in that conversion of power, the transgressing of limits is made palpable. I have narrated this understanding through the central ideas of spirituality and philosophy, which ultimately point towards the relation between subject and truth. This takes us to the last point which I consider must be observed in a political understanding of the care of the self, the place the self inhabits: the body.

To highlight the role of the body in an activity that is first and foremost a self to self activity seems straightforward and, so, the question then becomes: what is the political role of the body in the care of the self? As Foucault analyses the passing from the first to the second stage of the care of the self he puts particular attention into how the care of the self loses its pedagogical nature in between these stages. The passing from one moment to the next is marked by the fact that the care of the self ceases to be a pedagogical activity for future rulers and, rather, becomes a generalized activity, for everyone and throughout all of their lifetime. In this new envisioning of the care of the self, Foucault finds three characteristics: as a critical activity with oneself (as we have seen), secondly, the role between the self and medicine and, thirdly, the matter of old age. These three aspects are made into two main points: the replacement of a pedagogical model with a medical one and of the care throughout life (Foucault, 1997e, p. 235). As the care of the self stops being an activity that serves an educational purpose for a specific age and profession in life, the exploring of this activity becomes opened to all regardless of age or status and, thus, finds a parallel with the role of medicine, another activity open to all regardless of age or status.

As the care of the self becomes freed from specific characteristics, the Hellenistic-Roman understanding of it becomes closed to activities which are also free from specifics. As *epimeleia heautou* is no longer seen as an educational purpose for rulers, the care of the self becomes better understood through the medical model, a type of care which is permanent throughout life, and so the care can be read as one becoming the doctor of oneself (Foucault, 1997e, p. 235). There is no longer a particular achievement of becoming the best ruler but, rather, the care becomes a constant practice for life achievements, which the stoics and epicureans thought would only become evident moments prior to death and hence why old age is seen as completion (Foucault, 1997e, p. 235). The perpetual concern for oneself is what brings about Foucault's idea on the "art of living":

From the idea that the self is not given to us, I think that there is only one practical consequence: we have to create ourselves as a work of art. […] we should not have to refer the creative activity of somebody to the kind of relation he has to himself, but should relate the kind of relation one has to oneself to a creative activity (Foucault, 1997b, p. 262).

To read the care of the self politically then is not a one-time occurrence, but it is a perpetual activity of self making and creation; a perpetual concern not only in the immaterial (i.e., the soul) but also in the body, and so enters the importance of medicine. During the seminar on *Hermeneutics of the Self* Foucault points out that in the post Platonic tradition the role of philosophy and medicine were deeply interconnected: the philosopher was seen as the carer of the soul in the same sense as the doctor would care for the body (Foucault, 2005, p. 97), and so the care of the self ceases to only concentrate on the soul, and care also for the body (Foucault, 2005, p. 108). For the golden age of the care of the self, this was a practice that had the objective of returning the self onto itself, turning the status of the non-subject into the subject. Such a return to the self in the stoics and epicureans was not meant for enclosing in the ethical realm, but rather it was connected to the purpose of finding a status as a subject through the care of the self.

The status as a subject comes about from the recentring of *epimeleia heautou* onto the self-imposed limits of a new subjectivity. It is not that the self would then be enclosed, but rather that in its return to itself it poses its relation to the political in its 'own' terms. And this is why the body matters in this understanding. This new idea of the subjectivity is one which will live in a body, ultimately it is the body that holds a place in the world. It is not enough to care for the soul, but we must care for the materiality which carries this soul. This is, I think, the ultimate idea that the care of the self from the golden age presented. What would it matter how cared for your soul has been if the vessel where it lives has not received the same

attention? And so, this idea came to be read as the possibility of becoming the doctor of oneself.

To view the care of the self as an activity that could be approached through a medical model allows Foucault to signal the importance of the body. In the Platonic-Socratic reading, to care for oneself was regarded as to care for one's soul, however as we move to the second historical epoch of the care we find in stoics and epicureans discussion and concern for understanding the body and soul as one singular unit and, thus, both the physical and the mental should matter when it came to care for the self. This underscoring of the body is also met with a particular understanding of cure, or salvation. We have seen in the previous chapter how the stoics understand salvation in a particular way, and this links to the idea of a medical model through the care of the self. The salvation for the stoics is a positive one, insofar as they understand salvation in a positive sense, as saved by—and not saved from.

By caring for itself, for both soul and body, the self recentres itself, gains the status of a subject and, thus, saves itself. The self is saved by caring for both body and soul. Being a doctor of oneself leads the self to ask for the voluntary insubordination towards the limits, the call for courage. The body is of course a vital part of the subjectivation process through the care of the self. It is in and through the body where the care of the self becomes alive, where ethics and politics meet.

The Bodily Critique of Limits

No! I am not looking for an alternative; you can't find the solution of a problem in the solution of another problem raised at another moment by other people. You see, what I want to do is not the history of solutions—and that is the reason why I don't accept the word *alternative.* I would like to do the genealogy of problems, of *problématiques.* My point is not that everything is bad, but that everything is dangerous, which is not exactly the same as bad. If everything is dangerous, then we always have something to do. So, my position leads not to apathy but to a hyper-and pessimistic activism. I think that the

ethico-political choice we have to make every day is to determine which is the main danger. (Foucault, 1997b, p. 256)

I have tried to argue up to this point that the care of the self can be read as an activity with political potential as it calls for a new type of subjectivity. This political possibility comes about by paying particular emphasis to the notions of critique, limits and body. However, while I have made the case as to why these three aspects allow for a political reading of the care of the self, I have not addressed why these three aspects are the ones to be underscored to achieve such a reading. Nor have I addressed how the care of the self, even if now understood as a political activity, looks in a practical manner. The remainder of the chapter will deal with these two unanswered questions.

I have tried to stress that this political reading ultimately rests upon the tension between the subject and truth, the limits it imposed and the possibility to transgress them. Or, to put it in Foucault's own words, it concerns the relation between spirituality and philosophy. This relation between spirituality and philosophy I have also defended could be read, as the quote at the beginning of this section suggests, as the tension between the ethical and the political. It is Foucault himself who begins his seminar on the *Hermeneutics of the Subject* by demarcating what will be his reading of the care of the self by the relation between these two notions. The importance granted to spirituality and philosophy point us, precisely, towards critique, limits and the body.

If spirituality is the transformation done through the subject in order to be able to access truth, while philosophy is the limits that demarcate the possibility of that access, then ultimately these two ideas are connected by the aspects of critique, limits and the body. A transformation by the self through the self to access truth in Foucault's framework is something only achievable through the role of critique, which would demarcate the already existing limits and how to transgress them by philosophy. The body comes into the picture by

the fact that the transformation needed to access truth must find its place in the self, in the body. The body is the place where resistance first comes about. It is the body where the tension between the ethico-political begins. This is why I have signalled to particularly these core ideas to construct a political reading of the care of the self. By signalling to spirituality and philosophy, we can rethink Foucault's care of the self through the bodily critique of limits. Understanding the care of the self as an exercise of critique that aims at transgressing limits through the body is a reading of this activity that goes hand in hand with the idea of the political traced at the beginning of the chapter. To argue for the care of the self as the bodily critique of limits is to offer a political reading of such a notion because, much as I defined the political, such a reading of the care is one which signals to contingency, towards the possibility of the coming about of a new discourse.

Now, it remains to discuss the more practical implication of my argument: what does the care of the self 'look like' and how does a new subjectivity come about? This is something which Foucault leaves unanswered. As he signals to the idea of the ethico-political tension, he does so through a problematization of the subject, as "the development of a domain of acts, practices, and thoughts that seem to me to pose problems for politics" (Foucault, 1997c, p. 114). And this problematization through the care is an answer to the problematization of power; a power that came to be understood as totalizing, as dooming, as *bad.* But, as I have argued throughout this chapter, that was not the point at all. It is not about understanding power as bad, but as the danger it holds. So, in part, Foucault leaves the question of the practicality of the care of the self unanswered, mainly because of its unfinished aspect, but more so because his work was oriented towards problematizing, not towards offering clear path solutions. The problematization of the care of the self, I have argued, was a way by which Foucault pretended to answer the ethico-political choice. Given

the danger of a power that can embrace everything, the care of the self poses a response to it—given it is read through the bodily critique of limits enabling a new subjectivity.

There is, however, an idea which we encountered in the previous chapter, which will hold particular importance in this rethinking of the care of the self: *askēsis*. Foucault reads this notion as that which binds subject and truth, enabling truth telling to be constituted as the subject's way of being (Foucault, 2005, p. 327). This idea is introduced when Foucault is discussing the query of what spiritual knowledge looked like for Stoicism. As we have seen, it is this middle stage of the care of the self that most interests Foucault, that of the Hellenistic-Roman epoch, which he deems *the golden age,* and is particularly influenced by Stoicism and epicurean thought. The preference for this specific historical time is due to the understanding of the care of the self as an activity which has an end within the subject itself. Stoics and epicureans underscored the role of spirituality—being one of the two pillars alongside philosophy—given that they would heavily weigh the role of *self-transformation* by the self turning its gaze onto itself. This change of focus of the gaze signifies the spiritualization of knowledge, particularly read from Seneca, as it means the changing of position from the subject, allowing for the grasping of reality and the value of things, making the subject seek the finding of freedom (Foucault, 2005, p. 308). The subject that turns its gaze towards its body is changing its position, grasping reality under a different understanding, or put differently, is transgressing the limits of the imposed and exercising critique as the seeking of freedom. This is the enactment of *the bodily critique of limits*. This spiritualization of knowledge, says Foucault, is seen in praxis through *askēsis*, through the binding of subject and truth.

The association of *askēsis* and spiritual knowledge is particular to the golden age. During Christianity, for example, the idea of *askēsis* signified a practice with the ultimate objective of achieving a self-renunciation, and it found its maximum expression through the

act of confession (Foucault, 2005, p. 333). By understanding *askēsis* in this way, Christianity took it to be that the truth was within the subject itself, there was no need for self-transformation to be able to access it, all that was needed was for the subject to renounce itself through confession. *Askēsis* during the golden age was vastly different. While the idea of binding subject to truth is very much at the core of it, this binding happened through a transformation that the self needed to undergo. *Askēsis* was the achieving of a full and independent relation of the self to the self by constituting truth telling as the subject's way of being (Foucault, 2005, p. 327). This way of being happens as the subject achieves a sense of self-mastery over itself, through the practice of different techniques that make up *askēsis*. The exercising of these techniques ultimately is understood to be: "a set of practices by which one can acquire, assimilate, and transform truth into a permanent principle of action. […] It is a process of the intensification of subjectivity" (Foucault, 1997e, pp. 238–239).

The techniques that allow for this intensification of subjectivity are encompassed between two poles: meletē and gymnasia. The former refers to the imagining of possible events to test how one would react, whereas through the latter the self places itself in a real situation and tests the self's independence to the external world (Foucault, 1997e, pp. 239–240). Or, in other words, between the idea of self-training—through abstinence and tests—and mediation; all techniques are done by the self through the self, which makes *askēsis* a praxis in which the self makes itself as the object of tekhne, and life becomes to be understood as a work of art (Foucault, 2005, p. 424).

The spectrum upon which *askēsis* is found, gives us the opportunity to start envisioning a more practical understanding of the care of the self. It is through *askēsis* that the self manages to take care and envision a new type of subjectivity. When reading the care of the self as the bodily critique of limits, we can envision such a possibility of a new subjectivity for this reading is one which underscores the political potential of said activity.

And within that possibility what we find at the centre is the binding of subject and truth which is brought about by the techniques found in between the idea of training and meditation. Now, here it is important to clarify something, I am not trying to argue that it would have been Foucault's intention for us to practice the care of the self exactly as we can find evidence of it in Antiquity. Rather, I read Foucault's analysis of the care of the self as an intent to see what could be learned and bring it to our day. Much like he described his own work, I see Foucault's approach to this body of work as one would approach a toolbox, where one takes the pieces needed to solve a problem. So, I would not follow a conclusion that would take the analysis of the care of the self as the need to 'copy' what was done in the past. But, rather, I find the importance of the care of the self in Foucault's thought—and, thus, in our critical enterprise today—in the understanding of what the care of the self meant for Antiquity, and the value behind such meaning.

I have been arguing that the meaning of the care of the self in Antiquity, in the way that Foucault read it, can be reworked into an understanding of it bringing about a new subjectivity insofar as the subject finds itself bound to truth as it practices *askēsis* through different techniques. My argument of trying to bring to our day the practice of the care of the self is obviously not one to be understood as replicating in an exact manner such activity but, rather about capturing the meaning of such techniques. To care for the self today as to envision a new type of subjectivity means to identify for our world how the subject can bind itself to truth: what is the way to practice *askēsis* today? Bringing to the fore the exercise of critique which seeks to question the limits imposed through the body, to bring the care of the self in our present day means to bring to the fore ethico-political tension and in doing so choosing what is the main danger that we face. And this danger I take it to be, and will argue, is the living through an imposed truth and taking this for granted into what it signifies for the subjection process. In this way, to practice *askēsis* today means to find techniques which

allow us to awaken to this subjection process. Now, to be stating that we need to bring the care of the self to today is implicitly bringing to the fore another unspoken argument: a critique of the subject we are today. If I aim to claim that there is an imposed truth overshadowing the contingent subjection process, I must then address what I take this imposed truth to be. This is the topic of the next chapter, offering a problematization of who I take the self to be today, analysed through the digital media lens which I argue serves as an exemplary case for the hegemonic subjection process today.

**III.	Chapter Three: The Digital.**

Up until this moment this thesis has been heavily oriented toward a theoretical reworking of Foucault's care of the self. At the core of this dissertation we find an argument in favour of a political reading of Foucault's care of the self, which depends on a bodily critique of limits so as to open up the possibility for a new type of subjectivity. I contended that such reworking has to be made through the notions of the body, critique and limits. The care of the self as it calls for a conversion of power is an inherently critical exercise with the questioning of limits as its objective, and such an exercise is one that happens through and in the body. I concluded the previous chapter with a theorization of what the bodily critique of limits would 'look like', an aspect which was not answered fully and was left open ended. This loose end I admitted, on the one hand, was partly because Foucault's thought might be exhibiting a limitation in this regard, a matter to which I will return in Chapter Five. However, on the other hand, and more importantly, to close such an open end and better ground the argument for the coming about of a new subjectivity, I must now explicitly defend what has been a tacit argument up until now. To call for a defence for a new subjectivity implies a critique of the existing one. This chapter, then, turns to the fleshing out of today's subject.

We have seen that in his text "What is Enlightenment", Foucault argues for a critical ontology of ourselves, or, the critical knowing of what we are, what has made us, what are the limits imposed on us? A critical ontology of ourselves then serves to answer not only that which we are, but also what has governed making us so. From this, as we have seen in the previous chapter, the idea of critique emerges as the posing of the question *how not to be governed like that, quite that much?* I would like now to flesh this out further so as to better frame this third chapter. A critical ontology of that which we are must not exclusively flesh out the self, but also that which made this self. This objective is one which I think holds true

for the writing of critical political theory, it is not only about seeing the governed but also about highlighting the practices of governance:

> [T]hat is, the forms of reason and organisation through which individuals and groups coordinate their various activities, and the practices of freedom by which they act within these systems, following the rules of the game or striving to modify them. (Tully, 2002, p. 538)

Critical theory, then, underscores the practices and regimes of practices which subject us but, also, the way in which we resist and transform them by bringing to the fore the role of freedom. To see critical theory in this way is to analyse such practices from two sides, from both the governance side—looking into language games, the web of relations of power and the specific forms of subjection—and the governed side—and their acting in accordance to the rules, or raising problems or refusing (Tully, 2002, pp. 539–540). To put it in Foucauldian terms, it is seeing critical political theory as the bringing about of the ethico-political tension. For the critical ontology of ourselves, for the critical task to be fruitful, we must not only pose a critique of that which governs us, but also about the subject that has resulted from such governing; it is not only about the underscoring of practices of governance but of how these can be better understood and critiqued by those governed by them.

The need to analyse practices of governance is then the need to analyse that which makes us, that which subjects us, that which is commonly called the status quo, or the hegemonic discourse, which today receives the name of neoliberalism. Much more than an economic project and more so a regime of practices that govern us, neoliberalism today dictates the meaning of that which makes us:

> Neoliberalism has, in short, become hegemonic as a mode of discourse. It has pervasive effects on ways of thought to the point where it has become incorporated into the common-sense way many of us interpret, live in, and understand the world. (Harvey, 2007, p. 3)

However, my interest rests upon the analysis of a 'smaller' scope, and so, my claim here is that today we can take the digital as an exemplary case when it comes to neoliberalism's upholding mechanisms. I will contend that an analysis of the digital today, one of neoliberalism's great enforcing mechanisms, serves to offer an account of how neoliberalism has entered into every aspect of our lives, norming and making us into a particular type of subjects. My analysis of the digital will then play the part of an analysis of the practices of governance. And from this analysis the idea of the governed as a particular type of subject, which I will characterize as depoliticized, will result.

In today's world it is difficult to point to where the digital ends and analogue begins. We live in a world where the digital has become a part of our everyday. We wake up, we check our phones. We reach our office, we open our email inbox. We go for a run, we open an 'app' to track our distance and rhythm. We go to a restaurant and we post about it on our social media accounts. We publish a new piece of research and the incessant checking of how many 'retweets' we get becomes more stressful than the process of having written that piece in the first place. We read news that angers us and we let our twitter account know how maddening it is. We go to a protest, we use the trendy hashtag. This way in which we now understand the world has become so normalized we do not even question it. There was a time in which digital platforms did not exist and we could still work, socializing at restaurants was possible, exercising was not scrutinized by an app, and political uproar still took place. We fail to acknowledge that the priority that we give to the digital today was not always so. I do not mean to pose all of these examples in a tone of judgment; I myself fall into these customs. I acknowledge how pervasive and mentally damaging my participation in social media is, still my accounts remain active. I can recognize how invasive it is having my email linked to my phone completely blurring the line between work and home, but I have not dared to changed it. Such is the digital.

It would be easy enough to say that the digital world is more of a characteristic for younger generations, those that truly do not know a world without the digital given the fact that they were born already into its existence. In a way, this is true; the digital is an aspect which runs deeper into generations that are so accustomed to smartphones that they might have trouble recognizing a landline phone as something that, at its core, serves the same purpose of their latest iPhone. For example, Bernard Hartcourt offers an account of how teenagers today feel as if their existence is only validated through social media, if they don't have active profile on these platform then they do not exist (Harcourt, 2015). However, I think that an analysis of the digital is necessary because it serves an active role in our subjection process regardless of being active users of the digital media. The digital, as an exemplary case of the hegemonic discourse, subjects users and non-users alike.

The digital is so pervasive that it goes beyond its active users. Even for those that today have consciously, or not, decided not to have social media profiles, or those who do not do online shopping as to not reveal their shopping habits, or those who do not have a smartphone, even they remain within the digital because the digital is more than a defined space or tool in which we can actively decide to participate. The digital, as a tool-like space, is a mechanism needed to uphold the hegemonic discourse. To be sure, this is not to signify that I am trying to offer a normative argument of the digital. I am not making a case to understand that what results from the digital is bad nor that the digital in itself is bad or wrong. Rather, my aim is to signal that the way we today understand and participate in the digital is complex and that such complexity is deeply intertwined with a subjection process which poses important challenges for the creation of critical and transformative spaces politically speaking. Much like Gane and Beer argue in their analysis of the internet and its relation to individualistic aspects: it is not that the internet itself fosters individualism but, rather, that given its characteristics it can be made to serve individualism (Gane and Beer,

2008). Such is my argument for the digital: bluntly put, I do not understand the digital as inherently being adept for maintaining and creating a neoliberal discourse; had the digital come to be in another context we cannot know how it would look like, what it would have upheld and created. But today, as it stands, we cannot deny, or this is what I will try to argue, that the digital serves particular needs. However, I will also argue that the digital's discourse is a contingent one, not fully fixed, and hence it can be reimagined.

So, What is the Digital?

It is not a mistake or accident that it has taken me quite a few pages of this chapter to finally define the digital. I have given myself such space because I wanted for the reader, through the moments I posed as examples previously, to take the liberty to form an instinct of what the digital may be. My definition is as follows, the digital "is the exacerbated use of the internet through gadgets".[12] I offer this admittedly loose definition to capture the vast array of scenarios which I just described. The digital phrased in this way encompasses not only the internet, or social media, or the blurred lines between work and home spaces but rather acknowledges all of these aspects. Within this broad definition, one can fit aspects of: algorithms, online data, social media, technologies, internet, computers, personal devices, applications and so on. Perhaps the most specific part of the definition is the aspect of the gadgets, which I will further flesh out as this chapter develops. This specificity might ignite some initial confusion given the fact that I started the chapter by describing the digital almost as inescapable, even by those that actively choose not to participate in it—however, as the chapter advances, I will flesh out the fact that even if the definition 'depends' on gadgets, a person's lack of them does not exclude them from the digital's discourse.

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[12] By gadgets I mean a loose term that includes laptops, tablets, smartphones, smartwatches and the like.

A way to start unravelling this is by addressing if my definition of the digital refers to it as a space or a tool. Indeed, the digital can be used as tool for communication, for example, through emails or social media. This allows us to use the digital for other purposes such as: organization, socialization, and so on. But the digital can also be viewed as a space, as I have tried to describe, as all encompassing, reaching the most intimate parts of our lives. And in this way, it is that I envision the digital not as either tool or space but, rather, as a tool-like space. I use this phrasing because it is undeniable that the digital is of course a tool, but it is also a space when space is understood as:

> […] an order or representation that exhibits a structural regularity between objects, and spatialization to refer to the logic of representing or making visible objects, which (partially) fixes the meaning of their essentially contingent character. Social and political spaces are a specific subset of space and spatialization in general. (Howarth, 2006, p. 129)

In other words, I refer to the digital as a space because of its constitutive character of contingent meaning upon which certain articulated elements offer regularity between them. There are, of course, social and political spaces which are "not a subset of the physical space but, rather, physical space is a subset of any order that yields a structural regularity between objects" (Howarth, 2006, p. 115). This is to signify that the meaning we grant to the physical space we do so because of the social space, not the other way around. As meaning is in post-structuralist theory, social space is constructed rather than simply given to us. When referencing the digital as a space, then, what I mean is for it to be understood precisely as giving order and fixing the contingent meanings of the hegemonic discourse. This is why, even those that think they have been able to avoid the tool like aspect of the digital—refusing the use of gadgets, social media, online shopping—are still embedded in the meaning creating space that is the digital. And that meaning creating space, as one of the paradigmatic

mechanisms that upholds the neoliberal hegemonic discourse, is one that makes us into a particular kind of subject.

The digital then is a tool-like space insofar as the exacerbated use of the internet though gadgets can be understood as a tool, but it is also, undeniably a meaning creating space. Now, the reader might think at this point, that it is not clear why then I seem to be posing the digital as different than the technologies that have preceded it; radio and television could also be tool-like spaces of meaning and subject creation. However, I do indeed propose that the digital has particularities which previous technologies did not. One aspect we can underscore here is the speed by which the digital spread:

> In contrast, new information technologies have spread throughout the globe with lighting speed in less than two decades, between the mid-1970s and the mid-1990s, displaying a logic that I propose as a characteristic of this technological revolution: the immediate application to its own development of technologies it generates, connecting the world through information technology. (Castells, 1996, p. 33)

Castells takes that speed as a defining aspect by which to signal to the uniqueness of the technological revolution, and not only that but he also speaks to its impressive flexibility: informational technologies have the ability to mutate easily and seamlessly. Such speed and flexibility have allowed for such technologies to become present in every corner of our lives; Castells takes Nicholas Negroponte and says: "We live in a world that has become digital" (Castells, 1996, p. 30), ideas that are further developed in *The Internet Galaxy* where Castells argues for the internet's openness as one of its main sources of strength (Castells, 2001, p. 27). I welcome Castells' ideas and take them a step further by adding the aspect of gadgets to my definition of the digital. While previous technological advancements could also be seen as meaning creating spaces, in the case of the digital I understand this to be underscored and heightened given that those of us that chose to use gadgets have ended up creating a symbiotic relation with them. This is something that started with the PC (personal computer),

in an analysis which Sherry Turkle pioneered (Turkle, 1984, 1997, 2011), but as of now has advanced through smartphones, tablets and now, even to smartwatches: we now have the digital stuck to our wrists. These gadgets have become primordial in the way in which we make use of the internet: we hold a symbiotic relationship with them, one which sustains our dependence on the internet. The digital, thus, is shown through the fact that we seem to no longer comprehend a world without the internet, we no longer question the fact that we 'need' the internet, and thus need the devices that allow us to step into it, to make use of it.

The digital is sleeping with our smartphones next to us, it being the last and first thing we see during the day. The digital is having our smartphones out on the table when having a meal or coffee with friends. The digital is our incessant need to have the latest smartphone, even when the one we have works perfectly. The digital is the panic we feel when we cannot find our phone. The digital, thus, becomes 'palpable' through the gadgets that connect us to this tool-like space, with which we have a very symbiotic relation. This symbiosis is something which, as mentioned was developed by Turkle and her characterization of the "second self" with the coming about of the PC (Turkle, 1984). More recently we find the term "quantified self", referring "to the practice of gathering data about oneself on a regular basis and then recording and analysing the data to produce statistics and other data (such as images) relating to one's bodily functions and everyday habits" (Lupton, 2013, p. 25). Examples of this is the current fashion of measuring one's steps, tracking numbers of hours slept, counting the number of glasses of water drank, and so on—ideas which are sold to us by the unquestioned hegemonic discourse, and we normalized, due to a supposed health discourse. This term has been taken further into an analysis of the workplace by Phoebe Moore and Andrew Robinson (Moore and Robinson, 2015). Specifically, Moore and Robinson take this term into the workforce and show how this linkage of labour with the quantification of the self has been exploited by mass companies, making it now customary

for employers to keep track of every detail of the worker's performance, enforcing on their employees the mechanisms that allow them to keep perfect control and surveillance over their performance.

I want to claim that Moore and Robinson's analysis of the workforce and, thus, their characterization of the quantified self, is something to be taken beyond the workplace. Our symbiotic relation with the digital has led us to live lives of quantification; it has lead us to become subjects who, first and foremost, count: "the digital man *fingers* the world, in that he is always counting and calculating" (Han, 2017, p. 35). We quantify our bodily functions—how many hours of sleep, how many glasses of water have I drunk—and our social encounters—how many people liked the picture of my food, how many 'friends' do I have according to social media. We are not only counted extensively in our workforce, but we extensively count ourselves. We count our self-worth by the interactions on social media. We count the number of friends we have by the amount of contacts we claim to have on Facebook.[13] We measure our productivity during the day with the number of emails we answered, with the number of online forms we filled out, or the number of articles downloaded. We measure our research's value in the times it has been tweeted about or viewed, in the alternative metrics fashion, instead of real engagement and debate had with our ideas. However, what I wish to signal to here is not so much the quantification but its normalization and the implications of it. This quantification of our lives has come to adhere to our lives in such a subtle manner that we do not question it. It is normal to quantify ourselves, it is normal to count our contacts on social media, it is normal to get a rush of happiness if our post surpasses a certain number of likes. It is also normal for employers to

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[13] The *Millenium Cohort Study,* for example, has studied the impact of social media on the everyday life of teenagers, concluding that 2 in 5 girls spend at least 3 hours of their day scrolling through social media (Campbell, 2019). Also, a few years back, it was studied how the use of internet and social media impacted sleep patterns, where a fifth of the teens studied claimed to wake up during the night to log onto social media (Udorie, 2015)

make use of these quantification; how else could they account for productivity? But, as I will argue, this norm is the mere concealment of other possibilities, and in doing so creates a certain type of subject.

So, while Moore and Han offer extremely thought-provoking characterizations of our time as one of the quantified self, I would like to take their arguments a step further by signalling to the implications of being a quantified self. I have already hinted at one, the normalization of quantification, we understand the quantification of ourselves as a given, and so, to develop this more fully in the reminder of this chapter I will further underscore the subjection process undergone in the bringing out of this quantified self. In other words, I am not so much interested in the quantification *per se* but in what such aspect means for us being made into subjects. Ultimately, I will construct an argument that claims for the digital to signify a depoliticized subjection process—an aspect which I had already hinted at in the beginning of this chapter by classifying today's subjection process as problematic for the opening up of political possibility.

This characterization of 'depoliticised' is one that follows from my definition of the political in the previous chapter. Where the political I took to be the underscoring of contingency, the moment of rupture and possibility of sedimentation, de-politicization I take to be precisely the concealing of such contingency. This is a notion that seems easier to pin down empirically than conceptually; we can see something happening but cannot phrase exactly why it is (Foster, Kerr and Byrne, 2015, p. 226). Ultimately it is a term taken to be housed within two broad definitions: (1) depoliticization as the removal of the political character of decision-making, influenced by Burnham; and (2) depoliticization as closing off public deliberation on a number of issues, taking from Hay and Jenkins (Foster, Kerr and Byrne, 2015, p. 227). I find here that Roussos' idea of de-politicization brings together both of the mentioned strands in a helpful manner. He poses that a process signalled as de-

politicized does not mean it is not political but, rather, that "the significance of an issue or norm is systematically diminished or marginalized" (Roussos, 2019, p. 267). I find this definition particularly useful, because it helps to underscore the relation between the depoliticized and governmentality, insofar that it helps to underscore that "[…] depoliticization has the concurrent effect of politicising agencies and individuals in pursuit of normalised political goals" (Foster, Kerr and Byrne, 2015, p. 238).

By understanding the depoliticized as the diminishing of a norm's significance, it helps underscore that, at the same time, it is further strengthening the discourse that thrives by such marginalization. De-politicized, thus, I take to mean taking as natural, given and objective the discourse which is not so, and in doing so it hides the contingent possibility. Now, this might seem a rather stark comment to make when analysing the digital, given that many of the aspects that live in my encompassing definition have been argued for to open political possibility. Usually, the digital is taken to be a very politically enticing tool and space, and while I do not intend to deny this in its entirety, I do want to signal to the complexities that live within the digital.

One of the ways in which the digital has been simplified is in the understanding that it allows for a closer relation between citizens and politicians. It has also been spoken of by the way it facilitates access to information and how we make use of it. It, so we are told, enables participation. Our government officials are just a tweet away; all we need to do to have certain political information is do a quick google search; a few quick clicks on social media and a protest is organized. Succinctly put, the digital can be understood as a tool that has been used to create new spaces in which political participation is facilitated. The digital can also be viewed as a space for the practice of politics in itself; we inhabit such space through the voicing of our concerns, our thoughts and angers. These aspects just now enlisted, however, bring about a very simplistic view of the digital. Characterizing the digital as merely a tool

which we use to 'connect' to politics is not enough to capture its complexity, it is not enough to bring to the fore the ways in which inhabiting the digital changes us and makes us according to its particular needs. Again, I cannot emphasize this enough, I do not intend for my critique of such a simplistic reading to be understood as a normative argument, it is not that I want to argue for the digital to be 'bad' and that we should try to get rid of it. Rather, I aim for a more complex reading of the digital to be brought about. As Foucault himself said, it is not that everything is bad, but that it is dangerous, and this is the way in which I read the digital. It is not that the digital is bad, but it is dangerous as it conceals its mechanisms in the subjection process, showing itself as objective, natural, as a given.

Tania Bucher has shared an interesting argument in favour of ambivalence in our analysis of media technologies and their role in our society today (Bucher, 2019). Bucher signals to the critical power of remaining ambivalent, as she states that neither a full approval of these technologies, nor a complete dismissal of them, help us to truly analyse them and our society (Bucher, 2019). Just like the phrase from Foucault that I just mentioned, Bucher defends this ambivalence as not an "'anything goes' attitude, but, rather, a stance to 'stay with the trouble' of questioning basic assumptions and be transparent about them" (Bucher, 2019, p. 1). This is what I hope to transmit in the remainder of this chapter: not a normative argument but, rather, a signalling of those aspects we are taking for granted and their implications for the subjects we are today.

How we talk about the digital

As the brief outlining of the digital offered above showed, one of the ways in which the digital is thought about today is by its ability to create new spaces to practice politics, which in turn has meant a decline in the formerly traditional ways in which politics was exercised. People now prefer to pose their anger through their Facebook status than through the electoral ballots, so to speak. Peter Dahlgren has analysed this, to which he says that the decrease in

traditional civic engagement is not a decline in political worries but just a reflection of the resurgence of political movement outside of traditional party politics due to the fact that internet technology facilitates participation without which much alter-globalization politics would simply not happen (Dahlgren, 2007, p. 55). This shows, according to Dahlgren, that it is not that people have abandoned political engagement, but they have simply refocused their attentions outside the parliamentary system, outside traditional political engagement institutions, so to speak (Dahlgren, 2007, p. 57). Thus, for Dahlgren, democratic citizenship through the net offers a sense of empowerment, and supports innovative forms of citizen's identities (Dahlgren, 2007, p. 67).

We can take this idea of empowerment a step further. By being able to 'follow' our political leader´s account on social media we come to feel closer to them, we feel that holding them accountable is within closer reach. We also feel empowered by the ease with which we can share our political opinions through our own social media profiles, feeling as if we have a more prominent role in the political sphere. This empowerment goes beyond understanding the digital as a space and, rather, also highlights its tool characteristics. We feel empowered because we feel in control and in ownership of politics through the devices of the digital. We own the smartphone that allows us to voice our political views, we need no one´s permission for accessing the space into which we think we are enacting active citizenship, we give ourselves the permission. Sherry Turkle had already posed this idea many years ago as she analysed the relation between the PC and politics. She argued that the PC became so alluring because of the sense of mastery it gave the person, not only for the literal ownership aspect itself, but because the insertion of PCs into politics makes people think they have a better and clearer understanding of politics (Turkle, 1982), in the sense that they come to believe that the workings of the political is just as mechanic and 'straightforward' as the way that PCs

work. People come to equate the computer with politics, as owned by them and made understandable—for use purposes—for everyone.

The political exercised through the digital is also all the more enticing because this sense of empowerment and ownership that gadgets offer is even more gripping because of the symbiotic relation, as already argued, we establish with such devices. We have become one with the machine—whether it be our smartphone, our computer, tablets or smartwatches. In whatever form we prefer the machine to be, our dependence on it is undeniable. The symbiotic characteristic of the digital's gadgets, is something which Turkle started to develop through the analysis of PCs and how they started a trend of one-person-one-computer: the artefact became the extension of the self (Turkle, 1984). Being able to individually own one, and being able to carry it around, made the individual come to understand the PC as an extension of itself, something which has only been amplified by the technological advancements that have followed the PC. This idea, of course, invokes McLuhan's work and his analysis between media and man in this respect and how the former is the extension of the latter. McLuhan offered, precisely, the argument that our beings are extended by technologies: "any invention or technology is an extension or self-amputation of our physical bodies, and such extension also demands new ratios or new equilibriums among the other organs and extensions of the body" (McLuhan, 1964, p. 45); where one ends and the other begins will have, undoubtedly, important implications which I will discuss as this chapter develop.

This symbiosis, or these extensions, have become even more acute as technology has advanced. Think of tablets, smartphones and now even smartwatches, all of them tools necessary to enter the digital which we, literally, carry with us. We have become one with the tool that allows for the entering of the digital. We feel panic if we cannot feel our phones in our pockets. We sense our phones vibrating when they have not. Our phone screens are the

first and last thing we see in the day. If working on a computer, most likely many of us will still have the phone beside us—and even a tablet—as if they offered anything different than the computer itself. The gadgets are a part of us. And as such, what we care for is the world that they allow us to enter, the world that they let unfold for us. And so, we can say that another consequence of the digital is, precisely, the seclusion into its terrain, done in a very subtle way through our symbiotic dependence on the digital gadgets. This is a worrying aspect, "[T]he net environment needs to help connect them [them is particularly referencing young people] to the political world beyond the screen itself. Yet it could be the case that the daily habits of online life are making the connection beyond the net less likely to take place" (Dahlgren, 2011, p. 103). The digital has made us forget that our lives must not be restricted to screens, which brings us back to the symbiotic characteristic evidenced earlier in the chapter.

In this sense Turkle's research precisely deals with our relation to a type of technology that offers a substitution for our face-to-face connection:

> We are offered robots and a whole world of machine-mediated relationships on networked devices. As we instant-message, e-mail, text and Twitter, technology redraws the boundaries between intimacy and solitude. We talk of getting "rid" of our e-mails, as though these notes are so much excess baggage. Teenagers avoid making telephone calls, fearful that they "reveal too much." They would rather text than talk. Adults, too, choose keyboards over the human voice. It is more efficient, they say. Things that happen in "real time" take too much time. Tethered to technology, we are shaken when that world "unplugged" does not signify, does not satisfy. (Turkle, 2011, p. 11)

The symbiotic relation is one that highlights the fact that we have become secluded precisely in the digital realm. As the quote above says, the "real" world, takes too much time, too much hassle. And indeed, we cannot deny that that has been one of the primary characteristics of the digital which has made it so appealing, and which we constantly refer to: its speed.

Exchanging emails is faster than a phone call or face to face meeting, being informed through twitter or the online newspaper pages takes less time than buying the newspaper, adding a 'like' to a friend's social media page is faster than having a coffee with them. This concern is only made graver when accentuating that the digital today is not solely in personal computers but in their climax, that of smartphones and social media: a device that we can carry everywhere with us, supposedly as a form of communication but, in reality, we use to abstract ourselves from the world of relations into a world of online connectivity. What does it mean for us to become subjects in this scenario? Does it not result somewhat paradoxically, that we see the digital platform as one that makes connections easier, but our reality is becoming more restricted and closed within the online space? What does this mean for the supposed new spaces that the digital creates?

The new spaces for the practice of politics that are created by the digital have signalled us towards certain complexities. Given that such spaces are intimately related to the tools of the digital that created them and that allow us to enter, this has an impact in the way we relate to them; there is a sense of empowerment. The sense of ownership and entitlement that we have over the digital's gadgets can make us also feel the same for the exercise of politics. We come to feel empowered in this exercise given that we have tools that make our access to it so simple and straightforward. Our understanding of politics is very much influenced by the way we relate to the digital, in the sense we come to understand politics as if it functioned through the same mechanisms as the digital does. We naively come to think that political participation is as easy, straightforward and fast as posting our Facebook status or our tweet. And, soon, we become secluded in this particular type of space through the symbiosis that characterizes the digital. We come to equate the 'real' world with what we see through a screen. What then does it mean to make use of the digital for political purposes, when it can lead us to have a much distorted conception of politics?

Joss Hands offers an analysis as to how we do democracy online (Hands, 2007, p. 89), where his emphasis is on how to model democracy according to the internet's characteristics. This leads him to argue for what he names a radical e-democracy, as he sees in radical democracy's characteristics the possibility to form a productive political relation with the internet:

> The internet, in augmenting the balance of hegemony and autonomy, offers agonistic pluralism the capacity to further 'an extension' of the democratic revolution to a whole new series of social relations. As such, the internet presents the chance to expand the range of social movements while maximising their autonomy, and therefore it must be a vital component in any radical e-democracy (Hands, 2007, p. 91).

Hands sees that the internet has the capability of further bringing out radical democracy's characteristics of critical political change. It is not only that the internet creates new spaces, says Hands, but that they actually signify, in his view, productive practices of agonistic pluralism with a given new sense of autonomy. This, of course, begs the question of how true this would hold depending on the type of democracy in question, something which Lincoln Dahlberg has tried to answer.

Dahlberg looks into four different types of democracy: liberal-individualist, deliberative, counter-publics and autonomist Marxist (Dahlberg, 2011). What Dahlberg argues within these four positions is precisely that the way the internet is understood to serve democracy ranges between a tool-like space/object—i.e. the digital media is something to be used—and a constitutive discourse—the digital is a space which constitutes discourse and meaning (Dahlberg, 2011, p. 865). The first two positions have a very similar relation to the internet, in the sense that they both see the internet as enabling and facilitating the democratic exercise. Dahlberg states that the liberal-individualist takes the internet as offering easier access to the information that citizens need to better examine political positions (Dahlberg, 2011, p. 858), while deliberative democracy sees itself as having an elective affinity with the

internet and, thus, deems it to be enabling this democratic conception (Dahlberg, 2011, pp. 859–860).

The next two positions, however, have a less tool-like conception of the internet. For the counter-publics position, digital media is emphasized within "political group formation, activism and contestations" (Dahlberg, 2011, p. 860). Within the counter-publics position, democracy is based on two major assumptions: "(1) any social formation necessarily involves inclusion/exclusion relations and associated discursive contestation; and (2) that this antagonistic situation is the basis for the formation of vibrant 'counter-publics', i.e. critical reflexive spaces of communicative interaction […]" (Dahlberg, 2011, p. 861). This understanding of democracy means that the engagement sought through digital media, encompasses both inclusions and exclusions; in other words, it serves both dominant and counter-publics. However, even as it serves both types of discourses, by helping the bringing out of counter-publics, the internet in this democratic position is—overall—understood to enable and strengthen the voice of alternative and marginalized groups (Dahlberg, 2011, p. 862).

The last position, that of autonomist-Marxism, sees democracy as "a self-organization autonomous from systems of centralized power" (Dahlberg, 2011, p. 862), and understands the internet to be "enabling the extension of this commons networking, particularly in terms of 'dematerialized' open source cultural production and distribution […]" (Dahlberg, 2011, p. 862). In this sense, the internet is understood to challenge non-democratic systems through the possibility of alternative productive networking, rather than explicit protest movements (Dahlberg, 2011, p. 864). Dahlberg concludes that the closer the position to the liberal-individualist, the more the internet is understood as something tool-like that serves the democratic exercise. As we draw closer to the autonomist-Marxist, however, the internet is

seen in a more constitutive way, bringing into existence a new democratic society (Dahlberg, 2011, p. 865).

However, even this last position is to be taken with caution insofar as Dahlberg notes that there are two mainstream understandings of democracy and internet. One of these visions is the one that sees the Internet "as a force for 'radical democracy', helping marginalized groups, communication spaces […] the Internet's interactivity and reach assists politically diverse and geographically dispersed counter-publics […] the Internet supports online and offline counter-public contestation of dominant discourses […]" (Dahlberg, 2007, p. 56). In order to fulfil such aspirations, it is important to foster the articulation of counter-publics and thus opposition discourses (Dahlberg, 2007, p. 57). However, there is another reading of the internet and democracy, where the "Internet [is] seen as reproducing dominant discourses … this reproduction included powerful social interests promoting dominant meaning and practices, while blocking marginalized ones, through the ownership and control of the medium" (Dahlberg, 2007, p. 56). Whether the internet serves radical democracy or the status quo, has to do with the possibility of counter publics—however, this calls upon the questioning of how possible this actually is, since the digital is a space that primarily serves the neoliberal status quo. Wendy Brown speaks to this issue.

Specifically, in her text "At the Edge", Brown analyses the role and meaning of political theory and she grapples with why political theory has seemingly lost its interest in tackling capitalism. Some ideas she has as to give reasons for this are the fact that capitalism appears as unchallengeable, it is difficult to make the case for viable alternatives and, with time, capitalism has managed to make itself look less "odious", capitalism has developed an "ethical face" (Brown, 2002, p. 362). And, it is her argument of this 'ethical face', which I want to highlight here. Brown contends that one of the ways in which such a face of capitalism has come about, has been through its close relation with the media: the media is a

sponsor of capitalism, an aspect which makes her wary of any supposed intent of critique

coming from such a sphere. Media is one of the key aspects for capitalism thriving, thus she

criticizes any hope of capitalist critique to rise from such space: critique of the system cannot

rise from the mechanisms that enforce the system (Brown, 2002, p. 563). These are ideas

which we can bring to neoliberalism and the digital today. What is neoliberalism if not the

culmination of a capitalist society? What is the digital if not an augmented platform for

media? What are neoliberalism and the digital if not two concepts deeply intertwined?

Manuel Castells speaks to this in *The Rise of the Network Society: Volume 1*¸ as he

poses that the current technological revolution:

> […] originated and diffused, not by accident, in an historical period of the global
> restructuring of capitalism, for which it was an essential tool. Thus, the new society
> emerging from this process of change is both capitalist and information […].
> (Castells, 1996, p. 13)

Not only that, but Castells furthers this argument by underscoring the role played by the state

in the advancement (or lack thereof) of technology; he contends that it is the state that is the

leading force for technological innovation (Castells, 1996, p. 10). What critical capacity,

towards that which fosters and sustains it, can we then expect from the digital? I have

signalled to a supposed easier communication, but what is actually being communicated?

The digital enhances communication, facilitates it, creates it, but may also present it in

a very particular way, a manner which follows the needs of the hegemonic discourse, as was

just argued for through Brown. This idea is one which builds upon McLuhan's take on the

impact that the medium has on the message, where he argued that the way, or medium, by

which something is communicated can shape more than the message itself; he says:

"Societies have always been shaped more by the nature of the media by which men

communicate than by the content of communication" (McLuhan, 1967, p. 8).[14] When looking

into more current analyses of communication and capitalism, Jodi Dean's results are helpful.

Dean has studied the communicative aspect of capitalism, coining the term "communicative

capitalism", understood as "the materialization of ideals of inclusion and participation in

information, entertainment, and communication technologies in ways that capture resistance

and intensify global capitalism" (Dean, 2009, p. 2). In this way, Dean poses communication

to be one of capitalism greatest mechanisms of support, but communication understood in a

particular way. It is not about a true conversation, or a true critical outlet, but more so a

fetishization of speech, opinion and participation (Dean, 2009, p. 17), and thus it becomes a

vacuum in which criticism is offered to the abyss, and requires no answer because it does not

stick as critique, but just as one more opinion thrown into the mix (Dean, 2009, p. 21). Within

neoliberalism, everything is made into the market, made part of the market; we come to

understand our lives through the market's ideals: profit, competition, individualization, and

so on, and this is an aspect which requires "technologies of information creation and

capacities to accumulate, store, transfer, analyze, and use massive databases to guide

decisions in the global marketplace" (Harvey quoted in Dean, 2009, p. 23).

    Dean theorizes communicative capitalism through the role played by three fantasies:

abundance, participation, and wholeness (Dean, 2009, p. 25) each of them having relevance

and resonating with the argument I am trying to construct. Firstly, by abundance there is a

reference to an idea of having too much 'out there' and that, while we will have an impact

with our contributions, the reality is that the content is irrelevant, all that matters in

communicative capitalism is adding to the pool (Dean, 2009, pp. 25–30). Second,

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[14] Baudrillard's essay "In the Shadow of the Silent Majorities", albeit out of scope for this thesis, presents an interesting analysis that is worth pursuing of the relation of the coming about of the masses, meaning, representation and spectacle and how these instances are—and here the influence of McLuhan is textual—influenced by the medium (Baudrillard, 1983, p. 35).

participation refers to thinking that our participation in the digital will actually make a contribution, when actually we are remaining politically passive and captured by technology fetishism (Dean, 2009, pp. 31–42). Lastly, wholeness speaks to the illusion of the digital allowing for far-reaching participation as the fullness of the global is simulated to being just a click away (Dean, 2009, pp. 42–48). In other words, Dean's arguments further underscore the illusory empowerment, the symbiotic relation to gadgets and our equating the clicks of the digital with the world. Dean also denies a normative argument, and rather talks about the digital as something we cannot run away from: "globally networked communications remain the very tools and terrains of struggle, making political change more difficult-and more necessary-than ever before" (Dean, 2009, p. 48).

There seems to be, then, an argument to be constructed about the digital being a possibility. We cannot get rid of it and must learn to make use of it. In this matter it seems as if it is up to the marginalized groups to fulfil this productive aspect of the internet, for it is up to them to use: "[…] the Internet as a means for the formation of counter-publics, the articulation of identities and oppositional discourses, and the contestation of the discursive boundaries of the mainstream public sphere" (Dahlberg, 2007, p. 60). A promising and exciting way of seeing the internet, but it does not really answer to how such use is achieved in a space that can also be read as a restricted one that serves to perpetuate the dominant discourse. Cass R. Sunstein, in his book *#Republic*, points towards this very aspect, as he argues against this notion of the digital as a seemingly very open space, and poses a contrasting view of it being a mediated space, which can be observed at an everyday level, by showing that our interactions online become carefully curated and manipulated by data companies and by social media (Sunstein, 2017). In other words, what we see and encounter in the digital has been pre-selected for us.

This is something which has been studied by Nolen Gertz specifically regarding Facebook, a platform that determines a great deal of how and what we communicate (Gertz, 2019, p. 67). Where, then, in such a space do we find the freedom to construct a counter-public as envisioned by Dahlberg? And even if a productive one does arise, how are we to ensure it is spread wide across? Going back to Bucher's argument, and my own, on not wanting to make a normative claim on the digital, I am not now arguing that no dissonant discourse has risen from the digital. Indeed, marginalized groups have in certain instances found ways to creatively and effectively use the internet as a tool for organization and achieving coverage. However, counter discourses must be wary and cautious of the fact that the use of this tool, to enter such space, is one that was not built for the dissonance purpose, and hence, the use of the tool, the entering of the space, might not be as welcoming to counter discourse as we want to think.

Until now I have addressed certain complexities of the digital: empowerment, symbiosis, seclusion in the digital space, censorship. Tufekci's work on social movements in a digital age is a good exemplary summation of all of these aspects. In "Social Movement and Governments in the Digital Age: Evaluating a Complex Landscape", she explains how the relation between activism and digital infrastructure is more nuanced than it might seem at first sight: as empowering as the digital infrastructure may be for protests and movements, it can lead to disempowering events (Tufekci, 2014b, p. 1). A vital reason for this, she points out, is because of how the digital infrastructure makes the organization process of protests easier, and in turn it demerits the collective capacity that would arise from having to organize a protest face to face:

> […] the digital infrastructure allows movements to carry out protests with the same size and energy as past protests but without similar organization capacity. While this appears a shortcut for protests, it also engenders weaknesses, as these protests do not

signal the same level of capacity as previous protests, and do not necessarily pose the same threat to governments and power. (Tufekci, 2014b, p. 15)

This idea is one which Tufekci develops further as she insists that the extra time required in the "traditional" ways of protest organization actually allows for the emergence of a collective thinking capacity that can see the movement through the challenges it will inevitably face (Tufekci, 2014a). This is an aspect which today's movements lack insofar as, precisely because of the characteristics of the digital, they are able to scale up very quickly but without the time and opportunity to form the collective thinking capacity. The 'easiness' of organizing movements through digital platform alters our very understanding of the mechanics behind them; we expect results just as fast as the organization was achieved.

We tend to think that participation has been made easier, more accessible, but, as Nico Carpentier points out, we do not even question what the meaning of such supposed participation actually is. Carpentier is insistent in saying that participation and access should not be confused as the same thing; participation, he points out, is a political concept: "Participation is not a fixed notion, but is deeply embedded within our political realities and thus is the object of long-lasting and intense ideological struggles" (Carpentier, 2011, p. 31), hence, when talking about participation we must also talk about power (Carpentier, 2011, p. 24) because participation is contingent for it functions through the power struggles of society. It is precisely by signalling its inherently political nature that Carpentier is able to signal that participation must, then, not be confused with access or interaction, as to do so means to devoid it of its political characteristics (Carpentier, 2011, p. 27).

To signal to this important differentiation of concepts brings us back to the conversation between democracy and the digital. Ideas regarding political participation in different democratic conceptions were brought to the fore, but after introducing Carpentier's work, we must beg the question of how true such participation actually is. Is it not rather the

disguising of access as participation? Dahlgren, picking up on Carpentier's work, points towards power as inherently within participation dynamics, and takes it a step further, as he analyses where we, as citizens, stand within such constellations of power and participation:

> The web and its ancillary technologies offer possibilities of engagement, but to what extent their use can enhance democratisation is still an open question. Not least it is clear that they can also be used by power centres to maintain control over the citizenry. (Dahlgren, 2011, pp. 98–99)

This is precisely what the ambiguity of the digital rests upon, it can be viewed as a space that offers possibilities of engagement, as well as a control mechanism to uphold neoliberalism. Control over the citizenry is an aspect of the digital immersed in the political that has, over recent years, become more and more evident. In recent years we have witnessed several scandals, for example, in dealing with how certain media companies have altered and re-shaped political moments and instances in accordance to their needs.

Gertz, I have mentioned, has studied this through Facebook. Facebook, he claims, can be seen in four ways: as profile, as platform, as corporation, and as Zuckerberg. As a profile, it shapes what and how we communicate, and in doing so it—supposedly—gives us a place to occupy in social relations; a matter that is underscored in Facebook as a platform. As a corporation, Facebook is that which lives in the background of the scandals it is involved in. Gertz here argues that such scandals, as important and grave as they are, should not be our concern, for they conceal Facebook's true nature which is working in the background, even with people that think they are not in it, but in reality any information that has been uploaded of them by family and friends, Facebook has stored a shadow profile (Gertz, 2019, p. 69). This is also exemplified in understanding Facebook as Mark Zuckerberg, and hence falling into the mistake of seeing the distraction that Facebook throws our way—in this case through the concentration on one person—from its very present capitalist ambitions as like any other corporation (Gertz, 2019, p. 70). This is the crucial aspect of Facebook, and the digital; that

which happens, which we do not even realize. Just as important, then, as it is to pay attention to the ways in which the digital offers possibilities of engagement, it is to look into the ways in which it may not be. If we fail to look at both sides, we fail to have a conversation as to why intents of activism and political critique coming from the digital might be failing:

> [We know from scholars such as] Weber, Michels and Foucault that forms of activism that become institutionalised over time and/or focus their attentions on trying to achieve change through existing institutional structures of power, become implicated in their tendencies to preserve the status quo and maintain 'order'. (De Jong, Shaw and Stammers, 2005, p. 5)

So, taken from the framing of Bucher, of the productivity of the ambivalence, I have aimed at fleshing out the different ways in which we think and talk about the digital today. The digital can be seen as the opening of new spaces for participation in politics, while at the same time questioning what the meaning of such participation actually looks likes. The digital allows for the voicing of opinions, with no certainty of where such opinions will end. The digital can be a powerful tool for the organizing of social movement, while weakening them by the rapidity in which they form. The digital allows us to have the latest news at the reach our phones with one rapid click, as it also permits us to reconnect with friends living far away, and in doing so, secludes us in the virtuality. The digital makes it possible to buy anything by just clicking, but also permits for the tracking of our every thought and every move. I have not intended to offer a normative argument regarding the digital, it is not that I wish to defend it as inherently negative but, rather, as complex, as ambivalent. And, in such ambivalence, we are made subjects; a particular type of subject that comes about from the governing practices. The digital as a governing practice makes us into a particular understanding of the world, one in which the digital in itself is taken for granted.

The way that this chapter started was by offering an account of critical theory framed by the practices of governance and those governed by them. An account of critical theory

must offer an analysis of those regimes of practices, those discourses, which govern, which make, which subject. And, it must also offer an account of those it is governing, making and subjecting. To make an argument for an analysis of the subject as the governed side of the critical theory analysis is not without its complications. First and foremost, it poses a concern over individualizing arguments. I outlined in the previous chapter the preoccupations that Foucault's analysis of the subject poses. These critiques also resonate with the underscoring of the subject generally speaking in critical theory, regardless of Foucault. Ultimately, in a world where the political is social, the signalling to singularity may seem problematic. This is not to say that there is an utter dismissal of the subject, but rather it is seen with little hope of critical possibilities. Let us take Dean's argument on this respect as an example. We have seen that Dean's term of communicative capitalism captures well the complexities of the digital, aspects which she takes a step further by underscoring that communicative capitalism operates through a system of desubjectivation (Dean, 2019, p. 174). Such a system is meant to show that our relation towards politics is one which is characterized by individualism:

> The spontaneous response is individual: outrage, a demand that something be done, a call for change. Communicative capitalism supplies the infrastructure for this spontaneous politics of the individual: mobile phones and social media. These media reward immediate reactions such as the tweet, the status update, signing of a petition, emailing a representative – individual activities all ancillary to the singular act said really to matter: voting. What passes for politics enslaves individuals ideologically to bourgeois individualism and its individualised political practices. Jobs are less reliable, and people feel like everything is more competitive, more precarious. More and more choices in a more and more complex and uncertain informational field are downloaded onto the individual, even as these individuated choices have little to no impact on the real determinations of our lives in a setting where satellites, fibre-optic cables, server farms, Big Data, and complex algorithms power high-speed trading, enable just-in-time production, intensify labour markets and concentrate wealth in ever fewer hands.
> (Dean, 2019, p. 173)

Given this desubjectivation evidenced by individuality, Dean argues that we should find the subject through the divided people, taking up that space as its constitutive lack (Dean, 2019, p. 175). The challenge of politics in communicative capitalism becomes to "make effective the power of the many – how the crowd can be in and for itself, that is, how crowds can produce effects that can be attributed to the divided people as their subject" (Dean, 2019, p. 179). For Dean, then, critique is that which is beyond collectivity, critique is collective (Dean, 2019, p. 182). Gertz, who also offered a more complex analysis of the digital, points to the fact that one of our great failures in understanding Facebook is our lack of analysis into how it shapes the public sphere and its role in it (Gertz, 2019, p. 66), or, in other words, we have failed at understanding the relation between Facebook and the collective.

Now, to make an argument for the subject should not be understood as a dismissal of collectivities and, indeed, there should be caution regarding enclosed individualism. But, I will argue that we must look at the subject as the governed side; it is that subject after all that makes the collectivity. How would we go about understanding the public sphere that the digital has created, as Gertz invites us to, if we do not understand the subject made by the digital, which in turn makes the public sphere? Through the practices of governance there is a particular type of subject being created which feeds into the collective, the public sphere. Not that an analysis of the subject should be seen as a dismissal of the power of the collective, but it simply offers an analysis of that which makes up the collective. The spaces within the crowds come alive by the subjects that constitute said mass. The hegemonic discourse is upheld by important mechanisms, one of them being the digital, but what matters from those mechanisms is how they aid in the making of the needed subject for the status quo.

Neoliberalism needs a particular subjectivity, one which the digital facilitates, thus why I deem it to be the precise possibility upon which critique towards this hegemonic order

must rise. The reader might notice, rightly so, that this mirrors the defence I offered of Foucault's own focus on the subject in the last stage of his work. And, indeed, I argued for Foucault's turn to the subject to not be seen as a renunciation for previous work, or an individualistic enclosing, an argument which speaks to the case I am now trying to make about the subject's relevance.

Throughout this chapter I have offered a reading of the digital which signals to its ambivalence, its complexity of positives and negatives. I defended characterizations such as quantified, symbiotic and secluded in order to underscore an analysis that goes beyond a simplistic understanding of the digital as a tool which serves who uses it with no repercussion. I have also signalled to an argument that this complex tool-like concept is one that enacts governing practices, which in turn make a particular type of subject. This particular type of subject I have contended we should underscore and better understand, mirroring Foucault's interest in the subject, if we are to achieve a critical exercise. This I have defended as not being a dismissal of the collective, or the public, but rather as an accentuation of this aspect by paying particular attention to the singularity which makes them. In the next chapter I turn to the fleshing out of who is the digital subject. I build upon the characterizations already offered and defend an account of the digital subject as depoliticized.

IV.   Chapter Four: The Depoliticized Digital Subject.

The previous chapter started by taking Tully's approach to critical theory as one that must look at both governance and the governed. I claimed that we can take the digital to signify an exemplary case of the governing practices and, thus, has an important role to play in the way we become subjects. In doing so, I outlined a reading of the digital by paying particular emphasis to its ambivalence, and in doing so brought to the fore important characteristics: quantification, symbiosis and seclusion. I tried to show that the digital is a complex tool-like space which works to make a particular type of subject, one that serves the status quo. So, it is not so much about the characteristics drawn out of the digital in themselves but what they signify for the subject being made. In this chapter I turn to construct the governed subject, one that I will characterize as a depoliticized one.

I offered a very loose definition of the digital as the "exacerbated use of the internet through gadgets", and I did so purposely. I wanted to suggest a definition of the digital that could encompass many facets: the use of internet, social media, symbiosis with smartphones (gadgets), the quantification of data through the tracing of habits, the individualizing aspect of social media. I wanted a definition which would serve for both people who are 'active' partakers in the digital, but also for those that think of themselves as outside of it. Moreover, I wanted a definition that would lead to an instinctual understanding of the term, precisely because of how hard such a term is to pin down. Gane and Beer discuss in their book *New Media* (2008) that to define concepts that relate to the digital, or *new media* in their terms, is tough: "[these] are concepts that make thought possible but at the same time are hard to pin down and analyse" (Gane and Beer, 2008, p. 3). This is very much the case for the digital. To hear such term no doubt immediately makes ideas and thoughts jump out, but an actual pinning down of the concept is difficult. Sleeping with our phones next to us, no separation between home and work, using different application to track our everyday habits, from the

quality of our sleep to the amount of water drank, our need to post on our social media our

every opinion and even the most mundane activities, the panic of not feeling our mobile

phones in our pockets, all of these are the digital. And, all of these are instances I take will

not surprise the reader, she will find herself—in some way—reflected in these examples.

Such an open definition thus helps the reader to engage in thought experiments and

exercises, arriving at an 'instinctual' understanding of the term, a gut-like feeling, regardless

of it being difficult to pin down its specificity. The above examples also allowed the reader to

set herself in the pervasiveness of the digital. We know of these everyday examples, we know

how intrusive they are, and still, we participate in them. We know how invasive and

damaging the digital is, yet we continue to take part in it. In his analysis of online

participation, Dahlgren says: "Foucault suggests that discipline is participatory: we often

more or less willingly participate in disciplining mechanisms. This seems to be very much the

case in our daily patterns of use online" (Dahlgren, 2011, p. 101). We know that the

information of ourselves we feed into any online platform no longer belongs to us. We know

that having our emails in our phones is detrimental for our wellbeing and allows for further

work exploitation. We know that social media has augmented depression in younger

generations. We know we are losing our sense of privacy. We know, and still, we participate.

We participate because we are made to participate. We are made to participate in our own

quantification, our own symbiotic relation with the gadgets. This chapter will, precisely, flesh

this out and argue for the mechanisms that bring this about.

Taking from Foucault's genealogical stage, I will look into the disciplinary

mechanisms—understood as the logics that reinforce certain enactments of and within the

political at play in our current subjection process from which we emerge as a certain subject.

I must emphasize once more that the drawing out of these characteristics is not to construct a

view of the digital as bad, but rather to further highlight its complexity, or its danger in more

Foucauldian terms. Moreover, I do not wish to argue that it is only through the digital's

mechanisms that we become subjects. Rather, as I have insisted before, I take this tool-like

space to be an exemplary and paradigmatic case that serves for illustration purposes.

The Digital through Foucault

<u>Discipline through the Panoptic</u>

Perhaps the most obvious link between Foucault's thought and the digital is the idea of the

panoptic and the discipline it instilled. The panoptic was an idea that arose from the

genealogical stage, and referenced a particular architectural figure, envisioned as a prison.

Such figure, a tower surrounded by a circle of cells, was built in such a way that the guard on

the top of the tower was capable of seeing inside each and every one of the cells, but the

inmates had no possibility of seeing the guard. In other words, the prisoners knew they could

always be watched but had no way to confirm if they were actually guarded. Perpetual

surveillance is the way in which the Foucauldian panopticon is carried into analyses of the

digital. Mark Poster, for example, takes the notion of the panopticon to only be exacerbated

since Foucault's writing because of the development of the internet and databases (Poster,

1990, p. 121). For Poster, the panopticon of the nineteenth century had limitations which the

technological growth witnessed by the end of the twentieth century eliminated, creating what

he coins the *Superpanopticon* (Poster, 1990, pp. 121–122). Jeffrey Nealon is another author

who underscores the work of Foucault on this aspect, as he particularly uses such ideas to

signal the resurgence of discipline and the panopticon, which can be seen in the constant

government surveillance on its citizens and how it becomes official unquestioned policy

(Nealon, 2008, p. 3).

What is relevant when using the idea of the panopticon as a tool of thought is to

understand that the actual architectural figure is used in Foucault's writing as a means of

expressing an idea. It is not that the actual interest in *Discipline and Punish* was this prison design in itself, but what it meant. And, what it signified was the idea of visible but unverifiable power (Foucault, 1995). It is enough to instil in the mind the possibility of surveillance for good behaviour, such is the prime characteristic of the disciplinary power, one that disciplines the body as much as it does the mind or, in other words, the subject is disciplined into suitable behaviour. Now, needless to say, the use of Foucauldian thought for the analysis of the digital is not without critiques and problems, one of the most important being the time passed since his writings. When Foucault wrote *Discipline and Punish* the technological advancement that would come out of the internet in the nineties was still to be lived. Indeed, the last 30 years have signified an unparalleled technological growth—one so rapid that we cannot even comprehend its impact. Nonetheless this does not mean that Foucault's ideas are not fitting for the analysis being offered. Rather, I take his ideas to be further amplified. The expansion of the internet into the digital world which we inhabit today has only underscored the perpetual unverifiable surveillance, an aspect which we know and yet still participate in, further proving the disciplining into willing participation.

As soon as you do a google search of any product, the rest of your digital encounters will be filled by advertisements of such products or related ones. It has been said that one does not even need to do the search, but just talk about it, and our phones listen and in turn show us the pertinent promotions. Or, depending on our patterns of use of digital media, it can be guessed our age, interests, relationship status, ideological stance and a virtual profile of us is created to cater and target publicity and digital information. If we take part in online shopping, which is more and more the trend, our finances and expenditure habits become part of the digital machinery. Any photography we upload to social media, we immediately lose rights over. In fact, this applies to all of our information uploaded to social media. We give up the property of our information, so much so that in recent years a debate on the 'right to be

forgotten'[15] has underscored the discussion regarding the fact that online platforms refuse to erase or take down profiles of people, even of those that have passed away. We know all of this. The surveillance of our everyday life through the digital is patent; we know that anything and everything that we feed into the digital becomes a weapon of control:

> Every click that one makes is stored. Every step that one takes can be traced. We leave digital tracks everywhere. Our digital life is reflected, point for point, in the Net. The possibility of logging each and every aspect of life is replacing trust with complete control. Big Brother has ceded the throne to Big Data. The total recording of life is bringing the society of transparency to completion. (Han, 2017, p. 71)

We know this. We know that the digital trace is undeniable, from the moment we make an email address, from the first online shop that we do, from the second we activate a social media account, and there is no going back. Moreover, we know that we do not have ownership over that digital trace, whatever we do, anything we "upload", anything we "share" we lose possession over. *Every click that one makes is stored.* As the digital evolves, this reality reaches even more absurd levels. Today it is seen as 'healthy' and fashionable to allow an app to track your sleep pattern, or your water intake, or the number of steps you have taken. Our daily habits, as personal and intimate as they may be, are now also part of the digital and we give them willingly. We are always being watched, even when we cannot truly spell out who is watching us or from where. But, still, we feed the machine. We do so because this is the way in which we understand how to be a subject; we are created into this participatory surveillance scheme.

We are made to participate and to take for granted. We take for granted what our own participation in such surveillance does. And we take for granted that this meaning we grant to being subjected through the digital is not 'natural'. We are made to think that this is

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[15] Debates and legalities around this topic centre themselves on the attempt to regulate the indefinite storage of personal information on web pages by different organisations (GDRP, 2021).

unescapable. How many times we might have thought "well yes, I know I am actively participating in my own surveillance, but I cannot escape it", and so this seems to be reason enough to continue in actively participating in our own discipline. And so, like it was in the prison analysis offered by Foucault in 1976, in the digital we are normalized to take for granted the contingent, effectively depoliticizing us. The digital presents itself as incontestable, and by doing so it marginalizes and diminishes its political reality, and as subjects made by the digital, we buy this.

The subjection process undergone through the digital is one that normalizes us into, precisely, not questioning such a process, or accepting such surveillance: "Subjectification takes a particular from in neoliberalism, in which subject self-defines in terms of their status for the external quantified gaze" (Moore and Robinson, 2015, p. 2). This is something which further underscored the value of Foucault's tools of thought, for it allows it to be shown that we are made into subjects that have had not only our conducts normalized to a certain pattern but also our attitudes (Foucault in Moore and Robinson, 2015, p. 2). We might think that we are trying to contest, through certain key points of vigilance—the internet, laptops, smartphones, tablets—but we cannot really point towards the one who invigilates us, we can signal to structures, and agents, but, ultimately, we do not know who is the ultimate tower keeper of the panopticon. This takes us back to Gertz's arguments about Facebook and how unproductive it is to equate Facebook with Zuckerberg, who of course is a key figure, but the vigilance of the digital goes beyond him. If it were not him, it would be someone else. Visible but unverifiable power. We have come to believe that our engagement in the digital space is freeing when, in fact, we live the most powerful and subtle of repressions. Visible but unverifiable power. We feed our information into the digital because we have been disciplined to be validated by the digital.

The digital self sees as normal the perpetual recording of its being. It is normal for the digital subject to record its every biological move: sleep patterns, number of steps taken, number of glasses of water drank in the day. It is not only normal, but desirable; doing so tells the quantified self something about their health. Quantification moves beyond biology: number of emails answered, number of 'likes' on social media, number of 'friends' on Facebook, number of 'views' on social media platforms. This quantification we equate with value, with worth, with a supposed purpose of life achieved. We have been made into subjects that understand through quantification, we have been stripped down to the number in order to become politically lacking subjects. This surveillance, discipline and our active participation in it, serve a purpose; power mechanisms are not gratuitous. Furthermore, this disciplined surveillance is one that does not uphold on its own, it is in need of other mechanisms. And, very much like Foucault himself pointed out, one of them is discourse itself.

<u>Mediation of Discourse</u>

It is not an odd idea to pose the digital as a space that controls or mediates the ideas being shared. One of the ways in which the digital has been signalled to in a critical manner is precisely because of the echo chambers it creates: through the digital people tend to only interact with people that think alike, which in turns makes it seem as if everyone thinks the same. This is one of the aspects which shows how little 'free' flow discourse has in the digital, which brings to the fore the second Foucauldian characteristic I will make use of to construct the digital subject. It was indeed Foucault's genealogical stage that began by precisely offering an analysis of how discourse is mediated. In his inaugural lecture at the College de France, later published under the name *The Order of Discourse*, Foucault poses the query of "What is so perilous, then, in the fact people speak, and that their speech

proliferates? Where is the danger in that?" a question which he answers by offering the hypothesis that:

> In every society the production of discourse is controlled, selected, organised and redistributed according to a certain number of procedures, whose role is to avert its powers and its dangers, to cope with chance events, to evade its ponderous, awesome materiality. (Foucault, 1971c, p. 8)

What unravels from this lecture is the triad of terms that would characterize the next ten years of his work: knowledge-power-truth. Ultimately the argument becomes one of underscoring how Western society is one where the will to speak truth rules above anything else: we are forced to speak truth above anything else. But, if this truth is one that stems from a controlled discourse, what truth are we actually being forced to speak? By signalling to how intertwined power, knowledge and truth are, Foucault then poses the idea that there is in fact no scientific or objective knowledge or truth. If discourse is controlled, then so are truth and knowledge. Taking from Foucault, Wendy Brown states that "the representation that flows from speech is not without power; rather it is a vital field of its practice" (Brown, 2008, p. 71). Furthermore, by arguing that truth arising from a mediated power shows the falsehood of objectiveness and scientificity, he also hints towards power's productive quality. Power is not only repressive, Foucault famously stated; if it were who would obey it? Power's complexity and inescapability is not explained solely because of its repressive aspects, rather it is the productive dimension of power which proves extremely alluring. Power's productive quality starts to tie in with the disciplinary aspect of the previous section. We are created, produced, to comply in certain respects, and one of the instances we are made to submit to is surveillance.

I take that Foucault's analysis of the mediation of discourse offers productive tools of analysis within the digital on two levels. Firstly, the simple, obvious and literal mediation of discourse that we find within the digital, that is: censorship. I have hinted at this in the

previous chapter by the use of Sunstein's work. Our online interactions are carefully curated and manipulated by data companies and what we are shown has been preselected for us (Sunstein, 2017). The era f the digital is one of supposed easy access to information, but we do not really know what is actually the scope of the information nor the part of it that we are really seeing. This control of what we are exposed to serves a purpose, not only of 'censorship', but of an objective simulation which produces truth and knowledge. There is a specific goal being chased in the construction of this curated discourse, a precise truth-power-knowledge triad, which is built to purposely simulate being neutral and objective. The mediation of discourse on the superficial level is one that functions to create the production of a supposedly neutral discourse which veils its power mechanisms and inhibits critique—in other words, it depoliticizes. This should not be surprising, as Brown argued when analysing capitalism and media, the media is one of the key aspects for the thriving of capitalism and, thus, we cannot expect for media to be critical of that which it is helping uphold. Critique of the system cannot arise from the mechanisms that enforce the system (Brown, 2002, p. 563). Such an argument is relevant here, insofar as the digital is today one of the great upholding mechanisms of neoliberalism; why, then, would we expect to find within one of the core spaces of neoliberalism the tools to critique such system? And so, rather, what we are witnessing is the digital actively depoliticizing us.

This simulation of the digital's discourse being neutral and objective, almost natural, is what I take the second level of mediation of discourse to be, the mediation of not only what is said and what remains unsaid, but more so the mediation of meaning in itself. What I mean by this is that we have failed to take into account the meaning that the digital creates, and which undoubtedly creates us. The digital mediates a discourse, a meaning, that makes us. And this meaning is one that makes us take for granted the non-objective aspect of the digital. We are made by a discourse that presents itself as neutral, where the advancement of

technology is to be appreciated, and the downsides of it (surveillance and control) are presented, simply, as an inescapable part of this, and in such a way we are encouraged to continue feeding the machine.

We are made into subjects in a tool-like space that, first and foremost, wants to be understood as natural, objective, given. There is a seclusion of its contingency, there is a seclusion of the political and, thus, we are depoliticized. The reader here might want to point out that through the digital we have seen and encountered valuable moments of social and political unrest, which is true and I do not mean to take away any value from them. However, I see these as periodic outbursts of 'political' outcry, those moments of supposed political indignation towards certain crises or injustices, which the digital, for a few brief moments, makes a priority. We are a society of outrage and scandal, says Han, but those aspects are ephemeral and dissipate soon in the digital (Han, 2017, p. 7) for they rise upon isolated individuals with no common spirit (Han, 2017, p. 10). People go online and post their political opinions. A piece of news will ignite anger and, thus, the expression of outcry on their online profiles, which might be followed by other people chiming in. But then, the day will carry on. Or, if the news is something of more magnitude, probably we will also join in a viral hashtag campaign. But, then again, not much will happen from it. As Zygmunt Bauman says, these periodic outcries do not hold within them the possibility of true political change due to their inadequacy in the face of human misery gestated in the new global ethical void (Bauman in Dahlberg and Siapera, 2007, p. 2). Or, in other words, the mere expressions of indignation, even if well intentioned, have nothing to grip onto if they are posed in a space empty of critical and political insight.

Biopower

Panoptic discipline and mediation of discourse are not separate aspects of the digital, rather, they are closely intertwined. The meaning which the digital creates, feeds into the

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participatory nature we have within the disciplinary aspect of the digital, as I have argued.

These are instances which in Foucault's work itself are not separate either. The argument of

discourse being mediated and as a result, truth and knowledge, implicates the argument

offered for the disciplinary mechanisms of power. These two aspects meet at the end of the

genealogical stage, they reach a climax, where Foucault argues that the idea of disciplining

the mind and body is maximized through the idea of normalizing, subjection happens then

through normalization. Or, in other words, biopower is born. Biopower was Foucault's notion

of a power that reached its maximum potential, power over life:

> [T]he set of mechanisms through which the basic biological features of the human
> species became the object of a political strategy, of a general strategy of power, or, in
> other words, how, starting from the eighteenth century modern Western societies took
> on board the fundamental biological fact that human beings are a species. This is
> roughly what I have called biopower. (Foucault, 2009, p. 1)

Biopower becomes the medium of control between the "normal" and the "abnormal", in and

through life, as it normalizes—quantifies—the mind. In this last mutation of power, "the idea

of sovereign of power makes room for the careful administration and control of population"

(Han, 2017, p. 77). The careful administration and control of population is not something

achieved in an explicit manner, but rather by the way in which subjects are already made into,

to act in the way that is desired from them.

As I try to move this argument towards the digital, I want to be clear in saying that I

do not mean to say that the digital is the sole mechanism of normalization or that the digital

and biopower are synonyms. Rather, the argument here is that the digital is one of the

mechanisms that uphold the workings of biopower, or the hegemonic discourse, today, and it

does so because it has proved itself extremely useful in this regard. The digital is one of the

most effective mechanisms in dictating what is normal and what is not. We 'understand' the

world through our screens. We deem as normal the perpetual feeding of our information to a

machine we do not own or really understand. We deem as normal that we must have an email account in order to be able to work. It is normal to count on the mobile phone as the baseline for any social interaction. It is normal to have an app, which we do not know who created or who commands, tell us how good a workout we did or how many glasses of water we must still drink to be labelled as 'healthy'. We deem as normal the creation of an erasable virtual trace. We see as normal the elimination of the dividing line between work and home. We deem as normal, as understandable and acceptable, that more and more we merge into one with the digital, more and more we connect less with the world.[16]

The digital seems to be in every part of our lives, it controls populations and we take it to be normal, natural, a given. It is this perceived sense of normality that precisely signals to the depoliticization that characterizes the digital, as it covers over contestation and contingency, as it sells itself a discourse sedimented for good with no possibility of change. We are made into subjects that will not see the digital's normality as contingently constructed. Through the digital, the seclusion of the political that serves the grip of the neoliberal hegemonic discourse becomes actualized through the subjects that we become. Power over life:

> New media makes users more vulnerable to surveillance and other forms of control. Perhaps never before has the distinction between empowerment and vulnerability, between recognition and control, been thinner. (Brighenti quoted in Dahlgren, 2011, pp. 98–99)

We are vulnerable to the control and surveillance of the digital. We are vulnerable to understanding the world solely through the normalization the digital dictates. It is not, as I have been insistent upon, that the digital is in itself bad, I have made no normative argument.

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[16] Juxtaposing these ideas to those of Baudrillard's text *Simulacra and Simulation* (Baudrillard, 1981) would result in interesting further research. His text would be an invitation to further flesh out the interplay of reality and representation that underly my argument.

Rather, I have tried to signal its dangers, to the nuances that we resist exposing. And so, yes, while the digital can be seen as empowering as it allows for participation in politics, it also makes us vulnerable due to its surveillance. While the digital can grant us recognition as we see ourselves with more spaces to do politics, it no doubt also controls us.

The underscoring of the aspect of control here is one that echoes Deleuze's "Postscript of the Societies of Control", where he makes the argument that what follows Foucault's analysis of the disciplinary society is that of societies of control: the discipline that certain enclosed spaces enforced (family, school, factories, hospitals) starts to escape the specificity of location. Deleuze argues that while, in the disciplinary society "one was always starting again" (Deleuze, 1992, p. 5), in the societies of control "one is never finished with anything" (Deleuze, 1992, p. 5) because such societies instil their control through the openness, through the mutation of its medium, through the inescapability of consumption;[17] aspects which resonate with the argument I am building regarding the digital. Deleuze says:

> There is no need to ask which is the toughest or most tolerable regime, for it is within each of them that liberating and enslaving forces confront one another. For example, in the crisis of the hospital as environment of enclosure, neighbourhood clinics, hospices, and day care could at first express new freedom, but they could participate as well in mechanisms of control that are equal to the harshest of confinements. There is no need to fear or hope, but only to look for new weapons. (Deleuze, 1992, p. 4)

I find such an idea fitting with the portrayal of the digital I am offering. I am not interested in concluding the digital to be the most tool-like controlling space, nor am I trying to enclose it in a normative reading (either positive or negative). Rather, what I want to offer is a reading of the digital the underscores the complexities that make it, for only in such a way can we

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[17] An interesting angle that could be added to further this discussion is the work of Jean Baudrillard in *The Consumer Society* (Baudrillard, 1970). The idea defended there being how consumption has become the major feature of society, so much so that humans now find themselves surrounded not by other human beings, but by objects (Baudrillard, 1970, p. 25).

bring new weapons to better critique and thus fight the hegemonic discourse. Nonetheless, before being able to convincingly make an argument for what such a 'weapon' would look like, I must first conclude the argument of that which the digital, in its control and inescapability, is creating.

<u>Useful and Docile Bodies</u>

Ultimately, these three aspects of Foucault's thought come together into his argument of how bodies are created, offered in his text *Discipline and Punish.* While the idea of biopower is not explicitly drawn out in this text, and would rather be exposed in the next book of his to be published (the introduction to *History of Sexuality*), it is still evidently traceable. *Discipline and Punish* is an analysis of the historicity of the penitentiary system and its particular and contextual political economies, ultimately the rise and sedimentation of the prison as the only punishment system for law offenders is explained by it serving the objective of manufacturing useful and docile bodies (Lemke, 2019). I offered in chapter one an overview of Foucault's work, in which I said that his analysis of the penitentiary system starts by signalling to prisons deemed as natural and objective, which begs the question, why: why do we take the prison as a natural and given part of the way we structure society? Foucault offers the juxtaposition of corporal and public punishment versus the timely regulated manner of inmates scheduled inside prisons, to highlight the incoherency of seeing the prison as the 'natural' and perpetual form of punishment. The genealogical analysis offers a historically dependent account of political economies and their mutations to meet the needs of power within particular times and characteristics: from a sovereign power that thrives and reinstates its power through publicly punishing bodies, a penal reform in between to meet the economic needs of the time, to the finalized prison system being instated. If one looks at these events without questioning the context and the power mechanisms at play, one might, wrongly, conclude that the penal reform in between these two conceptions of sanctions had the purpose

of treating legal offenders in a more humane manner, placing their dignity as a matter of concern which then made the corporal and public punishment disappear. However, when one looks closer, at the role of the body, one can gather nuances that tell a different story. With the prison, the body remains as the target of punishment, even if not in the gruesome way that it was with the corporal punishment (Foucault, 1995, pp. 104–131).

A genealogical analysis of the prison system, one that looks meticulously into the historical moments, context and into the micro power mechanisms (Foucault, 1971b, p. 145), brings to the fore that which power's discourse had tried to disguise in a supposed concern for dignity, and shows that the mutation between forms of punishment has very little to do with a yearning for more humane treatment of criminals and, rather, more to do with finding the most efficient ways to punish. Succinctly put, the public corporal punishment represented an economic loss for the sovereign power for it was an event that presented a disruption in society given that the days prior to the punishment, parties and celebrations would be held. The penal reform intended to solve this issue more than the hideousness of the sentence. It was at this moment in history that the beginning of capitalism and the reign of the bourgeoisie was rapidly coming into being and the protection of the economy became paramount. Amongst the many ways in which the penal reform tried to safeguard the economy's interest was with the prison and soon enough the prison showed itself to serve the economy in a profound way. In such a way, incarceration became the main form of castigation insofar that it maximized the benefits of punishment at the minimum cost. The prison system met the need of a penal economy that wanted to minimize costs and the prison showed just that: surveillance was more efficient than punishment. Such efficiency however—and this was the key—had not only to do with brute economic costs, but with how deep the prison system was implanted into the society.

The power of the prison is, thus, not restricted to the actual building of confinement but to the discourse of surveillance within society. Foucault uses the idea of the panopticon to exemplify this, a figure already described in the previous section. The brilliance of this architectural edifice is that the possibility of being watched is enough to instil control and good behaviour in the inmates. It is subtle, but knowing of the perpetual possibility of being watched is an extremely powerful mechanism of control. Moreover, and this is the key, this allegory is not only restricted and functional in the prison system per se, but to society as a whole. The prison is more so a symbolization of control.

The prison, says Foucault, serves beyond the depriving of freedom to the criminal, it makes the rest of society think that they are free. There is the edifice of the prison and the citizens outside of it, what better proof of being free? This makes all the other spaces which serve as controlling mechanisms go unquestioned: how we are indoctrinated at school, the way the medical discourse impacts our lives, the supposedly objective discourse between state and citizens, and so on. And so, *Discipline and Punish* ends by making a case for how disciplinary power finds its maximization through normalizing power, which shows the beginning of what Foucault's work on biopower will become: perpetual surveillance works because it is enacted by the normalized discourse of control. We see, as I have mentioned, the prison as 'objective', as the 'natural' way in which to punish the offenders. We understand schools and universities to be spaces of 'scientific' and 'objective' knowledge. We take madness to be 'obviously' placed as the counterpart of rationality and, thus, excluded by it. The normalized discourse of control is one embedded in the inner most parts of our societies and ourselves, our bodies. *Discipline and Punish*, then, is not making the argument of docile and useful bodies exclusively by pointing towards the individual body, but the social body in its entirety.

This move however from docility into being useful is performed in a particular way, in the upholding of the hegemonic discourse. Let's bring this back to the digital's mechanisms. The panoptic discipline of the digital, its visible but unverifiable power. We are aware of the perpetual possibility of being watched, and this is enough to continue to feed the machine that which it asks of us. Anything we feed we cannot take back, it is there out of our control. The mediation of discourse, the making of a digital meaning that makes us understand our lives through virtual screens, that makes us see the digital as understandable, desirable, incontestable. Docility of being controlled even in the most intimate aspects of our lives. The digital has, we can affirm, power over life. To be sure, I am not trying to make the argument that the digital is a prison but, rather, as Foucault himself made use of this architectural figure, I am drawing a parallel with the way that the digital today also serves the creation of useful and docile bodies. Bodies that, given the mechanisms that bring them about, live through quantification, individualization, seclusion to the virtual, all with the sole purpose of taking for granted the political.

A docile and useful body, individual and social, to maintain the hegemonic discourse of the time. A docile and useful body as the one that takes for granted, that accepts without shadow of a doubt. Discourse not only as the speech dictated by the ruling figures but, most importantly, as the meaning that regulates life and body. Just as the meaning that makes the prison system into a 'natural' part of society, as the 'obvious and objective' manner of punishment, as that which allows for the 'free society' narrative to all those citizens that are out of the prison system, comes the meaning that makes the digital appear as incontestable, a neutral tool, a technological advancement not to be criticized. The docile and useful body of the unquestioned discourse. The useful and docile bodies that naturalizes the depoliticization of everyday life by secluding contingency.

Through the promise of empowerment, through disguising the complexities of political transformation by the number of 'likes' on a social media post, through making us believe that being able to tweet to the head of government actually poses significance, the digital has secluded the political. The digital has depoliticized the political. The political praxis has been relegated and secluded, and we see the public space more so devoted to the exercise of politics than the political. As discussed, the depoliticization we see in the "the significance of an issue or norm is systematically diminished or marginalized" (Roussos, 2019, p. 267), which we see in the digital's imposing of the taken for granted truth. This is indeed the matter of the digital, for of course as I pose the digital to be part of a hegemonic discourse, I could only do so by admitting it as political: the digital is hegemonic precisely because it is political. But the gripping of the digital depends precisely on the discourse and mechanisms which it creates and upholds, and which makes us take them for granted. We have come to take for granted the discourse that makes us subjects, a discourse that is not in itself apolitical, but that secludes the exercise of critique of that which has made us be. The depoliticization that I see in the digital subject is, precisely, the absence of contestation, the seclusion of contingency and uncertainty. Or, to begin to bring this back to the care of the self, the depoliticization in the digital is the imposing of a certain truth.

The Depoliticized Digital Subject

The ideas underscored up until now (mediation of discourse, panoptic discipline, and biopower) characterize Foucault's genealogical stage and reach a climax in his analysis of bodies, as I have also drawn out a parallel. These notions bring to the fore an understanding of power that can embrace everything including, of course, the subject. This is why, as I argued in chapter 2, contrary to many critiques, I do not see Foucault's work as disconnected in between stages. From a stage of thought that culminates in an analysis of power that runs through the subjection process, what else but an analysis of the subject as resistance could

have followed? The subject made into particular characteristics and needs for the hegemonic discourse. In *Discipline and Punish* the following quote appears:

> Our society is one not of spectacle, but of surveillance; under the surface of images one invests bodies in depth; behind the great abstraction of exchange, there continues the meticulous, concrete training of useful forces; the circuits of communication are the supports of an accumulation and a centralization of knowledge; the play of signs defines the anchorages of power; it is not that the beautiful totality of the individual is amputated, repressed, altered by our social order, it is rather that the individual is carefully fabricated in it, according to a whole technique of forces and bodies. (Foucault, 1995, p. 217)

The individual is carefully fabricated. We are made into subjects. We are made into subjects by the articulation of contingent meaning. As I have drawn these Foucauldian tools of thought out of the digital, I have shown that we are made into subjects that participate in our surveillance through the mediated discourse that makes us take the digital as a given, as natural, as normal. The digital, as a mechanism to uphold the hegemonic discourse, serves to control populations through the farce of normality, much like biopower. We are, as the quote says, fabricated into and by a society of surveillance, by a society with disguised mechanisms that simulate themselves as empowering technological advancements.

The normalized surveillance makes us then into depoliticized subjects. Depoliticized because it masks the contingency of the discourse, we are made to comprehend the world as one in which the digital is unequivocally given, and its functioning is incontestable masking in this way the contingency of its discourse. It is not only the digital that masks itself as incontestable, but also the way in which we are made into subjects. I have signalled to certain characteristics: quantification, (false) empowerment, symbiosis and seclusion, that make up the subject we are today, all of which work in securing the depoliticization that makes us. These aspects are, of course, not exhaustive, but they offer a well-rounded picture of the ways in by which the depoliticization is exemplified.

We count ourselves and allow ourselves to be counted. We understand the world through quantities and quantifications. Moore's work signalled to this, the quantified subject exploited in the workplace, but as I underscored quantification goes beyond that. Today, we are counted and we count, as Han says. It is not only that within the workplace the employer quantifies us, as with the example of warehouse workers, but that we as employees also quantify ourselves in each of our workplaces. How many emails have I answered? How many clients have I tended to? How many words did I write today? And, beyond work: how many likes did my Facebook status received? How many people commented on my picture? How many people saw my latest restaurant picture? How many glasses of water have I drunk according to my health app? We have become so accustomed to counting and being counted that we see the world through numbers, and we lose sight of what is in between those numbers or what those numbers signify.

We feel a sense of empowerment as we believe that, because of the tool-like aspects of the digital, this allows us to 'feel' as if we can have an impact on politics. Using the trendy hashtag, being able to tweet 'directly' at our politicians, being 'free' to post any opinion about anything, thinking that the world and politics work in the same mechanical way as the phone we are using to connect. We do not even care to realize the dangerous commodity fetishism symbiosis which rules us today. We are one with our gadgets; we are one with our phones, our tablets, and our laptops as we deem that it is through them that we achieve the validation of the quantified empowerment. This, of course, secludes us, it hides us from the world, it makes us captives of the tool-like space of the digital, it makes our gaze only concerned for the virtual screen and for what it asks from us.

Our perpetual participation in the surveillance instilled upon us through a created meaning that controls us and entire populations in the most intimate way, exemplified by our understanding of the world as quantified, disciplined participation as empowerment and our

symbiosis and seclusion as biopower reaching every possible corner. We are made into depoliticized subjects insofar as we are made to offer no contestation to that which rules us. However, I must insist again that this is not a normative argument neither on the digital or its subject.

I am not trying to conclude that the digital is the culprit of the depoliticized subject I have described. Rather, going back to Gane and Beer and their argument in their analysis of networks and individualism, they pose that: "It is not the internet that created a pattern of networked individualism, but it does provide an appropriate material support for individualism" (Gane and Beer, 2008, p. 23). So, mirroring this argument for my particular interest, it is not that that digital inherently possesses the characteristics of panoptic discipline, mediation of discourse and biopower, but rather that given its properties it provides an extremely productive support for these aspects. Simply put, I am not trying to claim that regardless of its context, the digital would always unequivocally create depoliticized subjects. Rather, given the hegemonic neoliberal discourse, its pervasive governmentality functioning takes hold of the digital and shapes it to meets its needs. Thus, precisely because my argument is not to say that the digital is the culprit, a critical study of the digital must then leave space for a re-envisioning of how this tool-like space can be understood differently. And this rests in the subject itself, and also in the space it inhabits. Having understood the space as that in which boundaries are constructed politically, this means that boundaries can be changed (Howarth, 2006, p. 119) which allows for us to rethink the relation between the inside and the outside of the space that constitutes the self and vice versa. The question then becomes: how to do this?

How can we envision the digital differently, especially if the argument made up until now is how much it resembles Foucauldian characteristics? Where is the space left-over from the panoptic discipline and mediation of discourse that reach a climax through biopower? We

must not forget, as much as Foucault's critics like to do, that all theorization of power and its mechanisms leave room for freedom and, thus, for resistance. If there was nothing to be done, then no theorization would even matter. Even in the analysis from where these Foucauldian power mechanisms stems, like that of the prison, there is still room for possibility. And such possibility I find it to be in the coming about of a new type of subjectivity through the care of the self. To this I turn in the next and final chapter, where I attempt to bring together the two arguments in this dissertation into a third and final one.

V.   Chapter Five: The Critical (Digital) Subject.

There have been, up until now, two core arguments offered in this dissertation. On the one hand, I have offered a close reading of Foucault's care of the self and have defended it to be politically productive insofar it allows for a new type of subjectivity, a political one that reignites the possibility of critique. On the other, I have offered a critique of the digital space by highlighting the problematic subjectivity that arises from this space as one which is depoliticized. I have argued that such digital subjectivity is generated by highlighting three power mechanisms at work in the digital: mediation of discourse, panoptic discipline and biopower. Both contributions, however, have loose ends. I signalled at the end of the second chapter, the political reading of the care of the self, the *practicality* of such activity remained to be developed: how can we envision the care of the self in 'practical terms'? The previous chapter finished by claiming that other possibilities within the digital can be found, but I have not fleshed this out. It is the task of this chapter to build upon these two foundational pillars a new type of subjectivity.

I have highlighted that a reworking of his study on the care of the self allows us to start imagining a new subject. If we take the care of the self as a praxis in which the subject transforms itself through the bodily critique of limits, we can come to understand this as politically productive. In such a scenario, my analysis of the digital serves to exemplify in a less abstract way how to conceptualize this. The choosing of the digital is not coincidental; I have proposed it to serve as an exemplar of the hegemonic discourse today which makes us into subjects. It is not that our whole subjection process is entirely defined by the digital, but that focusing on such space serves to make the scope of analysis manageable within this thesis. So, the digital, being a mechanism of the hegemonic neoliberal discourse, is one of the important spaces that serves the subjection process of such discourse.

My loose definition of the digital served the purpose of allowing the reader to approach it through a more instinctual understanding, one that would provoke thought even if it was not a fully pinned down definition. Also, the phrasing of the definition served to emphasize this as not being a normative argument on the digital. Again, mirroring the argument of individualism not being inherent to networks (Gane and Beer, 2008, p. 23), it is not that that digital inherently possesses the characteristics of panoptic discipline, mediation of discourse and biopower, but rather that given its properties it provides an extremely productive support for these aspects. Simply put, I am not trying to claim that regardless of its context, the digital would always unequivocally create depoliticized subjects. Rather, given the hegemonic neoliberal discourse, its pervasive governmentality functioning, takes hold of the digital and shapes it to meets its needs. And, thus, precisely because my argument is not to say that the digital is the culprit, a critical study of the digital must then leave space for a re-envisioning of how this tool-like space can be understood differently.

Taking Foucault's own invitation to understand his work as a toolbox, I have taken key tools to argue how the digital resembles the creation of a particular type of body, of subject. I have constructed an argument where I pose that discourse—i.e., meaning—does not flow freely in the digital, and that this mediation is met by a panoptic like discipline, and these matters point towards understanding the digital mimicking biopower, power over life, and power and control over the population. I have argued this not only as a characteristic of the digital in of itself but because of the gadgets that come hand in hand with the digital: smartphones, tablets, smartwatches, laptops, all machines with which we form a symbiotic relation. This is an aspect which is becoming underscored in new media analysis: "as new media interfaces have become woven into the bodily and/or spatial materialities of everyday life, they have also been described as being ubiquitous or pervasive" (Gane and Beer, 2008, p. 60). The interface, the gadget that make the digital accessible, are becoming more and

more a part of us, making them and the digital pervasive and ubiquitous. Just like biopower, this is a ubiquitous power which merges into the body.

The point of bringing to the fore these characteristics of the digital is not out of interest in the characteristics themselves but in what they represent for the subjection process. Our inhabiting of the digital, making use of it, makes us affected by it; we understand the world differently, we relate to each other in different ways, we cannot think that this tool-like space has no impact in the way in which we construct ourselves as subjects and the way we related and become subjects. And, the subjects we become, I have argued to be depoliticized, as we are made to take meaning as given, as objective, to take for granted all the mechanisms that make it and uphold it. Hence, the importance of a political reading of Foucault's care of the self for a possible new subjectivity.

The second chapter, the political reading of the care of the self, finished by hinting that it would be through the idea of *askēsis* where we would find the way through which to understand the bodily critique of limits in a more practical manner. Obviously, it is not meant that I want to argue for such practice and technique to be brought into our day-to-day life as they were practiced in Antiquity—this would be non-sensical. Rather, like a toolbox, it is about seeing what works for the task we are encountering and make use out of that. My call for reading the care of the self as a political productive activity today means to understand what was at its core as an activity in Antiquity and re-articulate this core to make use of it today. What was it about *askēsis* that made it significant in better understanding the practical manner of the care of the self, and how then do we bring it about today? As already advanced in pervious chapters, this is something which Foucault leaves unfinished, presenting a limitation in this work, and hence why this chapter will make use of complementary thoughts and analyses.

The framing by which Foucault began his tracing of the care of the self was through the underscoring of the ethico-political tension, in other words the juxtaposition of spirituality (the transformation the self needs to undergo to access truth) and philosophy (the already existing limits demarcating the access to truth). Simply put, from the start, the way the care of the self is contextualized by Foucault is through subject and truth, and the tension in which these two terms find themselves. We have seen how for Foucault there is a particular danger in the taking for granted of the subjection process (as the digital subject does). This danger stated differently could be phrased as the seclusion of the aforementioned tension between subject and truth. The care of the self read through the bodily critique of limits underscores such tension through *askēsis*, a praxis encapsulated by the poles of training and meditations. Training here read as the preparing for any possible life event, and meditation seen as an exercise of thought on thought. These pillars can be read to be referring to the experience of self-control (Lemke, 2019, p. 293). I will now return to the three aspects which allowed me to read the care of the self politically (the body, critique, and limits) reading them under the digital light, and fleshing out the aspect of *askēsis*.

The Body

The body was introduced when discussing how the care of the self moved from being an activity saved for a particular part of the population into a more generalized understanding; the pedagogical mode was replaced by the medical one, where to care for oneself is understood as being a doctor throughout one's life. The role of the body then takes the role of the vessel that brings together the practice of caring for oneself; I took this to signify politically as the body being the site of resistance.

Ethics in Foucault's work is then primarily "a corporeal phenomenon; habits are 'constituted though the repetition of bodily acts' making the body the 'locus of one's ethos'"

(Disprose in Lloyd, 1997b, p. 88). The body as a site of resistance means precisely this. It signifies the place where the practice of *askēsis* becomes possible, as the activity which sets about the bodily acts that allow for the exercise of critique. The question then becomes, as to what this theoretical reading looked like in a more tangible manner, particularly in my reading of the paradigmatic example of the digital. Within my argument of the digital, the body has been a notion looming in the background as that which is being lost, as we become secluded in the digital, but at the same that which is facing the utmost control, through the digital symbiosis.

The more we live our lives through the screen, the more it seems that our body becomes an afterthought. In his book *Exposed,* Bernard Harcourt points towards this as he proposes that the digital age is the time of two bodies: a digital permanent and mortal analogue one (Harcourt, 2015). As much as we would like to think of the digital as passing or ephemeral, the reality is that our digital trace is permanent, once we enter into the digital there is no way to erase ourselves from it. The moment we created an email account or a social media account, the moment when we decide to online shop, are moments we cannot take back. Very rarely can we delete such accounts, or such online financial patterns. We might be able to deactivate the account but never permanently delete them, because the digital trace is, precisely, perpetual. Within the digital age it is the digital body that seems to outrank the analogue one in importance, as paradoxical as that sounds, "if you are not on social media you do not exist" (Harcourt, 2015). One can no longer apply for a job interview without an email address to give as a form of contact; before a landline we are always asked for our mobile numbers; more so than hard print CVs we now need to have our LinkedIn or academia.net accounts up to date; all aspects which are further heightened within younger generations, those that truly do not know a world without the digital. We do not really seem to have the possibility to retreat from the digital without having our existence questioned. As

the digital more and more occupies the terrain of our everyday life, the space to step outside it becomes smaller and more alienating. What is, then, at stake by the loss of the body? And, even more so, what does this loss actually look like?

The loss of the body seems at first glance an appropriate enough take on what the intricacy of the digital in our everyday lives means. And, on the one hand, it is a fair assessment. Like the instances I have just narrated, we seem to live at a time where our virtual presence carries more weight than our material and analogue one. But, on the other hand, our dependence on our body is simply undeniable, even for the digital. As undeniably perpetual as our digital trace is, so is our mortal material body. This introduces, precisely, one of the main debates with regards to digital analysis and media studies: the status of the body. Authors, like Katherine N. Hayles, continue to give the body a central space of importance, seen as the embodiment of information and consciousness. On the other hand, there are authors, like Friedrich Kittler, who refuse to give the body any type of analytical or ontological priority (Gane and Beer, 2008). Hayles is of the idea that it is wrong to split mind from body or, in media terms, software from hardware, as consciousness and information will always be embodied in a physical medium (Gane and Beer, 2008, p. 111). Kittler however argues that the media age has rendered indistinguishable the body from the machine and, furthermore, the body is not seen in its "humanness" but rather as an effect of technology (Gane and Beer, 2008, p. 114). My argument falls in between this spectrum. While, on the one hand, I do pose a particular emphasis to how the digital's discourse seems to indicate the riddance of our body, on the other hand I find that such materiality cannot be denied, especially given that it is the thing which the digital clings most tightly to. It is a blurry line, that of the role of the body in the digital. But, it is precisely this blurriness which I want to emphasize, for it is there that the role of resistance, of practical *askēsis*, can be found.

To argue an idea of the body which is indistinguishable from the machine, to defend materiality as 'extinguished' signifies the offering of an argument which takes flesh to be subjected to the utmost control. However, it is not a control of the flesh for the control per se, but what that control serves and the way it shapes and makes the body. The material importance cannot be erased; it is taken to be of importance given that even that which escapes the material must inhabit somewhere. This gives priority then to the body in itself. If the argument is to be made that no matter how intricate the digital and the body are, the body is still something separate, then this means the body is not fully 'co-opted', and hence, the body remains as a site from where contestation can happen. The debate, then, mirrors the theorization Foucault made of the body in his work: as utterly controlled in *Discipline and Punish,* and as the possibility of resistance in the account of *History of Sexuality*.

Conceptualizing the body as both the ground of control—by its supposed elimination—and the site for resistance, sheds light on why Foucault turned to ethics after his genealogy on power. His turn to the subject was not a renunciation or an incoherent break, but rather it was the trace of this same line of thought that centres the body. Let us not forget that Foucault's analysis of power culminates in the historical tracing of the prison system which serves, in his analysis, for the creation of docile and useful *bodies*. His turn to the ancient subject and its relation to its body, then, represents the attempt to understand how the same terrain for subjection can be a terrain for resistance. I have attempted to further underscore such arguments in the previous chapters. I have posed that one of those paramount subjection mechanisms of the hegemonic discourse is one that captures the body to the point it tries to 'disappear' it and, parallel to this, I have offered a reading of the care of the self which offers an understanding of the body as a site of resistance for the possibility of a new subjectivity.

Our body is more than just flesh, it makes us, it connects us to the world. If we are to 'lose' our body we also lose skill, reality, and meaning as Hubert Dreyfus states in this analysis of *The Internet* (Dreyfus, 2001, p. 6). This is why the body signifies a terrain for the digital's subjection process. And, precisely, this is why it is also the place from where resistance can arise. Our body is the starting point of resistance, as it is the starting point of the subjection process. Since it is the body that the digital grips on to, paradoxically through simulating its elimination, it is from that same flesh which resistance arises.

I have signalled in the conclusion of the previous chapter the parallelism of the manner by which the digital and the prison make useful and docile bodies. Now, to be sure, I am not trying to make the argument that the digital is the equivalent of a prison or that the digital is a prison in itself. What I am trying to offer by delineating a similitude between the genealogy of the prison and the digital is how both spaces make use of the body, and how both spaces make the 'natural' or 'taken for granted' as their most forceful gripping mechanism for control. In other words, the digital, we can argue, also makes useful and docile bodies according to its needs. And in such a conceptualization of the body, as one which tries to make us see our materiality as 'not as important' and 'natural' given the digital world in which we live, there rests the digital's power. How, then, do we regain the body? How to awaken this taken for granted control of our flesh? This, I take to be precisely the quest that Foucault was attempting to delineate in the work of *The History of Sexuality*; from the conclusion of the docile and useful body, followed the analysis of how such body can resist such normalizing discourse.

As Foucault turns to Antiquity his analysis becomes heavily oriented, as we have seen, on the techniques of the self and the matter of experience (Lemke, 2019). There are, says Foucault following Habermas, three types of techniques: "the techniques that permit one to produce, to transform, to manipulate things; the techniques that permit one to use sign

systems; and finally, the techniques that permit one to determine the conduct of individuals, to impose certain objectives" (Foucault, 1997d, p. 177) or, simply put "techniques of production, techniques of signification or communication, and techniques of domination, respectively" (Foucault, 1997d, p. 177). However, Foucault will claim that in his studies and works, he became aware of another type of technique:

> Techniques that permit individual to effect, by their own means, a certain number of operations on their own bodies, their own souls, their own thoughts, their own conduct, and this in a manner to transform themselves, modify themselves […]. Let's call these techniques "technologies of the self". (Foucault, 1997d, p. 177)

When wanting to create a genealogy of the subject in Western civilization, it is the juxtaposition of the techniques of the self and those of domination, where we should place our attention (Foucault, 1997d, p. 177). *Discipline and Punish* offers us the techniques of domination, and the return to Antiquity would give the techniques of the self. The subjected subject juxtaposed to the possibility of the subject making itself. In this dissertation, the digital poses the analysis of the techniques of domination, and the praxis of the care of the self in our present day fulfils the techniques of the self. To be sure, the idea here of 'techniques of domination' must be understood as it is said, that which determines the conduct of individuals imposing certain objectives, but such determination and imposition are never fully closed, allowing for the possibility of resistance or, in other words, for the techniques of the self. This juxtaposition of techniques, I have also mentioned, can be understood or read through the idea of experience: the experience of how the subject is constructed versus the experience of how the subject makes itself; the experience of everyday life as a form of resistance; and the role of experience is that of the subject giving itself the right to critique the limits of truth (Lemke, 2019).

The body was brought into conversation as the care of the self moved from a pedagogical to a medicinal understanding, the body being the vessel of the activity, the flesh

for which to care. This flesh, through the digital, has tried to be made meaningless, paradoxically, by gripping to it ever so tightly. We see here, as just exemplified, a parallelism to the useful and docile bodies versus the self as possibility for self-creation. Or, in other words, we see the juxtaposition of techniques of domination and techniques of the self, both stemming from and creating at the same time the bodily vessel. It is here, in the flesh, that the self finds itself living the experience of being made and also of *becoming*. It is this second aspect that the digital secludes, that which it tries to deny as it tries to fulfil a meaning of needlessness. By doing so, the digital takes hold of the everyday experience, equally mundane and equally powerful.

Our everyday life, and thus experience, is mediated through the imposed truth of the digital subjects use of quantification, symbiosis, and normalized discipline. As Hartcourt notes, the truth the digital constructs is one which poses our existence in the digital more important than our materiality, *if we don't exist in social media we don't exist.* The digital's imposed truth is one where a teenager with no social media would come to think and understand themselves as not having the capacity to socialise and interact. Think also, of how each of us would be perceived were we to say that we do not have an email account, when this is what is deemed today to be the first point of contact and communication. We take these impositions as natural, as obvious and understandable, because such is the normalization of the digital. We are made into docile and useful bodies insofar as we relegate our materiality. We take it to be logical and understandable that our existence is given to us by the intangibility of the digital rather than our flesh.

And so, the starting point of envisioning a different way to understand the digital, for a new subjectivity to come about, is the regaining of this ever so controlled site. Our body, then, becomes the site of resistance, for it is through the flesh where the self finds itself dominated, but also, it is the place upon which it can become. The needlessness of our body

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is an imposed truth which sets our conduct, and so, to regain it we must disclose the possibility of becoming through the making of our own truth. To regain our body, then, starts by critiquing this imposed truth and its limits.

Critique

The imposed truth grips onto the body as it constructs a meaning which attempts to relegate it. This makes the body not only the site of control but also the site of resistance through critique. To regain the body is that which the practicality of the care of the self through *askēsis* must achieve. The digital makes us believe that we can and must think of our body as mere flesh that simply carries us around. The digital makes us understand our body as something that we have and that serves its function by facilitating our connection to the digital. The digital constructs our bodies as the docile and useful bodies of the twenty-first century. Docility and utility evidenced precisely because we do not question, because we move through the digital taking its meaning as natural, as objective, as understandable; ultimately, we seem to offer no contestation. But, this 'place', the body, as the site of primordial control, as the space in which the useful and docile bodies of the twenty-first century are made, is the place where resistance can start. To regain the body, then, means to break from that imposed truth, which then calls for the exercise of critique. And so, the seizing of the body must come from, and is built from, the experience of the everyday resistance, which itself stems from the exercise of critique and the posing of the question "how not to be governed like that, by such truth"?

Perhaps the critique could come about from the simple signalling of our body not being something that we have, as the digital's truth tries to signify insofar that it makes the body into something we can leave behind, but rather understand that our body is that which we are. Here, I find particularly helpful bringing into conversation the ideas of Merleau

Ponty, particularly Marina Garces' reading of him (Garcés, 2013). She poses that, precisely, the way in which Merleau Ponty brings about his philosophy of the body is through an understanding of the body as "that which I am, not that which I own". Diving into another complex thinker's work, like that of Merleau Ponty, is well beyond the scope of this dissertation, especially well beyond the possibilities of this last chapter. In a very succinct way, Merleau Ponty critiqued the philosophy of conscience insofar that he took it as making us mistakenly conclude that ourselves, as individuals, and our bodies, are merely to be seen as opposing each other. In contrast, he argues for the understanding of a 'we', through the insistence that we cannot get about on our own - we are not individuals, but subjects. This 'we', however, is not to be taken as a simple addition of subjects, rather, it is about the culmination of understanding the impossibility of individuality and, thus, achieving a plural anonymity which does not erase our singularities but gives meaning and identification to a collectivity (Garcés, 2013).

I bring into the conversation these ideas of Merleau Ponty, because I take them to help in furthering the argument being built here, as well as complementing it. If it is the body where resistance must arise by the exercise of critiquing the imposed truth, then bringing to the fore an idea of the body as that which offers the possibility of our own truth and not the imposed one is a crucial and productive starting point for the possibility of this resistance. As the digital forces on us a truth that tries to relegate out material body, what such truth is doing is relegating our capacity to understand the world. Hubert Dreyfus says this in his work *On the Internet* (Dreyfus, 2001) where he critiques the internet's discourse that constructs the body as something which we can go without, when the fact is that we are our body, and it is through our body that we make sense of the world. This is why I have tried to argue that the digital's discourse, that makes us into subjects that illusively think we can go without out bodies, is one which seeks to depoliticize us. Our body is a political terrain, which if we

'lose' by thinking we can go about without it, are then losing politically. Our relation to the world depends on the body we are. The prioritization of our digital body signifies that our material body is secluded to private spheres, actively depoliticizing it. And so, to regain an understanding of our body as that which we are, opens the way for the coming about of collectivity and the public, that which gives possibility to the anonymous plurality.

This brings us back to the importance of the tension between self and truth, and the need and importance for underscoring the ethico-political tension of our day, or, in other words, bringing to the fore the tension between the *self-transformation* needed to access truth and the already imposed access to truth; simply put, uncovering the taken for granted subjection process. The call of critique, not wanting to be governed like that, not seeing the body as dispensable, might seem as not powerful or not productive enough, but this is precisely what as digital subjects we are made to believe: if nothing can ever change, then why even question something? And while the posing of critique might not offer all the answers, the making of the interrogations: why?; why the digital?; why do we find it so understandable that we are one with the digital?; opens up a vast array of possibilities, because it is through critique that we achieve bringing to the fore the relation between philosophy and spirituality, between the truth that is given to us and the one we reach by self-transformation.

Lemke posits that for Foucault, critique is an ethical choice that creates itself out of nothing and opens rooms for freedom (Lemke, 2019, p. 293), a reading which is aligned with the argument being built here. The ethico-political tension, the juxtaposition between spirituality and philosophy, has the care of the self at its core. The care of the self, politically read, is an activity that calls for courage and opens room for freedom, for resistance. The subject takes the courage to critique the limits imposed upon him, enacting then a self-transformation by the setting of new limits to its truth. As we critique the limits set upon us,

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as we recognize that the limits may speak to a different truth, we exercise freedom and, thus, set the ground for alternatives, for other ways in which to imagine our world. Without freedom we cannot reimagine ourselves nor our world. To exercise critique might not seem as such a radical enterprise, but without it we cannot expect for any change. It is critique that allows imagining the possibility of an alternative.

We can now start to truly develop how the idea of *askēsis* plays a role here. Again, this praxis is one that is to be understood between the pillars of meditation and training, with the practicing of self-control at its core (Lemke, 2019, p. 293). Meditation here is referencing an exercise of thought on thought, and the idea of training is the mental exercise which prepares one for diverse life outcomes, particularly through the enacting of abstinence and tests. Training and meditation, Foucault says, stand on a twofold base for *askēsis*. The first, that of true discourse making up the soul's necessary equipment for life, giving the self-capacity to confront life's events as they come. The second, that of putting these true discourses to work, transforming truth into ethos, is where *askēsis* in the strict sense is found (Foucault, 2005, p. 416); to train to be prepared for life and turning truth into ethos or, differently phrased, turning truth into one's own. Foucault notes that these aspects are not actually theorized in the thought he is making use of to construct his own work; there is the posing of the question *for what is this life a preparation?*, but no theorized answer is offered (Foucault, 2005, p. 446). Nonetheless, Foucault takes this missed theorization not as an accidental oversight from Stoicism but, rather, as an understanding of a gaining of autonomy of the care of the self with regards to its theoretical problems (Foucault, 2005, p. 445), creating, thus, a space in between theory and praxis.

Let us remember that one of the reasons for Foucault's interest in the care of the self envisioned by Stoicism, during the Hellenistic-Roman period, was precisely the argument for autonomy. In contrast to the Platonic-Socratic care of the self, envisioned to prepare young

rulers to be, the golden age sought a care of the self that, as Foucault reads it, understood the care of the self as an activity in and for the self, a perpetual preparation for life regardless of the profession-to-be. This generalization of the care of the self meant for Foucault for the activity to be gaining a sense of autonomy, insofar as its end rested in the self itself and not in its age or intended profession. Given this autonomy, this end in itself could also be read upon the same argument of autonomy from its theoretical moments, opening up space between theory and praxis. I take it that Foucault's reading of the care of the self follows the tool-box like envisioning he had of his work, not setting any particular end. The lack of an answer to the question *what is life a preparation for?,* should be understood as providing a sense of autonomy, and this understanding takes its reasoning from the idea of the care of the self being a tool to be used, without granting it a set end beforehand.

In this way, then, to read the care of the self as an activity which opens up possibility becomes all the more evident. Not having set a specific theorization of its end goal opens the way for freedom and new possibilities. We are preparing for *something*, whatever that might be, coming from the posing of critique, from finding ourselves in the tension of the imposed truth and our making of truth to regain our bodies. The transformation of truth into an ethos meant for the stoics the turning of the gaze onto itself, passing from a non-subject to the status of a subject. Or, in other words, it meant turning the gaze from the imposed truth to the truth of one's own; from the truth of that which has made us into non subjects to the truth that we make ourselves, as we come to be subjects. We turn the gaze away from the digital's imposed truth onto the work redefining our own truth, one to be found by preparing ourselves to live in a world without the digital. Not that I am arguing for an elimination of the digital, this is impossible, but rather that the thought exercise, the meditation, of envisioning such a world, is the path to allowing us to see the possibility of a truth which is not imposed.

A truth that may be found, in the asking, or the pausing to imagine our world without the digital. In a similar way as it was for the stoics to train for life's most dark scenarios, even death, we can transgress the limits on the truth imposed on us by, simply, imagining what would be if those limits were not there. What if, we would dare to leave the house without our phones? What if next time we have lunch with a friend we make a conscious decision to not look at our phones all that time? What if next time we are angered by something online we try to engage in face-to-face conversation instead of posting on our Facebook and patting ourselves on the back?

Much like the posing of the question, *how not to be governed like that?*, the queries in the above paragraph might not seem like enough, might not come across as radical enough when it comes to making the shift from theory to practice in the critique of the digital. It is not yet clear, I take it, for the reader how these queries offer new openings and possibilities for freedom. Rather, when thinking about critiques or breakings of the digital, most likely the examples that might come to mind are those of the whistle-blowers: Julian Assange, Chelsea Manning and Edward Snowden. Hartcourt analyses these examples, particularly Assange's creation of WikiLeaks in an attempt to "turn the panopticon inside out", in other words, to make the citizens the surveillants of the state, to be able to see into the most intimate parts of it, just like the state has been doing with our lives up until now (Harcourt, 2015, p. 267). The hacker collaborative Anonymous and their work into making more accessible important information for those that want to better protect their privacy on the web is also brought up (Harcourt, 2015, p. 271). However, as valuable and brave as these examples are, I do not think they get to the core of the digital issue. I do not mean to belittle them, or deny their importance and the courage that it has taken for these men and women to show the rest of the world how dangerous the digital is. But I still see these instances to remain constructed within the limits demarcated by the digital.

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Snowden and Assange's life are still in danger and under threat, Manning suffered enormously while imprisoned, and only recently lives 'freely'. Anonymous remains, precisely, anonymous. The examples of trying to break the digital did not break it and were actually engulfed by the digital itself making them the ones at fault, the ones that have done something wrong. Their brave 'wrong-doing' has them living in exile, while the war crimes and frauds they exposed remain unpunished, and we, the citizens for whom they risked their lives, continue to feed the digital machine, upload our photos in search of 'likes', do online shopping, check our emails as if our life depended on it, buy the newest version of the smart gadget. The truth that the digital imposes on us remains unchallenged. These examples did not allow for the transgressing of an imposed truth into the making of our own truth, and this is why these brave women and men are the ones at fault.

The irremediable permanency of the digital makes it harder to argue for possible alternatives or possibilities. Of course, no convincing argument could be made for a digital disobedience based on the eradicating of the digital. As Jodi Dean says in her analysis of collectivity as critique, the digital is here to stay whether we like it or not (Dean, 2019). However, the undeniable fact of the digital's permanency should not limit our imagination for the resistance we can pose to it. On the contrary, it should be that which pushes us into reimagining; reimagining it, meditating it, training towards it. Otherwise, the extremely brave actions of those like Manning, Assange and Snowden will fall upon deaf ears. I think that Harcourt would agree with this, even if those were his examples, as the final conclusion of his analysis is the stating that, indeed, digital disobedience is still not clear, and the need for it is also the need for an ethics of the self (Harcourt, 2015, p. 283). In other words, the brave and heroic examples of digital disobedience like those mentioned will find no echo if they are received by the still depoliticized digital subject. A subject who continues to take for granted the digital imposed truth, who still understands life through quantification and symbiosis, a

digital made through normalized discipline, is not a subject that will be awoken by whistle-blowers. Making an ethics of the self within the digital, exercising critique to regain the body, must signify a transgressing of the digital's limits, opening ways for alternatives within our own truth. If exercises of thought on thought and the training that comes with them do not precede the attempt to tackle the digital, the actions will still fall in the exception as they have not yet managed to pose themselves as a possibility for alternatives beyond the 'wrongdoing', not managing to inscribe themselves in the experience of the everyday life, of the everyday resistance, that can only stem from a new subjectivity. Reimagining the digital must mean making our own truth, our own limits.

Limits

The body as the site of resistance, critique as its exercise and limits as its objective. To regain the body through critique, to pose new possibilities and alternatives to those imposed by the digital depends, then, on the limits, the awareness towards them and the transgressing of them. This is a Foucauldian idea which follows his thoughts on critique stemming from his reading of enlightenment. He takes from the meaning of this historical epoch that there is a call: to be able to know the limits of our epoch, those which make us, and a call for courage to be able to challenge them. The call for courage to be able to critique, to question, the imposed representations—as the exercise of meditation would do—and prove oneself as subject of truth (Sauquillo, 2017, p. 437).

I have tried to set out until now the body as the site of resistance, critique as the exercise of resistance and, now, we turn to the limits as the objective. I have argued that the discourse of the digital is one which makes us lose sight of our body, even makes us think we can go without it, when in reality the digital is clinging ever so tightly to the body, subjecting it in its needs for perpetuating of the status quo. Even in this tight grip, there is still room for

resistance, and transformation of the imposed bodily truth. The care of the self, then, understood as an exercise of critique brings about the possibility of the making of one's own truth. Such an exercise of critique is not any critique, but one which is framed by the poles of meditation and training; the posing of the question *how not to be governed like that* must be met by the preparation of the outcomes that such a query might have through the exercise of thought on thought. We must train ourselves into better navigating the digital on our terms and not the hegemonic ones. Practicing exercises of thought on thought to disclose the truth imposed and which we take for granted. And, in doing so transforming the imposed truth into our truth or, in other words, making the truth into ethos. An ethos to be enacted by the transgressing of the limits.

What does resistance as the transgressing of limits mean? What does it mean to transgress the limits of the digital? How is it that training and meditation come into play in my envisioning of resistance? In 1983 Foucault, in a seminar in Berkeley University, talked about *The Culture of the Self* and offered a succinct but dense summary of his analysis of the care of the self. He discusses how the idea of caring for oneself, seen as occupying yourself with yourself for yourself, comes to show an idea of the self as that which comes about through the correlation of different technologies, or techniques. So the key aspect becomes how we can come to create new types of relationships to ourselves or, as in my reading, how we come about into new types of subjectivities. If the self is the result of the coming together of techniques and this makes the question about how to understand ourselves differently, this has then to be about understanding those techniques differently, and that can be as 'simple' as bringing them to the fore, as not taking them for granted. The limit is transgressed insofar it is signalled, as it is made visible.

I have posed the digital to be representing the techniques of domination, those that determine the conduct of individual, whereas the care of the self speaks to the techniques of

the self, those that allow for the transformation of the self by the self. The juxtaposition of these allows the exposure of the ethico-political tension in between the imposed limits of truth and the self-transformation of accessing one's own truth. The imposed truth, that which determines the conduct of the individual, tells the individual that there is only such truth, that there is no escaping it. The imposed truth of the digital, of its perpetual discipline, surveillance, of its mediated meaning, of its power over life, as it depoliticizes the subject by bringing to the fore the limits of truth as given, as objective. The digital's truth thrives by secluding the hegemonic discourse's socially constructed and contingent manner and, in such a manner, it determines the conduct of individuals. And so, juxtaposed are the techniques of the self, those that give the self the ability to self-transform, those that rest between training and meditation.

Meditation as an exercise of thought and training as a preparation for life's events. An exercise of thought which ignites again the political, as we come to understand that the truth we are now living is a constructed and imposed one, we come to see the contingency, the impossibility of fixation. We come to underscore that this is in fact a truth that demarcated and is itself demarcated by limits, and limits exist insofar they can be transgressed. We do not have to accept ourselves as subjects which are disciplined, invigilated, quantified, and made into peons of the upholding of a discourse that presents itself as objective and immobile. And so, we train for what this thought exercise will open in terms of possibilities.

Indeed, to phrase the care of the self in this way offers no clear paths, no clear 'solutions'. In this reading, my reading, the care of the self allows for the envisioning of possibility but does not clarify what such possibilities may be. Foucault, then, did not intend for a universal principle of transgression but, rather, wanted to point towards the points where change is possible and desirable and grasp them (Foucault in Lloyd and Thacker, 1997, p. 4). And so, much like the criticism that Foucault faced, here the reader might then wonder why

would we embark on such a call? What is the purpose of a critical activity that leads into uncertainty? Furthermore, the reader might also think, why would this path be 'better' than the whistle-blowing examples which I argued as non-sufficient. The key aspect here is that the care of the self allows for the reimagining of the digital's limits, as uncertain as it may be that it will end up looking. The care of the self allows for this because as I have been arguing in this thesis it is an activity that allows for a new subjectivity, and in doing so reimagines, transgresses the limits. The example of whistle-blowers attempts to work within the existing limits, the existing depoliticized digital subject. This is not to say that such examples are not useful in themselves, but that they have to be supported by something else, that something being what I am trying to flesh out through the self in the everyday. The digital, as it takes our body, it takes and grips our everyday, the mundane. If what the digital takes from us is our daily being, our everyday life, an exceptional activity such as hacking cannot be the answer, at least not the whole of it. Rather, to fulfil the call for the reimagining of limits, we must turn to the nuances of the everyday.

Nonetheless, it is clear by now that we have reached a limitation in Foucault's work. While the call for the care of the self is a call towards the uncertain, Foucault does not guide us into how to reach the path of such uncertainty. There is no tangible spelling out of the hows and whys of the envisioning of possibilities. We know that this is something set in between the experience of being made and the experience of becoming, and that in antique thought itself this signified an opening of a space between theory and praxis. And, all of this, happening in the everyday or, in other words, in the micro. So, any tangible envisioning of the care of the self through *askēsis* must fulfil such aspects.

William Connolly's ideas on micropolitics and the politics of becoming are useful here. When discussing Foucault's work on ethics and the self, Connolly expresses concern precisely about the manner in which the theorization of the self was accounted for.

Particularly, Connolly claims that the arts of the self which Foucault theorized implied the imposing of disciplines onto the self to temper the demand of imposing disciplines on others, this as a result of the arts of the self not being met in a positive ethos of politics appropriate to a pluralist culture (Connolly, 1999, p. 153). This, as we have seen, is not an uncommon critique Foucault faced. For example, Lloyd recalls that Foucault is "condemned for not offering criteria to separate out those principles which are 'suggested' to individuals and those 'imposed' upon them" (Lloyd, 1997a, p. 294). Connolly's critique would also be welcomed, I think, by Myers who we have seen deemed the Foucauldian subject not capable of caring for the world. Nonetheless, I do not take these reservations to be too problematic in bringing Connolly into conversation with my reworking of Foucault's care of the self. After all, even with such critiques, Connolly did embrace certain parts of Foucault's work.

From Foucault, Connolly takes that "the self contains pools of "energy" and "impulses" that decentre these attempts at social unity and normalisation" (Connolly in Khan, 2010, p. 167). In other words, and as Khan reads Connolly, he sees within the self a "capacity to work on the multitude of material forces that constitute his/her being" (Khan, 2010, p. 167). In other words, Connolly, while sceptical on the role of imposition, finds value in Foucault's techniques of the self. Connolly will understand the Foucauldian techniques of the self within his own framework of the relationship between the virtual and material forces, arguing that an effective politics of intervention must engage with unconscious forces that make our passions and culture (Khan, 2010, p. 168). We need then, if we are to follow Connolly, ways in which to dislodge and dislocate the unconscious. Khan takes this to be accomplished through the corporeal appealing to the unconscious (Khan, 2010, p. 169), what can be seen and understood as "tactics of resistance that induce an emotional or bodily effect such as disgust, repulsion, shock, horror, surprise or laughter [to have the] greatest impact in dislodging and unsettling attachments to sedimented ideas and practices" (Khan, 2010, p.

171); simply put, here we find the defence of the visceral response through and to the everyday taken for granted behaviours.

This call for the dislocating of the unconscious, read through the visceral responses, is then a call for the coming about of new subjectivities, an aspect which Connolly further underscores in what he will call the politics of becoming:

> By *the politics of becoming* I mean that paradoxical politics by which new cultural identities are formed out of unexpected energies and institutionally congealed injuries. The politics of becoming emerges out of the energies, suffering, and lines of flight available to culturally defined differences in a particular institutional constellation. To the extent it succeeds in placing a new identity on the cultural field, the politics of becoming changes the shape and contour of already entrenched identities as well. (Connolly, 1999, p. 57)

The overlapping between the politics of becoming and the care of the self read in a political light are striking. Connolly invites us to think of a politics that invites for the flourishing of new identities born out of the suffering—or governing. He further underscores and develops this thought through the discussion of relational arts and micropolitics. Connolly explains that the politics of becoming represents a modest but powerful political exercise when juxtaposed with relational arts. Here Connolly offers an example of how this would look: he poses the case of someone who firmly believes that death is something only to occur when God or nature mandates it, in other words a person who is against doctor-assisted death for terminally ill people. But, this person's belief, when exposed to a larger variety and pool of understandings, might shift. If this person were to open themself to the stories of other people, maybe the terminally ill as their loved one, or were they to come into close contact with a terminally ill patient, they would ultimately understand their original position differently. The original positions shift as the subject lives through experiences of visceral and emotional reaction. It might not mean a radical change but rather that "what was

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previously thought as non-negotiable gradually becomes rethinkable" (Connolly, 1999, p. 147). This individual has now "worked artfully on [itself] in a modest but politically salient way. And the ethical effects of that work now inform the micropolitics in which [it] participates" (Connolly, 1999, p. 147).

Such example of self-artistry calls for a back-and-forth movement between registers of subjectivity, or an exercise of thought on thought – or *meletē*. It is one where the process is not one you can control entirely and there is no guarantee of a result—much like I am admitting in the possibilities to come from the care of the self—so, you must *train* for the possibilities. There is no assured result, there is no clear path to 'success'. As Connolly narrates: "these are the enchantments and risks of micropolitics. […] Arts of the self and micropolitics are two sides of the same coin" (Connolly, 1999, pp. 148–149). That which makes us and the possibility to make ourselves go hand in hand. In Foucauldian terms, governmentality and the technologies of the self are irretrievably linked, as one functions to sediment subjectivities, the other fights for the open space for creating anew. Because of this, as Connolly also comments, for the self-artistry to be *successful* it must be met by a "micropolitics receptivity that has been nurtured across several registers" (Connolly, 1999, p. 149), precisely making the point as to why I find troubling the exemplification of whistle-blowers as digital disobedience.

I contended that the fact that these are examples, still enlisted within a 'wrong-doing' discourse, show that their significance did not grip us; we must open the possibility for the grip. In other words, the work done by the care of the self must meet the power mechanisms it is trying to fight on the same level. The resistance or disobedience offered by the work of whistle-blowers aims to dismantle and critique the 'top' level power mechanisms, hence why my argument is that they do not resonate on the lower levels, and are quickly digested by the digital and repurposed for further sedimentation of the hegemonic discourse. The techniques

of the self and micropolitics being two sides of the same coin means that their efficient

working and, in turn, their dismantling, must be met on the same level. This is exemplified,

precisely, by the body: it being the site of utmost control through the paradoxical discourse

which claims it as unimportant and, precisely why I defend it to be the place from which

resistance must arise. Ultimately, I take that the control of the body into its docility and

usefulness corresponds to the control of the everyday.

The control of the everyday: we live through the digital, our day to day is structured

by it. We count our productivity in the number of answered emails, in the number of articles

read. We measure our worth through said quantifiable productivity. Our day to day is

structured by the digital, our desires, our pleasures, and our social interaction. We must

answer work emails as soon as they come, and we do in our home space, meeting friends

means posting it on social media, unwinding means online shopping, catching up with loved

ones means video calls. The worth we give to ourselves is the one the digital indicates. The

fact that it is almost unimaginable in going without the digital in our lives is a testament of

how much is has been woven into our daily life. And so, the *fight* must also come from our

daily life, reimagining the limits that have been made to demarcate it by an imposed truth.

The Examples of the Everyday

What if we dare to leave the house without our phones? What if next time we have lunch with

a friend we make a conscious decision to not look at our phones at all during that time? What

if we delete the email app from our phone? These examples towards which I signalled

previously, while vague and seemingly superficial, I think could allow us to formulate, or

rather, live an experience in which we could come to understand as rethinkable, or

contestable, that which we previously took as objective and certain. To try, in our everyday

life, to make some space between us and the gadgets towards which we hold symbiotic

relations, could be the first step into the regaining of the body and our everyday. Of course, this is something that has to be done with an awareness of what such an exercise might become. In other words, the posing of this space is one that has to be accompanied by a true critical take on what such space means.

Much like Connolly who doesn't pose the analysis on medical assisted death as a simple and superficial 'change of mind' but more so to an exercise done by the self where exposure to other ideas and minds is vital, here these examples intend to follow a similar train of thought. It would not be enough, nor is it my argument, to conclude from this dissertation that all that is needed is for us to try to look at our phones less, and the work is done. Rather, the space I am arguing for in between this symbiotic relation must be a space that allows for the exercise of thought on thought which calls for a critique of the imposed truth in the means of making one's own truth, the true exercise of *askēsis*. In other words, it is not about the posing of less use of our phones and think the work is done, but to make that decision accompanied by training and meditation into where it might lead us. Allow ourselves stepping into the space of uncertainty having questioned what we once thought objective.

The space created by the making of one's own truth can then be filled by a different relation with the digital. Opening up a space through meditation and training, through the posing of scenarios that make contestable what was thought otherwise, should not be read as the denial or the erasing of the digital. As I have argued throughout this dissertation, the argument is not about the erasing of the digital; not only is this a non-achievable argument but it would also not be coherent with my negation of a normative take on the digital. I have contended that it is not that the digital is intrinsically a neoliberal upholding mechanism but, rather, because of its characteristics, it easily merges and serves the hegemonic discourse. I underscore this again, because this is why I pose the space to be drawn in the making of one's

truth as a space that can be re-appropriated by another relation with the digital. It is within this space that examples like those of activism and whistle blowing can begin to grip.

In her text "A Cyborg Manifesto" Donna Haraway analyses the boundaries of machine and flesh, and accounts for how our lives are undoubtedly intertwined with such technologies, and she poses that to better navigate this reality:

> […] means embracing the skilful task or reconstructing the boundaries of daily life, in partial connection with others, in communication with all of our parts. It is not just that science and technology are possible means of great human satisfaction, as well as a matrix of complex dominations. Cyborg imagery can suggest a way out of the maze of dualisms in which we have explained our bodies and our tools to ourselves. (Haraway, 2006, p. 147)

Aligned with the argument being offered here, Haraway shows that the boundaries are to be reconstructed in our daily life. In *A Hacker Manifesto* McKenzie Wark argues that politics through hacking seek "to permeate existing states with a new state of existence, spreading the seed of an alternative practice of everyday life" (Wark, 2020, p. 423). The exercise of thought and training to create space between the self and the digital then allow for the collective critical work of the digital to grip. Let us recall the ideas of Merleau Ponty brought into this chapter to underscore that the body is not something that we have but rather, it is that which we are, and through that realization the collective can arise. The space that the making of one's own truth opens up, the turning of what was thought as incontestable into contestable, happening through the body allows the coming about of a collective rising in a different discourse than the hegemonic one.

So, to bring *askēsis* to the fore today, means to take the examples posed, as thought exercises that will open the way for the critiquing of the imposed truth. By posing questions and examples like "w*hat if we delete the email app from our phone?"* I mean to signal to the potential these thought exercises can open. It is through *askēsis* that a full and independent

relation of the self to the self by constituting truth telling to be the subject's way of being can

be achieved (Foucault, 2005, p. 327). In between the pillars of *meletē* and gymnasia, we find

a central concern over the idea of self-mastery. *Meletē* we know refers to the imagining of

possible events to test how one would react, whereas through the latter the self places itself in

a real situation and tests the self's independence to the external world (Foucault, 1997e, pp.

239–240). *Askēsis* happens by the self through the self, the self makes itself as the object of

tekhnē, and life becomes to be understood as a work of art (Foucault, 2005, p. 424). And so

the thought exercises that I am proposing to explore are the *askēsis* of our time, for it is

through training and meditation that they can achieve the underscoring of the imposed truth.

For the self to ask these questions, it means for the self to undergo the critical exercise that is

the care of the self and thus come to see that the digital's truth is imposed, and that it has

taken it for granted as natural and objective. And, in doing so, it must prepare for the

alternatives this could bring about.

     Much like in Connolly's example, the posing of these thought exercises should be

read as modest but powerful exercises which allow for the unthinkable to be thought

differently. Bringing to the fore these examples (leaving the house without our phones,

deleting certain applications that blur home and work space, not looking at our phones, going

for a run without tracking our progress, not fixating on the number of likes our social media

receives) are not, of course, novel. However, what is particular in my offering is how these

examples are read through the bodily critique of limits, or the exercising of *askēsis*. Such

exercises on thought carried out through the political reading of the care of the self defended

in this thesis, means that they must aim at the recovering of the body through the critique of

limits. So, it is not just about deleting our email from our phone, but about what doing so

opens up in the everyday with regards to our body and the making of our own truth. These

examples then, are not finite in the sense that a finite and specific amount of time is required

of them, rather it is about them opening the possibility for further thought and experience. From the *what if I delete my email from my phone,* more questions will unravel. There is not a definite answer of what will be found, and so the self must be ready for the uncertain and unknown. After all, any exercise of critique leads to such a path.

In conversation with Chomsky regarding human nature and justice, Foucault poses what he deems to be the paramount political task as that of "critiquing the workings of institutions apparently neutral and do so in a way that the political violence they enact is unmasked – if we fail to thoroughly criticizing power we run the risk of the "possibilities" posed in the aftermath to continue the reproduction of the same political violence even in the ways they seem noble" (Foucault, 1971a). I think this quote exemplifies well what I have argued in this thesis. To take the care of the self as the bodily critique of limits, results in a possibility through the critical task of refusing the taken for granted. I have argued that what is at stake here is the juxtaposition of the imposed truth and the subject's own truth, or the conversion of power evidenced from the passing of a subject that was made to one that makes itself and, in doing so, underscores the supposed neutrality as one that is constructed and imposed.

I have further underscored this through my analysis of the digital. I have offered a reading of the digital as one that makes a subject that, precisely, is depoliticized as it takes for granted the imposed truth, as it appreciates the tool-like space and the resulting subject as neutral, objective, understandable. If we fail to understand that the digital discourse is one far from neutral, and if we miss understanding that such a discourse is a powerful subjection mechanism, then we fail at being able to trace out alternatives and possibilities. If we miss this first step, then the reimagining of the digital becomes frustrated. It is through the bodily critique that transgresses limits that the envisioning of new possibilities can come about. The bodily critique of limits practiced through thought exercises questions the imposed, refuses it,

makes the self's own truth through the negation of supposed neutrality. This, of course, does not lead to specific answers or instances. Rather, it 'simply' offers possibilities, possibilities which arise anew and are not set beforehand, making way for the creation of space. A space built upon the self's own truth, not understood through quantification, symbiosis or seclusion, but, instead, through the flesh that makes it, allowing, through the recaptured everyday, the possibility of the collective.

Conclusion

My motivation writing this thesis - a yearning to better understand the world in the hopes that achieving such an objective can bring change - is shared by most scholars that find themselves within the field of political theory. As I read, developed and wrote this dissertation I came to see that such hope might be better phrased not so much in advancing an understanding that will permit change, but more an understanding that excludes the static.

I have throughout the previous five chapters offered three distinct contributions. The first: my political reading of Foucault through what I termed the bodily critique of limits. I have argued that Foucault's thought, particularly his interest in the care of the self, can be reworked into offering political possibilities through the notions of the body, critique and limits. This first contribution is one that finds conversation with the body of work that reads Foucault's interest in ethics as one that offers political potential. I speak against readings of Foucault that take his ideas on power to seclude any possibility of a politically productive subject. My political reading of the care of the self is one that remains critical towards works that take the Foucauldian subject as one that holds no space with the mechanisms that made it and, thus, has neither the ability or, more drastically, the desire, to critique (Žižek, 2002; Nealon, 2008; Castro, 2012; Allen, 2013; Myers, 2013; Castro-Gomez, 2015). By arguing against such an understanding of Foucault, I hold a conversation with the body of work that sees and highlights the role of freedom, possibility and resistance in the Foucauldian framework (Lloyd, 1997a; Butler, 2001; Luxon, 2008; Kelly, 2013b; Laidlaw, 2014; Sauquillo, 2017; Lemke, 2019). My reading of the care of the self as the bodily critique of limits is one which advances this body of work for it not only argues that there is possibility in the Foucauldian subject, but also by offering a theorization of such possibility through the underscoring of the body, critique and limits.

My second contribution speaks to my arguing for an account of the subject today as a depoliticized one, an argument which I built from the conceptualization of the digital as a complex and ambivalent tool-like space. I offered the digital to be an exemplary case of the subjection process which we undergo today, one characterized by quantification, symbiosis, and seclusion as a result of the mechanisms at play through the digital: mediation of discourse, discipline and biopower. I took particular inspiration in offering an account of the digital that would highlight its complexity (Bucher, 2019) and defending ambivalence against any normative take. Rather I aimed at constructing my argument regarding the digital through the various voices that feed into digital and media literature. From the pioneering works (Turkle, 1984; Poster, 1990), to the body of literature that has signalled to the undoubtedly close relation that the digital and democracy have formed, and its implications (Dahlgren, 2007; Hands, 2007; Dahlberg, 2011; Tufekci, 2014a), and also underscoring the authors that have remained more critical on the role of this new technology (Gane and Beer, 2008; Harcourt, 2015; Moore and Robinson, 2016; Han, 2017; Dean, 2019).

The bringing together of these voices, allows me to offer an account of the digital as a tool-like space, complex and ambivalent, which is characterised by quantification, symbiosis, seclusion and empowerment. Not only this, but I find my argument here to contribute in the taking further of each of these pieces of work insofar as I make the case for not fixating on each of the characteristics per se, but rather, I invite the unearthing of the mechanisms that allow them: mediation of discourse, discipline and biopower. In doing so, I find my argument to contribute to exemplifying how a Foucauldian framework still holds today in offering an analysis of the useful and docile bodies of the twenty-first century. In other words, I take here my contribution to not only be about the underscoring of a particular type of subject, but that I do so by reigniting Foucault's genealogical thought through an analysis of digital media.

Lastly, by the bridging of both these arguments, I offer my third contribution as the defending of the role of thought exercises in the posing of possibility. Here, I admit to the limitation in Foucault's work when wanting to unravel in a more practical manner how the care of the self offers a new subjectivity. While I take his invitation to look into *askēsis* through the pillars of meditation and training, such calling does not materialize into a practical conclusion. And so, I overcome this restraint by the inviting in of complementary voices in order to offer a defence of the body (Garcés, 2013) and of theorizing the uncertain through thought exercises (Connolly, 1999), which, by contesting the taken for granted, open up the possibility for new subjectivities.

These thought exercises I have exemplified through the posing of seemly simple questions "what if I were to leave my house without my phone?", for example. The posing of such questions is, I have argued, the first step to exercising the bodily critique of limits. It signifies a thought exercise which poses a modest but powerful political exercise, unfolding into the disclosing of contingency; it makes rethinkable that which was thought as incontestable. To introduce questions like the one just offered, or to invite actions like: not taking our phones during social times with friends, or deleting the email app from our phones, or not tracking our daily habits through smartwatches, we are opening up the possibility to understand our everyday differently and we are preparing towards what may come after. In this sense, I take my third and final contribution to be one that invites us to further the conversation of the body and thought through a Foucauldian framework. But, more importantly, I take that my offering of the role that thought can have in the coming about of a new subjectivity also invites the exploring of the role and potentiality that the uncertain can have in our trying to bring about change. Allow me to offer a brief overview of each of the chapters, before discussing the implications that stem from the arguments offered.

Overview of the Chapters

The first chapter, *Foucault's Care of the Self,* was one that presented an overview of Foucault's thought, culminating in an analysis of his work on the care of the self. I traced how Foucault's work is typically understood in a three-stage manner: archaeology, genealogy and ethics. At first the interest is the noting of the breaks in discourse formation, followed by a wondering of the mechanisms that allow for such ruptures, culminating in how the subject relates to such breaks. I then moved on to the true interest for the chapter: *epimeleia heautou*, or the care of the self. Such is a concept found within the wider project *The History of Sexuality,* a work that was left unfinished given Foucault's death. The introduction of the care of the self in said project follows, says Foucault, the need to better understand the desiring subject, and how such a subject comes about. In other words, the care of the self is introduced in Foucault's work in light of wanting to better understand how a certain type of subjectivity came about, particularly a subjectivity built by the subject itself. In this chapter, I narrate the historicity of the concept, and note particular attention to the Hellenistic-Roman period, which was for Foucault the key period when constructing the care of the self as an activity of cultivation of the self.

In the second chapter, *The Bodily Critique of Limits,* I deepen the theoretical ground set out, and I argue in favour of rethinking Foucault's care of the self by posing particular emphasis towards the body, critique and limits, thus allowing for the care of the self to be read as an activity which allows for a new (political) subjectivity. I argue that I do not understand Foucault's interest in the idea of subjectivity as a breaking point from his previous work; rather, I see it as consequence following of the realization of a notion of power that has reached even the most intimate parts of what makes us. In the face of a notion of power that works to control entire populations through the making of useful and docile bodies, resistance should come precisely from those same bodies. I thus make a case for understanding the care

of the self as an embodied exercise of critique which seeks to transgress limits. This, however, does not tangibly or practically explain how a new subjectivity comes about, and so I underscore the idea of *askēsis* as the way through which we can more practically envision the rising of a subject.

In the third chapter, *The Digital*, I turn to address that my call for a new type of subjectivity implies a critique of the current one. I frame the chapter through the analysis of the governed and governance, which I defend to be the subject and the digital. I take the digital as an exemplar case of the hegemonic discourse today. Moreover, I argue that the digital is to be understood as a tool-like space which is complex, nuanced and ambivalent. By underscoring such complexity certain characterisations came to the fore: quantification, seclusion and symbiosis. These aspects, however, are not my interest per se, but rather I signalled that my concern was for the role they played in the subjection process and, furthermore, what are the mechanisms that allowed them.

Building upon the previous argument in the fourth chapter, *The Depoliticized Digital Subject*, I argue that the characteristics named in the previous chapter are not gratuitous, but rather respond to specific mechanisms which function through the digital: mediation of discourse, panoptic discipline and biopower. These mechanisms underscore that the tool-like space of the digital enforces a subjection process which brings about the useful and docile bodies of our time. The subject made through the digital is done so for the needs of the hegemonic discourse, it is depoliticized, as it sees the digital's truth as unquestionable. The depoliticized digital subject understands the digital as objective, normal and incontestable.

We arrive to the fifth and final chapter, *The Digital (Critical) Subject*, where I offered how my political reading of the care of the self serves to reignite politically the subject that results from the digital and, thus, brings about a new subjectivity. In order to do so, and by highlighting the role of *askēsis* (and its pillars of meditation and training), I underscore that a

'fight' versus the digital is one that calls for the body to be seen as the site of resistance, critique as its exercise and the transgressing of limits as its objective. The role of *askēsis* is here to show that there will be no clear result from this resistance; rather we must train and prepare for the uncertain through thought exercises. In this chapter, I also discussed the limitation faced within Foucault's thought and, thus, complemented the discussion by bringing into conversation the idea of politics of becoming to further flesh out the idea of thought exercises. I concluded that such exercises underscore the political power that coming to contest something previously thought as unquestionable holds, finally making way for a new subject.

Implications: The Public and The Collective

This thesis has offered three distinct contributions. First, I have offered a reworking of Foucault's ideas on the care of the self as an embodied political exercise of critique which can be read as a practice to bring about a new subjectivity. Secondly, I offered an account of the subject today by arguing for a conceptualization of the digital as a complex tool-like space. In doing so, I underscored the subjection process which we undergo in the digital, signalled to its worrying characteristics and mechanisms and argued that from it, a depoliticized digital subject emerges; one that takes for granted the possibility of contestation. The third, and final, contribution aims to bring together the first two in a productive way. I signalled to Foucault's limitations and made use of complementing voices to better construct and exemplify what the bodily critique of limits would look like in a practical sense, 'fighting' against the depoliticized subject. I offered that a new subjectivity emerges from the digital through thought exercises of possibility.

I have dedicated the entirety of my dissertation towards the political potential of the subject, defending it to be of value in the work of theorization and the starting point of praxis. I have made the subject the core idea of my work and I have done so by the use of Foucault,

commonly accused of theorizing an individualized subject secluded from the public, an aspect which even if I have by now discussed against extensively, might still leave a certain preoccupation with the place of the public in my overall work. Moreover, my analysis of the digital is one which flagged worrying ideas with regards to the public. In my discussion of the digital as a tool-like space I noted the idea of quantification, symbiosis, seclusion and a particular type of communication.

The digital I defined as "the exacerbated use of the internet through gadgets", an admittedly very open and loose definition. I exemplified this definition by the use of everyday examples: the incessant checking of our phones, the allowing our phones to track our daily habits—from the hours slept to the number of steps taken and our hydration levels, the negative impact on our mental health from the number of 'likes' our social media post receive, the blurred lines between spaces as we carry with us our work everywhere we go. I used these examples to show the complex characteristics of this tool-like space. One of them being the quantification through which we now live, in the workforce and in our everyday lives (Lupton, 2013; Moore and Robinson, 2016; Han, 2017), the digital makes us into and through numbers. Also, and consequently, through the digital we establish symbiotic relations with gadgets that enable such quantification. We are 'glued' to the gadgets that give us quantified meaning; we panic if we don't have our phones, we rather read the news through our screens than on print, we are fed the happenings of our world through livestreams, we are out for lunch with friends and we have our phones at the ready. How many times have we not all encountered a group of friends in silence and each only facing towards their phones? We have become secluded in the virtual. We are gripped through our screens, making us run the risk of forgetting that our lives are lived through the analogue, not the virtual (Turkle, 1984, 2011; Dahlgren, 2011; Tufekci, 2014b). The digital, in its upholding of the hegemonic discourse, sells itself as attractive, as allowing and facilitating communication, and as

empowerment through an easier access to politics. But we have seen that aspects of censorship and commodification of communication show that it is not a free flowing of ideas that nurture the digital, but rather a calculated meaning (Sunstein, 2017; Dean, 2019). And so, the question then here becomes: what public sphere or collectivity can come from such a space? How to build a public space of critical deliberation from a stage that is set so skewed?

I have tried to underscore as the core of my thesis the value that rests within the idea of the subject. I have argued against a Foucauldian individualistic account of the subject and, rather, exemplified it as being one which is very much linked and theorized in unison with the care of the self being read as a social activity. I advanced this argument, as I contended that while the (individual) body is particularly important for my political reading of the care of the self, my understanding of the body is as the flesh which we are, not that which we own, contesting in this way an individualized subject. To understand the flesh as that which we are, is to understand the body in the possibility of the subject making itself, allowing for the self to enact the self-transformation in the making of its own truth. Such a reading of the body is one which fits with the way in which Foucault understood the care of the self, as an activity of cultivation of the self through the self but looking towards others (Foucault, 1986, p. 45). Let us remember that between its first and second historical moment, the care of the self passed from being an activity for rulers, towards being a more general activity, regardless of profession and age. This should not be taken to mean that the objective of looking towards the other was lost, quite the contrary. The importance of the other was heightened, as the other mattered not only in its role as citizen, but as a subject in itself. In this way, Foucault underscores that through the caring for itself the subject opens itself to the relation with others (Foucault, 1997f, p. 289). When bringing these ideas back to my own political reading of the care of the self and its implication for the public and the collective, I understand the purpose of caring for the self as an attempt to break the depoliticization barrier which makes

us understand ourselves as individual and secluded numbers. It is through the opening up of the possibility to contest that which is imposed, from which the collective may arise.

I have been insistent in not wanting to argue for a normative argument on the digital, as I have also insisted for my argument to not be one that advocates for the elimination of the digital. Rather, I defend the reimagination of the digital and I take this to be possible through the bringing of a new subject, one that by the conversion of power can also then convert the power mechanisms that allow for quantification, seclusion and symbiosis. The political reading of the care of the self thus challenges the imposed truth on us subjects and, consequently, the imposed truth on the possibility of the collective, of the public sphere. Today, the public is a space in which the depoliticized digital subject participates and makes. This is why I have contended my argument to be relevant even for those that have supposedly set themselves aside from the digital - they too reside within the public and the meaning that stems from such space. The reimagination of the public must come about from a self that, since its conception, turns to the other - a self that makes itself through a social activity and not an individualized one - and that is what I take the care of the self to offer. I thus take my argument to be an invitation to further explore the political possibility of the collective through the subject.

Indeed, this takes me to another point I would like to discuss the implications of: the relation between the political and politics, and what stems from this. In my constructing of an understanding of the political in Foucault's thought I made use of the differentiation between the political and politics. Foucault participated actively in politics, we could almost say that each of his texts and works were informed or inspired by the politics he was participating in at the time. *Discipline and Punish* was the culmination of his interest in prisons due to his involvement in Le Groupe d'information sur les prisons (The Prisons Information Group) with several other intellectuals of the time, for example. When it comes to the political, we

have seen he did not offer a succinct definition and, so, I have offered an account of what I take we can read as the political in Foucault, where the underscoring of contingency, and thus of freedom and the possibility of resistance, is of vital importance.

What I find of interest here is the interplay of politics and the political in Foucault. Every theoretical undertaking in his work to tackle the secluding of contingency was informed by the politics of his everyday life. His interest in medical institutions, prisons, madness and sexuality all informed his yearning for the political. And, so I take that the arguments offered in this thesis help to offer a juxtaposition of politics and the political centred on the idea of struggle:

> In other words, Foucault's political project is founded on the valorization of struggle. It is the human condition to exist within a system of power; it is the human potential to incessantly resist its reach, relocate its boundaries, and challenge its authority. The ethico-political choice to be made everyday consists in a judgement as to what form of power most threatens (the possibility of) its continued resistance. (Thiele, 1990, p. 918)

I find the previous quote particularly helpful to ground the point I aim to make. I take it that reading the political through Foucault allows for the underscoring of the role and attention given to the everyday, to the mundane, in terms of the juxtaposition between the political and politics. Within this Foucauldian framework we see that the noting of contingency in theoretical claims is grounded by the analysis of politics. And, as exemplified through Foucault's own example, this is not arbitrary but, rather, the underscoring of contingency must be done in the capillaries, in the everyday, for it is there where it became secluded. Every day we must make the decision to critique, to contest, because it is our everyday that which has been moulded most efficiently by the imposed truth. We have seen this through my reading of the care of the self; an activity lived through in the daily, not a one-off action that would be enough to set about change. And such an argument I culminated through the role of thought exercises, as ones that rest upon the everyday decision to exercise

them. Indeed, it is not enough for one singular thought exercise to critique the digital's truth, the task is about the regaining of the everyday, and so they must be done constantly, daring to see what unfolds.

Emphasizing the everyday results is particularly helpful for post-structuralism more generally speaking. A common critique, or problematic, scholars direct at poststructuralism is the heavy attention on the "matter of ontology at the expense of refinement of political concepts or a concrete analysis on of forms of power" (Khan, 2017, p. 552), a problematic which can be ameliorated by "an explicit shift to more concrete analysis forms of power and conditions of freedom" (Khan, 2017, p. 560). While this dissertation has focused on the idea of the subject through the political, I take that such an argument may be continued into the politics of the collective, as I am trying to argue now. In such a way, this work furthers poststructuralism theory in not stopping at the grand theorization of ontology, but to take such ideas into the concrete, for which I take Foucault to be a prime example for the aforementioned reasons. My reworking of Foucault's thought shows that post-structuralist thought can offer both accounts of ontology and concrete analysis of forms of power that, in conjunction, serve to point towards political possibility.

Simply put, I think that my discussion of the subject and the political, serves to show that there is a fruitful discussion to be advanced with regard to these terms and their relation to the collective and politics. The pairing of self-collective and political-politics are lived and accentuated through the everyday. It is there where the normalization of imposed truths grips strongly and there it is where we can begin to disclose contingency. Thought exercises that allow us to regain our everyday, that permit for the digital depoliticized subject to understand itself not as an individual body but as a body that it is, and that is within the possibility of the public. A subject that has refused the imposed truth of understanding itself as a quantified and secluded individual, such is a subject from which the public collective can arise.

Limitations, and the reimagination of the everyday

No piece of research is ever truly complete, and this thesis, as any, has limitations. Or rather, more than limitations I would like to frame them as unanswered questions. I have theorized a care of the self to be a political activity read as the bodily critique of limits, and within the delineation of such concept, I have noted that there is a need for courage to embark upon the exercise of critique and that this is thus a personal choice. The coming about of such courage is an aspect which has remained unanswered. How to call for courage, how to make the subject leap into the uncertain exercise of critique? I think that the answer to this question is one that could be nurtured by taking a step further the role of emotions, of the visceral in our moving through the political. Taking from Connolly, as has been discussed, emotion and visceral responses pose important tools of analysis and possibility (Khan, 2010). Indeed, this also brings to the fore the question of the presupposition of a critical ethos already embedded in the subject that dares to embark upon thought exercises.

However, and not wanting to dismiss the validity of such limitation, I think that the further thinking and debating of this quandary can only be productive. The urgency of better understanding the relation between emotion and the political has only been accentuated in recent years. To state that the practice of the care of the self is something that depends upon courage is to state that such is an activity which depends on emotion setting it about. We can say the same for the critique; it is built upon and embedded with emotion. And because of this, I take that the work posed here in this thesis is one that notes the necessity to further discuss emotion in our mundaneness, in our everyday and how to stem critical exercises from there. Now this, of course, would still not resolve what happens after critique is set about, which I take to be the second limitation of my work.

Ultimately, I have made an argument for understanding the bodily critique of limits to be practiced through thought exercises and, thus, allowing for the possibility of a new

subjectivity. How this becomes actualized in what happens after, I have not shed light on. I have, then, defended, in a very much Foucauldian manner, the role of uncertainty. Even if we were to conclude in a way in which the courage to embark upon the critical exercise could be called upon, the activity set about by such courage still offers no clear path. The bodily critique of limits, as it points towards the opening of possibility, does not reach conclusions about what such a possibility would look like. This takes us back towards the same critiques that Foucault encountered, in his lack of clear paths and answers: his theoretical work always being driven by trying to better understand our present and what we are, by noting the taken for granted; and, indeed, posing theory in this way can be frustrating.

This was advanced and admitted since the introduction: this thesis would not pursue any final answers, any recipe like solutions to the constructed problem. Not to conclude that the role of the uncertain is not without its problems but, rather, I take this limitation to offer the possibility of further exploring the political potential of the uncertain coming about from the analysis of that which we are today. I take it that more than focusing on what will come next in our theoretical undertaking, there is value to be better grappled with in the task of understanding that which we are today. And, today, I have argued we are subjects of the digital, living our lives through normalized quantification, symbiosis and seclusion, resulting in the taking for granted of such imposed truth. Today we are the incessant checking of our phones, we are the tracking of our health habits, we are the blurring of home and work spaces, we are the number value driven social interaction. And the theoretical analysis I have offered as a way to start contesting this which we are does not offer clear paths, but it does offer the idea of possibility and within that, it offers a refusal of the imposition. Foucault was insistent on this, in the power of offering a critical ontology of ourselves and our present (Foucault, 2007b), and then from such knowing we can then take the step toward refusal, refusing that which has been imposed upon us (Foucault, 1982).

Ultimately, I think this thesis serves to further a discussion in that an understanding of what we are, the refusing of such imposition and the struggle that results from it, need not be seen as pessimistic or frustrating given the lack of clarity in the steps to follow. Rather, I think that this should serve as an invitation to further explore the possibility of the uncertain and, in such a way, rest assured that while we might not know what is to come, we know that we have opened the way for that possibility. We may not be sure of the character and direction of the change that could follow from the struggle, but we know we have not remained static.

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