

Chapter 2

Introducing Foucault through the Narrative 'I': Reading and Writing (with) a Foucaultian Ethos

This Chapter sets out to give an account of how I came to read Foucault's writings 'differently', tracing some of the moves of my transition from IR's conventional focus on 'governmentality' and 'sovereign power' to embracing Foucault's self-transformative critical ethos as a lived experience of social scientific practice. While it seeks to problematize both the practice of reading and how we read Foucault's work, the narration also encounters its own conditioning by the ethos of the late Foucault. As such, it not only engages with our formation as 'knowers' in particular discourses but also reflects on the difficulties of telling the story of how we came to be who we are. A narrative account of 'reading' thus challenges our relationships to texts in the experiences of both reading and writing.

Perhaps there are as many 'Foucaults' as readers of his work, and most definitely, even many more. It is not difficult to imagine an infinite range and variety of portraits, impressions, memories or whatever emotional and intellectual traces might be held of a person in his life and after as emerging from how family, friends, lovers, students, colleagues, neighbours, or anyone outside of these regular categories of mapping one's social existence might have seen, encountered, known, loved, hated, admired, cared for or cared about him, comprising, among else, all the possible and impossible ways of relating to *Michel Foucault*. Besides being an extremely versatile human being (that is how *I* imagine him) there is also Foucault the author, and even then, just as in his account of the 'author function', that is, the particular subject position we take up in the process of writing, there are many different authorial-

selves unfolding from and dispersed throughout his books and essays.¹ Foucault's scholarly selves are also manifold in the different images of the philosopher who not only writes but also speaks, as countless interviews and his lectures at the Collège de France between 1971 and 1984 illustrate. Furthermore, there are also many *representations* of these scholarly, authorial, philosopher selves, just like Paul Veyne's personal account of a 'portrait of a Samurai', of a friend and a great sceptic who was not afraid of death. As Veyne recalls his memories of the last months of Foucault's life, he writes: "He was not afraid of death, as he told his friends when the conversation turned to suicide (as a good samurai, he carried two swords, the shorter of which was used for suicide)."² In a different vein, Gilles Deleuze called him a 'topologist', characterizing his thought as one that engages with how the 'inside', that is, ourselves *within*, is constituted by what our thoughts attach themselves to in the 'outside', in the world: that is, the ways in which our world inside is constituted by the folding of the outside.³ Inspired by Foucault's method and work ethos, Edward Said preferred an image of him "in his almost exclusive attention to exteriority and surface while discussing statements, Foucault is like a man who runs across rooftops, never descending into the houses, never going straight, always really moving from side to side."⁴ A samurai who walks the depths of the constitution of modern subjectivity while running sideways on the surface of discourse, in this sense, is certainly one possible picture that can be put together of Foucault.

Surely, others in different disciplines, different times and different contexts have received his work differently: 'Foucault' more often than not appears as the name of the 'author' that unites an 'oeuvre', forging the status and identity of a certain volume of texts, key concepts and arguments, definitions, findings, 'theories' (often when misread), methodological statements, including their relationship vis-à-vis each other and other writings. 'Foucault', in many of these instances, functions as a name of different worlds constituted in scientific discourses: worlds that mirror the logic of the panopticon, neoliberal governmentality, discipline, biopolitics or security apparatuses, to name but a few of the most prevalent themes. That is, the world(s) in which we live now as contemporaries. 'Foucault' thus takes on a discursive life as a

¹Michel Foucault, "What is an Author?", in *Aesthetics, Method, And Epistemology: Essential Works Of Foucault, 1954-1984, Volume 2*, James D. Faubion ed. (London: Penguin, 1998), 213.

²Paul Veyne, *Foucault – His Thought, His Character* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2010), 142.

³Gilles Deleuze, *Foucault* (New York: Continuum, 2006), 97-98.

⁴Edward Said, "An Ethics of Language", *Diacritics* 4 (1974): 35.

person, an intellectual, a friend and a scholar, or a name that brings into discourse particular expressions and statements, allowing for and inciting particular modes of doing things, such as certain analyses or readings, ‘discourse analyses’ and ‘genealogies’; certain styles of thinking and looking, such a ‘critical gaze’ that searches out and maps the contemporary operations of ‘power/knowledge dispositifs’; certain ways of relating to the world, and with that, to ourselves, maybe in the manner of a ‘critical attitude’ or perhaps through our (un)conscious involvement in the strategic relationship of ‘knowledge’ as we know it.⁵ And there all those various other discursive manifestations of different, never-thought-of, long-forgotten, or just too widely or too far away dispersed ‘Foucaults’, their discursive life and accompanying scholarly subjectivities, the ‘knowers’ of these ‘Foucaults’, that are surely escaping me in this moment and for the mapping of which a lifetime would just be too short.

In this sense, it is both hard and easy to read Foucault. The surer we are about which Foucault exactly we are reading, writing about, researching or applying to empirical phenomena, the lesser the confusion is. The more we become aware of how many different ways there might be to engage with his texts, their connections to his life and contemporaries, his political views, his historical present and not least, to our historical present, the less clear the picture becomes. Moreover, there may just be new Foucaults unfolding at every page, and maybe there are always more than one ‘Foucaults’ at a time which we would feel close to or feel confused about. And there may also be many other moments when the connections of Foucault’s texts to the lives of his readers, to our lives, would be very hard to deny. Sometimes it may strike us as a sudden realization, sometimes it might just emerge as some faint thought in the back of our minds that there is also something here for us, for the person and not only for the scholar, to be learnt there. But just like we are used to write and think in a particular, detached manner and through a certain objectifying gaze in the social sciences, most of our doubts about how to read, not only how to read Foucault but how to relate to texts in general have been toned down by a saturated sense of Cartesianism that assumes a certain fixity in relation to both the knowledge we produce and ourselves as knowing subjects. Again, McGushin’s

⁵See Michel Foucault, “Truth and Juridical Forms”, in *Power: Essential Works Of Foucault, 1954-1984, Volume 1*, ed. James D. Faubion (London: Penguin, 1994), 14. Foucault derives from Nietzsche’s writing a ‘model’ of knowledge, according to which “knowledge is always a certain strategic relation in which man is placed.”

diagnosis of contemporary philosophical practice is highly illustrative of the kinds of relations we develop, routinely perform and perpetuate in the everyday practices of reading and how we might experience what it means ‘to know’ through those assumptions, habits and routines that characterise them. He writes:

from our modern, Cartesian subject-position, the text is simply another object, an inert entity in the external world from which our mind extracts meanings through a kind of surgical operation. The text in this sense is a kind of corpse: an extended body which has an order and a structure, an articulation that reason actively surveys. In other words, our position, our mode of disclosing the text, is that of the cogito – it is a technology which lays out the body of the text and operates on it, but which is not implicated in the text itself. To take the text as an object, inert and lifeless, a container of concepts hidden within the words written on the page, concepts which the activity of a subject – a reader – must render visible through his operation of logical incision, is to presuppose a certain Cartesian relationship between a subject and an object.⁶

Crudely put, the text, for us, is dead. It functions as a lifeless, inanimate object, to which we develop an instrumental relationship when we read, and we train our minds to look for specific things as we skim through the lines. As we write ourselves out of the ‘omniscient social scientific prose’ in the academic genre of writing, we, ourselves, *persons* are also read out of the text. We look, find, extract meaning and move on to the next one, searching for evidence for the next ‘true statement’ which already fits into a certain grid of intelligibility, which is not supposed to change much in the course of the reading process. Reading, more often than not, is no longer a challenge we put to ourselves, and if it is, usually that challenge arises from the volume of the material that we need to go through to be able to keep up with the newest developments in our disciplinary subfields.

In fact, this is how I used to read Foucault, too.

This is a long and complex story, and of course what I am secretly heading towards at this juncture is to be able to say and show that I no longer read in the same way, that something has changed in the course of the years, and with that, I have changed, too. So did change, further, my subjectivity as a particular kind of ‘knower’ who reads in a particular way in order to know. As such, I also begun to reread and relate

⁶Edward F. McGushin, *Foucault's Askesis: An Introduction to the Philosophical Life* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2007), 193-4.

to Foucault's writings differently, in a different spirit and with a different purpose, but perhaps the very possibility of relating differently already emerged through Foucault's writings.

It would be hard to tell how it *really* took place. Perhaps this is not only a story but in fact, a series of stories. And it might also be nothing more (and nothing less) than a montage of fragments, of memory, sensations, experience, reflections; some parts of which I am still digesting and processing, and as such they aren't available to be told just yet, and some parts of it may just never ever fit together. As I am realizing it now, to tell the story of how I became a different kind of reader and with that a different kind of 'knower' can only happen from *this place, from where I am at now*, after having gone through all those changes that manoeuvred me *here*. My first person perspective, in many ways, is already an effect of these changes. This makes me also realize how little access I might have both to how things were and how things are now, still (and always) in formation. Again, there is a certain routine and comfort to giving a diagnosis of how we usually do things, even in our academic practices, but it feels like a completely different and infinitely more complicated matter how *not* to stop there and to embrace that life to which our diagnoses of the present refer to and for the negotiation of which, ultimately, the diagnosis takes place in the first case. It is hard to move away from that impoverished relationship between subjectivity and truth that the usual habits of academic practice not only offer but also in many ways inhabit.⁷ It is not too difficult to diagnose what may be wrong with how we usually read but it is indescribably more challenging to show all that through a personal account.

Yet again, as I am writing this it strikes me that however confusing and complicated it may be to openly embrace a subjective perspective (as opposed to speaking *about* a subjective perspective), there is just so much there in any attempt to re-connect with that life that we habitually write and read out of texts. It is hard, but there also many liberating aspects to it. It is perhaps exactly that *lack* of access that I encountered in relation to my constitution as a subject and my being as a person that could be turned into something else. Every time I try to re-tell, for myself and to others, the different experiences that constituted me and my reader subjectivity, the ways in which I came to read the way I am trying to read now, and how this way of

⁷See McGushin, *Foucault's Askesis*, 238.

reading still continues to take on different forms, the storyline changes and so do my emphases, reflections and the understanding I derive from my narrations. That's probably fine, because that's how *stories* usually work. And this is perhaps what I need to accept as such and try to engage with as an actual practice and experience: that this is a narrative account *of* reading, *a* narrative account of a particular practice of reading; it is not about the practice of reading *per se*. In a way it is only you who can fully engage with and experience reading *as* practice *in this moment*. While I am writing this text, reading is already thought and memory, and when I read my own text back when I write, strangely enough, I don't even register what I do as reading. Hence, what really is interesting here, in *performing* a narrative account of reading, is what a narrative perspective can provide for the both of us, readers and writers, in addition to the telling a story about reading.

As Butler notes, in the course of telling one's stories there is always a new narrative 'I' in the process of unfolding, that is, the narrative perspective from which our stories are told is always a surplus to what had actually happened, to what might have been there before. The narrative 'I' is born in the course of the telling of the story: something in me creates the story as I am telling it, and at the same time, this something, the narrative 'I' is also created and constantly re-created as I go along. Importantly, I am never accessible to myself as the storyteller of my stories in the here and the now. As Butler writes, in the "making of one's story, I create myself in new form, instituting a narrative 'I' that is superadded to the 'I' whose past life I seek to tell."⁸ And this narrative self, as she writes,

cannot be fully narrated at the moment in which it provides the perspectival anchor for the narration in question. My account of myself is partial, haunted by that for which I can devise no definitive story. I cannot explain exactly why I have emerged in this way, and my efforts at narrative reconstruction are always undergoing revision. There is that in me and of me for which I can give no account.⁹

For my purposes, the inaccessibility of the narrative 'I' in the course of its unfolding is more of a potential opening for further reflections than a restriction or a loss: I can just tell my story, knowing that there is also something else in formation, in process, in progress while I am writing this, which I may (or may not) be able to see,

⁸Judith Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), 41.

⁹*Ibid.*

discover, explore *later*. My accounts and stories here, of how I used to read Foucault, of how I read his writings now but also any other story about any other aspect of academic everyday life that my narrative 'I' tells, are the sites of the continuous emergence of something new, something added that will also be part of me as a storyteller, as a person. Knowing this allows me to relate to my own work with a particular attitude and ethic, and in fact, this is what makes me want to write myself back into my academic texts, this is why the 'I' has to be present in this thesis. If there is a narrative 'I', the scholar as the *person* doing the writing lives and grows. If there is a narrative 'I', self-transformation, even if unnoticed and of a very small scale, is already happening and with that, the subjectivity of the Cartesian *cogito* loses some of its fixity by virtue of that *excess* that keeps being added to the person, to that life that may choose to separate out a detached, objective observer and locate it in a 'space beyond the world'. As soon as I remove myself from what I study, as soon as I make an object of knowledge of it and reflect on it as something 'out there', by the same gesture I have already subjectified myself as a particular kind of knower in a particular place, one for whom writing can only be a mechanical exercise as there is no 'I' to be affected. Of course, that 'I', even when it is not present in the text, is always, already affected: if it is denied in academic practices, there is no 'living space' available for it *there*.

In telling a story about how my reading practices of Foucault have changed I can not help being curious about where this narration will take me, and what the process of putting it into a narrative will do, not least to my own narrative perspective. Incidentally, this narrative 'I' that keeps forming and growing in the process, has already given accounts of many Foucaults in many different ways. It has already seen the unfolding of what I had earlier referred to as reading Foucault differently, the account that so far has felt the closest to my own experience. This narrative 'I' has already dipped into that incredible richness and depth that is there in Foucault's oeuvre that is easily overlooked when we turn it into a Cartesian object of knowledge and source of information, something that, as I will show a bit later, many IR accounts habitually perform. The character and some of the most important ambitions of this thesis, such as trying to write from the lived threshold of scholarly experience, cultivating a living space for the 'I' in the text, turning writing into a transformative practice as well as practicing critique through an account of the self have already been influenced and inspired by a different relationship to Foucault's

writings. And even more so, it is impossible to tell how much this alternative reading and the conditions of its emergence had already been influenced by Foucault's writings themselves. My narrative account of my practices of reading cannot establish the 'truth' of any of that. My narrative account, in a way, is *the* truth, a particular truth of a particular way of reading *and* writing. And it generates further truths as it keeps re-creating the narrative 'I'.

Earlier this year I have encountered an 'other Foucault' unfolding from his late *Collège de France* lecture series, a 'Foucault' that I described in opposition to usual IR discourses on biopolitics, security or governmentality as a "Foucault who wrote experience-books from a blank space of writing as an exercise in philosophical life, with the purpose of taking care of himself."¹⁰ This other Foucault places emphasis on the self-transformation of the knowing subjects themselves in the process of knowledge production, and as such, this Foucault is already present in this text no matter how I will describe those segments of Foucault's oeuvre *later* that constitute the gist of this alternative reading I developed. As Johanna Oksala notes in her book *How to Read Foucault*, "the life of a philosopher is to be found in the philosophical ethos of his or her books, and for those of us who did not know Foucault personally, perhaps this is the only way to discover it."¹¹ In a way it is this *ethos* that I derive from Foucault's writings that is present in my work, and it is there in a fashion which helps *me* explore and move forward with the project *I am* working on. As I will show in more detail, this is also something that this Foucaultian ethos powerfully encourages: the cultivation of a philosophical life, a practice of doing and being that centres on the care of the self.¹² The emergence of the narrative 'I' in this sense is also an instance of such care: the personal perspective is able to address and engage with that bitterness and frustration that my socialization into and experience of the social scientific ways of reading and writing had triggered, something scientific writing cannot entertain as it had already deprived its knowing subject of such emotions and experience. My writing is also a practice of care as a continuous process of transformation of my perspective, of my narrative 'I'.

¹⁰Erzsebet Strausz, "Two Foucaults, Two Papers: Situating Knowledge as a Form of Self-reflection" (paper presented at the Annual Convention of the International Studies Association, San Diego, 1-4 April, 2012.)

¹¹Johanna Oksala, *How to Read Foucault* (London: Granta Books, 2007), 4.

¹²See in particular Foucault's last two *Collège de France* lecture series: *The Government of Self and Others: Lectures at the Collège de France 1982-1983* (New York: Picador, 2010) and *The Courage of Truth, Lectures at the Collège de France 1983-1984*. (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

A particular reading of Foucault, one that embraces the ethos of his work in the first place, is already present in my proposed narrative account of how my reading practices of Foucault's work have changed in the course of the years. As such the question for me is no longer how to read Foucault, or how I used to read him, but what a particular reading of his work may then enable, and specifically what it may do for this project, in my attempts of giving an account of myself and my experience in academic life. How will a Foucaultian ethos animate my story about how I used to read Foucault and how this reading fed into my studies on 'sovereignty'? How will it shape the contours of the ever-emerging narrative 'I'? This is what I will try to find out in the process of telling this story: instead of turning specific, clearly mappable and delineable parts of Foucault's work into objects of discourse that can support or prove statements and arguments, I will try to make space for a Foucaultian ethos as a *living* material with which I am in continuous conversation and through which I have already been forming as a 'knower'.

So I begin, again.

As I mentioned before, I came into IR through its 'exceptionalism' stream around 2006. I called it 'exceptionalism fever' in the previous chapter because that is how I experienced working within what I identified as this particular disciplinary subfield. The writings of Schmitt, Agamben as well as their commentaries kept me genuinely excited (and maybe also a bit obsessed) for at least one long year. To cut a long story short in a somewhat ironic vein, however, after about a year of research I abandoned the exceptionalism debate and turned to Foucault's writings on governmentality and biopolitics in search of an even broader scheme to *explain* contemporary world politics. What I thought I needed to find at that point in time was a more 'general' and less 'exceptional' take on sovereign power. My idea was to find out how sovereign power, something Foucault engages with but only sporadically discusses in depth, combines with governmentality in contemporary forms of government. I wanted to know how these two 'modalities of power' operate together in what Foucault called an 'era of governmentalization', where the dominant mode of governing became one of governmentality, that is, of governing people at a distance by means of their self-government, which, at the same time, as Foucault indicated, renders the question of sovereign power and its contemporary manifestations even

more acute.¹³ I could see that sovereign power, just as the war on terror's totalizing logic between friend and foe, detention camps, refugee camps and many other examples in today's world illustrate, is far from dead, outdated or dormant. Yet again, the mentality of the 'desiring subject of sovereignty', the lure of the 'excess' and the necessary limitations of whatever theoretical framework we might be using for nailing 'sovereignty' down made me relate to the subject matter of my research in a very specific way. I wanted to find an all-encompassing formula that also provides a meta-perspective to the 'exceptionality' of sovereign power, one that suggests something even more fundamental about the 'nature' of contemporary rule by throwing light on the broader context of social relations within which exceptionalism may arise and operate.

Hardt and Negri's depiction of sovereign power, as I mentioned before, appeared fascinating but also somehow limiting. In many ways I was still attracted to the image of sovereign power as a global machine, one that intervenes to secure a global liberal order while constantly relies on making exceptions to the rules it lays down. Exceptionality, in their account, or at least this is what held my gaze captive, necessitated the invocation of the figure of an omnipresent police that brings law and political authority together. The following two passages are illustrative of these moves and how a particular vision of world politics is constructed through the notion of the exception and its relation to power. As Hardt and Negri write, in that particular form of contemporary rule that they refer to as Empire,

domestic and supranational law are both defined by their exceptionality. The function of exception here is very important. In order to take control of and dominate such a fluid situation, it is necessary to grant the intervening authority (1) the capacity to define, every time in an exceptional way, the demands of intervention; and (2) the capacity to set in motion forces and instruments that in various ways can be applied to the diversity and the plurality of the arrangements in crisis.¹⁴

Taking this image ever further, they argue that

the formation of a new right is inscribed in the deployment of prevention, repression, rhetorical force aimed at the reconstruction of social equilibrium: all this is proper to the activity of the police. We can thus recognize the initial and

¹³See Michel Foucault, "Governmentality", in *Power: Essential Works Of Foucault, 1954-1984, Volume 3*, ed. James D. Faubion (London: Penguin, 1994), 221.

¹⁴Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011), 16-7.

implicit source of imperial right in terms of the police action and the capacity of the police to create and maintain order. [...] The juridical power to rule over the exception and the capacity to deploy police force are thus initial coordinates that define the imperial model of authority.¹⁵

This, of course, is one possible diagnosis of contemporary structures, trends and consequences of government, which, in fact, is an important task for any kind, form and genre of critique to assume and perform. What bothered me about this description, however, and this is what made me drop *Empire* after my first year of study and turn to Foucault's original concept of governmentality, is that there is something strangely stifling about thinking about sovereignty in *that* way. There is fascination and there is awe triggered by the monumentality, violence, totality and precision of the sovereignty machine, something that held me, my attention and thoughts circulating around the might and right of Empire. At the same time though, it is an image and a readers' experience that do not allow for much space to move around, for much space to breathe, for much living space for the 'I': upon reading these passages it felt as if Empire was brought into my room, into my head, in full power and full control, and it was *unpleasant* to have it (all) around. In fact, there wasn't even much left for me to figure out about sovereignty: Empire did offer a ready-made formula for understanding contemporary world politics. It seems to have been exactly what I was searching for, yet somehow it still didn't work. Ironically, both the seduction of 'sovereignty', that permanent discontent over what we can find and the restless suspicion that there is always *more* to it than what we may be able grasp within the confines of a particular theoretical framework, and perhaps, at that time to a lesser (or less conscious) extent, that experience of life which started to reclaim more room for manoeuvre and more freedom both for *thinking* international politics and for *being* a 'knower' of the field, made me shift the focus of my work to Foucault's concept of 'governmentality'.

Governmentality, at that time, functioned exactly as *that* kind of excess to sovereignty through which, as I imagined, it would be possible to catch that slippery fish, to nail it down, to perform that 'surgical operation' of the Cartesian mind on it by means of which its meaning, nature, and operations could be extracted, established and rendered visible as 'truth'. The attraction of governmentality, that of a broader, more general and more flexible notion of governance that, in Foucault's

¹⁵Ibid. 17.

description, pervaded all strata of society, for me, lay with its versatility, which at the same time, could also be used as a force, as a power over another concept, as an imposition of order over the excessive nature of ‘sovereignty’. The promise ‘governmentality’ held for me in the beginning was directly related to my relationship to sovereignty, and with that, to how I lived and experienced the multiple and interfering circles of its seductive powers in my academic practices. As I understood it back then, or at least this is how I am reconstructing it *now*, governmentality, applied as a framework to different manifestations of sovereign power and the sovereign exception had the *power* to tame, disempower, even emasculate ‘sovereignty’, rendering its operations less effective, and maybe also somewhat less threatening. There was a certain sense of security involved in the course of reading ‘sovereignty’ through a governmental framework, a sense of security that I derived from being able to know, crack and expose the sovereign logic (or at least to have the potential to do so), even if it always remained ambiguous, obscure, inaccessible and as such, the whole enterprise was deeply frustrating. In a way, finding ‘governmentality’ might have just been exactly what I needed as a *desiring subject* of ‘sovereignty’ to be able to go on and carry on with my research, with my thesis (which could have been *this* thesis) including all the loose ends, untieable knots and other anomalies for which the ‘knowledge’ I encountered and produced in IR never meant any definite resolution.

A similar microcosm seemed to have emerged in my everyday practices to what Koskenniemi described as the relationship between the ‘absolute and perpetual’ conception of sovereignty and the daily, easily disrupted routine of political institutions, which, once they are under stress, “we immediately begin the hesitant grapple towards some secular equivalent of the *potestas absoluta*, a justification or a theory that enables the re-founding of routine as the relative (and non-threatening) truth of what we do.”¹⁶ I must have needed a means to establish the non-threatening truth of what my research project was about, an easy and quick solution to the discomfort of the endless chase for the content and logic of ‘sovereignty’, and when locating it as an all-encompassing formula (such as Hardt and Negri’s ‘imperial model of authority’), to the disappointment of not liking what I found that much.

¹⁶Martti Koskenniemi, “Conclusion: Vocabularies of Sovereignty – Powers of a Paradox,” in *Sovereignty in Fragments: The Past, Present and Future of a Contested Concept*, eds. Hent Kalmo and Quentin Skinner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 224.

Governmentality seems to have offered that beyond, that excess through which the whole sovereignty question could be tackled and resolved at once. Perhaps by that time I no longer enjoyed the simple act of peeking outside the ‘sovereignty’ box that much and I might have just grown a bit weary of its grandeur and awe.

Maybe this is not quite how it happened though - *I do not know for sure.*

Usually there is a certain linearity and finality to stories, and a certain expectation and demand for an ending that is conclusive: a story begins, develops and finishes with something that is recognizably ‘the end’. Although I still haven’t had the chance to develop what my reading of the ‘other’ Foucault may be like, certainly one thing that the presence of that reading already allows for in this thesis is to let stories break down, let them continue in a non-linear fashion, let them reveal their fragmented and layered texture, let other stories weave in, including a whole other range of ‘letting’ that may happen outside of the conventional confines of narrative structures. This is certainly one possible story I can tell about my Foucaultian beginnings in relation to the study of ‘sovereignty’, but perhaps the more important aspect is how stories like this can come about and how this narrative ‘I’ came to narrate it *in this way*. And again, we need to go back to the practice of reading, and how it constantly interweaves with and feeds into the practice of writing. What my reading of Lawson and Shilliam, and in a somewhat more critical vein, of Walker, Havercroft and Koskenniemi allowed me to do is to become more aware of and reflect on the inevitable aspect of (scholarly) subjectivity, that of the ‘knower’ in my (and any other) academic attempts to understand power in terms of ‘sovereignty’. It helped me engage with how I got involved and eventually, tangled up in different ways of relating to the subject matter I was studying, and what specific form my subjectivity started to develop in relation to what others noted as the some of the subjective implications of thinking the terms of and thinking in terms of ‘sovereignty’.

Yet this is perhaps something very different from the intentions of the authors’ of these texts: in fact, each of the texts I drew on in the previous chapter had something important to argue or demonstrate about ‘sovereignty’. Taking seriously Butler’s claim regarding the impossibility (or ineffectiveness) of critique without reflecting on our own conditioning within those structures and power relations we are critical of, however, necessitated a different style of reading, one that allowed my

attention to wander in a different direction. I found myself wondering about not the authors' substantive claims but rather, about those remarks and side comments in their texts that helped me engage with the ways in which I might have been, must have been implicated in the production of forms of knowledge which claim themselves to be objective, detached, neutral, and as such, something potentially true. In short, I allowed myself to be drawn to what resonated with my scholarly experience and my experience of being a knowing subject: I started to look for points of reference in other people's writings that helped me turn the practice of reading into something like an *auto-critique*. This is the first time that 'auto-critique' came to my mind to describe this, and it feels to be fitting. One of Foucault's interlocutors described his inaugural lecture at the *Collège de France* titled 'The Order of Discourse' as auto-critique and as such, my choice of word is perhaps no coincidence either.¹⁷

Critique as auto-critique, however, as Butler reminds us through *her* reading of Foucault, comes with a certain 'price to be paid' for anyone who chooses to practice critique through telling the truth about themselves and exposing the limits of the epistemic structures constituting this self from the perspective of the 'I'. She writes:

When I tell the truth about myself, I consult not only my "self", but the way in which that self is produced and producible, the position from which the demand to tell the truth proceeds, the effects that telling the truth will have in consequences, as well as the price that must be paid.¹⁸

What might still be unique about my auto-critique, in *my* truth of telling the truth about myself and allowing a certain truth, the truth of the narrative 'I' to unfold in the process of writing are the ways in which something about me might be put at risk through the practice of critique and the kinds of risks I might be taking with that. How am I being risked as a subject, in my subjectivity and through what experience? Butler emphasizes that through a critique of this kind a new mode and experience of subjectivity is produced, one that exposes and also proves "the limiting conditions by which we are made" to be 'malleable and replicable' and as such, we pay the price of being risked in our 'intelligibility and recognizability' to others but perhaps also to

¹⁷See Michel Foucault, "The Order of Discourse," in *Untying the Text: A Post-Structuralist Reader*, Robert Young ed. (London: Routledge, 1981), 52-64.

¹⁸Butler, *Giving an account of oneself*, 132.

ourselves.¹⁹ In many ways and at many occasions, I might not be making much sense to you and also to myself as I am giving this account, as I am telling and re-telling stories about my scholarly constitution in and through the everyday practices of the ‘disciplinary life’ of IR. That risk, however, I seem to have already taken with the adoption of a narrative voice and the constant emergence of my narrative ‘I’.

Not knowing how I am becoming the teller of my own stories and the subtle but unstoppable creation of that excess that is being added to me, to my person as I am drawing things together and setting others apart in a narrative, however, appears as a different register of unknowns to what my first chapter revealed in my thinking process as I caught myself operating within that Cartesian mindset that I was criticising. The malleability and replicability of those conditions that make us into specific kinds of knowing subjects, in this sense, may not only refer to how their grip might loosen on us when we become aware of them, but how deeply they may be engrained into our ways of thinking and being, into the logic of our unthought, and as such, how malleable they might be in their *replicability* across different contexts and the life experience of different people. What would mean a *real* risk to subjectivity is exactly this: a risk derived not from the unknown, but from a particular logic of the unknown that animates the known, which, as soon as we turn it into *another* object of knowledge, only reinforces its hold on our thinking. In a way, these are the stakes of my writing about reading and *your* reading of my writing: to uncover without trying to capture, to create an opening to a different experience of subjectivity, and through that, to cultivate a different sense of intelligibility.

These may be the most significant contributions of the presence of a Foucaultian ethos in this text, and in any other practice of reading or writing.

Maybe all this takes is changing our relationship to those unthought logics that operate on us, indirectly, of course, through what the narrative ‘I’ and its living space may add to ourselves as persons; to embrace one kind of unknown, and see what this may do to the other kinds. This is what I have been trying to do so far: to let the writing wander more than usual, and to try to see what kinds of thoughts, possible pointers for all sorts of things, might emerge in the text and what kinds of reflections

¹⁹Ibid. 134.

they make possible. I don't know yet what all this will bring, create, trigger, induce: for that I will have to keep the writing going, keep uncovering things, and eventually, finish writing this thesis. In any case, all this may sound like a big jump from what I described above as the direction and spirit of my initial 'governmentality' reading and research. It has been an enormous leap indeed. As I mentioned before, for quite some time I read Foucault as text in a strong Cartesian sense, as a source of information and strategic asset to support what I had meant to say anyway. At that point Foucault served a particular function, I needed Foucault's concepts to be able to say what I wanted to say *better*: more subtly and more authoritatively. Speaking the Foucaultian 'language' also meant a matter of belonging: through acquiring a Foucaultian grammar in expressing myself I felt I could become part of a particular scholarly community, that of Foucaultian IR scholars, no matter how imaginary or real such a group might have been in my head. I wanted to *sound* like they did. I wanted my writing to be *recognizable* as good scholarship, just like theirs.

But then, suddenly and unexpectedly, something has changed. The more I dwelt on Foucault's concept of governmentality, the more I became aware of something I was never able to see before. This was the mysterious (or from a certain angle, rather invisible) 'mentality' element in 'governmentality'. With hindsight, this was a point of no return: somehow the subjectivity dimension of what I believed to have only been about complexes of 'power' and 'knowledge', of how society is governed through different forms of knowledge and regimes of truth, started to assert its presence more and more forcefully in my work. I still remember that moment when it fully and irrevocably struck me that contemporary modes of governance are not 'things', even 'processes' that we can think as abstract concepts or something that we can look at from what Inayatullah described as a 'space beyond the world', *as if* we weren't affected by them here, now. With this realization the notion of 'governmentality' was turned back on me, and I began to wonder what it actually meant for my subjectivity, my experience, my life to be governed in such and such ways. What did Foucault's diagnoses of Western modernity mean as *lived experience* for me? What did they mean for the actuality of my academic practices?

It was hard to think all this at first. It was hard to think about myself outside of the regular image in which I usually appear in the field of IR, and even to myself: as someone who is being trained to be able to write the discipline, and in writing it, someone who is supposed to write about the world. As such, most of my time most

days of the week is spent with reading, writing and thinking about *politics* in some relation to states, and sometimes teaching others how to read, write and think about the subject. Seemingly, there is nothing truly political going on in my life, and unsurprisingly, my life is certainly not an obvious object of knowledge for IR. Turning governmentality back on myself, on my own ‘mentality’ and how I became the subject of a particular experience of disciplinary routines made me realize that what matters most, perhaps, is what I customarily exclude from my professional thinking processes.

Just like what I was able to formulate about ‘sovereignty’ in the previous chapter of this thesis, what I began to realize about ‘governmentality’ at that time was exactly “the question of the power of discourse that cannot be treated within discourse itself”, as Koskennimi put it, which in my case translated into how discourse subjectivates us and how we subjectify ourselves in and through discourse. What is political is subjectivity itself and our scholarly subjectivities are no exception to that. Without this realization, without an opening to subjectivity, a *literal* opening that moves from concept to experience, it would have been hardly possible to read Lawson and Shilliam, Walker, Havercroft or Koskennemi in a way that could help me reflect on my own scholarly constitution in the academic discourse on ‘sovereignty’. It was not until my presentation at the Department’s weekly International Politics Research Seminar (IPRS) in March 2011, where third year PhD students are asked to present their research and account for their progress with their theses, that I was able to say, relatively confidently that what I was interested in is power, knowledge *and* subjectivity in relation to the lived experience of how we think and I was able to draw my own work and learning process into my narration. I began there by telling the story of how my research focus changed in the previous two and a half years, and how I experienced going through these changes. I wasn’t aware of this at that point but as I read back those lines, now it clearly shows that when I was asked to give an account of the progress of my research, I was already giving an account of myself.

Taking subjectivity seriously, for me, seems to have taken the form of an account of the self.

Although this account is already different from any of the previous ones, it now takes the form of giving an account of another account: I would like to show how I explained in my presentation those series of shifts in my thinking that led me to engage with the mentality dimension of govern-mentality. Now, about one and a half years later I might be able to track some aspects of the development, of the history of the narrative perspective of the thesis, of the Foucaultian ethos in this narrative ‘I’ through *that* narrative ‘I’, and see what reading my own story from back then can add to writing this story, *this* thesis, *now*. I have left my emphases intact: the bold formatting indicates what I wanted to stress while talking to my audience. This is how I told the story of my PhD research on the 2nd March 2011, the night before the presentation:

When I came to Aberystwyth, I was completely fascinated by Foucault’s famous notion of **governmentality**. I admired how handy the term was to capture the ways in which modern societies are governed: the ways in which “the right disposition of things and men”²⁰ is organized through the micro-capillaries of power pervading all social strata. Power is everywhere and works in mysterious ways: government happens at a *distance*, through “the conduct of conduct” of people, who, in fact, regulate their own behaviour.²¹

Initially, I wanted to say something important about this big scheme of power: the rationales of government, the biopolitical ordering of societies, about how life is produced, shaped or excluded across the globe through states of emergency or practices of norm promotion.

However, I became increasingly anxious about the question of “how”.

What makes government happen when there is no direct causality, only myriads of subtly operating power relations and the distance, that separates and at the same time, connects different subjects and practices through regulating the ways in which people regulate their own life?

I have to get my head around **this distance**, I thought, which seems to be so pivotal for the operation of contemporary forms of government.

That is when I started to become more and more aware of the often underemphasized **mentality** element of governmentality, the thought-

²⁰Foucault, “Governmentality”, 208-209, 217.

²¹Colin Gordon, “Governmental Rationality: An Introduction,” in *The Foucault Effect: Studies of Governmentality*, eds. Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon and Peter Miller (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 48.

dimension of conduct, and eventually, the **force** of what thought is capable of doing.

First, it objectifies the world. Thought provides us with a conceptual universe through the delineation of concepts, the establishment of categories, or the drawing of borders and boundaries. In short, thought enables certain problems and offers certain strategies for their solution by structuring the “possible field of actions”.²²

More importantly though, thought also makes us part of such a world of objects, and not only by creating different subject positions that we may occupy. We occupy and enliven these subject positions through the power of our thoughts, through the ways in which we establish relations to ourselves and the world so objectified.

Ultimately, it is through the subjectifying force of thought that we become subjects of governmental processes.

No wonder then that governing conduct requires the proxy of thought. But that is also the good thing about it, I thought. The mentality that government requires, after all, has a Janus-face: it delineates a particular order of things through processes of objectification, one that informs governmental techniques and practices, but it also appears as **the site** which **may or may not allow** government to happen. We just perhaps need to find a different way of relating.

Thus, the **psychological dimension**, where thought creates subjectivities and forms of behaviour, or in other words, where thought creates “us” and tells us how to live with ourselves, with others and in society, became of central importance for my purposes, ‘scientific’ and **other**.

Clearly, all that happening out there is also about me, a subject manoeuvring within the capillaries of power together with millions of other subjects; but even more importantly, it is also happening in here, in my head, and **inescapably**, in whatever I do, including **the thesis** I am working on and the permanent and all-pervasive confusion about **what makes sense**.

Out-there and in-there are probably not that distant from each other. But still, somehow, the world of objects, the abstract and autonomous life of categories, concepts and propositions like to keep them separate.

So I decided to make outside and inside meet again, to **consciously write myself into** what already contained me, without, however, trying to contain myself. I wanted to see thought in action: the ways in which it creates my world, and through that, eventually, the world as we know it.

I started to look at my research differently. I became more and more conscious of the moves through which I connected the dots in the map of my governmentality-fascinated mind. The problems and questions I identified, but also, my own identification with what I separated out as my research-universe. And I caught myself thinking about the problems of government and losing myself in the process of thinking. I identified a gap

²²Michel Foucault, “The Subject and Power”, in *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, Hubert Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow eds. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 221.

between the operations of sovereign power and the normalizing processes of governmentality, only to realize that I started to slowly inhabit that gap. I turned myself into an intellectual gap-filler and when I came to see that, I felt worried and liberated at the same time.

Unknowingly, however, in this process of reflection, I started to discover a different sense of distance, that is, a distance *from thought*. The Janus-face of mentality therefore became even more pronounced: the distance that renders thought effective may also make it visible.

So I found myself in the space of my own thought. The space of thought in which thought emerges and encounters itself in a reflexive move; **the space** in which the certain and the familiar are momentarily suspended, and so are governmental norms and logics.

Leaving behind the fascination with **governmentality**, hence, I arrived at a place of **mentality without government**.²³

The last three passages show something very important regarding where I was at in March 2011 and where I am now, in July 2012, writing this chapter. I already thought about thought as in how our own thought processes might be implicated in the performance and perpetuation of contemporary forms of government, realizing that some distance needs to be cultivated from usual patterns of thought in our everyday practices in order to develop a freer, less constraining and less frustrating relationship to them. I must have also realized that we should try to do something about relating differently to what we do when we think and how we think about what thinking means and does for us, *to us*, in the course of our work and everyday life. However, I might have just been a bit too caught up in thinking, and in a particular *style* of thinking, still, when I wrote about the ‘space of my own thought’, in which ‘thought emerges and encounters itself in a reflexive move’ and how all that makes it possible to suspend thinking, and with that the hold of governmental norms on ourselves. The ‘space of my own thought’ and the way I described its relationship to other aspects of the world has a certain conceptual feel to it and it *stays like that*. I introduced a series of concepts to describe a specific segment of the world (even if that segment is located in my head), only in order to move towards to the end point of ‘a mentality without government’, which I believed was *the* statement I wanted to make. ‘A mentality without government’ is something that we might certainly be able to think and imagine as such, but there is nothing in the text that would allow us

²³International Politics Research Seminar presentation, Department of International Politics, Aberystwyth University, 3rd March 2011.

to access it as experience. In this regard, the way I thought about it and the way I wrote it down do not really help us cultivate a distance, some space from the Cartesian conditioning. What would a ‘mentality without government’ be like, how would that *feel*? That I still do not know.

What I have been becoming more and more aware of ever since, however, is that thought cannot be suspended through *thinking* that suspense, especially through thinking it in a way that reinforces the style of thinking that needs to be suspended in the first place. In this sense, the aim is certainly not to arrive ‘at a place of mentality without government’. As this statement shows, I was still looking for a solution and a resolution to the problem of government, even when I was already thinking this problem through the dimension of subjectivity, including *my* own. I was moving from one extreme, from having been completely caught up in habitual ways of doing and thinking from which I must have experienced a moment of break to the other extreme of an ideal of freedom and boundlessness, a ‘mentality without government’, which at once resolves and eliminates the problem of government. I can still feel the effort I must have put into putting a finger on and giving a name, a catchy one, to something that I might have imagined as the antidote of contemporary modes of government. A ‘mentality without government’, in a way, is still very much of a governmental product: there is a lot of freedom in that freedom that is required for government to be efficient on individual conduct for us to imagine it as ours, especially that this freedom may also entail imagining ourselves to be completely free from government. Thinking something that has been offered to us as a ‘problem’ to be thought, such as the problem of government, and working out a solution that ‘resolves’ it, both reinforces a style of thinking that separates out and manages ‘objects’ and misses an opportunity to engage with how it is that a ‘problem’ as such could emerge as a ‘problem’ at all and how it affects us as subjects, as ‘knowers’ who are already placed in a strategic relationship with it in scientific inquiry. Yet again, in my reading, too, Foucault’s work fell victim to a utopian project that seeks to put an end to the problem of government through the suspension of thought, but what is even more important here is that through suggesting something highly conceptual, something I myself hadn’t experienced, only *thought*, I enclosed something (and myself) back into the activity of thinking on which the very Cartesian mindset is found.

What is lost here is that ‘way of living’ that a Foucaultian ethos brings back into thinking and cultivates in the course of his academic practice.

My account of my PhD research and of myself as the researcher of a particular project in March 2011 was not able or ready to fully embrace the ethical dimension of thinking, although taking the risk of allowing the narrative ‘I’ to enter my presentation was already an opening towards many ‘unknowns’ and it already meant an instance of reconnection with the personal, and through that, with that ‘life’ that is customarily written out of scientific research. Strong conceptual thinking (in an isolated, Cartesian sense) and openness to what may point beyond that were simultaneously present and operative in my text, thinking and way of being at that time. *Now, reading my presentation back and writing this account of it, I can see that.* In the meantime a shift must have happened that made me progress more and more in the direction of the beyond of the Cartesian mindset from that ‘beyond of the world’ that it establishes and designates for the detached and objective scientific observer. Whatever such a beyond of the Cartesian mindset might be like, a beyond that surely has no boundaries to be marked as such, is here, too, in our everyday practices, academic and everything else. It is not a projection of a particular or possible future, which would institute a similar separation to the one between ‘scholarship’ and ‘the personal’, it is more like a different mode of being in our everyday ways of doing, one that tries to move beyond that separation and tries hard not to create new ones. Exactly because some of our routines may just be stronger than what we might think (we have learnt to think about them in a certain way already), something that my numerous fall-backs into different forms of objectification have already illustrated in this thesis, there is no end point to these efforts, certainly not one that we would be able to conceive of right now. So we try and try again: read, write, read back, read again and write again, in the course of which we may choose to carefully contemplate what our practices of writing and reading, their results and our experience of them may express, trigger and open up.

This is what I have learnt to take from a Foucaultian ethos in the past one and half years and what I have still been learning to cultivate and take seriously, *literally*, as practice, as something lived and experienced ever since. While I was reflecting on my IPRS presentation above I was thinking that the best way to introduce, finally, that Foucaultian ethos that I have been constantly referring to would be to discuss

how Foucault himself thought about and related to ‘thought’. I have already made a plan and drafted a conceptual outline to discuss ‘thought’ in Foucault’s work, yet again, in a Foucaultian vein, something else requires our attention first. Although as Timothy O’Leary argues, Foucault’s work characteristically operates with “the principle of the irreducibility of thought”, jumping into ‘thought’ straight might just sideline what matters *most*, that is, the kind of relationship Foucault developed to thought and the style of thinking he actively nurtured in his academic work.²⁴

The notion of ‘experience’ and the practice of ‘experimentation’ are of key importance here. Foucault focused on what he understood as some of the ‘fundamental experiences’ of our age, such as madness, death, crime, or sex and there he also suggested that science and scientific practice themselves can be “analyzed and conceived of basically as an experience, that is, as a relationship in which the subject is modified in that experience”.²⁵ Foucault was interested in the ways in which “the subject undergoes a modification” in the process of constructing an object of knowledge and the forms of experience that the ‘reciprocal genesis’ of the ‘knowing subject’ and the ‘known object’ constituted, such as “knowing madness while constituting oneself as a rational subject; knowing illness while constituting oneself as a living subject, or the economy, while constituting oneself as a labouring subject, or an individual knowing oneself in a certain relationship to law”, and so on.²⁶ Both in his archaeological work and his genealogical histories he traced the movements of *savoir*, that is, the process of modification of oneself in the process of constructing positive ‘knowledge’ (*connaissance*) about the world, that is, how we emerge as ‘knowers’ in relation to what we ‘know’, including how we construct ourselves as subjects of a particular experience problematized by knowledge.²⁷ While Foucault never produced anything like, for instance, Bourdieu’s autobiographical *Sketch for a Self-Analysis* where the scholar’s personal experience within a particular academic discipline becomes the very focus of the research, at many textual sites and in many interviews he explicitly reflected on his own involvement with his *savoir*, those underlying assumptions, *savoirs* of a given moment that govern the practices of

²⁴Timothy O’Leary, “Rethinking Experience with Foucault”, in *Foucault and Philosophy*, eds. Timothy O’Leary and Christopher Falzon (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 175.

²⁵Michel Foucault, “Interview with Michel Foucault” in *Power: Essential Works Of Foucault, 1954-1984, Volume 3*, ed. James D. Faubion (London: Penguin, 1994), 254.

²⁶Ibid. 256.

²⁷Ibid.

everyday life.²⁸ Sometimes as side comments, sometimes in the form of strategically more functional statements, he recounted numerous ways in which he sought to challenge and transform himself in his academic practices and the ethical and political implications of his experimentations and what he called a ‘critical attitude’.²⁹

Importantly, academic work, for Foucault, was also a matter of *experimentation*. As John Rajchman notes, Foucault’s ‘modern practical philosophy’ assumes that “our identity is not fixed by our nature, divine or human, empirical or transcendental” and as such, “being the subject of one’s own experience should never be taken as given – either by religion or science, or by law or government.”³⁰ In this sense, his analyses of “who we have been constituted to be” are always driven by the purpose “to ask what we might become.”³¹ As Rajchman remarks elsewhere, Foucault’s scepticism means “the endless questioning of constituted experience” through which he “directs our attention to the very concrete freedom of writing, thinking, and living in a permanent questioning of those systems of thought and problematic forms of experience in which we find ourselves.”³² The “very concrete freedom of writing, thinking, living”, however, is not something Foucault might have only thought or wrote about: he turned the question of “what we might become” back on himself and he used his own practices of writing and thinking to not only ‘propose’ but also to *practice* “a freedom of choosing possible experience outside a prior knowledge or truth about ourselves.”³³

As Foucault said in an interview, “I am an experimenter and not a theorist”, and “I’m an experimenter in the sense that I write in order to change myself and in order not to think the same thing as before.”³⁴ Changing ourselves and changing our thoughts, self-transformation and critical reflection go hand in hand in his oeuvre, and this is what made me think the most in Foucault’s writings but also this is what I

²⁸Ibid.

²⁹See Pierre Bourdieu, *Sketch for a Self-Analysis* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008); on Foucault’s ‘critical attitude’ see in particular Michel Foucault, “What is Critique?” in *The Politics of Truth: Michel Foucault*, eds. Sylvère Lotringer and Lysa Hochroth (New York: Semiotext(e), 1997), 23-82 and Michel Foucault, “What is Enlightenment?” in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984), 32-50.

³⁰John Rajchman, “Ethics after Foucault”, *Social Text* 13/14 (1986): 166.

³¹Ibid.

³²John Rajchman, *Michel Foucault: The Freedom of Philosophy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), 7.

³³Rajchman, “Ethics after Foucault”, 170.

³⁴Foucault, “Interview with Michel Foucault”, 240.

have been finding the most challenging not to *think only*. I have learnt a lot about ‘thought’ through Foucault’s books, essays and interview, but not really about what thought thinks, but how relating to thought differently, and through that, to ourselves, we might just experience life, *our* lives, differently. In short, what I really learnt about was life, that ‘outside’ of thought, which can be many different aspects of the world but from where and in relation to which thought can change, and with that, we ourselves, our subjectivity can change. Thought by itself, its internal logic, its abstractions, theories, representations or categories or the mere activity of thinking were none of his concerns. For Foucault, thought is always and directly related to experience, to *our* epistemic experiences in Western modernity. The double-meaning of the French verb *experimenter*, to experience and to experiment, powerfully expresses this connection: to experiment in relation to forms of thoughts, ways of knowing and thinking is always grounded in and connected back into experience, and not only regarding how our collective and individual experiences of ‘madness’, ‘crime’ or ‘sexuality’ may be constructed and re-made in an experimental fashion but also to how the personal experience of the scholar may be the source of a transformative ethics of self-formation.

For Foucault, thought is *a point of access* to experience itself: both in making sense of our everyday experiences and to our constitution as subjects of these experiences. And thought can do many things. What thought usually does is that it problematizes experience, that is, as Timothy O’Leary explains, that “general, dominant form in which being is given to an historical period as something that can be thought”.³⁵ Foucault writes that thought is “freedom in relation to what one does, the motion by which one detached oneself from it, establishes it as an object, and reflects on it as a problem”.³⁶ Through the ‘work of thought’, in different historical times and in different cultural contexts, different aspects of our everyday experience are posed as a problem to politics: this is how, as Foucault shows in his ‘histories’, for instance ‘madness’, ‘sexuality’, or ‘criminality’ emerged as objects of knowledge, normative concerns and different modes of being in everyday life. Foucault studied problematizations along three axes or ‘focal points of experience’, according to which “forms of a possible knowledge (*savoir*), normative frameworks

³⁵Timothy O’Leary, “Foucault, Experience, Literature”, *Foucault Studies* 5 (2008):14.

³⁶Michel Foucault, “Polemics, Politics, and Problematizations: An Interview with Michel Foucault” In *Ethics: Essential Works Of Foucault, 1954-1984, Volume 1*, ed. James D. Faubion, (New York: The New Press, 1997), 117.

of behaviour for individuals and potential modes of existence for possible subjects are linked together”.³⁷ Whatever ‘problems’ our thoughts might define or engage with, it is always through the ‘joint articulation’ of ‘power’, ‘knowledge’ and ‘subjectivity’ that thought relates to a particular experience. For example, Foucault sought to grasp ‘madness’ as a matrix of bodies of medical, psychiatric, sociological, etc knowledge, as a set of norms against which deviance and normal behaviour are established, and as the constitution of a certain mode of being of the ‘normal’ subject as opposed to that of the ‘mad’ subject.³⁸ Thought, in this sense, is both free and *unfree*, and so are we in relation to our own thoughts. There is always freedom in separating out new problems to be solved which then gives rise to new practices, and in this sense, as McGushin explains,

thought reimagines the purposes and possibilities the world offers. It is a response, but not a solution. Rather, thinking is the activity that opens up a problem and prepares the conditions for many possible solutions to it. Thought, as the work of problematizing, is what opens up the dimension of the possible.”³⁹

Yet as Gary Gutting suggests, the experiences we might be processing, to a certain extent, have already been processed in and through societal structures. As he writes,

we live our experiences as we do because we live in a “conceptually structured environment”. It is precisely because of this environment (which is another way of referring to the epistemic unconscious that is the object of Foucault’s archaeology) that we are “mobile on ... a rather broadly defined territory” in which we are able to have a range of “lived experiences”.⁴⁰

This is what Butler described as the excess of discourse’s sociality over us, of its terms, structure, and grammar; that our stories of ourselves always refer back to “a state of affairs to which one could not have been present, which are prior to one’s own emergence as subject who can know, and so constitute a set of origins that one can narrate only at the expense of authoritative knowledge.”⁴¹ McGushin explains that what we may now identify as contemporary apparatuses of power and knowledge through which we are being governed in our societies, arose in part out of

³⁷Foucault, *Government of the Self and Others*, 3.

³⁸*Ibid.*

³⁹McGushin, *Foucault’s Askesis*, 16-7.

⁴⁰Gary Gutting, “Foucault’s Philosophy of Experience”, *boundary 2* 29 (2002): 79.

⁴¹Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself*, 36.

problematizations, as solutions to different problems, but “once these solutions are detached from their source in a problematization they become frozen into rigid forms, they become the very structure of the ordinary, the familiar, the given – they become the basis for future problematization”.⁴² What we no longer think about, however, is still part of our constitution as subjects in Western societies, as academics, as ‘knowers’, as writers, as readers. As Foucault once said in an interview titled “So is it important to think?”, “a critique does not consist in saying that things aren’t good the way they are”.⁴³ Critique goes a bit further, or in fact, it moves at a completely different plane: its realm of operation is what Gutting called the ‘epistemic unconscious’ and as such, there is no such judgement involved in it, it doesn’t engage with the terms of political debates, with what discourses say or what norms and ethics prescribe. Rather, it “consists in seeing on what type of assumptions, of familiar notions, of established, unexamined ways of thinking the accepted practices are based.”⁴⁴ Foucault writes,

thought does exist, both beyond and underneath systems and edifices of discourse. It is something that is often hidden but always drives everyday behaviors. There is always a little thought occurring even in the most stupid institutions; there is always thought even in silent habits. Criticism consists in uncovering that thought and trying to change it: showing that things are not as obvious as people believe, making it so that what is taken for granted is no longer taken for granted. To practise criticism is to make harder those acts which are now too easy.⁴⁵

However, making “harder those acts which are now too easy” through trying to change those epistemic structures and ways of thinking, such as a strong Cartesian mindset in social sciences that constitute human beings, us, as subjects in the domains of knowledge, power and self, is hard enough.⁴⁶ In fact, it is particularly hard since Foucault’s ‘modern practical philosophy’ requires this work to be on ourselves in the first place. The question is somehow similar for our own lives, individual experience and the broader epistemic structures within which they are embedded: how can we ever think otherwise? How can our thoughts change,

⁴²McGushin, *Foucault’s Askesis*, 17.

⁴³Michel Foucault, “So is it Important to Think?” in *Power: Essential Works Of Foucault, 1954-1984, Volume 3*, ed. James D. Faubion (London: Penguin, 1994), 456.

⁴⁴Ibid.

⁴⁵Foucault, “So is it important to think?”, 456.

⁴⁶See O’Leary, “Foucault, Experience, Literature”, 13.

especially that we may not even be aware of the extent to which we might have internalized those ways of thinking and modes of being that are offered in our contemporary epistemic conditions? Or posing the question from the perspective of society and collective experience, as O’Leary does, “how does discontinuity emerge?”: “how can we explain historical change?”⁴⁷ There is certainly no definitive answer to any of these questions, and what Foucault’s oeuvre as writings on aesthetics through his genealogies of modern form of power to the ethical turn to the subject powerfully illuminate is that there may be many different ways, sources and practices that may help us in a critical project like this. For one, Foucault’s “endless questioning of constituted experience” provides us with a number of further questions to be asked in conducting a ‘historical ontology of ourselves’, such as “how are we constituted as subjects of our knowledge? How are we constituted as subjects who exercise or submit to power relations? How are we constituted as moral subjects of our own actions?”⁴⁸ Nonetheless, asking these questions and trying to find answers to them is far from being the end point of critique. As Foucault writes, the purpose of critique is a kind of self-transformation which would somehow also free us from some of those social structures, modes of being and ways of thinking that we find ourselves being constituted through. As he writes,

if governmentalization is indeed this movement through which individuals are subjugated in the reality of a social practice through mechanisms of power that adhere to a truth [...] then [...] I will say that critique is the movement by which the subject gives himself the right to question truth on its effects of power and question power on its discourses of truth. [...] critique will be the art of voluntary insubordination, that of reflected intractability. Critique would essentially insure the desubjugation of the subject in the context of what we would call, in a word, the politics of truth.⁴⁹

Yet again, how does self-transformation take place, how can we form ourselves in our critical endeavours in a way that the effect of critique would be undoing some of those forms of knowledge, relations of power and modes of being which subjectivate us and through which we subjectify ourselves? As Timothy Rayner emphasizes,

⁴⁷Ibid. 14.

⁴⁸Foucault, “What is Critique?”, 47.

⁴⁹Ibid.

it is unlikely that simply reflecting on a different arrangement of axes in the case of any one problematization will automatically transform the problematic experience in question. The transformation of a problematic experience is not a matter of the scales suddenly falling from our eyes – it involves a protracted labour of meditation, coupled with a diligent practice of experimentation and self-alteration. Moreover, our reflection on problems is embedded within real historical networks of forces, grounded in material practices and institutions. In many cases, our attachment to these practices and institutions may run deeper than we realize, confounding any superficial attempt to reflect on and experience problems in a different way. Yet, as Foucault’s work shows, the practices and institutions that determine our thought and experience are to a large extent contingent and open to change.⁵⁰

Once more, the question of the possibility of self-formation becomes one of the openness and contingency of thought and experience, and our ability to build on and dwell in what may be ‘free’ in them. This is the point where Foucault’s critical attitude *as* ethos helps us break out of this cycle: as he writes, an ethos is “mode of relating to contemporary reality; a voluntary choice made by certain people; in the end, a way of thinking and feeling; a way, too, of acting and behaving that at one and the same time marks a relation of belonging and presents itself as a task”.⁵¹ In this way, Foucault already positions himself outside of the thinking process strictly speaking, outside of the very activity of thinking on which the Cartesian mindset rests: a critical attitude is a way of doing and a mode of being at the same time, which connects the ‘knower’, the philosopher back to life. ‘Relating’, ‘feeling’, ‘belonging’, ‘acting’ or ‘choice’ are present in any instance of Foucault’s ‘thinking’ and this is the place that, ultimately, allows him to reflect on thought itself, or in other words, it allows thought to turn back on itself. As Claire Colebrook put it in her reading of Foucault, the “challenge of thought is not to recognise or represent the logic of existence”, but to try and *not* do any of these things: this is how thought can appear as event, as force through “thinking the groundless character of *our* logic”.⁵²

This is how the ‘outside of thought’, the site and source from where thought can change, becomes a *place within* in Foucault’s last, ethical turn. As O’Leary reconstructs Foucault’s stance regarding the discontinuity of thought, he writes that according to Foucault “discontinuity begins “with an erosion from outside” [...], and

⁵⁰Timothy Rayner, *Foucault’s Heidegger: Philosophy and Transformative Experience* (New York: Continuum, 2007), 146-7.

⁵¹Foucault, “What is Enlightenment?”, 39.

⁵²Claire Colebrook, *Philosophy and Post-structuralist Theory: from Kant to Deleuze* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005), 168.

erosion which made possible by the way in which thought continuously “contrives to escape itself”⁵³ As such, he continues, “we can say that all of [Foucault’s] work was an attempt to investigate the way that thought ‘contrives to escape itself’ through contact with such an outside. And at every renewed turn of that effort, the guiding thread was the idea of the strange, the foreign, the alien and the question of its provenance and its effects.”⁵⁴ O’Leary suggests thinking about three periods in Foucault’s oeuvre according to how this ‘outside’ had changed: the first, aesthetic period in the 1960s can be characterized with Foucault’s focus on “literature, transgression, experience in relation to language”, then the second period in the 1970s moves on to the themes of power and resistance in relation to the forces of the body, while in the 1980s, with Foucault’s ethical turn and shift of focus to subjectivity the outside becomes the inside of subjectivity itself, where “the potential for change emerges out of a folding back of the self upon itself”.⁵⁵

In this last, ethical phase critique becomes ethos, and with that, speaking about the world and ourselves becomes one of being in the world and living it. Speaking or thinking *about* transformation and the *act* of transforming ourselves are no longer separate here. Once the outside of thought becomes the inside of subjectivity, thought can no longer escape itself carrying the ‘knower’ away, sometimes towards new problems to think, but sometimes also to fictitious and faraway places. As such, there is no longer a ‘beyond of the world’ for the Cartesian knower either, which would escape the questions of its own emergence and the exclusion of the person; thought confronts itself *as* thought. Just like ‘sovereignty’ may appear as a ‘word’ from a certain angle, ‘thought’ may also become *just* thought, which enacts a very different relationship to thinking and to thought itself. Using McGushin’s terms, the *diagnosis* of the contemporary forms of government, of disciplinary power, normalization and biopolitics, in this case *truly* coincides with an *etho-poetic* moment of transforming ourselves out of these structures.⁵⁶

Foucault’s reading of ancient Greek and Roman texts at the *Collège de France* can be read both as a genealogical engagement with questions of government and as a process and exercise through which Foucault’s transforms himself, lets

⁵³O’Leary, “Foucault, Experience, Literature”, 15.

⁵⁴Ibid.

⁵⁵Ibid. The same periodization of Foucault’s work in terms of ‘language’, ‘body’ and ‘ethics’ is also followed by Johanna Oksala in *Foucault on Freedom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

⁵⁶See McGushin, *Foucault’s Askesis*, xvii.

“himself be altered by the activity of thinking”, and offers “this experience of self-transformation to those who would come into contact with his work.”⁵⁷ As McGushin argues, “Foucault’s *work* in this last phase of his life was *himself* in the act of becoming a philosopher”.⁵⁸ In this sense, for instance when he discusses the ancient practice of truth-telling and the care of the self, his comments regarding his own philosophical practice are certainly not unrelated to what he is doing when he talks about these practices. In these lectures he talks about the ‘care of the self’ in a fashion that the act of speaking becomes an instance of philosophical exercise, one that “transforms the familiar into something strange and wrests one from free of oneself.”⁵⁹ When he talks about the ancient practice of truth-telling or parrēsia, he uses the structure of parrēsia to do work on himself, to be able to experience himself as other. In parrēsiastic speech the affirmation of “I am telling truth” leads to contemplating “who is this self, this me who’s telling the truth”, which, again, appears in a different light when read together with Foucault’s statements on experimentation and his aim of not to remain the same, as well as with the very last lines of his last lecture note, according to which “there is no establishment of the truth without an essential position of otherness; the truth is never the same; there can be truth only in the form of the other world and the other life.”⁶⁰

There is a certain sense of oneness, something like a self-sameness emerging from the final lecture series, something, which at the same time, creates an illuminating contrast to the experience of the kind of scholarly subjectivities that the disciplinary practices of social sciences, such as the academic discipline of IR tend to produce and reinforce through everyday practices of thinking, writing, and reading. For Foucault, the “very concrete freedom of writing, thinking, and living” in Rajchman’s description is found in the very practice of scholarly activity which takes up different forms, emerges in different practices of reading, writing or speaking, and operates against ever-changing ‘outsides’. The ethos of the final Foucault, in this sense, may both be a perspective and an inspiration, but it certainly isn’t a solution to be implemented or a target to be reached. My reading of Foucault’s work and its presence in this thesis, in the style of writing and its ambitions embraces this experimental, transformative spirit but it does so in a fashion which benefits my own

⁵⁷Ibid. xi-xii.

⁵⁸Ibid.

⁵⁹Ibid. xii.

⁶⁰Foucault, *The Courage of Truth*, 340.

understanding of how I am involved with my *savoir* in my scholarly work, how I am constructing myself as a ‘knower’, and how it may be possible for me to cultivate a living space for the ‘I’, and with that, to bring the person back into the academic practice. The only *true* self-transformation that this narrative ‘I’ can surely bring about in the course of writing is *my own*; as ‘experience book’, however, the text should be able to make this experience present and available to its readers. As such, at the end of the day it will depend on your reading how this Foucaultian ethos may translate into a reader experience and what it can do for and to the both of us, who, as Butler reminds us, have been in this text since the very first words.

Yet again, there is still so much more to Foucault’s oeuvre: the final Foucault, now reading his work in reverse, is only the beginning. It is in the spirit of the final Foucault’s ethos of self-transformation that the next Chapter re-reads some of Foucault’s most important writings on ‘discourse’ from the perspective of how Foucault himself negotiated his experience of being *in* discourse while he was writing *about* discourse in his diagnoses of the contemporary episteme. It concentrates on the ways in which he sought to work against the subjectivating forces of discourse, making his academic practice into a process of self-transformation and as such, a site of resistance to power. Through exploring some of the expressions of Foucault’s different modes of being in discourse, Chapter 3 refocuses on the lived experience of (academic) subject formation, on how we come to be constituted subjects of particular experiences in our ‘disciplinary lives’ and the possibilities of turning the everyday practice of writing into a practice of writing *against* discourse.

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